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Our Uzbekistan: Faith and Heritage: An exploration of Uzbek state discourse and policy towards heritage and religion.

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Our Uzbekistan: Faith and Heritage

An exploration of Uzbek state discourse and policy towards heritage and religion.

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Our Uzbekistan: Faith and Heritage

An exploration of Uzbek state discourse and policy towards heritage and religion.

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MA thesis Archaeology- Heritage & Museum Studies

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Uzbekistan is an old land with a deep history. A land of deserts, oases and rivers of life. It has been home to a central part of the ancient silk road with its famous trading cities of Samarkand and Bukhara as well as the seat of the last great nomadic conqueror, Timur the Great (Manz, 1999, p. 1). A place of great scientists, philosophers and traders. Its location is truly the crossroads of Eurasia, and one might come across influences from the Middle East, Persia, India, China and Europe. Its people have brought significant contributions in the fields of science and religion throughout the centuries. However, the modern state of the Republic of Uzbekistan is relatively young. Declaring independence from the Soviet Union on September 1st, 1991. Since then, the new country has vied to create a new national identity away from the old Soviet identity. By pivoting away from the old, the state attempts to embrace the even older. A new state ideology is necessary. This ideology draws heavily on Islamic values and traditions of the past. At the same time the government cracks down hard on Islam as a religion (USCRIF, 2023, 2024) in the name of fighting “extremism” (Akromov, 2021). This dichotomy is at the heart of this thesis. While the first president of Uzbekistan was sworn into office on the Quran (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 132). Wearing a hijab could land you in prison. Such seemingly contradictory attitudes towards religion have complicated roots. The government’s attitude can be explained when considering the wider context that has created this state discourse and what it tries to accomplish. This is closely related to heritage. Heritage plays an important role in the new nationalist government ideology. The concept of the nation and perceptions of heritage are deeply intertwined (Smith, 2006). And in the case of Uzbekistan, heritage and religion are tightly woven together. Through both association with the past as well as modern political concerns.

In order to analyse the dichotomy described above several research questions will need to be answered:

Main Question:

How is the discourse relating to heritage and religion in Uzbekistan constructed and what are the consequences in the material world?

Sub questions:

1. What is the official state narrative on heritage and religion and how is it constructed?

2. What other concerns affect the state narrative?

3. What are the consequences of the state discourse in the material world?

In order to answer these questions an analysis will be carried out on various publicly available communiques from either government or government-affiliated sources. These will be used to analyse the way that the government discourse is set up. As well as explore how the heritage discourse intersects with other government concerns and societal issues.

Methodology and Theory

This thesis will utilize the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (Henceforth written as CDA) is both a theory of and a methodology for the analysis of discourses by viewing them as particular elements within a political or social context in dialectical relation to other such discursive elements (Fairclough, 2013, p. 178). This puts the focus on the interrelation between different discourses and how these discourses are used in the political and social realms. CDA places an emphasis on the impact of discourses in the physical realm, adopting a more realist stance on the matter that is ideally suited for the type of analytical work presented in this thesis. Apart from this methodological framework a theoretical framework will also be established. This will fall within the discipline of heritage first and foremost as this is my area of expertise. The theoretical framework will set up various elements that will find their way back into the Uzbek case study. Especially in order to understand the heritage discourse presented and its intricacies.

Aims of the Study

This study aims to capture the complicated and almost paradoxical-seeming nature of religious heritage policy in Uzbekistan. Both simultaneously hoisted up and pulled down. Showing how heritage can be manipulated by state actors for their own benefit. The goal is to understand exactly how the discourse surrounding heritage is built up through historical, social and political processes and how discourse reflects itself on the physical realm. This understanding will also acknowledge and take into account the very interdiscursive nature of any given narrative. And how influences from other areas can have their effect on the official discourse. While the focus will mainly be on the government narrative. Attention will also be given to non-government counter-discourses where present or otherwise discourses that do not align with the government's vision. This study will aim to plug some of the gaps in the current research into Uzbekistan. The heritage aspect has not yet received enough attention. Especially from a critical angle. By combining theories from this field with new and yet unused online sources, this thesis can provide a useful addition to current scholarship on Uzbekistan.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the current political situation in Uzbekistan from a heritage perspective. While several studies have been written on religious policies, nation building or religious and political repression, the connection to heritage studies is one that is seldom utilized. This study will add to the discussion with this particular niche. It draws the discussion of Uzbekistan out into a wider theoretical framework. While at the same time analyzing several Uzbek case studies in depth to come to a greater understanding of the local context. Apart from more than just a deeper understanding of certain discourses, this study will highlight how these constructed narratives affect people in Uzbekistan in a very real way. This study attempts to deepen the discussion on Uzbekistan specifically and the utilization of broader frameworks serves to deepen this knowledge by providing a different angle of observation and critique. It is, in essence, also an exploration of how heritage can be used and abused for political purposes in general. And it seeks to contribute to increasing awareness of heritage as a political tool for authoritarian regimes.

Thesis Organization

This thesis will consist of multiple parts. Firstly, a methodology chapter will introduce CDA as a methodology and go into detail on the nature of the source material. Secondly, a theoretical framework will be established and dissected in its relevant chapter. This chapter will create an understanding of identity in a national context. And how this relates to the concept of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) as coined by Laurajane Smith (2006). Lastly an explanation will be given of how heritage and religion intersect in the context of the AHD and national identity.

This will be followed by an analysis of individual case studies. Such an analysis will be divided into several major themes. Focussing on the establishment of government ideology. Government repression. And control over religious discourse. Case studies will be presented on several government policies, narratives and practices such as the co-option of the mahalla system and the function of the new “Centre for Islamic civilization in Uzbekistan”. The separate case studies will then be synthesised together with the theoretical framework into a discussion chapter on the discourse of heritage and religion in Uzbekistan. The aim of this chapter is to answer the research questions and to provide a thorough understanding of all previously discussed elements. Lastly, a concluding chapter will summarize the entire thesis and its findings.

A Note on Language and Spelling

This thesis utilises material from multiple languages that use different alphabets. The material deals mostly with material written in Uzbek, Russian and English with certain terms coming from Arabic as well. Uzbek tends to be written in Cyrillic and/or in the Latin alphabet. While Russian is written entirely in Cyrillic. Within this thesis, the Latin alphabet will be used exclusively, for the reader’s convenience. Transliteration can sometimes be difficult however and there are many different ways of spelling the various names of people, places and organisations of Uzbekistan and beyond. I will be keeping to the most common English versions of these names but if there are multiple prevalent versions it is the author’s choice. An example of this would be the many ways to spell Timur. Either as Temür, Tamerlane, Tamerlan or with his epithet, Timur the Lame. In this case I will use “Timur’ as it is a good compromise between the original Turkic name and English common spelling. The spelling of Uzbekistan itself also warrants a quick discussion. The common way to spell this in English came from the Russian spelling which tried to fit Turkic pronunciation into Cyrillic. Because of the rigid pronunciation of Cyrillic it fails to capture the correct pronunciation. This is why in Uzbek the country name is spelled like O’zbekiston. Being pronounced more akin to Özbekistan. While this is a more accurate way to spell out the proper pronunciation that defies old colonial ties, this thesis will use Uzbekistan because this is the accepted English spelling at this time and therefore remains the most convenient for the reader.

A Relevant History of Uzbekistan

This section will provide a lightning pace overview of the various historical processes that led up to current situation in modern day Uzbekistan. With the goal of providing a basic understanding of Uzbek history. To serve as a background for the later analysis in this thesis.

For any history of Central Asia, it is important to understand that it is a large and diverse region. And much of its history defies the trappings of the modern nation-states that inhabit it. For millennia, the region has been the home to both nomadic and sedentary civilizations (Khalid, 2021). While Uzbekistan was the home to the most important Urban centres, supported by its many oases and rivers. The impact of the steppe and its nomadic people should not be underestimated. Most of the area of modern Uzbekistan used to be referred to as Transoxiana, meaning beyond the Oxus river. This was historically seen as the dividing line between the Iranic and Turkic worlds (Spuler, 2009) and still serves as the border between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. However, Transoxiana was eventually incorporated into the Achaemenid empire before becoming part of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (Khalid, 2021, p. 19). This kingdom was eventually conquered by the Kushan empire that swept down as nomads from the northern steppe to conquer all the way into India (Khalid, 2021, p. 19). This phenomenon of incorporation into Iranic and Nomadic empires would continue several times more. Iranic influence would turn Transoxiana into a mostly Zoroastrian society along with pre-existing shamanic beliefs (Alemzade & Shoja'i Mehr, 2012). This all changed during the Arab conquest of Transoxiana during the 7th and 8th centuries (Khalid, 2021, p. 20). The Islamization of Central Asia took centuries but once it was cemented it proved impossible to remove. The presence of Islam and the rule of the Caliphs from Baghdad made Transoxiana more integrated than ever with its southern neighbours. During the Islamic Golden Age it flourished as a place of science and philosophy. Many famous thinkers emerged from this territory. Writing mostly in Arabic but not being of Arab ethnicity (Khalid, 2021, pp. 21-22). Scholars from this region contributed to some of the most important religious texts in Islam and are still highly revered to this day. But all golden ages must come to an end. Eventually the Caliphate broke up and several empires and kingdoms emerged to rule the important Central Asian urban centres like Bukhara, Samarkand and Merv. Many of these empires had Turkic steppe origins as these populations had slowly adopted Islam and so became more entwined with the happenings of the rich sedentary lands to the south (Khalid, 2021, p. 22). This status quo came to a violent end with the Mongol conquest of the region. This led to both Transoxiana and the steppe being dominated by Chinggisid lords whose power originated in Turkic soldiers and Iranian administration (Khalid, 2021).

The epitome of this structure was the Timurid empire. Led from Central Asia by a Turkic warlord ruling in nomadic Mongol style using Iranian bureaucracy. His legacy is still clearly visible in modern day Uzbekistan where he became a national symbol soon after independence (Nurbayev & Kiyubek, 2023). The Timurid period led to a revival for Central Asian cities like Samarkand which was transformed by captured Iranian, Indian and Middle Eastern architects and master craftsmen (Manz, 1999). But also art and science were highly valued in the Timurid court, leading to a renewal of innovation during the 15th century. Eventually the Timurid empire took on much more Islamic and Persian characteristics and abandoned its nomadic traditions (Khalid, 2021, p. 27). This new status quo was once more shattered by another Nomadic invasion. This time by the Uzbek tribal confederation in the

16th century. Consisting of various Turkic-Mongol groups they established various Chingissid territories that would wax and wane over the centuries (Khalid, 2021). The biggest change was in the ethnic makeup of the region which took on a predominantly Turkic character with deep Islamic roots.

This leaves the territory of Uzbekistan divided into several sedentary emirates, khanates and other entities until the period of Russian conquest in the late 19th century. Essentially preserving a multi-ethnic, Islamic and feudal order dominated by Turkic speaking peoples. An important side note is that this Turkic language had not separated itself into what would become known as Uzbek, Kazakh and Kyrgyz. And neither did the corresponding ethnic groups separate themselves from local or Islamic identities (Khalid, 2007). All of this changed when the Russians came knocking. In their search for a defensible southern land border they came into conflict with the three surviving political entities that emerged out of the old Uzbek khanate's infighting. Namely the Emirate of Bukhara, Khanate of Khiva and the Kokand Khanate. With their capitals situated in modern day Uzbekistan, these three states controlled territory in all 4 other modern Central Asian countries. All of these states were decisively defeated by the ambitions of a single Russian officer looking for glory above anything else (Morrison, 2021). The Russian state decided to back him up only after he had already won and annexed the entire Kokand Khanate and the area around Tashkent (Morrison, 2021). Khiva and Bukhara were turned into vassal states under Russian "protection". The rest of Central Asia was all incorporated into a single administrative zone directly administered by a Russian governor.

This new province of Turkestan would simultaneously shake up life for its inhabitants just as it kept things the same. Islam was mostly ignored and so were all the legal elements related to it (Khalid, 1998). And in general the Central Asian and Russian societies co-existed almost independently from one another with segregated neighbourhoods and different laws for both groups (Khalid, 2007). However at the same time, new technologies, access to Russian-style education and incorporation into the wider Russian sphere of trade and ideas shook things up for good. The combination of the shock of conquest and the injection of new ideas became the catalyst for a new movement known as the Jadids. They advocated for reform to save their society which had so clearly failed in keeping its own autonomy. Their writings provide the first use of the term Uzbekistan. This term was mostly seen as synonymous with Turkestani "nation"" by early writers (Khalid, 1998, p. 206). This debate was partially a response to Russian ethnographers racist and colonialist notions of their new Central Asian subjects but also a clear internal discussion on who Central Asians were and where they were supposed to go. The solution to this failed society lay mostly in an attempt to move away from traditional society. To modernize in every sense of the word, including in the realm of religion (Khalid, 1998). In general feelings of a Turkic and Islamic identity still prevailed and specific nation-states were only beginning to be developed.

But the vision of the new generation of Central Asian scholars did not matter. For the Russian Revolution changed everything. The new Soviet regime established its authority over Central Asia after brutally crushing the native Basmachi revolt (Khalid, 2021). This revolt was mostly targeted against Russian settlers rather than an actual national liberation movement and was usually considered to be at odds with the Jadids and their vision of a Turkestani or Uzbek nation (Khalid, 2021). The soviets quickly went to work radically changing all aspects of society. While at first their revolutionary spirit worked in unison with the Jadid intelligentsia, they would eventually be purged from the Soviet state for the crime

of bourgeois nationalism (Khalid, 1998). In addition, the last semi-autonomous Central Asian states were finally annexed into the Soviet Union. To be divided once again into now national Soviet republics. The nations that were eventually decided upon where the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs. Based on notions of national self-determination forwarded by Lenin (Hirsch, 2005). National self-determination came only second to a larger Soviet identity that was purposefully created through mass education and propaganda campaigns (Khalid, 2021). All the vestiges of the old were supposed to be eliminated. One of those elements was religion. famously described as the “opium of the masses” by Karl Marx (1843) . The Soviet anti-religious campaigns were harsh and most knowledge of Islam was lost amongst the general population (Khalid, 2007). Still undercurrents of Islam remained and Islam in general was allowed to exist in a limited official capacity (Tasar, 2017). Central Asia had undoubtedly become a part of the Soviet Union by the time of the Gorbachev era. Modernized along Soviet lines, educated in Soviet ways and engaged in the Soviet system. But yet still Uzbekistan belonged to the periphery. The central party state forced an overreliance on cotton as the Uzbek staple crop which kept the population largely rural and segregated from their Slavic neighbours (Khalid, 2021). Child mortality rates in Uzbekistan remained twice as high as in the European parts of the Soviet Union (Khalid, 2021, p. 327). Despite the segregation Uzbek and Soviet identity and culture existed simultaneously and most people identified strongly as both (Khalid, 2007, 2021). Islam continued playing an important role in people’s self-identification on both a personal and national level (Khalid, 2021, p. 352). Under perestroika this Islamic identity was allowed to come to the fore ever so slightly with an increase in mosques and general public debate on the topic (Khalid, 2007).

