Title: Fashion in the Ferghana Valley: How Tajik national identity in a multinational region manifests in individual dress (WORKING PAPER)

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of 'traditional' Tajik dress is predicated upon a style which has actually been in flux since the late 1800s. While women before Soviet rule were likely to wear paranji, the full-body horse-hair veil, Soviet policy actively discouraged veils, instituting mass unveiling campaigns in the late 1920s (Harris 2006, Ibanez-Tirado 2016, Nozimova 2016). In place of this earlier style of dress a new, 'Sovietized' style of dress, which exposed part of the hair, neck, and arms became popularized as 'traditionally Tajik' (Lemon and Thibault, 2018). This linkage of new 'traditional' dress to national identity perhaps arose due to the unstable notion of the Tajik 'state' as a union of disparate ethnic groups—a union which has become even more important to uphold since the end of the Soviet Union (Heathershaw and Herzig 2011, Lemon and Thibault 2018).

In concept, it is not the history of the dress, or the form of the dress, that matters, but rather how people imbue this form with national meaning. In Mohira Suyarkulova's article on Kyrgyz dress and nationalism, she employs Barthes's concept of "myth," or how people collectively imbue objects with cultural association, to explore how "Kyrgyzness" is discursively produced in clothing. I think the same manufacture of meaning occurs with Tajik national dress, but I would like to explore what facets of identity clothing 'discursively' produces beyond official government narratives, and why the form of the dress is ultimately important.

METHODOLOGY

Over July and August 2019, I conducted discussions & semi-structured interviews with 36 women and 3 men, all residents of Khujand who worked in the fashion industry as fabric sellers,

seamstresses, designers, and artisans. I chose this demographic of primarily women in the marketplace, in the manner of Cynthia Werner's work on women in the Kazakh market and Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev's work on Dushanbe bazaars, because these women were most aware of the changes in demand for various commodities and because they themselves are agents in producing this fashion, traditional or otherwise (Werner 2003, Stephan-Emmrich 2016). To find these women, I used 'convenience sampling', locating workers on Instagram, through word of mouth, or from a list of people who participated in the most recent crafts festival, provided by Khujand's ministry of culture. I spoke with whichever women responded, as summer is wedding season and many women were too busy to give interviews. Of course, the opinions of this sample of women cannot be taken to represent the opinions of the larger population but hearing their individual stories added depth, for me, to national narratives I had read (Duneier, 2011). I interviewed women in their workshops or their homes, and as I do not speak Tajik, worked with translator Farangis Yakoubzoda.

For this conference, I will focus primarily on the stories and experiences of two dressmakers I encountered, for clarity. I have changed their names for privacy. Mavlyuda is in her late 30s, and she lives in a small village a 25 minute drive outside Khujand. She is a mother of four and lives in a large patrilocal home with her husband and children. She sews national dress, primarily for wealthy brides, and works from her home. Zulya is 55 and lives in the city center with her daughter Tahmina. She is Uzbek, so only speaks Russian. Her parents were orphans, and she is divorced from her husband. She sews European-style dress for clients in Khujand and works from an art school, where she teaches kids. These ladies come from different backgrounds and provide interesting contrast.

AIM

I aim to present a picture of how 'tradition' manifests to several women who choose traditional dress and what exactly tradition discursively produces on individual and regional levels in order to expand the view of 'national dress' as a purely 'national' choice.

I will first briefly present the centralized definition of 'tradition'. Then, I will explore how 'tradition' intersects with a localized idea of 'modernity' and how tradition produces regional identity. Finally, I will examine how tradition is defined and policed to produce individual identity, using various anecdotes and the stories of two dressmakers to whom tradition and modernity play complicated roles.

