Capstone Project
Capstone Advisors: Dr. Rozaliya Garipova, Dr. Alima Bissenova, Dr. Michael Bechtel.

The Meaning of Religious Veiling in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been an extensive "quest for identity" as some researchers call it, by the citizens of former Soviet Republics. Many religious, political groups arose especially in the territories of the Central Asian states. Since the 1990s up until today most of the CA states experienced the rise of Islamic groups and the general Islamization of the society. Today many more veiled women and bearded men, mosques and madrasas can be traced in these Republics that officially used to be atheistic under the socialist rule and that claimed to be secularist after the Independence. Being a Kazakh and growing up through 2000s, I can see that Kazakhstani ethnic Kazakh people consider themselves to be Muslims, however, the trend is that general population does not follow all of the required Islamic rituals, such as the five-time prayers, fasting, certain kinds of dress, or even have not pronounced the shahada. So, religious veiling that some women adopt is considered an exception rather than a rule in society, the exception that has been expanding vastly in recent years by 'newly pious' women, who rediscovered Islam. Such women usually have to undergo through some obstacles in society and from the state to maintain their religious beliefs and continue to express them. The society itself, especially the older generations, who grew up in the Soviet Union, adhere more to secularist ideologies and in some instances resist and criticize the rise of religion. The state remains cautious of religious groups, due to the increased terrorist and revolutionary threats of religious sects across the world.

The revival of religion in Kazakhstan is a part of the quest for identity after the collapse of the Soviet ideologies, as well as a part of a wider revival of religion across some other Muslim-majority states, such Turkey, Egypt, or Iran. Due to the long history of the

development of Western ideas across these states, what they have in common up until today is the dispute in the society between secular and Islamic ideas. One party that has been left out of this debate throughout history and even today, but which remains the victim of this political debate is the veiled woman. The aim of my capstone project is to understand and explain what is happening in the Post-Soviet Kazakhstan regarding religious veiled women - the reasons and the meaning behind women's veiling, the response from the state and the society. I argue that political agendas across countries and history diverge from the meanings and significance that veiled women themselves attribute to veiling. This discrepancy reveals broader tensions between state policies, cultural practices, and individual interpretations of veiling.

I believe that to explain the complexity of the matter, the reasons behind veiling, requires some historical context of how the veil came into existence, the meaning behind it across different historical periods. How did the narrative of veiling evolve through time, what stigmas existed especially, after the 19th century, after the colonizations and vast attacks on the Orientalist cultures. Later, I will use this part to retrospectively look at how this after-Westernization evolution of the meaning of veiling finds its place today in the society. Historical context of the Soviet State can help to understand the meaning put today into veil by the majority of the society, those who witnessed the Soviet government and older governmental officials, who started their careers under the Soviet ideologies. In order to clarify the relation between the historical development of veil and the current meanings that the veil bears in contemporary Kazakhstan, I conducted a series of interviews with six veiled women, to understand their motivations behind veiling, despite not having influence of their families and being first-generation veiling women. I went further to understand their experience of being veiled in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan and find answers as to how the general society and the government has been treating them after they veiled and if outside attitudes

changed towards them. To complete the understanding on the conditions of veiling and the political position that the state took since Independence about the expanding religious groups, I analyzed speeches that the First President N. Nazarbayev and the Second President K-J.Tokayev gave at various conferences regarding religious groups and specifically, about veiled women.

The first section of this paper is dedicated to the explanation of the historical context of veiling. I engage with a pioneering work in the Women in Islam subject, *Women and Gender in Islam* by Leila Ahmed. This work is important to give a historical explanation of the meaning of veiling, as well as to understand the political debates about religion and veiling in 19th-20th century Egypt. I also include a brief example of Turkish modernisation under Kemalists in the 1930s and the narrative they took against religious practices and religious veiling based on the article of Nilüfer Göle. Because my work is dedicated to analyzing the meaning of veiling and the divergence of opinion regarding veiling, the debates that happened at the heart of the Islamic world of the 20th century is important for me to show the important debate about women, that women themselves were excluded from and to show the similarity with the contemporary Kazakhstan. Later, I engage with Marrianne Kamp's work *The New Woman in Uzbekistan,* to describe the meaning of veiling that persisted throughout the beginning of the 20th century in Central Asia itself before and during the Soviet rule. Her work gives another example of the political debate in the society regarding veiling and women's position in the society, from where the women were excluded.

The second section of this paper is devoted to the explanation of the current veiling trends in Kazakhstan, the condition of it, the reasons behind veiling, the governmental and societal response towards veiled women. Putting together the state narrative and the actual experience of veiled women that I gained through interviews, I build a parallel with other states that witness revival of Islamization and conflicting ideas between secularists and conservatives.

Later, in the Discussion section I try to interweave both the history of CA, the experience of other states, and the modern Islamization trends that are happening in contemporary Kazakhstan and make sense out of it.

I. The History of a Veil

The History of the religious veiling goes back to the 15th century BCE in the Assyrian Empire. As Leila Ahmed, a prominent scholar of women studies in the context of Islam identifies in her book *Women and Gender in Islam,* the first signs of the obligation to wear a headscarves were found among the Assyrian laws. According to the law, 'honest' women were obligated to wear headscarves when they left their houses and on the other hand, women who were considered as 'publicly available' in the modern term, were punished if they were seen veiled on the streets.[1] In the first years of the establishment of Islam, it was recited in the Qur'an that a woman should cover her neck, hair and aurat in front of other men. However, in the time of the Prophet these regulations were imposed only on his own wives, and no other woman was obligated to cover herself in front of other men.[2] In later years, the author identifies, all Muslim women after the caliph 'Umar were obligated to wear a veil and through the years were more and more subjected to isolation from the social life and seclusion at home. Beginning from around the 7-8th centuries and especially, after the establishment of Abbasid dynasty, women were more and more marginalized from society. The veil was among the important aspects imposed on women as part of their isolation from social life. Until the 1800s the veil became a major requirement for the believer Muslim women in their religious practice and obedience across Middle Eastern countries.

[1] Leila Ahmed, *The Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 14-15
[2] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 55.