A few years later, the Union collapsed after the resignation of Gorbachev and Uzbekistan, along with the other Central Asian SSR’s, was thrust into independence (Khalid, 2021, p. 398). Rule over the newly independent republic of Uzbekistan was quickly consolidated by the first secretary of the Uzbek communist party, Islam Karimov (Khalid, 2021. Now rebranded as a national leader, Karimov ruled as what can essentially be described as a dictator. Opposition was banned and chased out of the country (Schmitz, 2023). And the economy was under heavy state control. Although it did transition to a market economy at least somewhat, all major industries remained under an essential planned economy (Schmitz, 2020). The security services became highly repressive and cracked down hard on dissidents (Schmitz, 2020). All of this did mean that Uzbekistan remained fairly stable through the tumultuous transition period from Soviet to national rule. Especially considering the crashed economy of all Central Asian states which were previously tied almost inextricably to Moscow (Khalid, 2021).

An important element of this stability was to introduce a new national ideology to replace communism, one of the Uzbek nation-state. How this turned out will be described in more detail in the following chapters. Karimov ruled the country until his death in 2016. He was replaced by the current sitting president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He pivoted the country away from authoritarianism and opened the country up to the world (Schmitz, 2020). The economy was liberalized and society was granted more freedom. Like expanded civil freedoms and a thorough reining in of the security services (Schmitz, 2020, 2023). In addition to more democratic reforms. Although this new liberalisation of society can and should be seen as a step towards a more open and free society. Its effects should not be overestimated. Restrictions remain in place on all aspects of society and regular human rights abuses continue. Freedom of expression is encouraged, as long as it does not go against the party line (Schmitz, 2020). Mirziyoyev’s regime wishes to portray itself as a reforming and

modernizing force on both the national and international stage and this image is considered extremely important. But at the same time the roots of authoritarian rule go deep and are not likely to go away (Schmitz, 2020). This is the environment that the modern state of Uzbekistan finds itself in and the context that allows for a discussion of Uzbekistan's dealings with its heritage.

Uzbekistan currently is, according to its own government's statistics, 96.3% Muslim (USCRIF, 2022). With religiosity amongst the general population ever more on the rise since independence (Khalid, 2007). Meanwhile Uzbekistan is firmly a secular nation enshrined in the constitution as well as in the attitude of the government (Schmitz, 2023). This dichotomy has clashed on occasion and it is essential for the government to keep a certain balance between Islam and secular government. The friction between the two has always played an important role in government policy since independence. With heritage playing a central role in this discourse. How exactly this works and what the underlying dynamics are will be discussed in the following thesis.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

The chosen method of analysis for this thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a method and theory mainly developed by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk, among others, during the 1990s (Wodak, 2014). It is relevant to unpack the different elements of this term separately in order to properly understand its meaning and its position within the wider scientific framework. Firstly, the word “critical” denotes an attempt to combine “social and political engagement” with “a sociologically informed construction of society” (Krings et al., 1973, p. 808; Wodak, 2014, p.2). With an emphasis on the uncovering of the interconnectivity and structural causality of all things related to any particular research topic (Fairclough, 1985). CDA views society as inherently “conceptually mediated” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 178). The material world is always viewed through a certain semiotic lens and uncovering and understanding this lens is crucial to any analysis. Fairclough (2006) sees the material and semiotic worlds as dialectically related. As the one impacts the other, systems of power are one of the elements that are the most important to analyse (Wodak, 2014, p. 2). Systems of power are manifested through language and CDA agrees with Habermas (1977) that language is ideological (Wodak, 2014, p.3). CDA’s goal is then to analyse such systems and their use of language.

The second word in CDA is discourse. Discourse here is the language particular to a type of system, among other meanings. Fairclough (2013, p. 179) describes 2 additional modes of discourse. Namely: “meaning making as an element of the social process” and “a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective”. Discourse is thus represented in CDA as the way that specific language is used to make sense of certain aspects of reality and how language itself creates meaning in those realities. The use of discourse in CDA is markedly different from other versions of discourse analysis. It actively resists the Foucauldian interpretation of discourse. According to Foucauldian analyses, discourse permeates everything and it often neglects the very real material conditions outside discursive or semiotic elements (Smith, 2006). CDA does acknowledge that discourse impacts the real world through language (Hall, 2001) and it does incorporate Foucault's ideas on power and knowledge. Especially concerning the way that expert knowledge can be used in power systems for control purposes (Foucault, 1991). CDA puts much more emphasis on the relation between the semiotic and material realms and how they impact one another (Fairclough, 2012, p. 10). Especially how each separate element internalizes the other, somehow separate but yet intrinsically and dialectically connected (Fairclough, 2013, p. 179; Harvey, 1996). This particular approach acknowledges and places emphasis on the fact that there is a material reality separate from discursive views on this reality. Thus grounding it firmly in actual material conditions in practice. CDA views social reality as comprising of three separate levels. Namely: social structures, social practices and social events (Fairclough, 2013, p. 179). CDA wishes to analyse the way that these different levels of social reality overlap and interact with one another. Both through how one discourse interacts with another. And how, within a discourse, semiotic and other elements interact (Fairclough, 2013, p. 179).

The third part of CDA is analysis. This is the way that research is done and critique is delivered. Both Fairclough (2012, 2013) and Wodak (2011) extensively mention the

normative and explanatory aspects of CDA. A major goal for CDA is to right a social wrong. It is acknowledged that “social wrong” is a rather vague term and within this thesis it will be interpreted as an angle of research rather than a specific value judgement. So, for this thesis it leads to the question of why Muslims suffer repression in a state that identifies itself as inherently Muslim. The research should reflect the explanatory aspect of CDA and allow for the unpacking of all that led up to the current condition (Fairclough, 2012). With a specific focus on why the current system of power needs this social wrong. Fairclough (2012, p. 14) boils down the practice of CDA into 3 points. Firstly, one attempts an analysis of the dialectical relations between semiotic and other (material) elements and between discourses themselves. As well as between social practices and how they are reflected in texts or other discursive materials. All in line with what was described in the section of discourse. The second element pertains to the selection of certain texts that describe the discourse in question. Thirdly, one analyses the texts in question and relates it to the broader analysis.

CDA is multi-disciplinary in nature in order to carry out a proper analysis and is uniquely suited to this particular thesis. CDA grounds discourse in real material conditions. The focus on the relation between the material and semiotic realms is an approach that works well with the subject matter of Uzbekistan. The study will use the groundwork above to look at the relation between the discursive and material realms relating to religious heritage in Uzbekistan. Seeking to determine the dialectical relationship between religion and heritage and the way that this is manifested through the government’s use of language and policy. This is done by the analysis of various texts and systems aligned with the government. These materials have been analysed on a qualitative rather than a quantitative basis. The purpose was to select relevant texts based on their use of language. Useful quotes from these texts were then used in this thesis to provide an idea of the analysed texts as a whole.

Primary source material:

The primary material used in this thesis is sourced from online websites. These sources are local websites written in both Uzbek and Russian. These have been translated using online translating tools. Translations that were deemed unreliable have been left out of the final analysis pool. The 3 major sources used for data gathering are uza.uz, muslim.uz and president.uz. These 3 websites give a good overview of texts written for different audiences and purposes. Different approaches were taken to data gathering for each different source. Firstly, uza.uz is the website for the “Uzbekistan National News Agency” (UzA), a government run press agency which publishes articles on a wide variety of topics. Because of the frequency of articles published it was decided to search the website using various keywords, both in Uzbek and Russian. Keywords include “heritage”, “tradition”, “Islam”, “religion”, “spirituality” and “Jadid”. These particular keywords were chosen for their relevance to the research topic and/or to recent trends in government propaganda. The second website is muslim.uz which is the official website of the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU). Their website produces articles and resources related to Islam, ranging from explanations on fatwas or other religious elements to positive reinforcement of the government’s actions. Keyword search could not be used for this website and instead a manual search was used. Lastly, president.uz contains a list of all presidential decrees and decisions signed since 2016. Since the database was of a manageable size, a full read of all decrees was conducted. In addition, several more sources were found later during research. Mostly involving articles published by Uzbek scholars in scientific journals during the last 4

years. These were chosen as additional objects of study due to their particularly propaganda-heavy nature.

Limitations of the study

It should be noted that this study focuses mostly on the analysis of literature supported by various documents related to government discourse, in line with Wodak et al. (2009) and their research into Austrian national identity as a case study. The primary material, as discussed above, serves as reference points to offer a deeper understanding of the type of language used in the state religious heritage discourse. This study is not a comprehensive overview and analysis of all sources available. For a more comprehensive overview of all religious regulation in Central Asia the author recommends Gamza & Jones (2021). As well as relreg.com. A website made by Jones listing all religious regulation documents until 2018 in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Neither is this study an in-depth analysis of politics in Uzbekistan. This study must be seen as an attempt to understand the current state discourse on heritage and religion. As viewed through a heritage framework. Thereby adding to the scholarly debate on post-independence Uzbekistan as well as to discussions on heritage and how it can be used and abused by state entities. This study will provide a good overview of the dynamics of heritage in the Uzbek state and link it to pre-existing discussions on heritage. In order to answer the research questions and solve the seemingly incoherent dichotomy that lies at the heart of Uzbek discourse on heritage and religion.

Chapter 3: Theory

In order to analyse the situation in Uzbekistan correctly, a proper theoretical investigation must be conducted first. This chapter will discuss various conceptual frameworks to better understand the concept of national identity and heritage. Firstly the concept of identity will be established. This will be logically expanded into the concept of national identity and finally how this relates to the state. After this conceptualisation is established an overview of the "Authorized Heritage Discourse" will be presented as this will play a crucial role in the later analysis. The last section of this theory chapter will deal with the overlap between heritage and religion. Taken all together this theory chapter establishes a thorough background necessary to understand the reality of the Uzbek lived experience.

National Identity and The State

Identity as a concept

The concept of the nation and the subsequent national identities emerging therefrom are complex phenomena. Wodak et al. (2009) provides a good overview of scholarly work related to discourses on national identity and their work will serve as the basis for this section. Their argument starts with a discussion of the works of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. In his work "hermeneutics of the self", Ricoeur (1992) divides identity into two parts. Namely: selfhood and sameness. Selfhood is the more personal sense of identity and sameness refers to the part of identity that stands in relation to others (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 116) and it is the part of his theory that is relevant here. Sameness is once more subdivided into 3 sub-categories. The first two being qualitative and quantitative identity. Qualitative identity refers to the possessing of identical traits between one and another object or person, referred to as substitution without semantic loss. A lack of numerical diversity (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 116). Quantitative identity refers to the occurrence of the same thing twice. To identify the same thing twice leads from mere cognition to recognition (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 116). The third sub-category of sameness is one of uninterrupted continuity. Throughout time any structure changes. People grow old, a building erodes or a concept acquires different connotations. Every small change threatens the identity of a structure through dissemblance of both the qualitative and quantitative identities. Especially when one delves into the deeper past. Therefore, by applying a concept of temporal constancy to the identity of a structure it can survive these individual changes and retain the same identity (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 117). Creating a sort of Theseus' ship. While all the individual parts changed the illusion of an inherent continuity is maintained. Once applied to groups, the concept of such a structure can be applied to social institutions as well (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 12). Ricoeur goes on to describe how the inherently dialectically opposed selfhood and sameness are brought together under narrative identities. The goal of narrative identity is "to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 140) as quoted in Wodak et al. (2009, p. 14). This is done through perceiving temporal continuity through the lens of a character as in a narrative. A narrative structure is what allows a continuous story to

emerge that keeps a sense of sameness of identity from what were originally heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory building blocks (Wodak et al. 2009, p. 14). Such a narrative is simultaneously both fictitious and real, and importantly subject to change when the coherence of the fable requires it (Martin, 1995, p. 8). Narrative identity seeks thus to make sense of the full identity of a person but also of a whole society. But any such story is always told with value judgements and internalised attitudes of those doing the telling (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 15). Through this understanding of identity, it becomes clear that group identity is a social construct. The individual imagines themselves as part of a larger narrative identity. This artificially gives the impression of sameness and continuity between today and the past centuries or millennia. Through this system it is possible to bring together a unique personal and a larger group identity into one story-driven narrative. Making it real through the belief in it. This leads into ideas on national identity and how it can be manipulated.

From narrative Identity to National Identity

To understand the concept of a nation in both a social and political sense, the works of Benedict Anderson are crucial. Anderson (1983) describes the concept of an imagined community. Socially, nations here are seen as inherently invented constructs. A nation is too large for any individual to know the whole community, so rather there exists an image of that community and all its traits in the minds of the individuals within that nation (Anderson, 1983, p. 27). While nobody can understand what every single person within their community is doing, it is possible that someone can feel like they have a complete understanding of what the continuous, anonymous whole is moving towards (Anderson, 1983, p. 26). Richter (1994) further argues that the nation should be seen as a “socially constructed pattern of interpretation with which the world is seen from the standpoint of the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Richter, 1994, p. 316). The idea of the nation is what it effectively becomes in reality. In a purely social sense, a nation becomes real through the invocation of collective unity, boundaries (Wodak et al, 2009, p. 22) as well as a sense of national culture (Hall & du Gay, 1996). Hall views a national cultural identity as a discourse that produces meaning about the nation. Which allows individuals to identify themselves with the nebulous concept of the nation (Hall & du Gay, 1996, p. 613). Instead of using the word “discourse”, the words “national narration” can also be used to describe the way that people give meaning to the social world around them (Ram, 1994, pp. 153-154). Uri Ram specifically points out that these narrations are no less real because of this, they are born out of long dissemination and reproduction by relevant cultural actors (Ram, 1994, p. 154). While narrative nationalism deals mostly with the past, the present and the future are just as important. To this effect, Kolakowsi (1995) presents 5 different traits for national identities. Namely:

1. National spirit or Volksgeist: representing a metaphysical concept of cultural forms of life and collective behavioural norms.