A CENTRALIZED LINK BETWEEN TRADITION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Rather than viewing 'tradition' as a society's adherence to the values, symbols and systems of the past, I view tradition in this paper as 'a performance where people, ideas, values and norms interact at a given moment, according to a certain order, and are collectively acknowledged as valuable and "traditional"' (Cleuziou 2019). Collective acknowledgement of Tajik 'tradition', to a certain extent, stems from governmental mandate. The focus of my paper does not permit me to explore governmental crafting of 'tradition' in full, but I will provide some examples to illustrate how the government defines what is and is not 'traditional' Tajik dress. The government, for example, has actively discouraged women from wearing visual indicators of religion, since 2007,when a decree prohibited women from wearing the hijab in educational institutions, and in 2010 Rahmonov publicly called hijab-wearing women 'monkeys' (Lemon 2018). The justification for this discouragement—that religious headwear was not 'traditional'. On Women's Day 2015, President Emomali Rahmon asserted in a speech: 'A sense of admiration for the foreign and imitation regarding clothing, behavior, communication among women and girls may have a negative effect on the strength of the foundations of national culture' while in 2016, Rahmon claimed that ethnographic studies have proven that since ancient times, Tajik women have worn beautiful colourful clothes, not black ones' (Miles 2015, Lemon 2018). The government further obliged citizens in 2017 to 'stick to traditional and national clothes and culture' and released a 367-page handbook detailing 'recommended outfits' for women (Irby, 2018). These statements authoritatively define the character of 'tradition', aiming to influence what women wear.

To Khujandi women that I encountered, however, the way in which tradition manifests in clothing is both influenced by and distinct from the centralized definition of 'tradition'. My interlocutors did not specifically explain to me what 'traditional' dress encapsulates in full. It was something that everyone knew and no one needed to talk about. However, whether or not a garment was 'traditional' could be viewed in different lights. For example, a woman I knew went to a dressmaker, saying she wanted a traditional Tajik dress made. I decided to go too and have one made for myself. I asked for the most basic, 'traditional' cut. When we received our outfits, mine was loose and hers was more form-fitting. I asked, in ignorance, if I could have mine cut to look more like hers, and she was appalled. She then pointed out that while my dress was traditional, hers was not traditional, but rather 'Russian-style', as mine was made from pleated material and attached to a semi-circular collar, while hers was cut from one piece of fabric. She had not changed her mind about the garment style during the creation process; rather, it simultaneously fit the mold of 'traditional' dress without a traditional cut. The garment had palimpsestic meaning and could simultaneously inhabit two domains, reinforcing that the definition of what was 'traditional' was not necessarily set in stone.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Despite the centralized Tajik valuation of 'tradition' as a tool to unite the country through national pride, women tend to value 'modernity' when choosing their clothes, and this modernity privileges international fashion and technology which makes this new fashion accessible. Being modern is being 'fashionable', and fashion means constant change. Fabric sellers in Somoni Bazaar estimate that new fabrics enter their shops weekly and that these new fabrics are unilaterally the most popular. The 'modernity' of new fabrics, however, is also linked with their international origin. Diana Ibanez-Tirado notes similarly the linkage of foreign dress and progress when discussing the ubiquity of western dress among men, stating that the clothes of young men 'represent Tajikistan's ideals of modernity' and that the 'foreign' is acceptable in this case, as it is 'appraised as the domain of science, technology and progress that needs to be emulated by Tajik men of working age' (Ibanez-Tirado 2016). Despite the statements of President Rahmon, 'foreign' was similarly evaluated as desirable by my respondents. The newest fabrics in the Somoni Bazaar, for example, originated in Dubai, a style often noted as fashionable in Tajikistan (Stephan-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). One fabric seller merely noted with pride that her fabrics were from 'everywhere'. The case of Atlas and Adras in Khujand reflects the view of the international as 'modern'. Atlas and Adras, are central to the image of 'national dress' in Tajikistan; women are encouraged to wear this fabric, for example, during Nowruz in the month of March. Khujand additionally is home to Khujand Atlas, a soviet factory built in 1936 and the only major factory producing these textiles in the country. However, Khujand-made textiles are not found in any shops in Khujand outside the on-site showroom and one shop in Panjshanbe bazaar. Rather, Uzbek-made textiles fill the shops, for several reasons. First, Khujand Atlas cannot financially compete with Uzbek producers, as labor is cheaper and cotton is internally sourced. Yet second, Uzbek patterns are 'in'. When my research assistant, from Khujand looked at the showroom of Khujand Atlas, she said to me, 'these are the patterns my grandma used to wear'. The Uzbek patterns are different and 'modern', and still traditional dress.

