

“The Politics of the Veil” in the Context of Uzbekistan¹

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■ Introduction

I borrowed the “the politics of the veil” concept from Joan W. Scott’s book *The Politics of the Veil* [Scott 2010], which addresses the 2004 French ban on wearing conspicuous signs of religious affiliation in public spaces. Scott analyzed the decision-making on this ban, during which debates focused on Muslim women’s headscarves. Scott’s book includes important implications for considering modernity, secularism, democracy, and citizenship in a nation state, not only for European countries but in general even for Muslim countries. When the veil, as an emblem or symbol of Islamic intolerance, fanaticism, or extremism is criticized or attacked, “the clash of civilizations” reveals hidden racist or colonialist views. In France, behind the veil question lies the marginalization of North African Muslim immigrants as “other” in the cause of French *laïcité*, or secularism.

Here, however, I would like to trace political discourses and images of Islamic veiling in Uzbekistan, beginning with some writings by Russian orientalists during the colonial period of the Russian Empire, then in Soviet propaganda, next as an ideology of new nationalism after Uzbekistan’s independence, and, finally, under current conditions. As a “Muslim” country, Uzbekistan experienced Soviet modernization under scientific atheism. As I explain below, Soviet authorities made great efforts to liquidate the veil during the socialist modernization of Uzbekistan and its society. The traditional veil *paranji* (Figure 1, 2) nearly faded out of daily life. After independence in 1991, Uzbekistan reclaimed Islam as an important part of Uzbek national tradition in a secular regime. Even so, influenced by Islamic revivalism, the new veil (*hijab* in Uzbek) appeared. In 1998 in Uzbekistan, just as in France or in Turkey, wearing religious clothing in public spaces was banned by law; then in 2012, the sale of *hijab* by private vendors was practically banned. It seemed that the anti-veil campaign had begun

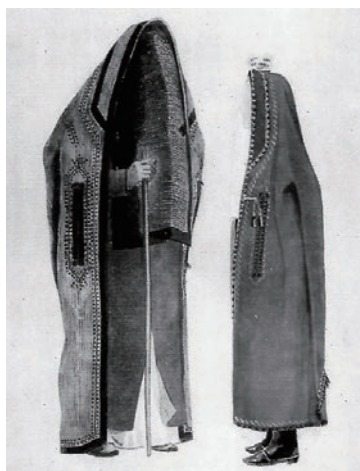


Figure 1 Paranji for Elder Women, Paranji for Girls (Usto Mumin, 1948) [Usto Mumin 1982: Illust. 76]



Figure 2 To Likbez (Photo by M. Penson, 1927)

¹ Part of the main discussion in this paper was published in Japanese by the author. See [Obiya 2011; 2015; 2016].

again, but this time without Soviet ideology or atheism and without orders from Moscow. Why is the veil "bad"? Examining this logic in a historical context illustrates the "modernity" that Uzbekistan, and more widely, the former Soviet Central Asia, experienced and still experiences, where Islam and socialism crossed paths.

■ Leila Ahmed's View on the Veil

For years, the veil question has been discussed from various standpoints, including Western feminism. Here, I would like to emphasize the view of Leila Ahmed, a prominent American gender studies scholar of Egyptian origin, who has questioned ways of Western thinking about Muslim women's liberation and progress.

According to Ahmed's work *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* [Ahmed 1992],² in the 19th century as Europe's colonization process was taking place in the Middle East, women's issues became a centerpiece of European narratives on Islam as "other." This colonial discourse adopted "the language of feminism" that had gained power in Europe and came to include a clear thesis "that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized that oppression, and that these customs were the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies" [Ahmed 1992: 151–152]. Here, the issues of women's oppression and of cultures of "other" men were combined. Especially because the veil was "the most visible marker" for Europeans, it became "the symbol of both the oppression of women" and "the backwardness of Islam." Thus, the veil became "the open target of colonial attack" to legitimize colonial rule [Ahmed 1992: 152].