2. Historical memory: almost synonymous with a narrative history, grounding a nation in deep historical roots. In the case for newer nation-states this narrative history can often be created ad hoc without substantial historical evidence. Žižek (2004) also specifically mentions that in the case for post-Soviet states, this is even more true. Societies were formally subsumed under the nation-state that only after fabricated its ideology based on national traditions.

3. Anticipation and future orientation: According to Kolalowski, who sees the nation more as a personified actor (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 25), the nation is inherently worried about its future. But unlike an individual, it does not have a proper death. Žižek (2004) draws on Heidegger's (1962) concept of being-toward-death, finding meaning in one's own death as the only authentic moment in a person's life. Communal traditions here replace the personal aspect of death as the foremost creator of authentic experiences on a societal level. The connection to death is still maintained in a lot of dialogue however, especially when issues of globalization or other challenges to the nation-state arise and challenge the ideas of national autonomy and uniqueness (Wodak et al, 2009, p. 25)

4. National body: Wodak et al. (2009, p. 25) prefers to view this trait as a purely metaphysical concept relating to the boundaries of the nation, both in physical dimensions of land and resources as well as who belongs to the nation and who does not

5. A nameable beginning: this includes anything related to a founding myth or founding fathers. Which are often set in the deep past without clear historical records. This particular element is the least applicable for the concept of Uzbekistan

These categories provide a useful framework for analysis of the Uzbek case while being applicable to other nationalist discourses. The first 3 points warrant further discussion before being applied to the Uzbek case. Wodak et al. (2009, p. 27) elaborates that through these traits the nation is raised to the level of a unique individual, made up of homogenizing traits that supposedly symbolize the whole nation. This replaces the need for individual uniqueness with a collective form of uniqueness. Furthermore, national discourse is thus deeply intertwined with time. Both the past, present and future matter for this discourse to be fully effective and immersive (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 26). Elements such as a "volksgeist" should not be taken too literally however, but should be seen to represent a type of discursive invocation of ideas of identity rather than hard truth. As narrative identity is always to be viewed.

National Identity and the State

The state has an inherent interest in fostering a strong sense of national identity. Anderson (1983) describes in detail how states moved from ones justified on the basis of sacral language and the divine right of the monarch to ones based on national boundaries and eventually the concept of nations as the primary justification. In the view of Anderson this is mostly due to changes to the written language. In earlier times sacral languages like Latin or Arabic were the dominant writing systems. This allowed people from all over those religious communities to understand at least some cultural aspects of their life and to identify with each other (Anderson, 1983). Through the adoption of the printing press various different languages were adopted more frequently and they gained a much more prominent place within society, causing a much more delineated map of national identities. Combined with the enlightenment that shook the previous system of divine right and replaced this system with the sovereign state, whose foundations were deeply rooted in the nation as the new system of legitimacy (Anderson, 1983). The nation-state has much discursive power to shape this idea of the nation. Pierre Bourdieu (1994) argues that the state has the power to

mould mental structures and to impose common principles on the people. This done mostly through various bureaucratic structures, educational facilities, social rituals and classification systems of identity. This falls in line with what Judith Butler (1991) argued about the nature of regulatory regimes to establish fixed identity categories. And the tendency to police the purity of those categories. Or more importantly, those who threaten to fall outside of those categories. She applies this in the discourse of gender studies. this useful approach will be extrapolated to fit national and religious identities. All these practices condense into a larger discourse that regulates what is acceptable in a society and which categories belong inside or outside the system, which is usually backed up by legal and state power (Wodak, 2009, pp. 29-30). It is however important to be aware that the state is not the only actor which shapes national identities. Every day social practices play a significant role as well. There is always a difference between the official and private discourses in any given society (Wodak, 2009, p. 30). This will be one of the points of contention that plays a central role in the data related to repression, presented in the next chapter.

The Heritage Discourse

The Origins of the Heritage Monolith

According to LauraJane Smith, the current dominant discourse on heritage evolved in 19th century Europe as a consequence of the enlightenment and emerging ideas of national identity (Olsen, 2001, p. 53) and a universalizing modernity (Smith, 2006). Smith echoes the thoughts of Anderson (1983) here on the emergence of the nation-state and reiterates the connection between heritage as belonging primarily to the nation-state (Smith, 2006, p. 30). Heritage in this discussion revolved mostly around physical monuments to the past that had to be protected and shown off to the general public. Mostly in order to showcase national identity as well as a spirit of cultural refinement (Smith, 2006, p. 18). This went alongside the institutionalization of museums as showcasers of national identity and national pride (Smith, 2006, p. 18). Gradually over the decades, most European countries adopted agencies to manage this heritage as official stewards and to find the correct ways to conserve them (Choay, 2001). These associations became increasingly concerned with the dissemination of the supposed innate national cultural value of monuments to the general public (Smith, 2006, p. 19). Choay (2001) notes that a sense of inheritance started to emerge where the past was supposed to be revered as a pristine thing to be passed on to further generations for their betterment and education. This was especially prominent in the English concept of “preserve as found” which aimed to remove any newer additions to old monuments to restore them to their authentic self (Choay, 2001). The right of government organizations to act as trustees for national heritage, and in association national identity and values, became ever more enshrined into law (Emerick, 2003; Smith, 2006, p. 20). Societal elites were seen as the only group that could act as proper guardians of heritage in 19th century Europe and they were the ones who championed conservation initiatives and the ones appointed to those committees. The educated professional was deemed the only one culturally sophisticated enough to understand and diffuse complex national narratives and the modern European ethos of the age (Smith, 2006, p. 21). Smith (2006) notes that through several

international treaties on the managing of heritage like the Venice Charter or several ICOMOS documents, the European ethos of conservation and heritage management has become enshrined and naturalized throughout the world. Byrne (1991) suggests that through such charters this discourse has become almost hegemonic and unquestionable and as such was imposed on non-Western nations. While this hegemony has been questioned recently in some Western countries it still seems very much relevant in other parts of the world. Especially in the case of Uzbekistan as it lies at the core of the Uzbek discourse on heritage.

Arbiters of Heritage

Smith (2006) coins the term “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) as what eventually emerged as the leading conceptual framework for heritage thought and practice around the world. Smith notes a few key points, extending upon the framework mentioned so far. The first component is the concept of authenticity. it proposes that there is such a thing as an accurate representation of the past (Smith, 2006). Which leads to the promotion of one particular historical narrative, usually the one that is compatible with the idea of the nation (Graham, 2001, p. 63). By association this then leads to concepts of national identity and national spirit. The next step in this process is to appoint or self-appoint those who are allowed/authorised to speak for “the past” as a monolith. Because “the past” is seen as something both vague and yet concrete and real, it quickly falls into the realm of expert knowledge (Smith, 2006, p. 29). Smith mentions archaeologists and historians but certain government agents or Islamic officials also fit this bill. Experts furthermore take on the role of stewards of the past. Those who protect the heritage of the people of today so that it can be passed on accurately to new generations (Smith, 2006, p. 29). In this view heritage is something inherently valuable as it explains the cultural values of the present. It represents all the positive aspects of a nation’s past and must thus not only be preserved but also passed on to the non-experts who do not get a say in the construction of the heritage discourse. According to Smith, the AHD is something that “the people” are only supposed to passively absorb and not engage with proactively (Smith, 2006, p. 31). The general public is assumed to be a blank slate unaware of their own heritage and thus the general public has to be taught by those who act as caretakers of heritage. This is especially true when it comes to physical places of heritage as well as museums which often still operate under 19th century assumptions of the population as something to be controlled and educated for their own good (Smith, 2006). But it is equally valid for heritage in the cultural sense. Tradition is such a cultural element that can easily be absorbed into the AHD. Hobsbawm (1983) uses the term “invented tradition” which is described as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1). While this is true for every society, certain traditions tend to be preferred over others which are deliberately forgotten (Smith, 2006, p. 60). Through the authority granted by the AHD, invocations of the right traditions can act as a powerful tool to socialize people into accepting the status quo as essential to their own condition through the idea of continuity of identity (Hobsbawm, 1983; Smith, 2006, p. 60). Heritage can effectively become a way to control and shape a social group to the needs of the state. As long as the hegemonic nature of the state heritage discourse remains in place. Previous heritage research suggests that through the institution of a hegemonic heritage discourse, now

neglected alternative discourses can become points of friction. Leading to a potential loss of credibility and believability of that same discourse by the people it claims to represent (Odermatt, 1996). So, the narrative of the discourse and its execution always remain points of contention and have to be managed carefully by the state. The way that the AHD can be used to control and influence behaviour is one of the most crucial aspects of this case study. And it will come back frequently in the case of Uzbekistan.

Heritage and Religion

Heritage and religion have a long history together. Both influence the other. The two next paragraphs will explore this link, as they are a crucial part of the theoretical framework used to analyse and interpret the presented case study of Uzbekistan.

Secularisation of Heritage

The development of the secular heritage discourse as discussed so far has a clear impact on religious heritage. This generally flows from the previously discussed origins of the AHD (Smith, 2006). As Wijesuriya (2017) mentions the overemphasis on a type of idyllic conservation dictated by heritage "experts". This, according to Wijesuriya leads to a type of secularization that divorces the concerns for the physical materiality of heritage sites from the concerns of the people still using that site for its original religious purposes (Wijesuriya, 2017, pp. 2-3). Rico (2021) echoes such thoughts, arguing that an ongoing heritagisation since the 19th century has reframed various religious sites as first and foremost important heritage sites in service of the nation. Originating during the French revolution and their anti-clerical approach. Specific conservationist rhetoric removed the religious aspects from holy sites and made them shrines to heritage instead (Rico, 2021). Usually justified through the same type of scientific humanism that lies at the core of the AHD (Smith, 2006). For example, during the Soviet Union several orthodox churches were used to house anti-religious museums in order to promote Marxist scientific materialism (Teryukova, 2014). These churches still retained a level of importance as a physical site but their meaning was subverted through nationalization to serve a new state-purpose (Rico, 2021). The French model of secularism specifically was, as Rico argues, very influential in forming global debates about heritage. The type of extensive appropriation of religious structures that followed AHD style conservation ended up creating an essence of unease where religion was concerned. Rico, (2021, p. 12) argues this originates from Europe-wide memories of the wars of religion that devasted large swathes of the continent. This attitude was enshrined in the founding charter of UNESCO in order to create "peace in the minds of men". As such it leads to a more cautious attitude towards religion in the heritage field (Rico, 2021, pp. 12-13). Usually favouring secularisation and to deny a voice to religion. While Rico and Wijesuriya concern themselves mostly with physical aspects of heritage, the same general theory can and should also be applied to intangible heritage and its role in national identity and value creation. This extension seems especially valid when studying the reappropriation of religious elements into secular heritage. Because of this process, religious values can be secularized into national values. But this usually goes accompanied with an ever-present fear of backlash from the religious community if it is not properly controlled. The

secularisation outlined above serves as an important addendum to Smith's (2006) concept of AHD and will serve as a useful analytical tool for the case of modern Uzbekistan.

Heritage as Religion

The second aspect of the interplay between heritage and religion is the way that heritage has always had undertones of sacrality. Trinidad Rico (2021) refers to this phenomenon as the "heritage cult". But the idea originates from Lowenthal (1998). Lowenthal points out the necessity of heritage to be based on faith (Lowenthal, 1998). As he sees it, heritage is not a rational position but rather a belief about the past of a people that must "feel" right to them (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 2). Heritage, in this view, can provide meaning and purpose to one's life, likening it to an almost religious experience. In the same way that religion can mobilize people into action, so can religion (Lowenthal, 1998). Heritage and religion are both positioned as belief systems. The fact that people can believe in them, beyond absolute reason, and sometimes even when faced with contradictory knowledge is what makes these aspects so important. When heritage is positioned as an almost sacral and pristine past, the preservation of it takes on religious tones as well. Being described by several people in the British National Trust as a spiritual calling (Lowenthal, 1998, p. 1). Hall (2011) noted that both heritage and religious rhetoric employ aesthetic values to appeal to wider audiences. Both types of buildings tend to favour grand imposing designs with forbidden spaces. All for the purpose of conveying a deeper meaning. Meyer & de Witte (2013) mention similar points to the discussion above. But in addition, they also raise the point of the canonical power that heritage holds. By declaring something as national heritage it brings it to a realm beyond reproach and the values that they supposedly preach are now set in official stone (Meyer & de Witte, 2013, p. 276). The untouchable sacrality of certain heritage sites and ideas make it even harder to counter-narratives to emerge. Rico offers both an acceptance of and a critique on the elements offered above. especially the urge to fetishize heritage as religion must be rejected (Rico, 2021, p. 6). But at the same time it is important to understand the discursive power of religious imagery and symbolism when used in a heritage context. This view seems valid, especially when keeping in mind the importance of heritage as a way of identification and meaning making. Instead of earlier religious modes of identity. Especially in the case of Uzbekistan the line can become quite blurred as will be shown in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter will present an analysis of the Uzbek case study. The first part deals with the creation of an Uzbek state ideology and its intersection with the heritage discourse and religion. The second part deals with government repression of Islam and its justification. Thirdly, an overview of religious education is given and the importance that the government places in controlling the religious discourse. Lastly, a small example case study is presented in the form of the traditional Mahalla system and how the Uzbek state has managed to further its control through the heritage discourse.