The situation started to change beginning with the 1800s - the veil came to symbolize 'backwardness' of Islamic cultures. The missionaries, and European people who came to work in Islamic states brought with them a new culture, the culture that was especially important for women. The stories about how European women can walk alone on the streets, work, and not cover their heads, sounded like a fairytale for hundreds of concubines residing in the palaces of sultans. The growing European influence on the markets of countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Ottoman Empire, led to the eventual colonization of some of Ottoman territories.[3] In 1882, as the author identifies it, Egypt became officially a colony of Britain, with the Khedive, the former Egyptian ruler, only as a public figure, while the power to govern was concentrated in the hands of Brits. Due to these close ties with the European elites, the upper-classes were able to benefit from the colonization and send their children to study in European institutions either in Egypt or Europe itself. The more high strata intellectuals were integrated into European lifestyle, the more they were preaching about the degradation of Arab society, for which the most important sign was the oppression, isolation and discrimination of women.

New narrative on the veiling question started to emerge among the intellectuals of Egyptian society. On the one hand, in the Egypt of the 1900s there were Westernized nationalist movements that saw the development of Egypt grounded in the abandonment of Islamic tradition, unveiling women, but regaining the Independence back into the local hands. On the other hand, conservative movements worked to prove the importance of veiling and adherence to Islamic laws as the only way for national Independence.[4] Whatever the political motives of the movements were, women were left in the middle of discussion conducted by men on their veiling. Neither were the Westerners' discourse taking into consideration the real women rights in the Arab countries, bearing in mind the Victorian discourse still

[3] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 130.
[4] Ibid., 162.

prevailing in Britain of the 1900s, nor were the nationalist movements acting at improving women rights with or without a veil.

Similarly in the shift from Ottoman Empire towards Republican Turkey, among the key narratives that a new secular government used was the emancipation of women through abandoning the old traditions. As Nilüfer Göle identifies, the new ruling group and everyone siding with new Republican ideas divided their own native society into barbarians or conservatives and progressive secularists. Whereas the same was seen in Egypt, the difference is that the division in Egypt in the 1880s was imposed by the ruling foreign Western government, while in Turkey it was the native population with Western beliefs.[5] An important idea that the author points out is that many of the newly 'modernized' Islamic states like Turkey, used 'modernization,' economical advancement, improved education as their arguments for following the Western form of culture and government. However, they did not really engage with those advancements within the context of their native culture. For some reason, the idea that became prevalent was that the native culture itself was inherently corrupt and only by abandoning the culture and following the Western way that was thought to be inherently correlated with Western economic and political domination, could they become better and return the previous power of their states. Again, "In the Turkish case, the project of modernization equates the nation's progress with the emancipation of women,"[6] and the veil or un-veil is a main symbol of the modernization campaign.

Women are the ones who are left in the middle of the state and cultural traditions. In the Babylonian Empire the veil was used to distinguish women in the society. In the Prophet's time, veil was worn only by his wives, however, later it extended to be a wider practice across Muslim women. When it comes to the 20th century, the veil was given the Western

[5] Nilüfer Göle, "The Quest for the Islamic Self within the Context of Modernity," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* eds. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1997), 85.
[6] Ibid., 86.

narrative of a backwardness of the Islamic culture, and thus had to be removed for all in order to improve society. The several narratives that came together at the end of the 19th century in the Western world - the Western right to dominate the world, the racial superiority and the emerging discourse of feminism, came together to allow the colonizers to put Eastern cultures on a far inferior position and especially in the Arab world, bind the backwardness of the culture with the perceived discrimination of women that was foremost binded with the tradition of veiling. In the later years, when the veil and Islamic traditions will be revived across different states, the narrative of barbarism of traditional cultures and the conflict of narratives between the secularists and Islamists will remain important and unresolved.

In a later work, *A Quiet Revolution:the Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America,* devoted to exploring the reasons and trends of Islamization in Western societies, Ahmed rediscovers the motivations behind veiling among Egyptian women in the 1980s. In the reality of the 80s, the tension as described above existed between the still prevalent traditional ideas on life and a Western reality with equal women rights. The traditional then, did not perish, but remained important in the spheres where government could not fully interfere, the private spaces and specifically, the families. Ahmed analyzes in her book the interviews conducted by Arlene Elowe Macleod between 1983-1988 with Egyptian veiled and unveiled women. In there she finds that the veil for the veiled symbolized an intermediary that helped them navigate in the world, their jobs, schools, universities, while adhering to traditional values of their families. In that sense, the veil was used as a tool to relax the tension between the two contrasts and allow them to participate in public life, while making a statement that I am a ‘good Muslim woman’ and maintain their personal lives private from the public. The tension usually arose in the families, with husbands being unhappy that other men in workplaces or other public spaces could have access to see their wives’ hair or look at them inappropriately. Similarly, even the unmarried women had an

intention of stopping all the male gaze and walking on the streets with an ease, sending a message to the world that she is Muslim woman and required a certain kind of respect towards that. However, among the conclusions of the interviews taken through those 5 years by Arlene E Macleod, throughout 1980s as the Islamic groups and political Islam was getting more power in the society, if veiling was a personal choice at the beginning of the decade, towards the end it was a conformity towards the majority opinion that it was 'right'. Out of 85 respondents that she interviewed throughout those years, only 29 were veiled, and towards the end 69 of the respondents adopted hijab even though some had opinions that they will never do that.[7] If through the 1970s and beginning of 1980s women had to be convinced, had to find reasons to cover themselves and be rather exceptions in the society than a rule, by the end of the 1980s being uncovered was seen as an exception and met with certain pressure of its 'wrongness'.

Simultaneously, it should be noted that politicizing religion played an important role in influencing this societal trend of islamization. In Egypt, by the 1960s, when the country regained its Independence, the Western secularist narrative was the prevailing one in urban society, and by that time most of the upper-middle classes adopted the Western kind of living without a veil. Many women received a higher education both at home and abroad and were able to pursue professional careers. By that time women intellectuals themselves developed several political groups that advocated for the rights of women in Western conservative ways. However, the establishment of the Nasser regime altogether eliminated many of the Islamic followers in the society, including one of the most prominent feminists Zeinab al-Ghazali, who had a strong belief that following the Islamic way was the most righteous and just way for women's advancement in society. The society was left without its traditional proponents and altogether the traditionalist religious ideas were abandoned for quite some time.