In addition, Ahmed criticized not only European colonizers, such as Lord Cromer (1841–1917),³ but also Arab reformists, such as Qassim Amin (1863–1908), who was regarded as the first Arab feminist to raise the question of abandoning the veil. At the same time, she criticized aggressive opponents—traditionalists who opposed those Arab reformists. She wrote that, on the one hand, Arab reformists imitated and internalized Western discourse, even sometimes looking down on their own Egyptian society, especially on women. On the other hand, she said, opponents—traditionalists' response indeed looked like the antithesis of colonial discourse, a protest based on nationalism, emphasizing "the dignity and validity" [Ahmed 1992: 164] of Muslim customs. Despite that, their discussion was based on colonial terminology that European colonizers had created. In short, or with or without veils, both in the colony in the Middle East and in the homeland in Europe, male-dominated societies continued to be reproduced.

Thus, discourse regarding the veil emerged in 19th century Europe. For Europeans, the veil was not a simple question of unfamiliar, exotic Oriental dress or outlook but that which implied superiority or inferiority of cultures, with dichotomies of progress/backwardness, free/repressive, West/East, "we/other," and so on. This kind of discourse omitted any discussion of true liberation and gender equality in women's actual lives.

■ Uzbekistan and the Veil in Historical Contexts: From *Paranji* to *Hijab*

Ahmed's discussion on discourse on the veil has implications for Russian/Soviet Central Asia, too. Thus, I would like to present a rough sketch of the development of discourse on the veil in its historical

² See especially chapter 8 "The Discourse of the Veil" [Ahmed 1992: 144–168].

³ Evelyn Baring, 1st Earl of Cromer. He was the British consul-general in Egypt from 1883 to 1907.

contexts: Turkistan under Imperial Russian rule, Soviet Uzbekistan, and independent Uzbekistan. Some visual images I have included here place special focus on “politically correct” Uzbek women during the Soviet period.

(1) Turkistan under Imperial Russian Rule

Generally speaking, prior to the Russian Revolution, exchange of knowledge, information, and people was basically free between Russia and Western Europe. Naturally, therefore, we can observe almost the same colonial discourse on Islam and Muslims in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century among the ruling elite and observers of Central Asia in the Russian Empire, as Ahmed illustrated in her work.

Imperial Russia legitimized its conquest of Central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries in the cause of its great mission to civilize Asia by the Grace of God and the Tsar. For Russians, Islam was still something unknown, unfamiliar, even sometimes awful and evil. Muslims in the Empire were undoubtedly “the others” and needed to be assimilated, i.e., “Russified.” In the Volga region where Tatars and Bashkirs lived, as a policy Imperial Russia enforced conversion to Russian orthodoxy. Similarly, in Turkistan, the latest colony of the Empire, the “ignorance of Islam” policy was introduced: Basically, Muslims were not forced to convert but were left alone as long as they did not resist Russian rule.

As a result of the conquest of Central Asia and establishment of the Turkistan General-Governorship in Tashkent in 1876, Russia came to have almost 20 million Muslims inside the Empire. In 19th century Russia, discussion on the Muslim question as a political agenda for integration and academic Orientalology, including Islamic studies in general and ethnographical studies on Russian Muslims, developed in close relation to each other [Schimmelpenninck van der Oye 2010].

For example, Nikolai P. Ostroumov (1846–1930) was a distinguished Russian orientalist, a specialist on education of non-Russian native people (*inorodtsy*) and on anti-Islam missionary propaganda among Russian Muslims. He was dispatched to Turkistan (Russian Central Asia) as an inspector for schools, became the first director of the teachers’ seminar (normal school) in Tashkent, and then worked as an orientalist/ethnographer and journalist throughout his life there. He knew well the academic work of Islamic studies in Western Europe. In *Islamic Studies*, he expressed his opinion about Russian Muslims as follows: the Muslim question was very important and serious for Russia; Russia should take all possible measures to bring Russian Muslims close to Russia, cutting them off from pan-Islamism and the non-Russian Islamic world; Muslims’ subordination to England, France, and especially Russia supported their lives, because this favored them with higher cultures [Ostroumov 1914: 55–57]. Although he repeated that Russian Muslims were “our” compatriots, he never thought that Islam was compatible with modernity or progress, as another of his works, *Qur’an and Progress* [Ostroumov 1901], clearly showed.