The National Ideology

Spirituality and the Nation

During the Karimov era (1991-2016) the government worked fast to establish a national ideology in order to cement their control over the country. This was eventually distilled down into Ma'naviyat va Ma'rifat or Spirituality and Enlightenment during the 1990s and the concept was institutionalized with the creation of the ministry for propaganda in 2004 (Sattarov, 2017, pp. 1-2). According to Sattarov (2017) the main goals of this national ideology were to push for loyalty to the regime, protect Uzbek culture from Western values, protect the youth from harmful ideological influences and to promote Uzbekistan's unique development path. Schmitz (2023, p. 9) names 3 elements for the same ideology: 1. the entrenchment of the Uzbek language, culture and customs as they had come out of the Soviet period, 2. a new historiography that promotes the idea of Uzbek independence under a strong, secular developmental nation-state as the natural historical path for the nation and 3. Hanafi Islam as the basis of the national culture and history as well as the source of national spiritual values. The former president Karimov himself published frequent works on morality which were made required reading in schools during his time in office and university students were required to pass yearly exams on Karimov's thoughts. His work titled "High Morality is an Invincible Force" was hailed by Uzbek state media as "the best book on philosophy and morality since the times of Socrates" (Najibullah, 2008). Such moral values come partially from Islamic roots. To give one telling example. When a famous Uzbek singer went on stage wearing a dress that revealed her back and legs during the Navruz celebrations of 2014, she was seriously reprimanded by Uzbeknavo (state agency for performance licenses) for wearing clothing that were against the "national mentality". The agency issued a general warning for all singers to not wear revealing clothes or commit any "sexualized" actions (Pannier, 2015). It is interesting to note that during this time the hijab was also forbidden during public appearances. So clearly conforming to Muslim dress is considered an even larger taboo by the government.

Fig. 1. The dress worn by an Uzbek singer that caught the attention of the government (Pannier, 2015).

The exact definition of what is meant with ma'naviyat is purposefully vague and changes depending on the situation (Maerz, 2018, p. 208). But a recurring trait is usually that it revolves around "protecting" the "national values and traditions" of the Uzbek people and especially its youth, both from Soviet influences and modern foreign ideas. In general, the state has managed to create a teleological discourse that equates the national ideology and the identity of the regime with universal humanitarian goals of progress and development. This discourse is then framed as an organic state of being that emerged from a pre-political consensus of the community (March, 2003, p. 229). Any critique of the state can thus easily be discounted as being not only against the government but against the people and their unique national spirit. A national spirit that stems from ancient traditions that were suppressed by the Soviet Union, now awakened to provide a bright future (Kendzior, 2014; Maerz, 2018). It is perhaps then ironic that the discursive methods used by the Uzbek state apparatus are inherently tied and rather similar to old Soviet methods and ideological framing (Maerz, 2018, p. 216). Especially the idea of the Uzbek path being one of universal human process and enlightenment is rather reminiscent of Soviet views on Marxist interpretations of Hegelian dialectics (Thomas, 2014). In the case of Uzbekistan this is not surprising as a significant portion of the political elite emerged from a Soviet milieu where they already held positions of power within the Uzbek SSR (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 130). In this view of progress, independence was an inevitable conclusion of the indomitable Uzbek spirit, rather than an event thrust on the country by outside forces (Kendzior, 2014, p. 230). But Karimov made sure to establish that this spirit or ma'naviyat needed state guidance as well as devotion of all the Uzbek people to reach its full potential (Karimov, 1994). A sentiment echoed by Mirziyoyev as well. While some hoped that with the death of Karimov the ideological grip of the government on public life would loosen, like proposed by Sattarov (2017, p. 7) one year after the ascension of Mirziyoyev, this has turned out to be only marginally true. Despite the liberalizing wind that did blow through the country in matters of economics, rule of law and religious matters (Schmitz, 2020, 2023) political control over the

country’s ideological and religious fronts remains tight enough to ensure that any new freedoms stay within certain parameters (Schmitz, 2023, p. 13).

Ancestral Wisdom as Spiritual Vaccine

One can see a return to the use of Ma’naviyat va Ma’rifat (Spirituality and Enlightenment) in official press documents. On the 22nd of December an extended meeting was held for the Republican Council of Spirituality and Enlightenment (Spirituality should become a new movement, 2024). chaired by president Mirziyoyev himself the meeting detailed new plans for the cultural sector. As explained by Raziya Matibayeva, associate professor of history at the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan, this meeting comes as a reaction to a more globalized international arena and the need to protect Uzbek ideology, morality and traditions from outside influences (Matibayeva. 2023). A summary offered by Ibaidullayev (2024), himself a professor at the Andijon state pedagogical institute, describes the meeting like this: “In a word, summing up from the historical meeting dedicated to the issues of spirituality and enlightenment, in the conditions of today's globalization, it is important to preserve, [...] and protect the independence of the state, which our great ancestors dreamed of for centuries. We realized that it is the sacred duty of our people, following the idea of "loving the country is from faith", not only leaders, teachers, but the whole society should work together to educate all citizens, especially our youth, to be truly patriotic.” (Ibaidullayev, 2024). Specific religious connotations are clearly used when referencing the idea of national traditions. The word ‘spirituality’ itself has religious undertones and when used in tandem with concepts of ‘’tradition” and “national values” it instils a, state propagated, automatic connection between Uzbek culture and Islam that has always been inherent in the concept of spirituality since Karimov’s days.

The government of Uzbekistan is launching a new ideological initiative, based largely on the old framework provided by Karimov. Hinging on the need to “protect” the future generation from moral bankruptcy. In an article titled “Each nation creates its own spiritual vaccine”, Matibayeva (2023) uses language related to disease in an effort to compare foreign influence to a virus. This framing is intentionally, just after the corona pandemic to resonate more with readers who may have suffered during the lockdown. Matibayeva (2023) points out that “As the President has repeatedly stated, harmful ideas, concepts and views that are completely foreign to our national spirituality can enter our home, society, and most what's worse, the virus is entering the pure hearts and minds of our children.". The blame for the spread of this “disease” is put on the increasing influence of the internet and mobile phones on the lives of young people., Ideas of consumerism, egotistical behaviour and bad attitudes towards work and the family are supposedly being imprinted on the youth. It is lamented that the traditional education by the family and school is not providing enough guidance. The proposed “vaccine” to this problem is to harken back to the illustrious ancestors or “grandfathers of the nation”. Ancestors whose glorious deeds must serve as inspiration for the new generation. Ancestors who “raised the flag of enlightenment against ignorance and devoted their intelligence and potential to the deep study and enrichment of scientific achievements created by mankind” (Matibayev, 2023). The particular ancestral elements mentioned by UzA are key to the concept of the third Uzbek renaissance.

Fig. 2. Propaganda of happy children being raised in the ways of Spirituality (Matibayev, 2023).

A Third Uzbek Renaissance

The discourse about the “third renaissance“ represents the idea that under president Mirziyoyev’s leadership Uzbekistan is on its way to a new golden age (Uzbekistan’s Third Renaissance Roots, . It harkens back to the supposed “first” and “second renaissance” of Muslim culture and science in Central Asia, specifically Uzbekistan. The discourse on the “third renaissance” got traction since 2020. And when large amount of articles have been published by Uzbek scholars on this topic. Echoing government propaganda or discourse . In this particular view of history, Uzbekistan saw its first renaissance around the 9th to the 12th century BC (Bahodir, 2021, p. 18) which is also known as the Muslim Renaissance. Great advancements in art, science and philosophy were made. But as Fayzieva and Bekimbetova (2021) describe it, this was only possible due to the independence of Central Asia from the Arab caliphate. Only when national tradition flourished so did science and Uzbekistan became the jewel of the Islamic world (Fayzieva & Bekimbetova, p. 105). The second renaissance belongs to the Timurid period of the 15th century. Great architects, scholars and scientists lived on the lands of Uzbekistan (Bahodir, 2021, p. 18). People are reminded to learn from spiritual guides like Alisher Navoi (1441-1501) and his poetry (Abjalova & Gulomova, 2023). The next 5 centuries are presented as a dark age due to a lack of innovation that eventually caused the loss of national independence (Achildieva et al., 2021, p. 18).

In this vision, a rejuvenation was necessary to carry the nation into its historical heights. The word renaissance here is contextualized as a rebirth, like Europe coming out of the dark ages (Nosirbekov, 2022, p. 130). A rejuvenation that was, supposedly, started by the Jadid reformers during the early 20th century but was snuffed out by the Soviets (Karimova, 2022, p. 196). The Jadids are seen as the real starters of the third Renaissance and their

dedication to seeing a free and prosperous homeland should be remembered or as president Mirziyoyev noted: “It is known from history: in the situation of increased threats to the fate of the homeland and people, it was the devotees of the nation - intellectuals with awake hearts, poets and writers, representatives of the arts, employees of the field of spirituality and enlightenment - who bravely came to the field. At the moment when our country is entering a new, high stage of its development, we need mature personnel who have been brought up in the spirit of national values along with the achievements of western science like our ancestors” (Spirituality should become a new movement, 2023). Jadids are honoured as freedom fighters striving for modernity and independence of the Uzbek nation. But as both Khalid (1998, 2017) and DeWeese (2016) pointed out, their program was inherently religious in nature. And while they did formulate conceptions of the nation, they were not based on ethnic nationalist conceptions of Uzbek independence. The state narrative prefers to cherry-pick the parts of history that fit with their message in order to create loyal citizens to the state. In an article from UzA, Nigora Rakhmonova phrases it like this: “Our forefathers, who came to the field with the noble idea of "unity in language, thought, and work", believed that the main way to get our people out of ignorance and backwardness is through knowledge and enlightenment, acquiring worldly progress. In this sense, it is necessary to inform today's youth about the comprehensive activities of the Jadid movement. After all, the dedication of our ancestors, who fought for the independence and development of the Motherland, is known to many experts. Many people are unaware of this. Our main goal is to inculcate their views in the minds of our people.” (Rakhmonova, 2024). The right kind of knowledge that is mentioned here is secular in nature and is supposed to fit in the concept of ma’naviyat va ma’rifat. The values attributed to the Jadids of the past are a reflection of the values the government wishes to instil in its new generation.

Fig. 3. A portrayal of Jadid intellectuals posing as heroes of the nation (Rahmonova, 2024).

This concept of the past is utilized to promote a positive image of the present. Now that Uzbekistan is once more fair and free and the difficult years of rebuilding are in the past, a true third renaissance can begin. One focused on science, spirituality and enlightenment

(Nosirbekov, 2022, p. 134). In this discourse, science is seen as an exceptionally important element with Mirziyoyev being depicted as someone who prefers the company of scientists, not unlike Timur himself (Uzbekistan's Third Renaissance Roots, n.d.). The people depicted as scientists were in essence religious figures but they framed as secular figures. The third renaissance is meant to reinvigorate the nation through scientific progress and an adoption of modernity without risking the national ideology. The present-day goals are presented as a continuation of Uzbekistan's central role in the Muslim world as a scientific and cultural actor. Thereby claiming legitimacy through association with this heritage.

To promote this heritage the state founded the centre of Islamic civilization in Uzbekistan in 2017 through presidential decree (presidential decree no. PP-3080, 2017). Although the centre was finished only at the end of May 2023. The stated goals of this institute are: "Developing and implementing a scientific-historical concept that reflects the fact that our country has been an integral part of world civilization for centuries, one of the centres of Islamic culture". As well as "Scientific research aimed at deeply analysing the fact that the religion of Islam calls people, all nationalities and peoples to a bright life, goodness, mutual friendship and humanity, its original, humanistic content, to unite the people of the world towards one goal - against ignorance". And finally, to "promote our great compatriots who made a great contribution to the development of the Islamic religion" through "Deep research of the unique heritage of scholars like Ahror Vali on a scientific basis, wide promotion of their scientific and spiritual courage, great human qualities" (presidential decree no. PP-3080, 2017)

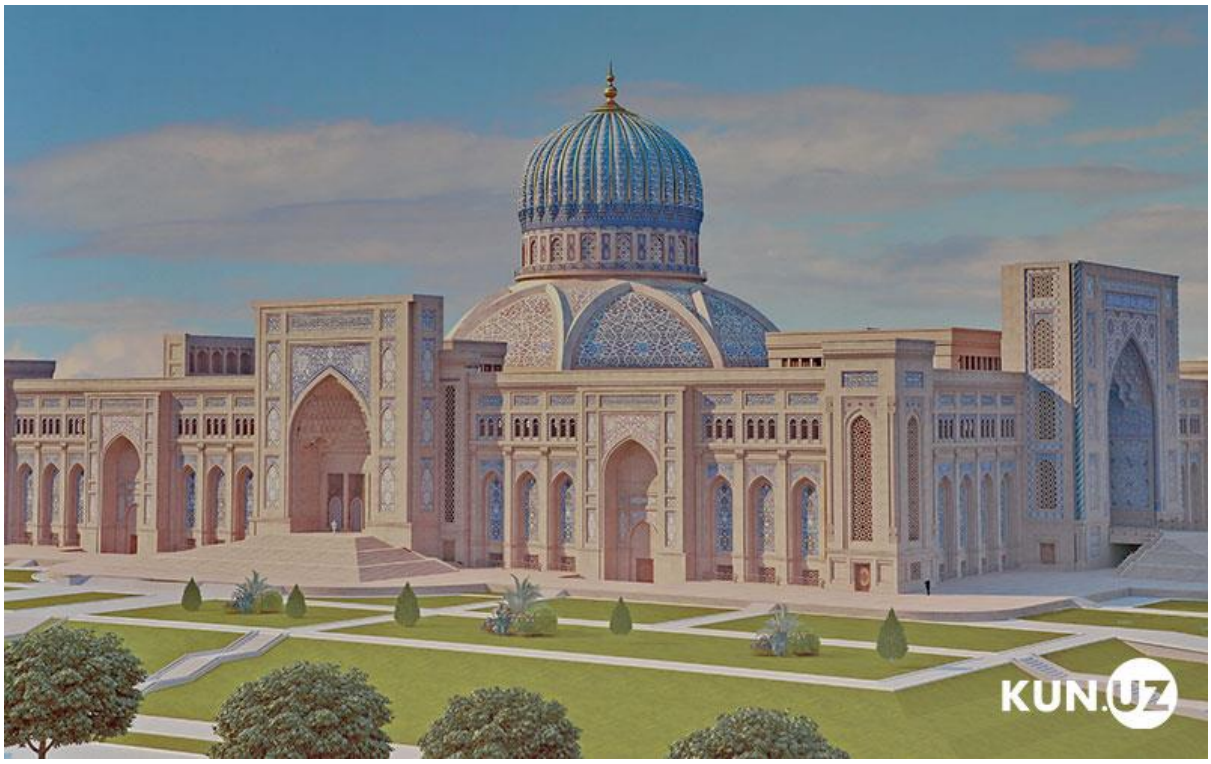

Fig 4. A model of the centre of Islamic civilization in Uzbekistan (kun.uz).

