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Between the "Good Scarf" and the "Bad Scarf": National Tradition and the Veil Debate in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Chika Obiya

Introduction

In February 2009, Anvar qori Tursunov (1958–2018), the *bosh imom-xotib*[1] of Tashkent city, the capital of Uzbekistan, appeared on television and warned female viewers not to wear the *hijob*, claiming that "foreign attire brings foreign ideology that is dangerous to Uzbekistan" (Fakhraie 2009a). *Hijob* is the Uzbek word for *hijab*, which is a headscarf used by Muslim women to cover their hair, ears, and neck. The *hijob* gained rapid popularity in Uzbekistan during the 2000s (Figure 1). Tursunov suggested that Uzbek women must dress "nationally" and "traditionally" and should only wear the scarf that is part of their own culture.

Figure 1. A woman in the *hijob* style. Photo taken by the author at a bazaar in Tashkent, December 2019.

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Tursunov was a senior member of the pro-governmental Muslim Board,[2] so these remarks viably represented the intentions of the Uzbek government at the time. Similar to the "good Islam–bad Islam" dichotomy observed in the official statements of Uzbek authorities since their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991,[3] another dichotomy can be noted between the "good scarf"—the traditional scarf worn by Uzbek women—and the "bad scarf" derived from foreign Islamic movements, particularly Islamic extremism. The good scarf is known as the *ro'mol* (described later, Figure 2), whereas the bad scarf refers to the *hijob*.

Why is wearing an Islamic veil so vehemently rejected in Uzbekistan, where more than 90% of the population is Muslim, and various phenomena related to the Islamic revival have unfolded since its independence? This chapter aims to address this question by examining the historical context, particularly the Soviet unveiling process and its consequences, as well as the contemporary situation surrounding Islam in Uzbekistan.

Women's appearance in Islam, represented by the *hijab* or the veil in general, is a hot topic of discussion worldwide, and the so-called "veil debate" or "scarf debate" have become "problematic" in the context of each country and region (Joppke 2009). The cases of countries from the Soviet Union that experienced socialist modernization and secularization under the tight control of the Communist Party have

Figure 2. Women wearing *ro'mol*s. Photo taken by the author at a bazaar in Urgut, September 2002.

yet to be closely examined, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan by McBrien (2009) and Suyarkukova (2016), as well as Tajikistan by Thibault (2018).

From my perspective, the context of Uzbekistan in addressing this question may be compared with France and Turkey, with relation to secularism as a national creed (Barras 2014)—that is, supporters of the principle of their own secularism known as *laïcité* in France and *laiklik* in Turkey, who could not or did not want to recognize the Islamic piety expressed through women's use of the headscarf in public. For the case of France, Scott (2010) asserted that the debate about headscarves and its ban in 2004 did not reconcile religious and ethnic differences, and instead led to "othering" Muslim citizens, rather than fully integrating them into French society. Regarding Turkey, as a Muslim majority country that experienced rapid state-led secularization in the 1920s during the Westernization process, the context may be closer to that of Uzbekistan. Kavakci Islam, a US-based Turkish scholar who lost her seat in the Turkish parliament because of her headscarf in 2001, stated that "the role-model status of Turkey with respect to the advancement of female agency in the secular context with a specific reference to its treatment of women with headscarves" (Kavakci Islam 2010: 3).

Uzbekistan is often regarded as an authoritarian state; Islam Karimov (1938–2016), who was the first president as well as the former leader of the Uzbek Communist Party, was elected for four terms as the president and continued to rule over the country for more than 25 years with an intensely strong presidency. His administration created a new state ideology and intended to strictly control the domestic culture. Through this ideology, he aimed to contribute to Uzbek nationalism by ensuring that Uzbek people would develop the moral principles of "Spirituality and Enlightenment" to defend its secularism and traditional "good Islam," to prevent the Uzbek youth from radical Islam as well as Western mass culture, to support traditional gender roles, and to promote a modest dress code (Sattarov 2017; Obiya 2020). In such circumstances, control over "bad scarves" was exercised arbitrarily without allowing for debates with citizens or due democratic procedures. Based on this background, this chapter examines the implications of the "good scarf–bad scarf" dichotomy in the context of the current challenges faced by Uzbekistan, shedding light on the development of discourses about national tradition in relation to the Islamic veil and women's headgear.

1. The Veil and Modernity in Uzbekistan

When examining the use of veils in Uzbekistan, the historical context of how the Soviet socialist regime created the earliest discourse regarding the Islamic veil in the 20th century cannot be disregarded. An overview of this is provided in Section 1.1, because improving the understanding of this movement can help to ensure that current issues regarding the veil can be properly contextualized.