Ostroumov wrote an interesting piece on Muslim women in Russia, *Contemporary Situation of Rights of Muslim Women* [Ostroumov 1911]. He criticized some of the Russian Empire’s debates on Muslim women at that time, explaining Muslim marriage, polygamy, marital relationship, divorce, and women’s general situation in light of the Qur’an and shari’a. Indeed, he tried to understand Islam deeply, but it remained “other” to him. In conclusion, he said, “As long as an access to European education and knowledge is closed for Muslim women, no improvement in their family and social situation will come true” [Ostroumov 1911: 45]. Regarding Sart⁴ men, he said, “[they were] jealous and preferred keeping their own hearth untouched by anybody” [Ostroumov 1915: 67].

To take another example, in an article from the newspaper *Tashkent Courier* titled “Women According

⁴ A term used to mean “Central Asian settled people” by Imperial Russia. In the context of this paper, it means almost today’s Uzbek.

to Muslim Law," an anonymous author wrote that the question of the veil was then the most important "hot topic" among various circles of intellectual Muslim society. Here, the author, taking not only Russia but also the Middle East into consideration and referring concretely to Turkey, described how Muslim women were forced out of social life, forced to change into a substance without spiritual and intellectual needs, and were buried forever under the veil [Zhenshchina 1910].

Obviously in Russia, knowledge of Islam and Muslims was gained and developed progressively during the second half of the 19th century and toward the beginning of the 20th century. For instance, a Russian translation of the Qur'an (in 1877) and the index for the Qur'an (in 1879) by G. Sablukov were published in Kazan' and widely used by Russian orientalists. We might see some of Russia's own contexts in writings, such as those mentioned above, but more importantly, directly and indirectly, they reflected European colonial discourse and dichotomies relating to Islam and Muslim people.

(2) Soviet Uzbekistan

After the October Revolution in 1917, Soviet authority was established in Central Asia. In 1924–25, the national delimitation process was introduced in Central Asia. Consequently, Central Asian national republics, including the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, were established, and in each republic, the socialist modernization process began.

In Europe, as Ahmed observed, feminism and cultural anthropology served, as a result, for the creation and development of colonial discourse on Islam [Ahmed 1992: 151–152]; in the Soviet Union, the theory of socialistic gender equality (including the theory of the death of family⁵), scientific atheism, and Marxist–Leninist materialistic and progressive view of history firmly supported the further development of similar discourse in the newly established, huge Soviet state, which was, in its ideology, instituted through the struggle against Imperial colonialism.

In addition, the Soviet state involved its own Orient, the Soviet East (*Vostok*).⁶ The distinction between tradition and modernity and between backwardness and progress became very clear because the 1917 Socialist Revolution was regarded as a great turning point in history, i.e., from the pre-October 1917, traditional, backward, repressive, feudalistic, and capitalistic society to the post-October 1917, modern, progressive, free, socialist, and communist society. In other words, clearer dichotomies appeared as state ideology. Central Asia's tradition was regarded as something to do with Islam and patriarchy. As Massel [1974] and Northlop [2004] wrote, in Central Asia, women became the symbol of the Soviet socialist nation: In Soviet discourse, if women were not liberated, not only women, but a nation in its entirety, including men, could not progress. In Uzbekistan during the *Hujum* campaign, abandonment of the veil became an emblem of liberated women. If the new Soviet Uzbek nation had veiled women in its society, it could never construct socialism—or so went Soviet rhetoric.

Given below are some examples from Soviet propaganda discourse and images related to the veil and the ideal new Soviet Uzbek woman.