The goal of the museum is thus to present religious heritage in a secular way through "scientific methods". Religious thinkers are to be remembered for their contributions to "spirituality" and humanistic national values. Islam itself is used as a weapon against ignorance, which in this context will refer to the wrong kind of non-government Islam. The

people of the past once more represent what is supposed to be proper ideology. All of the most famous scholars, academics and theologians from Uzbekistan are mentioned by name in this decree. Famous figures like Ibn Sina, Al-Bukhari, Bahauddin Naqshband, Mirzo Ulugbek and many more are thus put at the disposal of the state. Even if people like Ibn Sina lived centuries before the Uzbek migration of the 16th century into modern day Uzbekistan (Soucek, 2000). The museum presents a version of history very much in tune with what the government ideology dictates. A news article from 2021 sums it up accurately: the museum is meant to promote the idea of a third renaissance in a new Uzbekistan and to show the achievements of this new revival as a direct result of the country's historical trajectory and national spirit (Centre of Islamic civilization to be transformed, 2021). The future of Uzbekistan is thus tied intrinsically to its past.

Matters of State: Security and Repression

The State and its Opponents

Swiftly after the declaration of independence, several contenders emerged to challenge the sitting post-Soviet elites. Both secular and religious opposition groups entered the political arena to offer alternatives to Karimov's rule. The secular opposition parties of Erk and Birlik (formerly one party during perestroika) were slowly strangled of support through a methodical coopting of their party program. Especially when it concerned Uzbek nationalism (Kendzior, 2011). This can be considered ironic, given the fact that Karimov initially supported the Soviet hardliners in their 1991 coup against Gorbachev but changed his position when it became clear the Soviet Union would fall. Eventually the political struggle against the liberal democratic parties was ended with the ban of both Erk and Birlik as political parties (Schmitz, 2023, p.8) and the exile of their leaders in 1992 (Khalid, 2003, p. 586). Now the only threat to hegemony was religion. A resurgence in interest in Islam worried the government and measures were implemented to suppress any potential challenge to the existing order. During this time several radical Islamic groups emerged in the Ferghana valley, the most religious and conservative part of the country., These groups eventually urged Karimov to meet with them to discuss the creation of an Islamic state (Naumkin, 2006, p.129). Once again, their leaders were either arrested or forced into exile (Schmitz, 2023, p. 8). The civil war between post-Soviet and regional religious factions in Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997 was a clear example to the political elite what could happen if things got out of control. The swift destruction of the opposition led many radicalized Muslims to flee into Tajikistan and Afghanistan to fight in their civil war. Some came back to fight for an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. These groups coalesced into the IMU, which committed several kidnappings and minor terrorist attacks over the following years (Schmitz, 2023, p. 8). The state saw these Islamic fundamentalists in both Tajikistan and Afghanistan as a terrorist threat and while they did present a real problem, the reality of the situation was exaggerated as an excuse for more authoritarian measures (Akromov, 2021, p. 28). The government was aided by the events of 9/11 and the declaration of the "war on terror" by George Bush. They internalized the international rhetoric at the time to justify harsh authoritarian and extrajudicial measures against supposed terrorist threats (Akromov, 2021,

pp. 29-30). The attitude of president Karimov towards real or perceived Islamic extremists is most accurately described in a speech he gave in 1998 saying that "Such people must be shot in the head. If necessary, I'll shoot them myself." (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Especially the 1999 Tashkent bombings, that blew up several government buildings, were another clear indication of such necessary measures in the eyes of the government (Akromov, 2021, p. 32). The government caught one of the leading figures of the IMU, Zayniddin Aqsarov. And forced him under torture to confess that it was both the IMU and the exiled Erk political party who planned the attack. Although according to Aqsarov later rescinded these claims in an interview. He denied the involvement of the IMU and said that it was most likely other radical parties or even the government itself (Zayniddin Askarov's interview, 2015). Although there is no concrete proof of government involvement, the circumstances are still suspicious as it did end up benefiting the government (Polat & Butkevich, 2000, p. 546). Aqsarov also accused the government of knowing the plans and letting the bombings proceed regardless (Zayniddin Askarov's interview, 2015). After the bombings around 5000 people faced arrest under various allegations of religious extremism. A convenient way to cull any potential troublemakers that otherwise would have been hard to arrest without backlash.

State Violence

The state's harsh response to so called terrorists and fundamentalists culminated in the tragic events of the Andijon massacre in 2005. The massacre was the government's reaction to a series of protests in Andijon after the arrest of 23 influential local businessmen on trumped up charges of "religious extremism" (Human Rights Watch, 2005). It is more likely that these businessmen were targeted for their independent outlook and the high popularity they enjoyed in their native region (Norton, 2005). The only ties to Islam that were present, according to human rights reports, was that they were devout Muslims who engaged in charity and prayer (Human Rights Watch, 2005). On May 12th, supporters of the businessmen stormed several government buildings, freed the businessmen and took some government officials hostage. Their demands were that the president come to Andijon to discuss their grievances (Human Rights Watch, 2005), which were economic and social in origin. Karimov's policies had strangled economic opportunities and led to massive unemployment (Zanca, 2005, p. 77) and government repression was becoming unacceptable (Verme, 2006). After these events a peaceful and unarmed protest started in one of the main squares of the city with as many as 10.000 people attending, among whom were many women and children. At some time during the day of May the 13th, US- trained (Andersen, 2005, p. 15) government forces surrounded the crowd and started opening fire without warning. Throughout the day they trapped the protestors in a killing field, mowing down hundreds without pardon (Human Rights Watch, 2005). The government tried to frame the protests as being organized by a radical Islamic organization known as "Akromiya" that sought to overthrow the government. While the existence of such an organization has always been in doubt (Kendzior, 2006, p. 546). The supposed founder of this movement, Akrom Yo'ldishev, did attempt to create an alternative to the state-sanctioned version of Islam. One that was clearly unacceptable for the Uzbek government (Kendzior, 2006, 558). Through official government channels the events of Andijon could be used to both discredit genuine concerns as extremist terrorism as well as provide justification for cracking down further on dissenting versions of Islam deemed not "traditional". This also means that the

government never took responsibility for the shooting. When the author visited Andijon in June, 2023 there was still no memorial dedicated to the hundreds of lives lost and the memory of the events appeared to be erased from the public eye.

Fig 5. Uzbek protestors gather at Babur Square in Andijon (ifex.org).

Legality and Regulations

Apart from former president Karimov's preferred strategy of "shoot first, fabricate answers later", the Uzbek state was also quick to establish a legal framework on religious rights. Especially since 1998 this process has ramped up in the name of counter-extremism, framing religious regulation as the only way to prevent fundamentalism and terrorism (Gamza & Jones, 2021, pp. 207-209). Two mainstays to this development stand out. First The 1998 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations". It basically curtailed a lot of previously granted rights. Effectively limiting the exposure to religion in daily life to a minimum. It introduced, among other points, a ban on religious clothing in public for non-clergy, a ban on proselytizing religion and a ban on involving minors in religious affairs. In addition, it granted exceptional censorship powers on religious publications (cabinet of ministers decree no. 263,1998). The law is purposefully vague on what qualifies as an official religious activity or as a national tradition (Khalid, 2007, 133). Leaving them in doubt, for example on whether or not the reading the Quran for deceased people was allowed, What made this even more complicated was that this decision ultimately came down to local government officials and their view on religion. Punishments on breaking religious laws were steadily ramped up with tougher legislation in 1998, 2003, 2005 and again in 2006 (Gamza & Jones, 2021, pp. 209-210). Despite the general liberalizing reforms of president Mirziyoyev post-2016 overall religious regulations have only tightened (Schmitz, 2023, p. 13). Although

through a series of economic reforms the general standard of living has quickly risen to a height (Marszewski, 2018) that pacifies the population to an extent that would prevent another Andijon, the government is still not willing to take any risks.

The second mainstay was introduced in 2018 when a new law on countering extremism that was passed. This law also was intentionally vague, allowing the government maximal space to adjust to current needs. Extremism could be determined to be whatever the government deems it to be. Free speech was not sufficiently protected in this law according to a report drafted by human rights watchdog OSCE (OSCE, 2019). In 2021 a revision was finally made to the old 1998 law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” after consistent international backlash (Schmitz, 2023, p. 14). The law was revised substantially but in spirit it differs only little from the original version (Schmitz, 2023, p. 15). The law is, just like the law on extremism, vague in its definitions of terms that can be used to limit certain freedoms. It still prohibits many of the previous points like proselytizing and private religious education. Furthermore, it heavily regulates religious symbolism in public, offers only limited autonomy to religious institutions and limits the distribution of religious texts or information (On Liberty of Conscience and Religious Organizations, 2021). Although the law does offer slightly more liberties than before in most of the areas related to the public sphere, like lifting the ban on religious clothing, the practice de-facto stayed in place at government institutes or universities (Schmitz, 2023, p. 15).

Abuses Continue

The situation for Muslims has undeniably improved compared to the pre-independence period. With Islam being pushed more to the forefront of society it is no longer reduced to the fringes of society. Or so it may seem. The government itself frames it this way. In a written statement by the deputy chairman of the office of Muslims of Uzbekistan, Ibrahimjon Inomov, the improvements in Islamic life are described. The statement was written specifically for the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2021 and published on the UzA website. It compares the difference between living as a Muslim in the Soviet Union and living as a Muslim in current day Uzbekistan. Inomov makes the comparison that while in the Soviet Union religious freedom was a constitutional right it was not adhered to while now with the new religious law of 2021 those freedoms are being upheld properly (Inomov, 2021). In addition Inomov specifically mentions that while in the USSR publishing religious literature was forbidden it is now thriving. That now people can enjoy religious ceremonies and rituals without constraints. And finally, that prayers can now be performed freely without a need for secrecy. All of these accomplishments, according to Inomov, are put squarely on the shoulders of Mirziyoyev who out of the goodness of his own heart wants to see the people of Uzbekistan prosper. Therefore ,gratitude should be shown to the president who cares about the motherland first and foremost and people should follow his example and stand behind the president in all his decisions, for he truly understands the national values and will see them upheld. This discourse is clearly fabricated as it contradicts the evidence presented by both Human Rights Watch (2023a) and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCRIF, 2023, 2024) in their yearly reports. For example, these institutions note that there have been violations in pretty much all categories listed by Inomov in the year 2022 alone. in May 2022, a woman was sentenced to 3 years in prison for clicking “like” on a 5-minute video lecture about religious chastity on a Russian website 5 years ago. She was

charged with storing and disseminating religious fanatical material that could threaten public safety (Elderly woman sentenced to 3 years in prison, 2023). In another case, Uzbek authorities shut down and raided multiple halal restaurants in Tashkent without any reason given. But all of them provide prayer spaces for their customers which was expressly mentioned by the police during their raids according to Radio Liberty (Serve alcohol or go bust, 2023). According to another report by Radio Liberty (2022) more than 10 people were told to come to a police station in Tashkent and forced to shave their beards or face imprisonment. Their beards were seen as carrying religious connotations. In addition, the police in one case followed an 18-year-old girl who chose to wear a hijab and warned her neighbours and classmates not to associate with her (Bayram, 2022a). Forum18 (Bayram, 2022b) noted that on April 10th police officers raided a mosque during Ramadan and drove out the children praying there with help of the Imam who did not interfere.

Fig. 6. A man forced to shave his beard. Before and after picture (rus.ozodlik.org).

Controlling the Narrative

The statement by Inomov in support of Mirziyoyev's policies rings hollow when compared to the ongoing harassment of religion in public life. While Muslims no longer face mass arrest as they did under Karimov (Human Rights Watch, 2023b), the situation is not nearly as good as it is made to appear. Especially in 2023 the arrest of people who look at unofficial religious material has ramped up significantly (USCRIF, 2024). The state uses any slight improvement in the condition of Muslims as proof of their role as shepherds of all good Muslims. In contrast, the state cracks down very hard on anyone who might fall afoul of government standards for religion. Essentially villainizing anyone who might not ascribe to the government mandated religion or ideology. Dissent is thus framed as coming from Wahhabis or terrorists who attack either the cultural and spiritual spirit of the people or the secular nation state that cares for the people. Heritage plays an incredibly important role in this justification. For this reason, the state views it as paramount that people do not find their

own version of Islam, although this is essentially impossible for the whole population (Khalid, 2007, p.5). The regime will however just try harder with new regulations and new crackdowns. Potential threats to the regime and its carefully created state ideology are thus dealt with ruthlessly. Inside or outside the law.

Islam and Knowledge

Religious Education and Official Islam

Islamic education has always been important in Central Asia. In pre-modern times Islamic institutions like madrasas and maktabs were the major educational facilities all over the Muslim world (Khalid, 1998, p. 200). Maktabs presented rather informal educational facilities present through almost every neighbourhood. Education focused mostly on acquiring cultural capital such as a basic understanding of Islam as well as the behavioural norms and values derived therefrom (Khalid, 1998). Madrasas on the other hand were institutions aimed at producing a specific class of professionals well versed in Islamic law and theology (Khalid, 1998, p. 29). Graduates of a madrasa could go on to become part of the ulema class and work for example as mufti or qazi in their local communities. The particular Islamic knowledge imparted on students was one entrenched in the local customs of Central Asia and transmitted mostly orally (Khalid, 1998, p. 33). And it therefore was reliant on the continuation of generation after generation of scholars well versed in the same cultural groundwork.