1.1 The Soviet Islamic Veil Abolition Movement

In 1927, five years after the establishment of the Soviet Union and three years after the establishment of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (hereinafter, the Uzbek Republic, the predecessor of present-day Uzbekistan), a large-scale movement for the liberation of women began in earnest, led by the Communist Party. Determined to attack the feudal customs that were often attributed to Islam and the patriarchy, this movement was called the *hujum* (attack), and the abolition of the *paranji* was the primary aim. The *paranji* is a long cloak made of thick fabric with decorative sleeves and was worn by women. At the time, Uzbek women wore it along with a long black face cover woven out of horsehair called a *chimmat* (alternatively, *chachvon*). Women were expected to wear this anytime they were in public. This *paranji* and *chimmat* set are equivalent to the Islamic veil (Figure 3).[4]

A series of socialist modernization policies was implemented concurrently with the launch of the *hujum*. Inspired by Soviet secularism and scientific atheism, the

Figure 3. Women wearing the *paranji* and *chimmat* (old town of Tashkent, 1920s). Photo by M. Penson. Source: www.maxpenson.com.

creation of a modern Soviet–Uzbek woman, who was a respected member of society and contributed equally to the construction of socialism, became the main goal. The Soviet regime thus aimed to turn Uzbek women away from the influence of Islam and transform them into modern and productive Soviet workers.

However, the hasty veil abolition campaign provoked fierce backlash from Uzbek male conservatives, who adhered to traditional family and gender norms. This backlash led to increased instances of family based harassment and violence against women who had abandoned the *paranji*—to femicide or honor killings to prevent the family's loss of honor (Kamp 2006: 186–202; 2007). This became such a frequent and serious social problem that Soviet authorities stopped the *hujum*. Through law reforms, various measures, such as inspection of family situation (determining whether there were veiled women in a family) and enhancement of daily life discipline with relation to "crimes of daily life" were introduced (Northrop 2004: 242–283). In addition, repeated unveiling campaigns were conducted until the *paranji* gradually disappeared from Uzbek's social life. It was also partially achieved due to the onset of World War II, when countless Uzbek men joined the Soviet army and were thus absent from home. The *paranji* had almost disappeared from daily use in Uzbekistan by the late 1960s (*Ibid.*: 355).

1.2 The "Correct Dress" Without the Veil

The *paranji* abolition campaign led to the following question: What should replace the *paranji*? As revealed by ethnographic descriptions during the latter half of the 19th century (Khoroshkhin 1876: 113–114; Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886: 92–97), women's clothing underneath the *paranji* typically included a *ko'ynak* (a loose, long tunic or dress), *ishtan* (trousers), and *ro'mol* (a scarf) on the head. This clothing style was to be worn at home and was even considered underwear; it was unthinkable for Uzbek people (both women and men) to venture out wearing this outfit. Although the Soviet authority encouraged the use of "European-style clothing," which is typically worn by Russian women, this traditional, indoor style of clothing eventually became widely accepted as the standard fashion of Uzbek women in public spaces (Northrop 2004: 129–136).

Over time, Western clothing, such as jackets, blouses, and skirts, gained popularity in urban areas, and the *ro'mol* was no longer widely worn by young women.

Traditional *ko'ynak* became shorter one-piece dresses with short sleeves. Moreover, trousers were not worn during the summer; thus, some degree of showing one's arms and legs became widely accepted.

During the 10–15 years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbek women could be seen covering their head and neck with a scarf (*yopinchik*, which will be described later), or more rarely, covering their face with a cloth, revealing only the eyes, in Islamic institutions or local *mazar*s (mausoleums of saints or notable Islamic leaders). However, the sight of a woman walking around town in Islamic clothing was still rare.

1.3 The Veil and Soviet Modernity

During the imperial Russian rule, Russians who colonized Central Asia perceived the *paranji* as a symbol of both women's suppression by men and societal regression as a whole. This perspective was influenced and based on general European perceptions of the Muslim world at the time, which was a dichotomous view comprising of "Europe vs non-Europe," "progress vs regression," "civilization vs barbarism," and so on. According to Leila Ahmed, a US-based scholar of Egyptian origin, theories about the superiority of Europe "captured the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, toward Other men and the cultures of Other men" (Ahmed 1992: 151). In this way, the colonizers perceived Islamic veils as a symbol of an inferior culture wherein men oppressed women. These perspectives can also be observed through writings by imperial Russians about Central Asian people, describing Muslim women of the present-day territory of Uzbekistan, who covered their entire body with thick veils, as "the most unhappy beings" among miserable Russian Muslim women, even among the entire Muslim world (Obiya 2016b).