Figure 3 is an illustration from the front page of the newspaper *Qizil O'zbekiston* (*Red Uzbekistan*), dated March 08, 1927. On this day, symbolically, international women's day, the mass campaign for abandonment of the veil—"Hujum" or "attack"—was initiated.⁷ In this picture a young woman (or a

⁵ According to Kawamoto, the outline of the theory of the death of family is as follows: When means of production are seized from private individuals and communalized, and socialism is realized, the family that was needed to inherit property is no longer needed, and as a result, women are liberated. Marriage is no longer based on property or economy but on love. Children, no matter whether legitimate or bastard, are treated equally, and society, in place of the family that became unnecessary, cares for children. [Kawamoto 2012: 191]

⁶ About Soviet West/East see [Martin 2001: 126–129]

⁷ At the same time, Hujum was scheduled to be completed by May 01, 1927, which was, as it turned out, completely impossible.



Figure 3 Qizil O'zbekiston, 08/03/1927



Figure 4 Komsomolets Vostoka, 08/03/1927

girl) has just thrown her *paranji* to the ground, and the sun is shining. The clear message is that if she abandons *paranji*, a bright future and a new life await this young woman, who is eager to obtain them.

Figure 4 is an article titled “Open the door more widely for girls of the East!” from the newspaper *Komsomolets Vostoka* (*Komsomol Member of the East*), also dated March 08, 1927. Here, the appeal reads, “Throw away the veil [*chadr*], it closes you away from the world, it damages your health, and it obstructs your working.” The illustration seems to show the ideal, new woman’s life: working, reading, and gaining knowledge, mothering children, and doing housekeeping. This heavy situation of the working Soviet women was, later, in the Perestroika period, regarded as women’s double or triple distress in.

Here, attending to the terminology of “veiled/unveiled,” expressed as “closed/open” (in Russian *zakryt/otkryt* and in Uzbek *yopik/ochiq*), is interesting. Literally, it means a woman’s face is open or closed, but obviously this terminology has ambivalent meanings: “open” means a woman is free, open-minded, and progressive; she has the right to go from her home into public space according to her own will and decisions; the door to knowledge, to society, to labor, to a bright future is open for her. “Closed” means the opposite: A woman is not free, being under the control of her father or husband and segregated in the house as if still in the feudal era; she is cut off from society and remains an ignorant victim of Islam and patriarchy. As I observed in my fieldwork, this terminology is still used among people who have a negative attitude toward the veil (and toward Islam or toward religion in general) in today’s Uzbekistan. In 2009, in Samarkand, a housewife-pensioner told me: “In Uzbekistan before the Revolution, women could not see unrelated men, ... could not go out of the house. ... Only after the Revolution, women abandoned *paranji* and became open, free. Today we live well. We are open, too. In Karimov’s⁸ independent time, we live well.” This quotation seems to suggest how deeply people internalized such terminology and dichotomy during the Soviet era.

Figure 5 is part of an article “Without any hesitation! [to abandon the veil]” from the newspaper *Pravda Vostoka* (*Truth of the East*) that celebrates on March 08, 1928, the one-year anniversary of the *Hujum* campaign’s initiation. In a photo (right), three women are standing in *paranji*. The photo caption reads “[*Paranji* is] Vestige of slavery past.” In another photo (left) two young girls are reading a newspaper.

⁸ Islom Abdugʻaniyevich Karimov (1938–), President of Uzbekistan since 1990.

Open the door
more widely for
girls of the East!

Throw away the veil,
it closes you up
from the world,
it damages your
health, and
it obstructs
you working

Its caption says, "Daily life and culture of preparatory faculty for workers of the East in Moscow. Uzbek girl students read Uzbek newspaper *Yangi Yo'l* (*New Way*)."

Figure 6 is a drawing entitled "Without *paranji*" (1930) [Usto Mumin 1982: illustration No. 28]—the work of Russian artist Usto Mumin (Aleksandr Nikolaev, 1897–1957) who lived and worked in Soviet Uzbekistan. The drawing is clearly of an ideal, "politically correct" Soviet Uzbek woman or girl. She is unveiled, wearing European clothing with a (possibly *Komsomol*) red tie and a short hairstyle; she is carrying books (or notebooks) and moving forward with a serious face and decisive steps, while two small women in black *paranji* are left behind, standing still. This picture is redolent with Soviet metaphor.