After the Bolshevik revolution, the production of Islamic knowledge changed dramatically. Soviet policies demanded ruthless modernization and several campaigns were launched to eradicate old “superstition”. Maktabs and madrasas were closed and replaced by a more western style system of primary, secondary and higher education (Khalid, 2014, p. 518). Many ulema were arrested and executed during Stalin’s purges (Tasar, 2016, p, 270). Similarly, Stalin launched the hujum campaign in 1927 which aimed at removing traditional Islamic elements from public life, such as wearing the veil or visiting mosques. While this encountered resistance in the short term, it did mostly eradicate Islamic symbolism from the public sphere in the long run (Khalid, 2007). However, Islamic education was allowed to continue in a very limited form in 1943, in an attempt to win favour with religious communities to support the war effort (Tasar, 2016). Several Muftiates were established for Muslim communities all over the Soviet Union. The muftiate for most of Central Asia was SADUM, headquartered in Tashkent (Tasar, 2017, p. 16-17). With it came the reopening of the Mir-I-Arab madrasa as the sole institution to train Islamic professionals in Central Asia. These new rights came with the obligation to promote loyalty to the regime and to ensure maximum support for the war (Tasar, 2016). SADUM itself was placed under the oversight of the secular government administration of CARC (Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults). CARC allowed SADUM to operate with at least some degree of autonomy although it still closely monitored its actions (Tasar, 2017). It saw the incorporation of Islamic practice into state supervision as the best way to eradicate religiosity in the long run (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 81). As argued by Eren Tasar (2017, pp. 6-10), intense bureaucratization and collaboration were the cornerstone of Soviet strategies to ensure stability and obedience to the Soviet regime. Such bureaucratization has always been foreign to Islamic traditions

(Khalid, 2014, p. 523), which were organized in a more informal patchwork approach consisting of individuals with overlapping authority and knowledge. Therefore, the complete authority of SADUM was never fully accepted (Khalid, 2014, p. 523). SADUM clerical officials often worked together with unofficial hujra (prayer rooms) run by underground ulema (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008 pp. 7-9). And unofficial Islamic practitioners continued to administer certain rites (Tasar, 2017, p. 81) that were mostly done out of tradition rather than religiosity. Although a large group of official SADUM ulema spoke out against traditional practices and called for a more scriptural approach to religion. But this argument was mostly lost to the general population as opportunities to visit sermons at mosques were limited (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 88). As time went on, religious knowledge was mostly lost amongst the general population but a sense of Muslimness remained that separated those native to Central Asia from their Slavic neighbours (Gleason, 1997, p. 47; Gunn, 2003, p. 391; Olcott, 1995, p. 21). It was basically in the private sphere, the homes of people, that this sense of Muslim tradition was propagated. . These social practices created a divide between the Central Asian Muslimness at home and the Homo Sovieticus (Zinoviev, 1986) in public life. Muslim identity was however not seen as incompatible with a Soviet identity and many people identified both as Muslim and as Soviet at the same time (Rasanayagam, 2011).

Fig. 7. The Mir-I-Arab madrasa in Bukhara. Now part of a UNESCO World Heritage site (structurae.net).

Religious Education on Government Terms

When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Central Asian republics were unexpectedly thrust into independence, this Soviet identity fell away. Many people were quick to embrace a more open Muslim identity and religious behaviour reached the forefront of society more openly (Khalid, 2007). Many mosques were reopened and thousands went on Hajj pilgrimages (Khalid, 2003, p. 583). With many Uzbeks eager for more Islamic knowledge, more people

schooled in Islamic thought were needed and the ulema grew in popularity and influence. During the last years of glasnost, underground ulema could clearly challenge the existing order of SADUM. A development that was quickly countered after independence by the ruling elite. Out of fear that without sufficient control religion would soon challenge the regime. For this reason SADUM was replaced with the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (MBU) in 1993, but otherwise it functions mostly in the same way (Khalid, 2014, p. 528). The major difference is that now the state derives its political legitimacy from national heritage. A heritage that is deeply rooted in its Islamic traditions that were so important for the Uzbek people during Soviet times. And thus Islam has to be seen as having a place of some prominence and respect. But the state wants to ensure it can dictate what elements of Islam are recovered. The state does not allow Islamic actors to have any freedom (Khalid, 2014, pp. 528-529) for this reason. For example, imams who want to operate in MBU-operated mosques need to show political loyalty to the regime by passing a test on the works of Karimov as well as swear support to both the state and the president (Khalid, 2014, p. 528). Due to the strict laws forbidding private religious education and the mandatory registration of religious institutions, the ulema are essentially denied an avenue for opposing the state in any capacity in a legal manner. Furthermore the government frequently interferes in the MBU's activities, sacking imams they deem inappropriate and dictating what is said in sermons (Khalid, 2014, p. 528). The MBU's rhetoric has firmly been forced back into a certain "traditional" Hanafi dogma, away from both indigenous Jadid and Soviet era critiques and theological innovations (Khalid, 2014, p. 531). The government can thus effectively use clerical authority and legitimacy to spread its ideological message and influence how people express their religiosity. For example the MBU published a fatwa in 1998 banning the use of loudspeakers for prayer calls, claiming this practice was quintessentially unislamic (Khalid, 2014, p. 531) even if this is a common element in many Muslim countries. What is considered unislamic or not is based mostly on what the government views as good or bad Islam (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 104). "Good Islam" being a synonym for government approved official Islam and "bad Islam" anything deemed unofficial. The MBU has even gone so far as to issue a fatwa on the social stigmatization and exclusion of people supposedly associated with Hizb ut-Tahrir (an international Islamic organization seen as extremist in the eyes of the government) and that anyone associated with any unofficial Islamic institution would not receive a Muslim burial (Human Rights Watch, 2005). Much like during Soviet times, religion is incorporated into the state's apparatus in an effort to limit its influence and to eventually be able to co-opt it for its own purposes.

Fig. 8. Friday prayer in Kokand (eurasianet.org)

Secular Control is Paramount

The MBU receives further oversight from the CRA (council of religious affairs), established in 1992 (Schmitz, 2023, p. 14) as a direct successor to CARC. The CRA however, has far wider influence and authority that CARC ever had. For example, the CRA now runs several secular educational facilities relating to religious studies. During the late 90s there were 4 of such institutes (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008, p. 18). The purpose is to provide secular way of teaching religious education that lies outside of the control of the clergy (Khalid, 2014). In this way Islamic knowledge is separated from its societal context that was so crucial for madrasa graduates. Instead, Islamic knowledge is supposed to be gained through a western style school system with soviet style pedagogy. While madrasas still exist, government emphasis is placed more and more on these secular types of schools which receive way more funding compared to madrasas (Olcott & Ziyaeva). Furthermore, madrasas are seen as only high school level educational facilities while their secular counterparts are seen as higher educational facilities (Schmitz, 2023, pp. 14-15). Since Mirziyoyev's inauguration in 2016, 3 more religious educational colleges have been opened. All of which focus on Central Asia's role as an important part of the Muslim world. All of which have fallen under the control of the CRA (Schmitz, 2023, p. 17). In 2021, the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan was placed fully under CRA control as well, turning it from a nominally non-governmental institution into full government control. This change is rather significant as the academy trains most Islamic educators, imams and madrasa officials. This yet further consolidates the discursive dominance of the state over religion. This is deemed necessary in order to combat any influences from propagators of unofficial Islam. Which continue to challenge the current order in the background. Underground hujra continue to some degree

(Khalid, 2014) and the internet now provides a whole new avenue of spreading information on religion that is harder to control (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008).

The Internet

Online religious preachers have become more popular since the liberal reforms of Mirziyoyev as people were not satisfied with the level of Islamic education on offer. Some online preachers can reach up to half a million subscribers on YouTube, outshining the MBU which has around 350.000 subscribers (Schmitz, 2023, p. 24). According to Andrea Schmitz, (2023), these internet imams and bloggers get away with a fair bit of critique against both official Islam and state censorship. According to Schmitz this toleration was grounded in their inherent popularity and the fact that arresting them might anger a significant section of the population. But it also comes with an upside. Since these bloggers operate in the open space of the internet, rather than in private settings like the hujra, it allows the state to monitor public opinion more effectively (Schmitz, 2023). This does come at the cost of allowing more conservative rhetoric to enter into the public sphere. A telling example, put forward by Schmitz, is the case of blogger Mukhtor Ali who has caused some controversy over his statements endorsing domestic violence against women and denouncing homosexuality (Schmitz, 2023, pp. 25-26). Ali worked as head of public relations for a government run Islamic institution. While they issued an apology for his standpoints, they did not fire him. Instead, Ali was made director of a newly created department concerned with Quranic recitation (xabar.uz). His popularity makes it impossible for the government to get rid of him fully. He was however sentenced for 15 days for shouting at law enforcement in February of 2024. The sentence was later rescinded however and only a fine had to be paid (Abror Mukhtar Ali released from detention, 2024). This shows that the government's crackdown on religious dissidents is not endless. There is an undercurrent of real religiosity that cannot be denied in the current state of affairs. The government is afraid of the backlash if they acted too strongly against popular Islamic elements. But it does make it clear that they can and will act if necessary.

From recent attempts at expanding government ideology, it can be seen that the state is incorporating certain elements of conservative rhetoric in an attempt to coopt popular, alternative voices. Especially when it concerns rhetoric about western moral corruption. This is seen as acceptable to the national ideology because it has always focused on the uniqueness of its own path and the Uzbek government does not appreciate foreign interference in religious or cultural matters. So at least a part of this conservative rhetoric can be made to fit with government propaganda. Even if other parts are actively resisted but must be tolerated to some degree due to their current popularity. The government is actively trying to reduce their popularity by going after the very space where these bloggers can exist: the internet. The state urges for a return to more traditional styles of education that are more easily controlled and thus would take influence away from these online influencers. This can also be seen in statements from the MBU. In an article published on the 30th of May, 2024 on muslim.uz, the website of the MBU, the use of modern phones is discouraged. Through an appeal to family values people are shamed into showing neglect for their families if they spend too much time on their phone. Instead, people are encouraged to spend that time reading the Quran (Hamdamova, 2024). Although reading the Quran should

be interpreted as an appeal to morality as dictated by the government rather than being suggestive of deep Quranic self-study. Something that is heavily discouraged as it takes away power from the government-controlled mosques. Since this trend is ongoing it is hard to say if the government will eventually crack down further on these Islamic influencers or if the government will coopt and incorporate more hardline Islamic thought into its ideology out of necessity. This will become clear in the next few years. although secular forces are likely to overcome any religious obstacles.

Fig. 9. An image to discourage the use of mobile phones. Text reads: “Oh God, don’t leave me!” (Hamdamova, 2024).

Conclusion

Religious education in Uzbekistan is of crucial importance to the Uzbek government. Challenges to Hanafi Islamic dogma become challenges to the state ideology and the government itself through the complex interweaving of state control and religion. From this perspective it will remain important for the government to make sure that it maintains as close to a monopoly on religious education as it can have. While also keeping the wishes of the population in mind. In the case of Uzbekistan, knowledge is power. Too much knowledge of Islamic scripture can be seen as a threat as this would challenge the traditionalist narrative of Uzbek Islam. While too little knowledge is also considered a threat as this could lead to extremism when exposed to the “wrong” kind of Islam. A correct middle-ground between the two is what the government strives for.

The Mahalla: Tradition and the Government

This section will provide a case study on the mahalla. An important Uzbek national institution. It is steeped in tradition and has become one of the targets for government centralization. With heritage and Islam both playing an important role in this process.

The Mahalla System

Mahallas represent an important part of Uzbek society at present. In its most basic essence, a mahalla is a communal neighbourhood organization. It acts as an official administrative subdivision as well as a social organization (Rasanayagam, 2011, pp. 49-58). Its inhabitants follow shared patterns of rituals, morality and tradition. Through the organization of communal labour projects or public welfare programs, a mahalla, can also provide crucial social support in harsh economic times (Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022, p. 481).

Mahallas have existed in Uzbekistan since the medieval period and take up an important part of a local person's identity (Noori, 2006). Ever since this period, Mahallas operated under the auspices of an inherently Islamic legal and social system (Sievers, 2002). Mahallas operated in the past as closed off neighbourhoods, guarded and gated which were often divided on either ethnic or occupational lines (Sievers, 2022, 108). It was not unusual to have in any given city for example Arab, glassblower or metalworker mahallas. Although through intermarriage and inter-mahalla cooperation mahallas would still be fairly ethnically diverse and mahalla participation trumped all other religious or ethnic ties, non-Muslims were excluded from mahallas however (Sukhareva, 1976, p. 28). Shared facilities such as mosques, water canals or guardhouses would be frequently owned on waqf (charitable endowment in Muslim law) basis. Public waqf property played an important role in the pre-modern Islamic world. It provided many needed social services like schools, hospitals, mosques or simply supplying communal tools to work the land through a system of donations made according to Islamic law and overseen by Islamic judges and caretakers (McChesney, 1996). In essence the Mahalla constituted an autonomous structure of partial self-administration. Traditionally a mahalla operated under the guidance of a few community leaders including an aqsaqal or "whitebeard" who preside over mahallah matters in an unofficial capacity (Dadabaev, 2013, p. 184). Next to the "whitebeard" this informal body of community leaders would often comprise of a wealthy member of the community and a woman-leader (Urinboyev, 2014, p. 166). As well as an imam who offers his services in religious matters and rituals as well as with conflict mediation (Schmitz, 2023, p. 22).

The Mahalla During the Soviet Union

During the Soviet period the mahalla was one of the few holdouts of traditional culture that the Soviets deemed useful enough or too bothersome to remove in their drive for a new society (Sievers, 2002, p. 113). Mahallas were integrated into the Soviet administrative apparatus and the election of aqsaqals was now overseen by party officials who communicated with several mahalla committees to make sure that everything happened as they wanted (Sievers, 2002, p. 113). Especially during and after the Khrushchev period the mahallas became just one of the several parastatal organizations that provided social functions in the USSR like residence committees or druzhiny, often in collaboration with each

other (Sievers, 2002, p. 113-115). These general trends towards a bureaucratization and officialization of the mahallas meant that the Soviet party apparatus could penetrate deeply within the daily lives of its citizens in Uzbek society. Through the various committees set up under the umbrella of the mahalla they could monitor any anti-Soviet agitation or inject their own pro-Soviet propaganda as well as check on proper payments of taxes (Dadabaev, 2013, 185-186). The officialised bureaucracy stratified the mahalla system to an almost unrecognisable level, as illustrated in fig. 7. This weakened the internal cohesion of the mahalla as communal activities as organized by the official committees were viewed with suspicion rather than a source of internal cohesion as they had been before. But nonetheless the mahalla continued to play an important part in Uzbek social life (Dadabaev, 2013, p. 186). In general, the Soviet integration of the mahalla into the wider Soviet society had the effect that the mahalla residents came to expect social organization and support to come more from the state than from waqf or mahalla communal services (Sievers, 2002, 117). Even if those state services were provided at a local mahalla level.