In the Soviet Union, which was established by fighting against imperialism and colonialism, and particularly in Central Asia, which was its *Vostok* (East), such a colonial dichotomy was further refined and bolstered using the socialist principles of gender equality, scientific atheism, and Marxist–Leninist perspectives of progressive history, such as "liberation–oppression," "bright future–dark past," "post-October revolution–pre-October revolution," "Soviet–not-Soviet," and so on. In this context, the Orientalist image of the "East" and the Marxist concept of "exploitation" overlapped with the issue of the *paranji*. Therefore, the colonial meaning appointed to the *paranji*

became even stronger than it had been during the imperial Russian rule and continued to be represented as a symbol of the problematic "culture," of "the backwardness of Islam," and an unfavorable custom to be abolished.

Interestingly, the presence or absence of a *paranji* is expressed using both Russian and Uzbek with the adjectives "closed–open" (Russian: *zakrytyi–otkrytyi*; Uzbek: *yopiq–ochiq*) describing whether the face is covered or exposed—an "open woman" refers to a woman not wearing a veil. This "closed–open" dichotomy can provoke the unlimited expansion of a binary image, such as "dark–bright," "unsocial–social," "distressed–pleased," "ignorant–knowledgeable," "idleness–labor," and "stagnation–progress." Indeed, in Uzbekistan, a series of propaganda campaigns were conducted using such easy-to-understand contrasts, claiming that wearing a veil "closes one off from the world," "impairs health," or "interferes with work" (Obiya 2016c: 11). Such dichotomous thinking was not only embedded among Uzbek communists and policymakers, but also among some intelligentsia and ordinary people, as observed in the fieldwork for the current research.

Soviet socialist modernity, initially pursued under the strong leadership of the unification between the State and the Communist Party, was constructed to exclude the veil from public spaces and to not accept any argument against this. Even when the Soviet Union and its ideology disappeared and Uzbekistan became independent, this dichotomy had been deeply internalized in people's minds during the Soviet era and could not be swept away in a single day. Instead, under the influence of post-Soviet secularism as a renewed national creed following independence, emerging threats of Islamic extremism, and the harsh measures set by the authoritarian regime to prevent it, the dichotomy continued to evolve.

2. The Appearance of the "Bad Scarf"—the *Hijob*

2.1. A New Style of Veil

An American scholar, Marianne Kamp, who conducted fieldwork in Uzbekistan immediately after its independence, wrote that she occasionally observed women wearing a new style of scarf called *yopinchik*[5] in Tashkent, as well as men wearing beards and white skull caps; this phenomenon began to spread among ardent followers of Islam at the time (Kamp 2006: 233–234). The *yopinchik* was a large-sized scarf worn around the face, sometimes concealing the face at the edges, and was often paired with

loose, long clothing that covered the arms and legs. Such clothing led to increased concerns among the government about Islamic extremism, and since the mid-1990s, those who wore such clothing became the subject of close surveillance.

Similar to the emergence of a new style of veil in the region and different from the *paranji*, the *yopinchik* could be considered the first step, followed by the *hijob* in the second step. It was unclear when, where, and how use of the *hijob* began to spread. Although the author noticed their ubiquity in Tashkent in the summer of 2009, after a three-year absence, based on some information, it seems that the *hijob* became so popular in Uzbekistan around the beginning of the 2000s. Unlike the *yopinchik*, which is white or pale in color and does not feature any patterns, according to Kamp, the *hijob* at the time was a unique, diverse, and brightly colored or patterned scarf wrapped around the face. There are several methods of wearing the scarf, and in some cases, decorations, such as brooches, are used to fasten it. It was presented as "total" colorful and gorgeous Islamic clothing because it was often combined with long-sleeved garments, such as tunics and pants, which did not accentuate the body's shape.

Although the reasons for wearing a *hijob* may be diverse (Obiya 2016a), apart from the principal reason for expressing piety, it became a new fashion style for young Uzbek women to express their individuality within the norms of conservative dressing styles, without exposing their hair, neck, arms, or legs, or revealing the outline of their body.