[7] Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011), 119.

However, already by the 1970s with the new political leader in Egypt Anwar Sadat, who supported and sided with Islamic groups, Islamic presence was more and more noteworthy in the major cities as Cairo and Alexandria.[8] Sadat's political motivation of siding with one of the major groups in the country, the Islamists, to gain support and come to the office, consequently, led to the strengthening of Islamic groups. Such a trend affected the wider society and allowed for more relaxed rules for veiled women, which increased their numbers by the 1980s. In other words, such political divergences showcase the general ideological divergence within the society, as well as show how women were subjected to different kinds of lifestyles based on the political narrative that was present in the country at that moment. In the complexities of political motivations, religion was used as a tool for certain goals, but religious people and particularly women were the ones affected by those motivations. To veil or to unveil in the 20th century Middle Eastern countries like Turkey or Egypt was not a part of a personal agenda of a woman, but a part of the political agenda of the state leadership.

Similarly to what was happening to Middle Eastern states, Central Asian countries experienced the influx of ideas and innovations in regard to women's position in the society, without asking women of their desired position. While Middle Eastern countries like Turkey, Egypt or Iran were experiencing their own turbulent years of reforms and new ideas, non-Middle Eastern Muslim-majority states as those of Central Asia, had their own pace and course of reforms. The 1920s were years of the shift from traditional norms to the new modernizing ideas. The pre-Soviet religious norms of places like modern day Uzbekistan, Ferghana Valley or Turkestan back at that time, were as strict as that of the Saudi Arabia - women were not allowed to exit the house without a man accompanying them, and were covered in *paranji*, the veils that covered all of the body with a net-like material of horse

[8] Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* 217.

mane in front of the eyes.[9] Meanwhile, in modern day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in the steppes, in the conditions of constant moving from one place to another, nomadic tribes practiced a rather relaxed form of religion with no *hijab* for women.

In Uzbekistan, as well as in many other Islamic States that in one way or another was occupied by or influenced by a European power in the 20th century, the general discourse of unveiling was associated with improving the society and modernization. The wider trend of modernization in the Ottoman Empire, the rise of Young Turks affected the Central Asian people and led to the formation of the Jadid movement, *jadid* meaning 'new' from Arabic. The Jadid movement that started prior to the Revolution of 1916 had local intellectuals who proposed the ideas of women education and improvement of their social position for the sake of the future of society. With the correlated ideas of the newly formed Soviet State in later years, some of the novatory ideas of Jadidism regarding improvement of women's position in the society and expanding the education across the nation, forcefully spread across the state and many other neighboring Central Asian Soviet states. Eventually, the Soviet socialist ideas integrated into the CA societies, but in strongly religious and traditional parts like Syr-Darya Valley region, for some time they had to coexist with religious authorities and shari'a legal system until the beginning of 1927. Although in this new form of integrated society, women got equal rights with men, had access to good education and work opportunities, the veil still signaled the backwardness of a society and compliance with religious norms. Modernizing process could not be fully realized without getting rid of the most socially present element that would remind about the past backwardness and barbarism - the veil.

From the outside, the narrative of the Soviet State towards Central Asian women is somewhat similar to the West European Orientalist narrative, seeing Eastern cultures inherently backward as opposed to themselves and using 'oppressed women' as the main

[9] Marianne Kamp and Noor Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity," in *The Routledge International Handbook to Veils and Veiling Practices,* eds. Anna-Mari Almila and David Inglis, (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 84.

evidence for that. While West Europe did not engage much with the improvement of women's position in their colonized countries, the Soviet State saw it as its mission to emancipate discriminated women by illiterate men and barbarian culture.[10] The reason for that could lay in the political agenda of keeping former Russian Empire CA colonies under Soviet rule, bolsheviks would try different options of integrating Central Asian nations into the new socialist ideology. The discriminative in nature gender dynamics in this case was used as a tool for the Soviets to appeal to women, emancipate them, and get them on the side of the Soviets.[11] Another reason was the generally rather innovative ideas of the Soviet state and socialist utopia of equalizing men and women within the society, involving women in labor, and making them a part of the proletariat. The veil in this case was seen as an obstacle, preventing women from leaving their houses, educating themselves and becoming a part of the civilized society.[12] In other words, in both of the cases it could be said that women's emancipation for the Soviets was rather a component of achieving socialist utopia, together with their political agenda of taking control over CA states, rather than doing it for the sake of women.

In that way, women were left in the middle of yet strong local influences of the majority conservative society and the new reformist ideas of the state and socialist groups. The Hujum campaigns were aimed at the veil in particular as a symbol of barbarism. In February, in the main communist Uzbek newspaper Yangi Yo'l, the narrative was as follows, "Comrade women and girls! You have freedom and the right to throw off your paranji and chachvon! Since the paranji has been the chain of enslavement, no woman or girl can set herself free from slavery while she is under paranji!"[13] However, the state propaganda, unveiling

[10] Kamp and Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity," 86.
[11] Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 77.
[12] Kamp and Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity," 91.
[13] Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2006), 165.

demonstrations and pressure on working men, although successful for Hujum itself, provoked mass murders by men against unveiled women. Even though it was not imposed in laws on a state level to unveil, as that would not have been accepted by a wider society, the pressure by the state to be excluded from the party, left without work or even further imprisoned, forced many women to unveil, which left them in the middle of their cultural traditions and at high risks of being abused, beaten or even murdered. Yet it should be noted, that the narrative here goes not onto the state violence against veiling and forceful unveiling but that the state ideologies did not match the cultural setting and even though some women wanted to use the opportunity to be part of the communist party, get educated and advance, there was the tension between them and local conservative population. The tension between the traditional culture and state ideologies was high and in the middle of it were female and the veil.

In modern day Uzbekistan, having gone through the Soviet period as well as Kazakhstan, the 1990s were a year of religious revival. As Kamp notes, the religious teachings and foreign influences of Islamic countries spread through the newly Independent state and more women could be seen on the streets wearing hijab, an international Islamic veiling. Although the re-veiling was seen disappointing by many elderly women of Kamp's study, she notes that in comparison to the veiled women of the 1920s these women are making their individual conscious choices to start practicing religious traditions.[14] Re-veiling then became a religiously conscious attribute as opposed to being a traditional attribute.