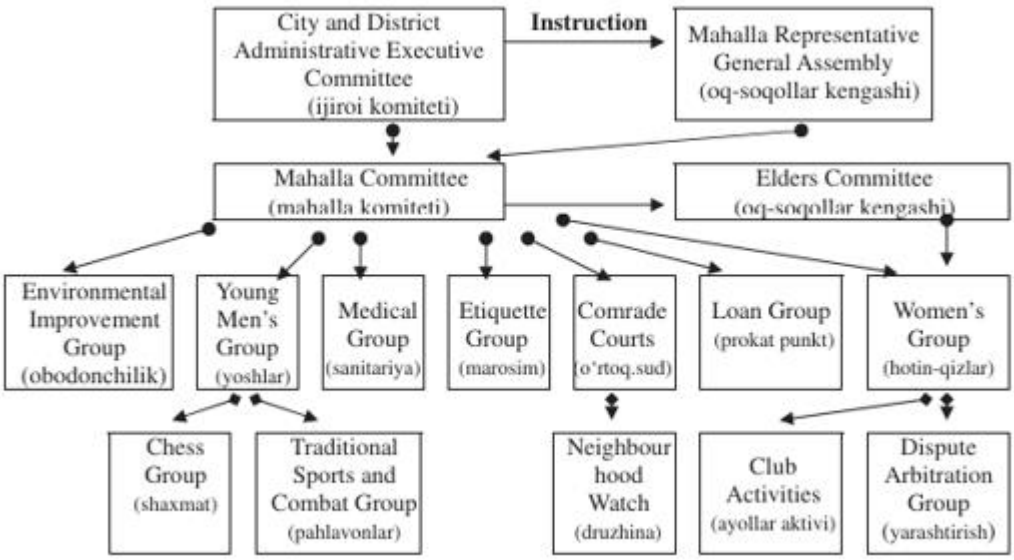

Fig. 10. The structure of a mahalla committee during the 1970s in the Uzbek SSR (Dadabaev, 2013, p.186).

The Mahalla in Modern Uzbekistan

After independence the Soviet bureaucracy fell away and public welfare began to once more enter into the realm of the mahalla itself (Abramson, as quoted in Sievers, 2002, p. 144). The Islamic character of the mahallas returned slowly as mosques were once more erected and charity work along Islamic principles became more important for the survival of the less wealthy mahalla inhabitants (Urinboyev, 2014). The government of Uzbekistan had very early in its existence taken an interest in the mahalla system, mentioning it in the constitution by name. This makes it the only non-governmental residential community organization to be mentioned in a constitution anywhere in the world (Sievers, 2002, p. 95). The mahallas came under more and more legal scrutiny as time went on. Several laws were introduced and refined in 1993 (Sievers 2002, p. 151), 1999 and 2013 (Gamza & Jones, 2021). Most of these laws impacted the authority granted to mahalla leaders to enforce rules and

regulations on the otherwise informal structures of the Mahalla while at the same time increasing government control over those mahalla leaders. But it also enshrined the task of social welfare officially into the mahalla system. The government based this on the assumption that mahalla residents could more accurately determine the needs of their community than government officials (Micklewright & Marnie, 2005). This greatly increased the autonomy of the mahalla on paper as its decisions were now legally binding in some aspects related to social norms and social welfare (Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022, 486). In effect, the government outsourced its social welfare programs to local self-government organizations like the mahalla whose leaders operate under Islamic social values and traditions as their main motivator. Leadership however became more regulated. The leader of the mahalla committee is now a rais (chairperson) who is state appointed, albeit negotiated with the local mahalla (Sievers, 2002, p. 100). Mahallas now, unlike in the Soviet system, once again have a religious leader who is usually the local imam. These imams, as seen previously all belong to the MBU and are monitored by the CRA for any anti-establishment action.

In modern-day Uzbekistan, the mahalla itself became ever more controlled and shaped to the liking of the government. The Posbon law of 1999 for example introduced morality guardians to the mahallas, whose effective job is to regulate any suspicious activity in the name of crime prevention (Bogners, et al., 2003, pp. 11-12). In reality this means that local members of the Mahalla who qualify as “spiritually pure” (Bogners et al. 2003, p. 12) work together with the police to determine who is a threat to the established order. Anyone who deviates from the path of the standard Uzbek Islam is liable to this scrutiny and may have their rights to aid severely limited (Gamza & Jones, 2021, p. 209). In addition, as an addendum to a 2003 resolution on mahalla, the mahalla committees were pushed to enforce government-sanctioned “local traditions” and a sense of Uzbek Islam on its members. This included several regulations on weddings, funerals and other rituals. Restrictions for those who did not follow those regulations or for those who deviated from a standard Uzbek Islam were increased (Gamza & Jones, 2021, 210). Mahalla workers who promote “respect for the national values” and “ensure a stable spiritual environment” are honoured by the state and can receive medals for their work (presidential resolution no. PP-3132, 2017). Once again showing the entanglement between local mahalla affairs and the state’s ideology. While the Mahalla institution itself can and is encouraged to operate independently from the state, the Uzbek government has, as shown, continuously increased control over the Mahallas. This development resulted finally in the creation of a separate Mahalla ministry created by president Shavkat Mirziyoyev in 2020 (Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022, p. 487). The ministry oversees the state funding of the Mahallas.

Conclusion

In comparison to the Soviet era, the Uzbek government has managed to utilize the mahallas more effectively. Ideologically, he Soviets, could not promote any traditions from before the new soviet realism (Hirsch, 2005). The new Uzbek nation-state can effectively argue that they are the custodians of tradition and therefore deserve to have a hand in the way that traditional institutions like the mahallas operate. The post-Soviet Uzbek government in essence incorporated the Soviet system of control and bureaucratisation into its own laws. And building upon “tradition” has managed to penetrate even further into the social fabric. It resembles a very different sort of mahalla compared to the original truly autonomous

structures of partial self-administration. Mahallas have in fact become almost a part of the municipal administration since the latest change in the law in 2013 (Urinboyev & Eraliev, 2022, p. 486). As Khalid (2014, p. 529) puts it, the state mastered a balancing act between catering to the Muslim sensibilities of the general populace and the need to control those very same people. Building upon those sensibilities serves as a functional way for the state to outsource welfare programs to a collective sense of Muslim responsibility towards a collective well-being, charity and social tranquillity (Schmitz, 2023, p. 23). While in the meantime ensuring a sufficient level of control to enforce government dogma in the mahalla.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The Nation (and its elites) Forever

It can be argued that, over the decades of Uzbek independence, the reigning government has had as one of its main priorities, the continuation of the status quo for the ruling class. The old Soviet government collapsed unexpectedly (Marples, 2011), and the leaders of the Uzbek SSR suddenly had to deal with a completely new political reality. Since Karimov had initially supported the 1991 coup to save the USSR (Khalid, 2021, p. 416), it is quite clear that an independent Uzbekistan was not something that was desired by the political elite at the time. But nevertheless, this is what happened. Due to the policies of perestroika new counter-movements had already popped up before the independence period. This resulted in the founding of Erk and Birlik as a secular opposition, both liberal, democratic and nationalistic in outlook (Khalid, 2007). In addition to the opening up of Islamic expression in the public sphere (Khalid, 2007) had created the beginnings of an Islamist revival which had not yet coalesced into a political unit. Both of these options presented a threat to the political establishment. The idea of liberal democracy was quickly expunged by coopting part of their program and subsequently brute-forcing their leaders into exile (Khalid, 2003). Since one of the demands of Erk and Birlik was independence, the declaration of independence by the ruling elite put the wind out of their sails (Kendzior, 2011). Uzbekistan was now officially a democratic independent nation-state. The old Soviet elite had rebranded themselves successfully as the new national elite. The Uzbek state started taking on more national characteristics, the Supreme Council, itself a direct successor to the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet, was replaced by the Oliy Majlis in 1995 as a new national parliamentary body. New nationalist rhetoric slowly began to take a hold. This has coloured its policies in many aspects. One aspect being national identity and ideology. Drawing on the nation as the new way of legitimizing the state meant taking inspiration from the past. Whatever that “past” was had lived on mostly behind closed doors in family or community settings (Khalid, 2007), away from prying Soviet eyes. The cultural perception of being Uzbek, as opposed to the Russian dominance of the Soviet Union, was very much tied to these rituals which were often Islamic in nature (Gleason, 1997, p. 47; Gunn, 2003, p. 391; Olcott, 1995, p. 21).. Due to Soviet religious policies, actual knowledge of Islamic doctrine and theology amongst the general populace was reduced to a bare minimum however. This resulted in an understanding of Islam rooted first and foremost in cultural activities. Muslimness as a cultural category to distinguish Central Asian societies goes back earlier than this however. Being reflected in the ways that Russian ethnographers first described and divided the various peoples of Central Asia (Khalid, 2015; Morrison, 2021). As well as in indigenous nation-state building projects before the Russian Revolution (Khalid, 1998, 2015). The understanding of being “Uzbek” is tied inherently to the idea of being “Muslim”. But exactly what this entails is was still in flux. With the rise of interest in Islam as a religion the government seemed to fear that if the wrong Islamic interpretation could take root it could well cause a chain reaction that would lead to the fall of the current political elite. Therefore controlling and channelling religious currents became a matter of national security. Devolving into civil war like Tajikistan had to be avoided at all cost.

The main drive for the state discourse on heritage and religion can thus be seen as its own security. This strategy can be divided into two main parts. Termed here as the “carrot” and the “stick”. Two approaches to religion and heritage that are first may seem contradictory but do present a coherent framework when looked at through the lens of the Uzbek government’s desire to stay in power.

The Carrot

The approach of the “carrot” revolves around the use of the heritage discourse by the state. Particularly by framing Islam as being a part of the heritage discourse. It is the way that people are made to believe in and support the government. In this vision, Islam is claimed as part of the “national values” and part of Uzbekistan’s core identity. To be Uzbek is to be Muslim and to be Muslim is to be Uzbek. This is intrinsically tied to the core ideological framework of the Uzbek state: Ma’naviyat va Ma’rifat or Spirituality and Enlightenment. This approach utilizes the Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith, 2006) as well as older Soviet rhetoric and ideological framing. Even if it contains anti-Soviet rhetoric. In the conceptualisation of the Soviet state, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine played a crucial role in imagining how society should be (White, 1988). The same attitude is given by the state to its own national ideology. Heritage and tradition play the most important role in Ma’naviyat va Ma’rifat. As previously established, the heritage that is focussed on is inherently Muslim in origin. The idea of the “nation” is tied more to this sense of religious traditions as being synonymous with secular heritage. Rather than a more ethnic definition of identity. Important lifetime events on the household and mahalla level were the core of people’s connection to the past outside of public life as a Soviet citizen. Certain birth, death or other rituals continued to be observed even if the meaning behind them was sometimes lost (Khalid, 2007). These rituals usually involved some religious elements like reciting Quranic verses or otherwise involving inherently Muslim elements. Like saying a short prayer before dinner or hosting elaborate parties for the birth of a child. This general feeling amongst the population is what the Uzbek government focusses on. It is the feeling of a connection to the past that is important rather than any other nationalist agitations. For example, the Uzbek national narrative does not contain any mentions of a greater pan-Turkic or Turanic identity. Like the trajectory of Turkey, which moved from a primarily religious identity to a Turanic, and later a Turkish identity (Jeong, 2018). Even if pan-Turkic ideas did circulate in Central Asia through the teachings of the Tatar intellectual Mikhail Gasprinski (Grigoriadis & Opçin-Kıdal, 2020; Khalid, 1998). They did not have a lasting impact due to the rise of the Bolsheviks. This is well reflected in the phrasing of the analysed documents. In general terms like “homeland” or “the nation” are preferred over terms like “the Uzbek people”. The government does not claim to represent “the people” per se as an ethnic category. But rather it represents the “homeland” of Uzbekistan and its historical material conditions. Nor does it press any irredentist claims on other Central Asian polities. Even if it potentially could with a different reading of history.

This is a natural by-product of the focus on past traditions as the focal point of identity. Especially when it is viewed through old communist lines of interpretation. It is a lasting legacy of the Soviet union that tradition and spirituality have been moulded into an ideology that is seen as dialectically opposed to other “outside” ideological influences. What previously was the battle for communism versus capitalism has become the battle of Uzbek

traditional values versus a vague list of enemies. Be it western “degeneracy”, radical Islam or historical Soviet repression. Furthermore, the state ideology promotes a certain idea of how Uzbek people should act and what values they should hold. Much like the earlier Soviet project that tried to create the perfect Soviet Man (Soboleva, 2017). As the conceptualisation of the New Soviet Man changed depending on the needs of the government. So do the nuances of the Uzbek national ideology change depending on the situation (Soboleva, 2017). The same sort of need to control the narrative and to control the way people behave is engrained within the post-Soviet ruling elite. All of this is justified through the common perceptions of national identity outlined by Wodak et al. (2002) and Anderson (1983). The core element for Uzbekistan, is that of a volksgeist (Kolakowski, 1985) or national spirit connecting a nebulous perception of a metaphysical Uzbek nation to the modern ideological construction. Articles written for state news agencies like UzA commonly refer to this national spirit and emphasize its uniqueness. This uniqueness is posited as being directly linked to the pre-Soviet past. The lack of general understanding of the past means that the government can easily control this narrative.

Common themes from government articles include the need to inform the youth of their supposed ancestor’s wisdom. A wisdom that shows the nation its path forward to prosperity. Thus, connecting the past, present and the future (Kolakowski, 1985). Whatever past is projected onto the present is entirely selective. The actual historic credibility of many claims by the Uzbek government can be murky. Especially when it comes to any claims about the third renaissance as a concept. Both in its incorporation of religious scholars into a secular Uzbek national framework. As well as in the use of the Jadid movement as a justification of current policies. Claiming that the current government is continuing on the righteous path starting by the Jadids before they were exterminated by the Soviets. Modern research into the history of the Jadids (DeWeese, 2016, Khalid, 1998, 2006, 2021) does not back up any claims made by Uzbek propaganda writers. But they are still represented as enlightened thinkers who fall in line with the spirituality and enlightenment ideology of the government. This is the crux of what “spirituality and enlightenment” means. A national spirit based on traditions that survived the Soviet period. Traditions that belong to a greater primordial spirit of Uzbekistan that must be savoured and protected. “Spirituality” must then be seen as a combination between a national spirit flowing from an inherent Muslimness. And “enlightenment” represents the “ideals” of previous generations, exemplified by famous scholars and national heroes. Those ideals are depicted as the only true way forward to a better future. Under the current regime of course. Both terms are possessed of heavy religious connotations but are inherently secular in nature. The framing of the past is always viewed through this light. Famous scholars from previous “renaissances” are reduced to being merely scientists or otherwise only impacting the cultural richness of Uzbekistan. Their religious importance is not mentioned in official government cannon. This is especially obvious in the new centre of Islamic civilization in Uzbekistan. Which equates Uzbekistan to being an essential part of the Islamic world and a contributor to its civilization. This view of civilization is very much in line with Western views on nationalism and its relation to religion (Rico, 2021; Wijesuriya, 2017). Religious contexts are deprived of their original meaning and secularised into new national meanings. Common tropes amongst Uzbek propaganda feature various such secularising elements. Mostly showing Uzbek heritage as contributing to international humanist values and the world‘s scientific knowledge. And lauding Uzbek national heroes as patriots whose thought should be studied for their enlightenment and wise vision for the future. All of this is extremely reminiscent to Soviet framing of those past

Uzbek figures that were allowed to be studied (Khalid, 2021, p. 337). But at the same time the idea of the heritage cult (Rico, 2023) frames those national meanings in almost religious connotations. “spirituality and enlightenment” are particular terms that could well be used in any religious context. And the entanglement of Uzbek heritage with Islam makes the separation of the two difficult. It is a balance carefully struck in Uzbekistan. A secular attitude is maintained in society through a near monopoly on knowledge production. Heritage and Islam must always be studied through a “scientific” lens. This was especially made clear in the purpose of the Centre for Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan but this “scientific” attitude is clear in school programs as well (Schmitz, 2023).