After 2009, the author observed women wearing the *hijob* not only in places related to Islam but also in the streets and parks of Tashkent, in the zoo, at bazars, supermarkets, shopping centers, cafes, and restaurants. The *hijob* also seemed to have grown in popularity among unmarried young girls—a popularity hardly enjoyed by the *ro'mol.*

2.2. How Did the *Hijob* Become a "Bad Scarf"?

In Uzbekistan, *hijob* wearers have seldom been known to take collective action or make political appeals. In addition, the *hijob* neither covers the entire body nor face; thus, it is unlikely to cause security problems, such as the possibility of hidden weapons or bombs under the veil, difficulties related to identification of an individual by face, and so on. Therefore, the question regarding why and how the *hijob* came to be addressed as a "bad scarf" has yet to be sufficiently addressed.

Uzbekistan suffered a horrific suicide bombing attack in February 1999 in Tashkent for the first time. In August of the same year, Japanese miners dispatched for investigation were suddenly taken hostage in Batken, in the Western region of Kyrgyzstan, bordered by both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. These attacks were perpetrated by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)[6] that was based in Afghanistan at the time. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, Islamic extremism became an urgent security challenge for Uzbekistan, and the state joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)[7] in 2001 to address it through international regional cooperation. Immediately after the September 11th terrorist attacks in the US, when American retaliation airstrikes in Afghanistan began, Uzbekistan actively cooperated with the US by providing access to its military airports. With this background, as the US turned a blind eye to the human rights issues in Uzbekistan, the repression of Islamic groups escalated, and even domestic Muslim citizens, who were unrelated to extremism, sometimes bore the brunt.

For the purpose of strengthening control over domestic Islamic movements, the 1998 Act on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (hereinafter, the "Act on Religion") (*c* [1998]) (O'zbekiston Respublikasining Qonuni No. 618-1)[8] was enacted. Although it declared freedom of religion in its title, it was intended to develop networks to oversee domestic religious organizations under the principles of secularism and separation of religion and politics, against the background of the emergence of Islamic extremism and its internationalization.

Article 14 of this Act, "Religious Rituals and Ceremonies" states that "the people of Uzbekistan must not appear in public places in worship clothes [except for those who work in religious organizations]." The legal rationale for the repression of the *hijob* is drawn from the unspoken interpretation that the *hijob* is regarded as one of the "worship clothes." In other words, nominally, wearing the *hijob* was prohibited from the perspective of secularism in the context of not permitting the wearing of items to express a certain identity for a specific religion in a public space. In addition, Article 184-1 of the Code on Administrative Responsibility set penalties for violating the prohibition of wearing worship clothes in public places in 1998 (O'zbekiston Respublikasining Qonuni No. 621-1).

Chronologically, a series of suicide bombing attacks by women, or a group involving women, rocked Tashkent toward the end of March 2004, and seemingly triggered the crackdown on the *hijob*. In this series of attacks, suicide bombings

occurred in several places over three days, killing 47 people, including police officers (IWPR staff 2005). In an attack near the presidential residence, a car with three women approached a police checkpoint, where one of them detonated her explosive vest. The others fled and hid in a nearby apartment, where a subsequent shootout with the police led to the deaths of 11 male and five female suspects (*The Irish Times* 2004). Similarly, in the old city bazaar, a 19-year-old female suicide bomber killed two police officers (IWPR staff 2005). These violent incidents shocked Uzbekistan, and the authorities recognized the need to include women as targets in measures against extremism.[9]

These attacks were immediately followed by the repression of devout Muslims, including *hijob* wearers in the capital city and other major cities. In a *mahalla*[10] of the provincial city of Qarshi, for example, the *mahalla* head issued a notice stating that "all *hijob*-wearing women are related to terrorists, and they will not be allowed to dress like that in the *mahalla* in the future" (Rotar 2004). The control over the *hijob* gradually increased. In February 2009, S. Abdulloyeva of the Uzbek Committee for Religious Affairs[11] appeared on television to oppose the wearing of the *hijob* and called on viewers to "recall that religious extremist women used to wear this kind of clothes, women might have carried guns under their hijabs" (Fakhraie 2009b). Two physicians featured in this program emphasized that the Arab-style headscarf could cause calcium deficiency and adverse health effects.[12] In 2009, social bans were imposed on wearing religious clothing in bazaars, and penalties were imposed. Around 2010, the wearing of scarves in public schools was informally banned (Barno 2010). In October 2011, the first guilty verdict was issued to a woman wearing a *hijob* (Cleek 2012). In the same year, sales of religious clothing in stores and bazaars were banned and *hijob* wearers were fined 5–10 times the minimum wage or detained for 15 days (*Regnum* 2012). With the rise of the Islamic extremist organization "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Lavant" (ISIL) in the Middle East in 2014, control over *hijob* sellers and wearers in Uzbekistan was further tightened. In 2015, there were reports of a series of crackdowns. For example, a large-scale detention of *hijob* sellers and wearers in bazaars was organized (*Ozodlik Radiosi* 2015a; 2015b; *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty* 2015). Moreover, prosecutors demanded legal action against female students posting *hijob*-wearing photographs on social media (*Ozodlik Radiosi* 2015d). Women who wore the *hijob* to bazaars were detained and interrogated at police stations. If they removed the veil, they were released; however, if they resisted, they were taken for further interrogation by