Throughout 25 years of Islam Karimov's Presidency many rival candidates or opposing factions were imprisoned by the government, including Islamic leaders and parties. Beginning from 1997 veiling *hijab* was considered illegal in public spaces like educational facilities and many women were given the choice either to adopt traditional Uzbek dress or

[14] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan,* 234.

be expelled from the university. As Kamp notes, when she visited Uzbekistan in the 2000s almost no woman dressed in *hijab*, and only few wore traditional Uzbek clothing.[15]

The governments of the 1990s were not on the side of a choice and support, but conversely on the side of opposition to the freedom of choice. While in the Soviet state women were convinced to give up veiling and the phenomenon was associated with a mere compliance to social norms and long-lasting traditions, in the Independent Post-Soviet states the Central Asian governments took a forceful turn at restricting religious expression in public spaces. In Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, decrees were made to prohibit the presence of religious attributes in the attire in public schools and sometimes universities.[16] In Uzbekistan, many people tried to open cases against educational institutions for restricting their freedom for expression, but all of them were lost.[17]

It is noteworthy, to see that in states, such as Egypt and Uzbekistan, after they gained Independence, compliance with religion for some times was accompanied by political motives. The state leaders almost hegemonically could decide to ban religious presence in the public spheres, as in Karimov's or Nasser's regimes, or suddenly revive them. In between those changes were women, who got expelled from universities or fired from work for wearing *hijab.* In Kazakhstan although, the narratives of the two Presidents are cohesive in regard to religion, the general attitude towards veiling is rather controversial. The state leader can go on to visit Ka'aba in the Islamic white robe[18], but claim that black *hijabs* are the product of Islamic fundamentalists. Similarly, one portion of the society might act more respectfully towards veiled women, while the other portion act offensively towards them.

---

[15] Ibid., 236.
[16] Kamp and Borbieva, "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity," 91.
[17] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan,* 233.
[18] "President Tokayev performs Umrah," *"Kazinform" International News Agency,* July 25, 2022, https://en.inform.kz/news/president-tokayev-performs-umrah_a3958598/

II. The meaning of Veil in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly Independent former Soviet states had to decide for themselves what course of action to take, what national identity to build, and how to identify themselves. As well as the states were building a new national identity, so were the people building new lives and new identification points for themselves to thrive in unstable times. Some researchers note that as the state-centered ideology perished with the absence of the state that decided for each person their whole course of life, there came the vacuum of beliefs in people's lives. If before for generations the majority of the population got used to living state-centered lives, in the 1990s people were left without that center to revolve around and everyone had to decide for oneself what to hold on to in their lives.

In those conditions Central Asian states experienced an influx of foreign ideas and political support of other states, especially, from the Islamic world. With the Independence the new foreign ties that the states formed, defined their future course of action. Among the major ties Kazakhstan built with the Islamic world were with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt. New schools, institutions were built with the help of those states and many investments were made to facilitate the development of the newly Independent state.[19] However, the government of Kazakhstan also formed close ties with the Western world, while also acknowledging its close relationship with the Russian Federation and Chinese neighbors. Acknowledging the identity crisis of its population accompanied with unstable economic conditions and high crime rates, the government tried to appeal both to the traditional culture of the steppe nomads, as well as the new modernizing realities and aspirations of the Western World. Considering the vastly mixed population of Kazakhstan

[19] Bilal Ahmad Malik, "Islam in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Experiencing Public Revival of Islam through Institutionalisation," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies* 13, no. 3 (2019): 77.

that formed during the Soviet government and the long history of atheism, the state decided to declare itself secular.

The speeches of the Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan can show the general attitude by the state and the majority of the secular population towards religion. It can be traced in the speeches of the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, his support for the Islam in the new Kazakhstan, but no support for religious expression or presence of religious attributes in public spaces and daily life. In the 2nd Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held in Astana 12-13th September 2006, he deliberately expresses that 'Kazakhstan is a part of cultural continent of Islam,' 'majority of the population considers itself Muslim,' and finishes his speech with, 'for You who are on this path of sacred goal I wish you the Mercy and the Grace of the Creator!', using the words that correspond to the ar-Rahman and ar-Raheem names of the God in Islamic tradition.[20] In his address to the citizens of Kazakhstan on the occasion of Eid-al-Adha in 2011, he notes that 'the true values of Islam have returned to us thanks to our Independence. They have played a significant role in the spiritual development of our people.'[21] However, in his speech addressed at the 2nd Jas Otan meeting, a young wing of the previously dominant party Nur Otan, on 16th of November 2012, he said "We are Sunnis, we have our own way. We respect everyone, we respect everyone's opinion, however, putting on the Arab-style dress on the heads of our girls and women, trying to return them back to the Medieval period is not our way."[22] In his speeches the first President highlights that the current trends of veiling among women is not something that was a part of Kazakh tradition,

[20] Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Speech by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A.Nazarbayev at the II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions", *Akorda.kz,* September 12, 2006, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/speeches/external_political_affairs/ext_speeches_and_addresses/vystuplenie-prezidenta-respubliki-kazakhstan-n-a-nazarbaeva-na-ii-sezde-liderov-mirovykh-i-traditsionn_1342417707.

[21] Nursultan Nazarbayev, 'Congratulations of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A.Nazarbayev on the Eid al-Adha holiday,' *Akorda.kz,* December 5, 2011, https://www.akorda.kz/ru/speeches/internal_political_affairs/in_statements_and_congratulations/pozdravlenie-prezidenta-respubliki-kazahstan-nanazarbaeva-s-prazdnikom-kurban-ait.

[22] ULA Ydy, "Назарбаев хиджаб туралы," Youtube, April 6, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMP9E4sq7fs.

giving examples of warrior women of Kazakh tribes, who fought together with men and were never isolated from the society. This indeed corresponds to Kamp and Borbiyeva's research on Soviet unveiling campaigns in Central Asia, where they note that Kazakh and Kyrgyz women were not affected as much by such campaigns, as were Tajik or Uzbek women, due to the history of their nomadic lifestyle that prevented them from adopting deep religious tradition of covering and isolating women from the outside world. Up until today among the formerly nomadic groups, as Kyrgyz or Kazakh, usually married women and women of big age veil for the purposes of showing their status and special respect towards that.[23] Nazarbayev connects the trend of veiling among younger generations with the degradation of the society, and puts it forwards that the only way towards the future is through education and not religious adherence.