Figures 7 and 8, also by Usto Mumin, illustrate a call for work in cotton fields. As is well known, growing cotton was the most important task for Uzbekistan in the Soviet economic system. Thus cotton was called "white gold." These pictures were used for propaganda posters. In figure 7, "Even one



Figure 6 Without Paranji (Usto Mumin, 1930)
[Usto Mumin 1982: Illust. 28]

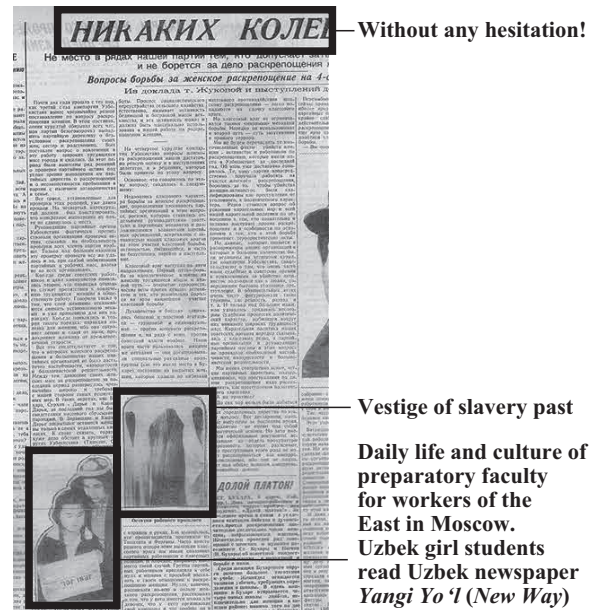


Figure 5 *Pravda Vostoka*, 08/03/1928



Figure 7 Even one gram, don't lose cotton! Even one minute, don't waste! All cotton to the state! (Usto Mumin, 1933)
[Usto Mumin 1982: Illust. 34]



Figure 8 All men, Go to Cottonpicking (Usto Mumin, 1933)
[Usto Mumin 1982: Illust. 35]



Figure 10 Ro'mol (Photo by C. Obiya)



Figure 9 Pravda Vostoka, 07/03/1937

Tursun-oi Rakhmanova

gram, don't lose cotton! Even one minute, don't waste! All cotton to the state!" (1933) [Usto Mumin 1982: illustration No. 34] Here, a woman works alongside men, gathering cotton. The slogan, like the picture's title, is on a red banner held above the cart. In figure 8 "All men, go to the cotton field!" (1933) [Usto Mumin 1982: illustration No. 35], a woman is calling loudly, inviting men to work in a cotton field. This woman represents the ideal, diligent hard worker of cotton *kolkhozes*. Not only that, she is obviously a worker superior to the men who are behind her, relaxing with tea in a dark space (somewhere in a *choikhona*?).

Portraits of good Uzbek women workers were often shown in communist newspapers. Figure 9 "Tursun-oi Rakhmanova"

from *Pravda Vostoka* (March 07, 1937) is one example, which says that she is a *Komsomol* member, work team leader, and now a *brigadir* (leader of *brigada*) of *kolkhoz* "International." She pledges that her *brigada* is going to have a cotton crop of 14t per ha. for 1937. Many articles and photos of this kind appeared in various newspapers. Those "liberated" women were praised and used as propaganda, but except for some famous activists/specialists, such as the first Uzbek female parachutist Basharat Mirbabaeva, they were mostly depicted almost without personal characteristics, even though their names, addresses, professions, and working ability were indicated.

As we already know, the *Hujum* campaign in the 1920s was not successful. It was confronted with harsh reactions, including honor violence and honor killings of unveiled women by men (in most cases, fathers, brothers, and husbands) who maintained conservative traditional family and gender norms [Northlop 2004: 85–96; Kamp 2008: 185–214].