counter-terrorism officials (*RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty* 2015). Therefore, *hijobs* were perceived as a marker of Islamic extremism by the authorities, and strict preventive measures were employed in an effort to avert future expansion and development of the influence of Islamic extremism.

3. The *Ro'mol*: The "Good Scarf"

While the *hijob* was branded as the "bad scarf," the *ro'mol* became the "good scarf." The *ro'mol* thus emerged as an opposing force against the *hijob*.

3.1. The *Hijob* vs. the *Ro'mol*

Ro'mol is a generic name that means "headscarf" in Uzbek. According to the latest work on Uzbek national headgears by contemporary Uzbek researchers, Sodiqova and Gaybullayeva (2014: 41–50), the *ro'mol* used to be one of the terms used to refer to a turban for women and was made using a medium-length cloth. However, after the use of turbans gradually ceased in the 19th century, women began to wear daily shawls or headscarves instead of turbans. Today, turbans, shawls, and all types of headscarves, particularly for women, can be generally called *ro'mol*. Even the scarf that we call *hijob* in this chapter is included in the broader sense of the term. In recent anti-*hijob* campaigns, there were instances in Uzbekistan wherein, irrespective of the difference between the *hijob* and *ro'mol*, women wearing headscarves were sometimes subject to crackdowns and harassment.[13]

For women who have worn the *ro'mol* both in the Soviet and independent eras, it is a part of their daily clothing, particularly for married women. Gradually, people began to question whether or not the *ro'mol* should be subjected to regulations, and what qualified as "worship clothes," which they were prohibited from wearing in public spaces under Article 14 of the Act on Religion 1998.

In 2013, the Muslim Board proposed that the parliament and government must discuss the possibility of amending the Act on Religion 1998 to dispel the ambiguity in the definition of "worship clothes" and allow legal sanctity to wear the *ro'mol (Ozodlik Radiosi* 2013). The officials of the Board also stated that "the *ro'mol* is not Islamic," and that the *ro'mol* is a "national" and "traditional" scarf, with no religious elements. Therefore, they reiterated that the ban had nothing to do with the *ro'mol*.

In January 2014, the Committee for Religious Affairs, which was responsible for general religious affairs under the government, attempted to explain the following:

> There is no such notion as "special clothing for faith" or "clothing for worship" in *sharīʻa* (Islamic law). Since ancient times, there have been Uzbek national costumes such as the *yaktak*,[14] *doʻppi*,[15] and *roʻmol*, which can be worn during worship. According to the Hanafi school,[16] which we have respected for centuries, women are not required to cover their faces. … In our country, human rights and freedoms are fully guaranteed, and wearing traditional national clothing in public does not violate any laws (*Ozodlik Radiosi* 2014).

At a meeting conducted on August 15, 2017, heads of the Committee for Religious Affairs, the Muslim Board, the Tashkent Islamic University,[17] and other Islam-related organizations discussed the issue of religious clothing of Muslim women, and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Religious Affairs stated: "The Committee for Religious Affairs, bureaucratic organizations, and experts involved all agreed that the *roʻmol* was never a religious garment. Let us know if you are faced with a situation where *roʻmol* is regarded as a religious garment. Let us resolve this issue." In the same month, a Muslim Board spokesman stated in another meeting that, "*Roʻmol* is not regarded as a religious garment. [The meeting is] raising the issue of the *roʻmol* worn by our grandmothers and ancestral women. It is already forbidden for girls to wear *hijobs* at schools and educational institutions. But as for *roʻmol*, it's as I just said" (Ashur 2017).

Through these remarks, they attempted to show that the traditional Islamic teachings of Uzbekistan do not require women to cover their faces. Moreover, under the principles of secularism, the *roʻmol* is not a religious item, but a traditional national costume, and women can thus wear it at any time in public spaces. This strongly implies that Uzbek women should not cover their faces, and if they wish to wear scarves, they should use the *ro'mol*, and not the *hijob*.

Therefore, the *roʻmol* has been positioned as a national scarf, as part of traditional and national clothing, and a clear and preferable alternative to the *hijob*. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the *roʻmol*'s religiousness and Islamic meaning were clearly denied, and that when discussions were focused on "tradition," the *paranji* was completely disregarded.