Such concerns towards the deep engagement of some groups in the society with religious practice, corresponds both to the governmental and societal trend of associating religious dedication with terrorism or in more general terms, backwardness. Among the possible reasons for that could be a broader trend of terrorist events happening across the world, especially in the 1990s and 2000s that had ties with radical Islamists and simultaneously, in various regions of Kazakhstan in 2011 that were associated with the *Jund al Khilafah*, the Soldiers of the Caliphate, radical Islamist movement.[24] Together with that the still engraved Soviet narrative of viewing a veil as an enemy to modernisation, "veil had come to symbolize the apparent oppressive, backward and fanatical nature of Islam"[25] persist among the older generations that makes them all the more resistant towards veiling youngsters.

[23] Julie McBrien, "Mukadas's Struggle: Veils and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, (2009): 134.

[24] Erlan Karin, *The Soldiers of the Caliphate: The Anatomy of a Terrorist Group* (Astana: The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016), 8.
[25] McBrien, "Mukadas's Struggle: Veils and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan," 135.

In other words, Islam was an important part of building a new national identity that was different from the Soviet past and its close association with Russian counterparts, however, the state throughout the 2000s was cautious of not giving too much space towards religious engagement among the population. As McBrien mentions in her book, *From Belonging to Belief,* the new internalized kind of private religion was preferred among secular Central Asian states, because it created a sense of a separate non-Soviet, non-Russian identity, yet did not allow religion to develop into public political Islam.[26] The meaning of veil then in the Central Asian states, and particularly in Kazakhstan, was made unnecessary in daily life, foreign to the culture, and terroristic in nature. Again, although the government acknowledged its Muslim history prior to the Soviet identification, and maintained close ties with Islamic counterparts identifying itself as part of the Islamic world, the religious expression was seen as radical and unwelcome in the society.

The second and the current President of the country takes on the narrative of N.Nazarbayev, and urges young generations to engage themselves in education. Namely, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his speech, that he addressed to the pedagogues of the country on October 5, 2023, highlighted that "According to the Constitution, Kazakhstan is a secular state. This principle should be strictly observed in all spheres, including education."[27] However, this strict observance of the secular norms of the country is usually met with some uncomfortableness among the religious population. According to some, it seems that the state is limiting the Constitutional right for its citizens to have a freedom of religious expression, by recommending schools to ban religious attributes. I believe for that reason, did the President proceed with the explanation that, while the government guarantees the right for freedom of choice and religious expression, in the school age people are still young to make a conscious decision to follow or not to follow religious practice. This is particularly true of the

[26] Julie McBrien, *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 9.
[27] Aqorda, Telegram message, October 5, 2023, https://t.me/aqorda_resmi/12127.

Islamic veil, as the most vivid example of religious engagement and an affiliation with religious groups. It can be justified that the state does not want people to engage in religion before they receive a proper education, and still then as in the opinion of the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, particularly of *hijab* 'it is not our way.'

He then proceeds with the explanation of what secularism means in the context of Kazakhstan, "Speaking about the worldview of our people, one can characterize secularism as pragmatism, commitment to a healthy lifestyle, reverence towards our traditional religion, preservation of national consciousness".[28] The narrative here shifts to the national identity as opposed to religious identity at the center of identification of a person. Being a part of the secular state then implies the abstinence from illiteracy and radical religious views, identifying oneself according to the nationality and being an independent thinker. This complies to the later speech of the President Tokayev given on March 15th 2024 at the 3rd National Kurultai, where devotes a significant portion of his speech to the discussion of religious groups, the Islamic dress that some Kazakh women adopt and national identity:

> "The fact is that in recent years there have been a lot of people wrapped in black robes in our country. Everyone knows about it. And these are not strangers, but our fellow citizens.
>
> Dressing in all black contradicts the worldview of our people, is a thoughtless copying of foreign norms caused by religious fanaticism. We must not break away from our spiritual roots and blur our national identity.
>
> The desire of radical neophytes to impose alien religious ideals on society, including in the form of an archaic form of clothing, is an undisguised challenge to our traditional foundations and values. We must rely on thousands of years of religious knowledge and spiritual guidance from our ancestors."[29]

For the government the religious identification of a person and particularly, seemingly Arabic adherence in the way religious women decide to dress, poses a concern and a threat, as it signals the increasing and expanding trend of global Islamization among the society. As

[28] Aqorda, Telegram message, October 5, 2023, https://t.me/aqorda_resmi/12127.
[29] Aqorda, Telegram message, March 15, 2024, https://t.me/aqorda_resmi/15600.

it was mentioned earlier it is not an internalized religious practice any more but a public expression of Islam and the possible adherence to certain religious groups. For that reason I believe the President refers to the national identity that should be at the core of a person's identification. National identity in that sense complies to the previous explanation of secularism and citizenship in contemporary Kazakhstan, where secular norms followed by education and independent thinking, with only a slight presence of religion are preferred. Then, are those women who adopt a *hijab* that can potentially be classified as an Arabic form of dress, lack the qualities of an exemplary citizen of Kazakhstan?

The notion of secularism imposed on the nation, did not prevent some groups and especially the youth to adhere and follow the religious path that was promoted by foreign missionaries or Islamic allies of Kazakhstan. To name but a few academic examples of how foreign representatives influenced the Islamization in Kazakhstan, I am using the auto-ethnography of anthropologist Ulan Bigozhin, reflecting on his youth on coming to Islam and sociologist Alima Bissenova, who engaged in interviews with first students from Kazakhstan sent to Al-Azhar to receive religious education.

Ulan Bigozhin's auto-ethnographic note describing life of the 1990s, displays how easy it was to get into the religious sects, while being a student in Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan back then.[30] Many researchers identify the vast income of missionaries from across various religions and places of the world that propagated each of their ideas. This ethnography gives special example and data, on how in reality this vacuum of beliefs after the Independence was filled with various groups coming from different regions - the Chechens and Ingushs with the Qadiriyya Sufi thoughts, Ahmadiyya movements, and Salafism. They do not comply with the traditional way of Muslim practice that was preserved by some Kazakhs in the Soviet Union. Salafism, in particular, as the author mentions played an important role for him to become a

[30] Ulan Bigozhin, "Becoming Muslim in Soviet and Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," *Ketmen* 1, (2022): 22-35.

practicing Muslim, although many of their ideas he later found too radical and in some sense unnecessary, it still contributed to his preservation of religious beliefs.