Modern technology facilitates the growth of fashion, particularly internationally. Mavlyuda, for example, originally gained popularity 'without internet', she specifically notes, as rumors passed from mouth to mouth of her skill. However, her recent success has been driven by her presence on Instagram. Brides see her work on Instagram, write to her on Instagram, and order dresses on the platform. She also finds her inspiration on Instagram. Brides are no longer ordering purely national dress for their trousseau, she shares. Rather, they prefer styles from Samarkand. So, she searches Instagram and the internet for styles to emulate. She showed us pictures of Samarkandi and Dubai fashions on her phone. "As long as it resembles Tajik national dress," she said. Zulya similarly notes that technology is constantly changing. "I used to just think and think and then make something," she says. Now, she tells her clients to look for models online for European dress, and she fuses a new style from 3-4 models. When she sews national dress, too, she says, she takes inspiration first from the fabric, and second, from models on the internet. Tradition and modernity accommodate each other as women choose their dress (Ibanez-Tirado 2016). Mavlyuda said to me, 'мода меняется, стиль остается', as I later discovered, a Coco Chanel quote: Fashion changes, but style remains the same. In the same spirit, Tajik dress remains

‘Tajik’ while still constantly being transformed by modern technology and international influence.

DUSHANBE IS FAR AWAY

Women uniformly asserted similarity between dress in Khujand and the Tajik cities of Uzbekistan. ‘Khujand girls dress… a bit like Samarkand’, Mavlyuda said. ‘Samarkand, Bukhara, Khujand… all the same, all generally the same’. Zulya brought in the religious similarity: ‘Muslims are muslims, all the same. Almost everything is one in the same’. Embroiderers shared patterns with me and explained that Khujand’s ornaments, while distinct from other regions of Tajikistan, share many ornaments in common with Uzbekistan, such as the pepper and the pomegranate, king of fruits.

My respondents, however, also expressed a divide between Khujand and Dushanbe. Dushanbe was built from a market town, and experienced much rural-to-urban migration during and after the civil war (Stephen-Emmrich and Mirzoev 2016). Some, correspondingly, looked down upon Dushanbe, and Dushanbe fashion, as provincial and viewed Khujand as more advanced in female freedom. A dressmaker in Panjshanbe bazaar, when I asked her how to characterize fashion in Dushanbe, make a choking motion to demonstrate that she imagined higher necklines and longer sleeves in the capitol and viewed this fashion as restrictive. A woman who runs a business teaching women dressmaking and handicraft skills told me that Khujandi women are ‘more proactive’ than women in the south, that they have a different mindset. She explained to me that in Khujand, women mostly work, and if they don’t work, they start small businesses by embroidering at home, and selling that embroidery on Facebook or Viber to other women. For these two women, the lower necklines and shorter sleeves of Khujand represent comparative freedom while the act of embroidering from home empowers women through this art.

Of course, I cannot generalize; not all women saw Khujand as similar to Samarkand and Bukara, as different from Dushanbe, or even as distinct in its traditions. Zulya, for example, called Dushanbe ‘more modern’. She said, ‘they have this intelligence, an upbringing which is completely different than ours: more open, more modern. We are a little bit isolated’. Dressmakers also took much inspiration from Dushanbe designers. Multiple dressmakers, including Mavlyuda, named Nafisa Imranova as an inspiration, and in Panjshanbe and Somoni, I saw photographs of the embroidery designs of Khurshed Sattorov being sold to be copied.