3.2. The *Ro'mol* Reconsidered

The historical development of the *ro'mol* must be reconsidered, because even a brief reading of some historical descriptions and ethnographical remarks about Central Asia can lead to the following question: "Did the *ro'mol* really have nothing to do with the Islamic faith, as claimed by the contemporary *hijob* opponents in Uzbekistan?"

A former Russian military officer and prominent scholar Vladimir P. Nalivkin and his wife, Maria V. Nalivkina, who lived in the Ferghana region (present-day eastern Uzbekistan) under imperial Russian rule in the late 19th century, wrote a valuable ethnographic work on the lives of local women in Ferghana. They referred to the *ro'mol* as follows:

> When woken up in the morning, a Sart[18] woman wears a scarf on her head as soon as she pats her hair with the palm of her hand, but being without a scarf is not only disrespectful but even considered a sin. What is seen as a particularly great sin for women is that they are not wearing a scarf in a room with a Qur'an, and during Qur'an recitations, many women make their faces shine with a scarf firmly wrapped around their heads. (Nalivkin and Nalivkina 1886: 92)

They also wrote, "A guardian angel would fly away from her if a woman ate food without a scarf on her head" (*Ibid.*).

Based on this description, although no references have been made to stipulations in the Qur'an and the Sunnah or to interpretations by local *ulamas*, wearing the *ro'mol* during that time was related to the local faith to a certain extent.

There was a three-layered structure of Muslim women's head coverings in Central Asia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries: The *ro'mol,* which was worn indoors; the forehead cover called the *durra*,[19] a decorative item worn on the *ro'mol* for outings, and the *paranji* and *chimmat* set that covered the entire body, including the face, and was also meant for outdoor use. The *paranji* and *chimmat* set became the subjects of abolition during the Soviet women's emancipation campaign. The *ro'mol* and the *durra* were not attacked during this campaign.

We can see many "Soviet Uzbek" women (communists, *kolkhoz* workers, people's delegates, etc.) wearing *ro'mol*s in photographs from the early Soviet Uzbek newspapers. A contemporary Uzbek scholar, Babadjanov, discussed an interesting

episode from the mid-1930s about an Uzbek woman, based on a Soviet ethnographer’s work and his own interviews (Babadjanov 2014: 230–232): The woman was respected as a doctor in her local community and had significant success as a social propagandist in convincing people (both those who did and did not want unveiling) that the *paranji* could be replaced by the *ro‘mol*. Moreover, the *ro‘mol* was later known as the “Soviet *hijab*” in her village. The woman herself believed that “the call to drop the veil was an infringement of ‘*nomus*,’ which was a sacred concept”[20] (Babadjanov 2014: 231) and she never appeared in public without the *ro‘mol* (or a doctor’s cap) throughout her life.

The Soviet authorities intended to force women to show their faces by abandoning the *paranji*, which was a very thick veil that covered the whole body and face and, to the eyes of the Soviet authority, gave a strong impression of suppression. In this regard, allowing the *ro‘mol* to be worn signified a compromise between the Soviet authorities, who wanted to abolish the veil, and those who wished to abide by the norms of veiling. The *ro‘mol* became a buffer between “bad old customs” and Soviet modernity. As previously mentioned, the *ro‘mol* remained a part of daily clothing throughout the Soviet era. As has often been pointed out, during the Soviet rule, Islamic aspects became acceptable for the authority by converting them into “something national” or by mixing it with “national traditions.” The *ro‘mol* may follow a similar course, and its Islamic significant has been deliberately diminished, or at least people have attempted not to mention this significance of the *ro‘mol* in Soviet public discourse.

Therefore, when listening to the present-day announcements that “the *ro‘mol* was never a religious garment” or “the *ro‘mol* is not regarded as a religious garment,” we are witnessing the new phase of the process of creating and adapting “national traditions” with relation to the *ro‘mol*, and it is now strongly supported by the state.

Conclusion

In contemporary Uzbekistan, public sentiments regarding women's scarves are evolving and becoming institutionalized, and are expressed as follows: “In Uzbekistan, scarves basically do not need to be worn”; “If you want to wear them, it is not a *hijob*, but a *ro‘mol*”; “However, you should not wear both of them at school anyway, because on the one hand our education is categorically secular, and on the other generally scarves are not included in school uniforms”; and “Covering the face is entirely out of the question.” In such a situation, the boundary between the *hijob* and *ro‘mol* is now

under question.