Alima Bissenova in her article written back in the beginning of 2000s, interviews the first Kazakhstan students who went to obtain a religious education at a partner university Al-Azhar in Cairo.[31] From among the answers that she received from the students, there was a noteworthy point that one woman made, that "the high crime rate was a manifestation of the breakdown of social order and morality and that justice and 'moral order' would be achieved when people became more religious (Islamic)."[32] This complies with the point that under the circumstances of political instability in Kazakhstan, people were looking for ideas or concepts to hold on to and find balance, a safe space that would allow them to navigate and some found an answer in the religious practice, and particularly, Islam. In this case, not the missionaries, but the diplomatic ties and educational support that Egypt provided for Kazakhstan, played out a role in people's lives to expand their religious knowledge and find an identity, a religious one, for themselves.

The path of identity that the state undertook was that of a new national identity, where religion plays only but a surface role. However, religion for the people themselves played a more important role than a surface identity.

In order to understand the reasons behind veiling of contemporary Kazakh women, I conducted a series of interviews with 6 women who were either first-generation practicing Muslims, who adopted Islamic practice recently or were practicing for more than 5 years, or those who were born to first-generation practicing Muslims and followed the religious practice since childhood. All of the women have a secondary education and a higher education degree, or are on the path of obtaining a higher education degree, most are in their

[31] Alima Bissenova, "Central Asian Encounters in the Middle East: Nationalism, Islam and Postcoloniality in Al-Azhar," in *Religion, State & Society* 33, no. 3 (2005): 253–263.
[32] Bissenova, "Central Asian Encounters in the Middle East: Nationalism, Islam and Postcoloniality in Al-Azhar," 260.

20s, some are working. The interviews lasted for around 1 hour each, and included approximately 10 questions that were asked from each respondent, together with additional questions necessary for clarification on a case-to-case basis. Among the most crucial questions were “What does the veil mean to you?”, “How did the attitude of your surroundings changed after you veiled?”, “Do you remember what was going on in your life or in the world when you decided to start religious practice/decided to veil?”, “Have you ever experienced prejudices or discrimination against you, because you were veiled?” The notion of being first-generation religious practitioners can be interchangeably used with the word ‘newly pious,’ meaning those who were born to not-practicing Muslim families, but who themselves rediscovered religious practices and started them. The ‘newly pious’ is also used in a similar context in other research regarding Central Asian or other Muslim-majority countries.[33]

For most of these women the religious practice began with the influence from an outside group - classmates, friends, family or grandparents. The usual beginning of the religious practice started with fasting, either done due to curiosity “**E: I started first to fast, when I was 15 years old. Although my family was not very religious, my grandparents used to fast, I was very curious, so I decided to join them in that quest. But in a more conscious way I started to practice when I was 18**” or mere compliance with what the rest of their society were doing “**D: In the 9th grade our class became more religious and everyone started fasting during Ramadan, I used the opportunity to fast with other people.**” Those individuals or groups who encouraged the fasting in the first place for the respondents, themselves were a product of various outside influences like in the case of **A*[34]** who studied in a Kazakh-Turkish College, whose friends took some of their ideas from that educational facility, sometimes affiliated with the Turkish Nurcu movement associated with their

[33] McBrien, “Mukadas's Struggle: Veils and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan,” 133
[34] Each individual respondent is given a unique letter for the sake of maintaining the anonymity of the subject

religious beliefs. Another similar case was that of **D*.** As mentioned above, she had classmates who were religious and who imposed some of their ideas to the class, but above them was a different group of older generations that required those youngsters to go to the mosque nearby their school and participate in prayers. These teenagers would later go and spread the ideas they heard from imams to the rest of their classmates. So, although most of my respondents did not receive religious guidance from their immediate family, before entering a religious path they received some religious guidance from their surroundings, peers, outside groups, or moderate grandparents.

However, although the respondents were to a certain extent influenced from the outside into beginning their religious journey, the decisions to veil, to commit to religious practice were individual ones, usually met with some resistance from wider society, parents or to a moderate extent from the state officials. All of the respondents began their religious journey from fasting in the month of Ramadan, many believed that their practice will be limited to fasting and never go further. Similarly many of the respondents believed that after they started praying, they would 'definitely' not cover themselves.

> Y: You said you wanted a new identity, but with veiling, did you come to veiling immediately after you started praying or it took some time, maybe there were other concerns?
>
> **D: Actually, no. When I started doing namaz, I thought it was the peak of my religiosity. I openly said that I will not wear a veil, said it openly, just like that. But after a year I, for some reason, started to want to cover myself. You know, something just changed inside of me, I started very much… to want to wear a veil. Um.. I can not explain what happened, because I did not understand it myself. I was fiercely against veiling. Even though I was already praying, I had some slightly transparent clothing, mini skirts etc. But after a year, I just wanted.. [to veil].**

Some of the respondents shared that they had concerns before they veiled, that they will meet prejudice in the society, resistance from the parents or later, have a hard time

finding a job. Some had to go through some secrecy before they veiled from their relatives.

> **A: We had huge fights with my mother. She used to cry a lot, I still do not understand why she acted like that back then, but once she even threatened me, she said 'okay, you go veil, and I will go drink [alcohol].' And for me it was a shock as she abandoned even casual drinking with her friends after I started praying. So, I postponed my veiling process. I thought, when I leave my house, I will be able to cover myself without my parents or relatives knowing about it. Because they would comment, try to convince me against veiling and I was afraid I would not be able to withstand them.**

Some after they committed to changing lifestyle encountered biases and open persuasive talks to unveil.