Thereafter, there were some waves of anti-veil campaigns with other measures, including the establishment of the official representative of Soviet Islam (the Muslim Religious Board, SADUM, in Central Asia) or propaganda from various channels and media. The custom of wearing traditional *paranji* was gradually lost in daily public life, especially after WWII. Instead, of *paranji*, women began to wear headscarves (*ro'mol* in Uzbek) (figure 10). As time went by, these headscarves also disappeared in large cities. Whether the Islamic meaning of the veil has been maintained by the *ro'mol* might be a question for careful investigation, but at least during the Soviet era, reexamining or rediscovering the "positive" meaning of the veil in public debate was almost impossible.

Thus, for more than 60 years, throughout the Soviet modernization process, the dichotomy of open/closed, unveiled/veiled, progress/backwardness free/repressive, etc. deeply penetrated and was

internalized, especially among the ruling elite and urban intelligentsia in Uzbekistan. And these internalized dichotomies seemed rooted also in the concept of Soviet-type secularism, which was basically maintained after independence.

(3) Independent Uzbekistan

Islamic revivalism has been observed in various spheres of social life in Uzbekistan since the late 1980s, the time of Perestroika. After Uzbekistan became an independent secular state, the authority made great effort to create new official institutions for Islam, for instance, reorganization of the Muslim Religious Board and official *madrasas*, establishment of a new Islamic university,

and so on. But on the other hand, this effort was challenged by politicization of Islamist movements from inside and outside the country. I do not discuss the details here, but, for example, in the late 1990s, violent activities, including some bombings by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), based then in Afghanistan, caused serious concern for the government of Uzbekistan. Then, in 2001, the September 11 incident happened in New York and Washington DC. This was followed by US bombing of Afghanistan and wars for justice in the Middle East against international terrorism from the perspective of "the crash of civilizations," which gave some authoritarian countries justification to strengthen control and suppression of anti-governmental elements, including various types of Islamist organizations.

According to Rasanayagam, Uzbek authority adopted a new dichotomy under such circumstances—good Islam/bad Islam for Uzbekistan. The former is "traditional" Islam for Central Asia and Uzbekistan, based on modest morality and values historically maintained in people's relationships, for example, in *mahalla* (local community) life. The latter is exclusive and fanatic Islamic dogma from outside Uzbekistan, i.e., Islamic extremism [Rasanayagam 2010: 96–120].

In such a situation, the new veil—*hijab*—appeared in Uzbekistan. I do not have enough information regarding exactly when and how such veiling began in Uzbekistan, but Marianne Kamp wrote that in 1991–1993, in Tashkent, she sometimes observed young girls wearing the new veil, called *yopinchik*⁹ in Uzbek (figure 11). At that time, those who wanted to express their affiliation with Islam began to wear a beard and white skull cap (men) or *yopinchik* (women). Kamp also commented that in the middle of the 1990s, Uzbek authority seemed concerned about this religious outlook seriously connecting them with expansion of Islamic extremism, so they initiated rather strict control [Kamp 2008: 233–234]. This period might have been the first phase of the new veil's emergence.

The second phase might be the appearance of another new veil—*hijab*. Figure 12 are photos from 2009, when I was, in a sense, very shocked at veiling. After my three-year absence from Uzbekistan, I suddenly saw many veiled women at the zoo in Tashkent, one by one, walking happily with their



Figure 11 *Yopinchik* (Photo by C. Obiya)

⁹ At the time of the workshop, Dr. H. Kikuta kindly commented that in her field in Ferghana valley, there is a type of veil people call *yasmak/yashmak*, meaning "veil" in Turkish. Then Dr. N. Azimova explained that *yopinchik* is a rather general name for headdress, while *yasmak/yashmak* means veil, which often includes face covering.



Figure 12 *Hijob* (Photo by C. Obiya)

families or friends, just enjoying their Sunday. I was shocked because it was a landscape of Uzbekistan that I had never seen since my first trip there almost 20 years previously. This type of veiling rapidly became popular in Uzbekistan.