SOCIAL SARTORIAL CHOICE

So far, I have examined how modernity and tradition intersect and how dress is affiliated with regional identity in addition to national identity. On a more intimate level, each woman’s dress is determined by and therefore expresses her social role. In Nozimova’s 2016 article on the hijab in Tajikistan, she talks about the ‘social control approach’, which postulates that dress is ‘a social artifact that contains and reproduces elements and cues of non-verbal communication expressing an individual’s disposition to the immediately surrounding social order’. Women are both

subjects and objects of the communal control of this artifact. I would like to apply her argument to dress in general beyond the hijab.

I first noticed the association of national dress and age. The recently issued guidebook on national dress, is divided into sections by each decade of age, and each decade's dress is vastly different. 'Business attire' is present in the book for younger generations, but noticeably absent for women after the age of 40. Women on the streets, correspondingly, wear national dress as they grow older. When I asked women why they loved national dress, it was not because of this narrowly distributed book, but because of comfort. One woman told me, 'I love it because of my figure'. Another said, 'when you're young, you think about what you wear. When you're old, you just want to be comfortable, and national dress hides the extra kilograms'. An embroiderer shared with me the style progression of her mother. When her mother was young, this woman said, she wore Western-style dress sometimes with her hair down. Now, however, she has switched to only wearing national dress with her hair covered, and her sleeves get longer and longer each year. When my respondent asked her mother why, she simply responded, 'Because I'm old'. I do think this signifies beyond comfort. Colette Harris defines 'tradition' partially as a 'conscious attempt to preserve social cohesion within a specific social group' (Harris 2004). Perhaps women want to look like other women their age.

In a different social situation, I met a dressmaker in her mid-twenties who prefers to wear Western dresses with short sleeves and short skirts. However, as she is getting divorced, she states that she needs to dress conservatively to maintain social standing. 'If I was married', she said, 'those clothes would be fine'.

My respondents enforced the traditionality of their own dress in order to match their social position or to fix their image. However, women's communities also police their dress (Nozimova 2016, Harris 2004). Zulya's daughter Tahmina of course dressed under the influence of her dressmaker mother growing up. However, the opinions of the men around her similarly impacted her style. In one of our conversations, Tahmina said that her brothers sometimes forbid her to wear clothing items, and her mother laughed, responding that the two brothers argue amongst themselves over whether the clothing is appropriate. Tahmina then shared another story about external policing of her wardrobe: 'Last year my mom bought me a jagged jeans top that was on trend. When I went to school in it, my male friends all said bad things about my top: that it was vulgar. They told me not to wear it again, so I didn't'. Tahmina obeyed the social pressure of her peers, despite the fact that her mother was upset because she had bought the top for 100 somoni. Mavlyuda similarly noted the impact of men, not necessarily on the style, but on the visibility of women's dress. Fans write to Mavlyuda on Instagram, asking for more photos of her work. So, she asks her clients, brides, for photos of their dresses. These brides, however, respond, saying that their husband does not allow it. 'They don't want their brides to show their dresses to the world'. Mavlyuda says that it's nothing serious: that some don't want photos posted online and that others agree.

CONCLUSION

In my conversations with women over these brief two months, I have gathered the sense that the form of traditional dress is constantly changing and modernizing with international influence and that this tradition seems more immediately significant to my respondents as a sign of regional and individual identity than as a part of national narratives.

As I just completed my fieldwork a month ago, I am excited to rewrite this paper and would welcome any advice. In the future, I hope to perform discourse analysis on all the interviews I've taken to find patterns and trends in their responses beyond my anecdotes, and perhaps to perform a longitudinal study, returning to these ladies in a year, in two years to see what has changed, how modernity and Tajik identity have changed, if they have changed, in Khujand. Мода меняется, стиль остается. Thank you for listening.

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