> **R: I am a medical student and I have two jobs, one in a governmental clinic and another in a private clinic. I work as an Assistant Doctor and Children Neurophysiology Doctor. Before going to the umrah [small pilgrimage to Mecca] I talked with the administration of the governmental clinic and asked if they were okay with it and if they would accept it if I veiled. Their response was generally positive and accepting. Now when I participate in the surgeries I do some adjustments in my head covering so as to comply with sanitary regulations. In the private clinic, however, [when I came back] they asked me to remove the headscarf at the workplace. They offended my appearance in many ways and said something like 'remove it, it ages you, you have such beautiful hair, why would you cover it.' But I stand by my opinion. They then asked me to participate in a serious conversation with the administration director of the clinic, who again was offending me, not in a harsh way, in a somewhat nice tone, but with words like 'you will never find a job in Kazakhstan or abroad in this way.' I told them that it is my decision that they have no right to question whatsoever, but that I am ready to make some adjustments towards their dress code requirements. I kind of draw the borders.**

At the core of it, despite the extensive persuasions and the resistance from close ones, colleagues or friends, was the individual inner determination to veil. To discover those

strong reasons, that made my respondents withstand many of the critics, I asked them "what was the meaning of veil for them?"

Among the most common answers were two - that the veil means protections from the outside gazes, and that the veil is the reminder of the path of God that they are undertaking. Some indeed shared the experience of experimenting with veil prior to fully committing to it. One of the respondents, **M***, who decided to veil as soon as she reached the first legal age 16, mentions that "**you usually do not come to veiling immediately, I would say. I was 16 years old, I was not comfortable with the attention male were giving me, looking as if on an object. After some experimenting and seeing the change in the attitudes towards me, I came to the conclusion that there was less sexual attention when I am veiled and you feel more free, with no stigmas on you."** Many others shared the experience that after they veiled, they felt a different, more cautious in a good way, respectable attitude from men towards them. However, as another respondent noted, in recent years instead of protecting women from male gaze veil attracts more attention, as it serves as a sign for some men that a veiled, righteous woman will be a good wife. This complies with the analysis of Anna-Mari Almila in the *Routledge Introduction Handbook of Veil and Veiling Practice*, where she discusses that for many women veil is a way to keep privacy in the public spaces and specifically, defend themselves from outside gazes. Meanwhile, for the outside world, it can represent a variety of meanings, including a stigma of 'good,' pious behavior of a woman behind a veil.[35]

When it comes to the commandment of God and a reminder of the path that they decided to undertake, it was repeated many times by various respondents that 'Islam is perfect, but people are not perfect.' In many difficult life situations respondents were

[35] Anna-Mari Almila, "Introduction," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Veil and Veiling Practices,* eds. Anna-Mari Almila and David Inglis (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2018), 11-13.

finding solutions to their problems and soothing to their fears and anxieties in prayers in the belief that they are on the path of God, even though they are not perfect. It can comply with the idea that the perfect God is what makes those women know what to hold on to in unstable life situations.

> "Y: Do you remember what influenced you to start practicing Islam?
>
> **M: I became sick, incurably sick. I had to.. Well, not had to, but it gave me the hope of healing."**
>
> **"E: It was Friday, Ramadan, I was already doing only morning prayers and had a hard time shifting to 5-times namaz. We had a fight with my mother over nothing, and it seemed like we resolved the issue, but I just could not let go. As if I was sinking in those emotions and I could do nothing about it, so the only thing that came to my mind was to pray. I took my abolition and prayed Maghrib and then Isha, since then I started completing all 5 namaz. Everytime I have something bad happen or feel like I have too many emotions, I pray. I feel like He is the only One who can soothe me and calm my soul."**

For these women, the decision to veil or to start a religious practice came with accompanying crisis situations that they needed a solution to cope with. The prior knowledge that they received from their friends or relatives on the matter of religion helped them to choose a religion and religious practice as a way to cope with those crises.

This reminds of a Mukadas story recorded by Julie McBrien, where Mukadas, her respondent in Kyrgyzstan in an interview given back in the beginning of 2000s, recalls that she started a religious practice at the same time she was experiencing a family crisis and poverty that they were coping with. Religious adherence is what helped to go through those hardships. Similarly, the defense of outside gazes correlated with interviews of Arlene Elowe Macleod back in 1980s in Egypt, where women veiled to keep privacy in public spaces, feel safer from male gazes and have a more respectful attitude towards them.

However, the question remains as to whether those 'Islamized' covered women do not comply with the idea of Kazakhstan exemplary citizens that the government imposed. The modern state of Kazakhstan as was mentioned, made a strong narrative to develop a national identity and not solely a religious identity, due to some security concerns of the threats that some religious sects create. Based on the findings and responses of those women I traced no connection to religious sects whatsoever. Mostly the decision to veil, the decision to start Islamic practice was accompanied by certain life events that led to an individual choice to become a part of the religious world. Even then, there are no traces of those women after starting a religious practice, to be spreading Islam or to have a political agenda. The practice is strongly kept to oneself, and even though there are precedents of families following their daughters' steps into religion, it is not out of propaganda or political narrative that it is done, but out of an individual choice to engage with practice. In other terms, leading it back to the concept of identity, the spread of religion at least among my respondents had a nature of building an identity, having something to hold on to in hard times, and expressing one's identity into the public, not for the purpose of making a statement, but the purpose of 'protection' or maintenance of identity borders.

V. Discussion

This leads to the discussion of outside narratives like those of secularists, older generations, the state that try to stigmatize veiled women and impose on them their understanding of what veil means. What is noteworthy is that throughout history as Leila Ahmed mentions it, at the pick of political arguments between the conservatives and Westernizers, the women were left in the middle of the conflict, and the veil became the symbol of it. No one asked what women wanted to do or gave them a chance to express

themselves. Similar thing occurred in Turkey under the Kemalists and in Uzbekistan under bolsheviks, "the state's project for modernizing women was instrumentalist: the goal was not to establish women's rights and individual freedoms for their own sake, but to change women's roles for the sake of broad social transformation."[36] Moreover, on the broader scale of the society in Uzbekistan of the 1920s women were tormented between the local traditionalists and the new government, where the latter encouraged them to unveil and the former murdered them for unveiling. However, these tensions again do not take into consideration the desires and opinions of those women, nor do they express their own position on the issue. A somewhat similar thing is happening today in modern Kazakhstan, the state for various purposes claims that the religious expression, especially in the form of *hijab,* is a result of an influx of foreign ideas and missionaries that is alien to Kazakh identity. Such a narrative, in the essence of it, leaves an impression that those veiled women are affiliates of religious sects or products of local foreign education.