Although, in general, visible protests or political demands suggesting Islamic extremism or politicization did not seem to be observed in women who began to wear *hijob*, authority again saw the enemy. A representative of authority said, “Religious extremist women used to wear such clothes, and women might have carried guns under their hijabs” [Fakhraie 2009]. To stop *hijob* wearing, the authorities tried to explain its negative influence on the public through medical information that “Arab-style headscarves cause calcium deficiencies” [Fakhraie 2009].¹⁰ This is more or less reminiscent of Soviet logic against *paranji*, as in figure 4, saying *paranji* “damages your health,” basically meaning that veiled women could not have good health because they were cut off from sunlight and could not breathe fresh air.

In 1998, prior to my first experience of seeing *hijob*, the law banned wearing clothing for religious rituals in public space. Even after that, the use of *hijob* seemed to increase gradually. In 2012, rather quietly, an announcement prohibited private vendors selling religious clothing, especially *hijob*, in shops and bazaars. Thanks to information provided by Prof. B. Babadjanov, a *fatwa* that welcomed unveiling was issued by an *imam* of the Muslim Board in 2013.¹¹ It was reported that restrictions on vendors and wearers of *hijob* were renewed in 2014. In 2015, police began active public attacks on *hijob* wearers. In Tashkent, police arrested veiled women at bazaars, took them to the police station, and forced them to take off *hijob* or to see anti-terrorism department officers [“Deveiling” Drive 2015; Uzbekistan: Tashkent Police 2015]. Again, the veil is an emblem of Islamic extremism. However, I wonder, did all the women I saw in the zoo have something to do with extremism?

There is a discussion that the emergence of the new

¹⁰ At the same time, interestingly, the representative also criticized Western clothing. Uzbek “‘traditional attire’ was in, hijabs were out, and Western clothing was ‘undesirable,’ because it led to ‘unspecified health problems.’” [Fakhraie 2009].

¹¹ According to this information (unofficial Russian translation of the *fatwa* by Prof. B. Babadjanov), the traditional headscarf *ro‘mol* is fit and sufficient for pious Muslim Uzbek women.



Figure 13 Which One is *Hijob*? (Photo by C. Obiya)

veil from the 1980s in the Middle East was rather a new phenomenon as a result of (or in response to) the European modernization process, influenced also by globalism in a broader sense [Ahmed 1992; Scott 2010]. Basically, I agree with this view. Why did women in Uzbekistan begin to wear the new veil? This is an interesting academic question, considering perspectives of post-Soviet identity and social change in Uzbekistan. However, broad and deep investigation for this purpose would possibly not be allowed under the current political situation there.

Conclusion

To conclude, let us examine one more photo, figure 13. In Uzbekistan, there are many types of veil—for daily use and for rituals, including *hijob*. Is drawing a line between “good veils” and *hijob* worthwhile? Is spending so much time and energy defining a border between good and bad veils worthwhile?

Regimes have changed historically, but dichotomies—traditional/modern, East/West, backwardness/progress, closed (veiled)/open (unveiled)—have remained. To add to this situation, the emergence of the new veil (*hijob*) after independence was not a simple revival of traditional veiling, but rather part of a new global phenomenon. Its banning by authority also indicated a new dichotomy of bad Islam/good Islam, suggesting the “other/we” dichotomy in a nation state with almost 90% Muslim population. In France, “others” wearing the veil are Muslim immigrants from North Africa. In Uzbekistan, then, exactly who is “the other”?

As long as such a dichotomy is active, we cannot expect any real development in positive discussion related to women and gender relations in a contemporary context, for example, about respect for the individual, realization of women’s own will, and pursuit of individual happiness, a concept that little concerned the Soviet’s modernization. With or without a veil, each woman, as well as each man, has the right to seek ways to a better life.

To end this paper, I would like to cite Ahmed again: “Far from indicating that the wearers [of Islamic dress, including the veil: CO] remain fixed in the world of tradition and the past, then Islamic dress is the uniform of arrival, signaling entrance into, and determination to move forward in, modernity” [Ahmed

1992: 225]. I am not a supporter of veiling, but it is important to recognize that such a positive view is possible and reasonable for deconstruction of discourse on the veil, or furthermore, on modernity and progress, on a better society, and on a better life for women today.

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