Similar public morals are noted in some Muslim nations of the former Soviet Union, which share Muslim culture and the experience of socialist modernization under the Soviet regime. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these nations were exposed to waves of influence of Islamic revivalism both from inside and abroad. Currently, in a post-socialist era, they are searching for a way to ensure a "national" and "secular" form of Islam.

For example, Tajikistan, which shares a Central Asian sedentary Muslim culture with Uzbekistan, has had similar experiences with the *hijab* issue (Thibault 2018: 123–133). The Ministry of Culture published a guidebook with over 300 pages for Tajik women's dress codes in 2018 (Najibullah 2018). It specified what women should wear in terms of color, shape, size, and material, and in accordance with situations. Headscarves with bright colors and patterns are accepted, but it is clearly stated that "according to the Tajik national style, scarves should be tied behind the head and the face and neck should not be covered." Even during funerals, dressing up in black is prohibited. It is widely believed that there is undoubtedly an attempt to exclude Islamic veils through this dress code. Therefore, in Tajikistan, there is a more conscious and persistent political intention to eliminate Islamic elements from modern dressing styles.

However, as noted in the words of contemporary *hijob*-wearing women in Uzbekistan, this boundary is ambiguous, and one can easily cross it. For instance, an Uzbek woman named Madhiya, who was interviewed by journalists on World Hijab Day[21] in 2019, stated that she chose to begin wearing the *hijob* at age 17 but had to quit the Tashkent Institute of Agriculture because of the strong pressure to take off her *hijob*. She stated that, "then I had a lot of problems at work, too [because of the *hijob*], so now I have a knot at the back of the neck, not under the chin" (Maisuradze and Iarmoshchuk 2019). To her, it was similar to a *hijob*, regardless of whether the knot was in the front or back.

Today, in the context of the pursuit of post-Soviet modernity in Uzbekistan, one may imagine that people can discuss the freedom and progress of women, regardless of how they are veiled or unveiled, and such values can be widely accepted and shared in society. However, as noted in this chapter, there are other alternatives. The present-day secularism in Uzbekistan as a national creed is a mixture of the survival of Soviet-type secularism and "Western" secularism introduced as the current global standard

after the independence of Uzbekistan. The mentality of politicians and government officials, as well as Soviet-oriented intelligentsia that was formed and internalized during the 20th century, in perceiving the veil as a symbol of evil, their strong concerns about Islamic extremism, and the social atmosphere under the authoritarian regime and nationalism, where public morals tend to be institutionalized as a command from above—against this background, an arena was presented where “the good scarf” and “the bad scarf” face off on the clear boundary line drawn between them, thereby leading to the creation of new discourse about the traditional, national, and unreligious “good scarf.”

Addendum: This chapter is primarily based on the circumstances in September 2020. Subsequent changes related to the content should be included as significant developments are underway in Uzbekistan.

The new administration of Shavkat Mirziyoyev (1957–) established after the death of the first president, Islam Karimov (1938–2016) in September 2016, adopted the policy of listening to the voices of citizens, while maintaining an authoritarian regime, and has demonstrated a certain understanding of religious freedom and domestic Islamic revivalism.

A full-fledged review of the revision of the Act on Religion 1998 began in 2019, and the amendment approved by the President in July 2021 led to the ban on wearing worship clothes in public spaces being lifted (*RIA Novosti* 2021). As a result, wearing *hijob*s in public spaces is also allowed. This marks a drastic change for Uzbekistan. Many women can be seen wearing the *hijob*, and they are also included in advertisements related to Islamic fashion on the streets of Uzbekistan. Furthermore, in September 2021, from the perspective of guaranteeing the rights of all children to receive mandatory education, the Minister of Education announced that every female child can be permitted to wear the *ro‘mol*, albeit only “as an exception” if approved by their parents. However, they noted that the “scarf should be in white or light color, and tied in the back of the head” and they should also be permitted to wear the national cap *do‘ppi* (*Gazeta.uz* 2021). Allowing girls to wear headgear at school is a notable compromise. However, this compromise was only extended to the *ro‘mol* (and *do‘ppi*), which are national and traditional garments, not the *hijob,* which is religious, because mandatory education is secular. Although this is a remarkable change, on the other hand, a clear boundary between the *ro‘mol* and *hijob* remains in schools. This situation

should be observed for future developments.

Notes

* This chapter is an updated and revised version of the author's original Japanese article published in Kenichiro Takao, Atsushi Koyanagi, and Emi Goto, eds., *Shukyo to fuki: <Seinaru kihan> kara yomitoku gendai (Religion and Public Morality: Contemporary Age Through 'Sacred Norms'),* Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2021, 36-61.