Influx of ideas happened, however, alone it can not be argued to be a reason for women's veiling. Individual choice is at the heart of it. However, as it was seen, those women, although they can not possibly be representatives of all Kazakh veiled women, can serve as good examples of the possibility of a strongly individual choice to come to religion. This further is exemplified by the struggles, cautiousness and criticism these women had to go through from the society and from the state to defend their choices.

In Post-Soviet Kazakhstan there is a certain dualistic nature of the argument regarding religion and specifically, veiling, it is either foreign and inappropriate or part of tradition and respectful. However, this dualism and stigmas do not take into account the real nature and motivations of veiling among women. On the one hand, there is a secular government that claims certain religious roots, but denies most of the religious expression

[36] Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan*, 165.

and practices, together with secular people, usually the older generations who grew up in the Soviet state and do not accept nor understand religious spread among younger people. On the other hand, there are some religious groups or sects, foreign missionaries, representatives of Islamic states from countries like Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, that contribute to the spread of Islamic beliefs among the population. However, to neither of the groups one can actually qualify veiled women. The veiling in Kazakhstan then, within the scope of this research, is a product of individual choice that is most often misunderstood in the society and by the state, and the idea of it is often distorted.

Conclusion

In contemporary Kazakhstan as well as in many other geographical places and the history, the debate among the secular and religious ideas persist. The recent events that happened at the verge of the 21st century and that are happening today related to radical Islamism is what makes these debates all the more important, and secularist groups all the more cautious of their religious counterparts. Religious veiling in society is the most vivid example of religious presence, and for that reason it remains the main focus or target of those debates. Today, as well as before, those debates often were aimed at veiling in particular and made veiling a site of political dispute. Veiled women, however, most often were excluded or rather not included in those debates. Starting from 19th century debates over veiling in Egypt and 20th century forceful unveiling campaigns of the Soviets that resulted in mass violence against them and ending with modern decrees of abandoning veiled women to enter educational institutions and some other public spaces, veiled women fell victim to those political disputes. In modern day Kazakhstan, veiled women remain a target of political debates. However, as this research suggests the reasons behind veiling do not always comply with the political narrative assigned to it. In most cases the stigmas that the society or the government puts on these women do not match the reality of their identities, motivations and aspirations.

This research was limited in its scope to the number of veiled women to interview and the social strata that these women belong to. Among my respondents were women of middle, upper classes, who have higher education degrees, who aspired for career advancement, however, interviews with other women who did not have access to education or are from the lower classes, might reveal different motives for veiling. The interview scope could also be further expanded to secularist groups and their answers could also be taken into thorough consideration of their opinion on the veiling in Kazakhstan. The narrative of the government could be expanded further not only to the speeches of the state leaders, but also to the decrees and fatwas of SUMK, a religious institution under the government. The research done on Central Asian states is rather small, and is mostly conducted in states like Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Most people in Kazakhstan argue that *hijab* as a kind of religious veiling is alien to Kazakh culture and that women should adopt a more traditional ancestral kind of veiling like *kimeshek.* A wholescale academic work that would engage deeply with the religion across Kazakh nomadic tribes and up to modern Kazakhstan is absent and is much needed to develop the understanding of the evolution of religious practice in the steppes.

My research helped me understand that it often happens that we tend to put stigmas on veiled women, but not take into consideration the important path of resistance and bravery that these women had to undergo to stand up to their opinion and position. The political debates in particular that result in new rules, bans and governmental decrees that directly affect those women, should include women in them and give them opportunity to express their own opinion on their motivations, positions and aspirations. My hope is that, through interviews, analysis and historical examples, this work can shed light on the real meaning of veiling that veiled women attribute to it, struggles that they have to undergo and the reality of veiling as opposed to political construct.

Bibliography:

Ahmed, Leila. *A Quiet Revolution the Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Ahmed, Leila . *The Women and Gender in Islam,* Yale University Press, 1992.

Almila, Anna-Mari. "Introduction." In *The Routledge International Handbook of Veil and Veiling Practices,* edited by Anna-Mari Almila and David Inglis, 1-25. London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2018.

Aqorda. Telegram message, October 5, 2023. https://t.me/aqorda_resmi/12127.

Aqorda. Telegram message, March 15, 2024. https://t.me/aqorda_resmi/15600.

Bigozhin, Ulan. "Becoming Muslim in Soviet and Post-Soviet Kazakhstan." *Ketmen* , 1 (2022): 22-35.

Bissenova, Alima. "Central Asian Encounters in the Middle East: Nationalism, Islam and Postcoloniality in Al-Azhar." *Religion, state & society* 33, no. 3 (2005): 253–263.

Göle, Nilüfer. "The Quest For The Islamic Self Within The Context Of Modernity." In *Rethinking Modernity And National Identity In Turkey*, edited by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, 81-94. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1997.

Kamp, Marianne. *The New Woman in Uzbekistan: Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*. Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2006.

Kamp, Marianne, and Noor Borbieva. "Veiling and Unveiling in Central Asia: Beliefs and Practices, Tradition and Modernity." In *The Routledge International Handbook to Veils and Veiling Practices,* 1:84–93. 1st ed. Routledge, 2018.

Karin, Erlan. *The Soldiers of the Caliphate: The Anatomy of a Terrorist Group.* Astana: The Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016.

Love Astana. "Нұрсұлтан Назарбаев хиджаб мәселесі жайлы өз ойын білдірді." Youtube, September 25, 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aM0AMaweP1U.

Malik, Bilal A. "Islam in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Experiencing Public Revival of Islam through Institutionalisation." *Asian journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies* 13, no. 3 (2019): 64-84.

McBrien, Julie. "Mukadas's Struggle: Veils and Modernity in Kyrgyzstan." *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, (2009): 127-144.

McBrien, Julie. *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

Northrop, Douglas. *Veiled Empire: Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia.* Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2004.

ULA Ydy. "Назарбаев хиджаб туралы." Youtube, April 6, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMP9E4sq7fs.

"President Tokayev performs Umrah." *"Kazinform" International News Agency,* July 25, 2022. https://en.inform.kz/news/president-tokayev-performs-umrah_a3958598/