1 In Uzbekistan, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (*O'zbekiston musulmonlari idorasi*), one of many social organizations, fulfills a special role of representing the "official Islam" and taking control of domestic Islam under the strict supervision of the State Advisor to the President for Religious Affairs and the Committee for Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers. In this system, *imom-xotib*, which originally means prayer leader and Friday preacher at mosques, serves as a representative of a registered mosque and performs an official job in the administrative hierarchy of the "official Islam." Being *bosh imom-xotib* (head of *imom-xotib*s) of Tashkent means to be the top of all *imom-xotib*s in the capital.

2 Tursunov was regarded as one of the most influential Islamic scholars next to the *mufti* (the head of the Muslim Board) at the time.

3 Rasanayagam asserted that "good Islam" refers to religious beliefs based on traditional moderate morality and values in Uzbekistan, whereas "bad Islam" refers to a trend in Islam with exclusive and fanatic consultations originating from outside the country (Rasanayagam 2010: 96–120). Babadjanov pointed out that Uzbekistan's officials in charge of Islam policy consider that those who identify as purveyors of "good Islam" should constantly cooperate with the state and contribute to its stability (Babadzhanov 2015).

4 Hereinafter, for convenience, I refer to wearing both *paranji* and *chimmat* as "wearing *paranji*" in the sense of "wearing the Islamic veil."

5 *yop-* is the root of the Uzbek verb "close."

6 Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (*O'zbekiston islomiy harakati*), a militant Islamist organization, was formed in Afghanistan in 1998 by Tohir Yo'ldosh (1967–2009) and Juma Namangani (1968/69–2001), both of whom were Uzbek people from Ferghana Valley, who had escaped the Uzbek authorities, and fled to Afghanistan. It received the patronage of Taliban and al-Qaeda there.

7 Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a Eurasian regional alliance for political, economic, and security cooperation formed in 2001 between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 2017, India and Pakistan joined SCO with full official membership.

8 The Act was enacted in 1991 after the independence of Uzbekistan and revised once in 1993.

9 IWPR's report (IWPR staff 2005) contains the statement of the mother of the 19-year-old female suicide bomber in the bazaar attack. This statement reveals that she began taking

interest in Islamic teachings outside of her home with her sister, and after participating in a meeting, she stopped wearing modern clothes, listening to music, and watching TV. In this case, against their parents' wishes, the daughters chose to wear Islamic clothing and eventually left home. They were a middle-class family, and the student in question was a computer programmer studying at the Police Academy and spoke English, Turkish and Arabic, in addition to her native Uzbek and Russian languages. The women involved in these attacks almost certainly belonged to an Islamic organization; however, the name of the organization is unknown.

10 *Mahalla* means “district” and refers to traditional local communities based on mutual assistance. It is also the smallest administrative unit in modern Uzbekistan.

11 The Committee on Religious Affairs is among the national committees attached to the Cabinet of Ministers, which oversees religious matters and administers all religious groups in the country, including the Muslim Board.

12 The physicians also claimed that Western-style clothing “causes unspecified health-related issues” (Fakhraie 2009b).

13 For example, in September 2015, it was reported that all female staff who wore a *hijob* or *ro‘mol* in some maternity clinics in Tashkent had been dismissed (*Ozodlik Radiosi* 2015c).

14 A robe-like upper-body garment.

15 A square or round skullcap.

16 One of the four major Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence, which is mainstream in Uzbekistan.

17 A university established under the jurisdiction of the Cabinet of Ministers by the Presidential Decree of 1999. Unlike the Islamic education institutions attached to the Muslim Board, it was primarily aimed at conducting secular Islamic research and Islamic higher education.

18 Sedentary Turkic people in Central Asia were called *Sart*s by Russians at the time. Most of them fall under Uzbek identity today.

19 It is now called *peshanabog‘* or *peshanaband* in Uzbekistan.

20 *Nomus* is explained as an “Uzbek term of Persian origin. As an Islamic term, it signifies the observance of religious precepts, religious shame/conscience or chastity.” The grammatical and everyday meanings of the term are broader and it “is understood as a norm of behaviour, a code of ethics” (Babadjanov 2014: 229–230).

21 The World Hijab Day has been celebrated on February 1 since 2013 based on the idea of a New York resident Muslima, Nazma Khan. It is to invite women (non-*hijab* wearing Muslims and non-Muslims) to experience the *hijab* for one day as a means to foster religious tolerance and understanding (World Hijab Day Organization).

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