Due to this near monopoly on knowledge production, Spirituality and Enlightenment and its views on the world has become dominant. Using the inherent trust placed in experts. The definition of what tradition and heritage are can be completely decided by the state. Something that the Uzbek government relies upon heavily. Many published propaganda articles on news sites are written by professors or otherwise “qualified” personnel. Members of the MBU are also frequently used in government messages. This tactic relies on the inherent trust in the learned intelligentsia to know what is right. In Uzbekistan it is not just heritage experts that have the authority over heritage but any university scholar. Mostly due to older Soviet attitudes to education that looks upon teachers as a more prestigious and trustworthy class of society (Counts, 1961). Government control over the media also ensures that those qualified individuals that publicly speak about heritage are towing the party line. In general, the same attitude in Uzbekistan is upheld when compared to the AHD (Smith, 2006). The people are assumed to be largely ignorant of their own heritage and thus must be taught it by state actors. Heritage is also seen as innately valuable. And thus, it must be protected by the state against those who wish to harm the nation and its culture. This type of discourse allows for the justification of a heavy hand in Uzbek social life. This can be clearly seen in the example of the mahalla. Where the Uzbek state claims the right to formalize and centralize most aspects of the mahalla. Leaders are now appointed under state supervision and morality police check on people’s behaviour (Bogners et al., 2003). Behaviour that is supposed to be linked to vague notions of Islamic tradition. Even if the mahallas were traditionally self-administrating neighbourhoods that disciplined their own members on their own terms (Dadabaev, 2013). Through such actions the state effectively manages to exert a level of control over important elements of life that the Soviets could have only dreamed of. While during the Soviet period there was always a distinction between “speaking” Soviet in public and the privacy of the home and close community. Now the government claims to represent that community and all their values, they have granted themselves the right to infringe upon elements of society that before were seen as family business only. Justifying it through the importance of heritage and the need to keep heritage alive and pure. Whatever is considered pure or authentic is solely up to the state and its experts to decide.

In the distribution of Islamic knowledge, the government holds a virtual monopoly too. increasing regulation over the decades, the government now controls almost all of the education for Islamic professionals. And through the MBU the government also monitors closely what is being shared in sermons. But at the same time, it maintains a certain official distance from religious matters. The MBU is not technically a government organ for this particular reason. Direct control over Islamic doctrine would not be possible within a secular framework. Instead, the previous Soviet system of control has essentially been copied

exactly but with even sharper regulations and deeper levels of control. Once again justified through the heritage lens. Since the traditional strand of Islam in Central Asia has been Hanafi Islam. This has been taken as the dogma that must be propagated by religious institutions. A dogma that must be rooted in ancient traditions but also simultaneously must be apolitical and supportive of the state. Something that is anathema to the very Islam that is supposed to be protected. Islam in Central Asia has always been decentralized without government control (Khalid, 2014). And Islamic law always played a crucial role in the governance of Central Asian states. This older reality is ignored and a version of Islam is substituted that fits the government narrative. This version is framed to protect Islamic traditions but it neglects the actual reality of faith. It is an inherently heritage-based view of religion. Secularised and adapted to fit a controlling state. Through its control over the heritage discourse, the Uzbek government can thus force an unnatural dogma over religion. All in the name of saving “good” Islam from “bad” or radical forms of Islam. although in reality it echoes the former Soviet divide of official and unofficial Islam.

Official MBU Ulema are also utilized to prop up the regime’s image of being a protector of Islam and its virtues. This is clearly illustrated by the article published by the head of the MBU for the 30th anniversary of Uzbek independence. It presents the current Uzbek government as being a benevolent actor for religious affairs. Noting that Muslims have much more freedom now than during the Soviet Union. But many of the particular talking points are easily debunked or rely on a very specific reading of the situation. Overall, a Muslim identity is much more strongly present in today’s Uzbekistan and there has been an increase in religiosity. But it is only a very specific government version that is allowed. This version promotes an apolitical reading of Islam as well as obedience to the government and an understanding of the government ideology. New imams have to pass tests on the government ideology and loyalty to the state before they are even allowed to work in mosques. It is clear then that Islam itself is supposed to serve as a way to uphold government security and to justify its national identity and ideology. Which both in turn rely in a specific reading of tradition rooted in Islam, even if certain elements are twisted to fit this narrative. The average citizen is supposed to instil into them a feeling of Muslimness without being too active a Muslim. i.e. An Uzbek citizen is to believe in Uzbekistan’s Islamic civilization and its values but is not supposed to busy themselves with Islamic doctrine. This can only be maintained through strict regulation of religious authorities and individuals themselves, lest the system is revealed to be false and inaccurate. This level of control is then itself justified through claims of heritage. Completing a circular reasoning where both elements are necessary as a presupposition to the other.

The Stick

The elaborate discourse set up surrounding ideas of heritage and national identity is crucial for the survival of the entrenched post-Soviet elite. For post-Soviet they truly are. They present a continuation of leadership and a continuation of institutions. For this post-Soviet elite to ensure their own continued hold on power, a new national ideology was needed. It is the platform upon which the state bases its meaning and its credibility. Challenges to this discourse are thus met with harsh repression. This is represented by “the stick”. Any repressive action is always framed as being defensive in nature. As the only way to prevent Uzbekistan from falling into the hands of “radicals”, “terrorists” or otherwise traitors to the fatherland. In Uzbekistan anyone can be named an extremist. And it serves as a convenient scapegoat to any challenge to the government itself or its ideology. This can range from

small acts against individuals to large scale human rights abuses. These accusations can sometimes appear quite contradictory or strange at first. A good example of this is described by Rasanayagam (2014). In this case a man who converted to Christianity came under enormous social pressure from his local mahalla to convert back to Islam (Rasanayagam, 2014, p. 4). Accusations were made that he had betrayed his faith and his community and that he was a Wahhabi. His local mosque even threatened to report him to the security services. This was later followed up by an actual visit by security service personnel to the local school to note down the names of all the children who had converted to Christianity (Rasanayagam, 2014, p. 4). The only way that an Uzbek converting to Christianity would be considered as a Wahhabi is through the government constructed cultural and political discourse. It speaks to the inherent unnaturalness of an Uzbek Christian. Even if the man in question was ethnically Arab, he is still considered to fall within the same social norms. Uzbek heritage and identity is based around cultural-religious roots and this discourse can thus lead to accusations of radicalism for those who fall outside of those roots. Practicing Christianity is then almost seen as treachery to everything you are supposed to stand for. Every act of cultural-religious abnormality is then quickly labelled as radical. But the current discourse frames this in radical Muslim terms. Hence why a Christian convert is called a Wahhabi. This particular framing is a purposeful creation of the government in order to retain control over the religious narrative. Besides heritage, security is another main justification for the invasive actions of the government. As Islam is the last real threat to the current political order, restricting the threat is a prime concern. While radical Islamic groups have formed a problem (Akromov, 2021), the response to this threat has been disproportional. Following the Tashkent bombings thousands were imprisoned on religious extremism charges (Akromov, 2021, p. 32). The fear of extremism, both real and deliberately nurtured, serves as an important tool in the state's arsenal. The true nightmare scenario for the early Uzbek government was that of Tajikistan and its civil war (Schmitz, 2023). That threat however, has passed. Since the end of the civil war, Tajikistan has gone down a very similar path to Uzbekistan. Using similar framing techniques to paint its opponents as religious extremists and terrorists in order to delegitimize their very real secular issues (Lemon & Rahimi, 2020). In both countries the state utilizes its monopoly on public discourse to frame potential conflicts in ways supportive of the government. A strategy almost endemic of authoritarian regimes (Owen et al., 2018). In the case of Uzbekistan this is best embodied in the case of the Andijon massacre of 2005. Despite the protests being secular in nature, the anti-government nature of the protests could not be ignored. The arrest of the businessmen was already linked to supposed Islamic extremism by the government, who accused them of being part of an extremist Islamic group that is only rumoured to exist. And so the justification for the subsequent shooting of hundreds of protestors was lumped into the same category. Although all independent sources portray no links between the businessmen or the protestors to any extremist ideas (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Kendzior, 2006). Their major crime was offering a different way of living as a Muslim while not being affiliated with the government. Through encouraging an anti-radical discourse in society the government strikes two birds with one stone. It allows for the arrest of anyone who might challenge state Islam and its heritage ideology. While also enforcing secularism from anyone who might take their faith too seriously. Both of which have the same effect of neutering any opposition

Aside from more extreme cases of violence. The Uzbek authorities commit many smaller transgressions as well. Men are forced to shave their beards and hijabs have only recently become tolerated, if still unofficially discouraged. Every arrest usually follows the same

reasoning. Anything public that does not follow the ideal version of government Islam is subject to arrest. The rule of law is usually discarded if inconvenient. But a strong legal basis has only slowly been built up over the years as well (Schmitz, 2023) The government has attempted to improve religious rights on paper for the sake of its international standing. While it has partially succeeded in doing so, it hardly improves the situation on the ground (Schmitz, 2023). The Uzbek police will often ignore new laws in favour of enforcing a secular public space. Laws which are kept specifically vague as to allow law enforcement to get away with way too much abuse. The enduring violations of human rights, both big and small serve as a reminder of the authoritarian nature of the Uzbek government. There are obvious parallels to older Soviet ways of policing and enforcing secularism when compared to the current Uzbek model. It is the Soviet legacy that makes this system so effective. What perhaps would only aggravate the religious community and worsen public opinion in other areas of the world, provokes no such reaction in Central Asia. Research in Kyrgyzstan shows that religious repression of Muslim practices has a negative effect on political mobilization (Gamza & Jones, 2020). The harsher the potential crackdown is going to be the less likely Central Asian Muslims are to rebel against it. This is possibly explained through a focus on the community over the individual that is present in Islam (Gamza & Jones, 2020, p. 380). The more severe the punishment is, the higher the costs for the community as a whole if individual members get targeted. This relates well to the way that the mahalla system is set up in Uzbekistan and how the community itself is encouraged to pressure others into conforming. On a societal level this makes any meaningful counter-discourse ever harder the more regulated and controlled Islamic expression becomes.

Instead of promoting the old ideal of the “new Soviet man”, the Uzbek system promotes a culturally Muslim but religiously secular individual. The heritage discourse plays a key role in the persecution of thousands of individuals. It serves as the background for the ideology that allows for control over religious expression. If that control is transgressors are framed as religious extremists and terrorists. Anyone who would independently gain Islamic knowledge would quickly find fault with the government’s version of religion and culture. As has historically been the trend for Islamic ulema ever since the Jadids and throughout the Soviet period. By framing these people as dangerous extremists the government can quickly shut down these attempts. Transgressions do not have to be religious in nature however. Any vaguely anti-establishment action is punished. Secular dissent is effectively reimagined as belonging to this same realm of terrorists and radicals Even if the charges are often made up or exaggerated they remain effective.

The Uses of Heritage

The AHD as a concept is tied deeply to an inherently unequal balance between those who may speak for heritage and those who may not (Smith, 2006). As this divide becomes more stratified, those without power over heritage cede ever more control over the social fabric of society. Especially in countries that have only recently gained statehood, the nature of that state’s institutions and character is still in flux. While there has been a clear concept of “Frenchness” or “Germanness” for centuries, the same cannot be said for “Uzbekness”. Apart from its claims to Islamic civilization, most of Uzbek identity is hard to pin down. There is a lot of history that could be used. But not everything lives on in popular memory.When the nation rests on a definite view of its people and past. The attached nation-state has secure foundations that justify its own existence. When this view is uncertain or in flux, it provides

fertile ground for dissenting opinions. This could potentially lead to different interpretations of how the government should organize itself. By actively engaging with the AHD a government can effectively monopolize its own view on how it should run itself. Heritage can turn things that would otherwise be subject to scrutiny and change it into something sacrosanct and untouchable (Meyer & De Witte, 2013). A common example of this is the sanctity of the US constitution (Zarefsky & Gallagher, 1990). Through similar discursive techniques the Uzbek government has utilized the power of the past to control the present. Carefully selecting elements that can be framed in ways benefiting the establishment. Especially the control the government has over both the media and educational facilities means that its narrative is quickly taken as gospel. A gospel that then becomes almost unassailable. If a current nation-state maintains its legitimacy through claims to ancestral heritage, then any alternative view is immediately circumspect. To provide an alternative view on history or to be ascribe to a different heritage is to be a branded a dissident or even a traitor. The weaker the foundations, the harsher the reactions to alternative views are. As has become apparent in the case of Uzbekistan and its harsh repressive policies.

History and heritage can only be contested if a strong idea of the past already exists in people's minds. A good example is Japan's struggle with its imperial history. Again and again, right wing political parties tried to change history textbooks to omit certain atrocities from the narrative and to promote a view that Japanese acts of war were justified (Beal, et al., 2001). Strong critique from all layers of society however prevented this revisionism and public pressure ultimately undid whatever changes to the narrative had been made (Beal, et al., 2001, pp. 180-181). Such a public denunciation of government history can only be possible under these circumstances. This is not the case for Uzbekistan where the older generations have only ever had official Soviet education and their general knowledge of the past would not have included any Uzbek history. Save for what their families passed down. For the younger generation their idea of history thus still remains malleable. Hence why the Uzbek government focusses especially on "protecting" the youth from outside influences. Especially when social media is concerned. Social media falls outside of traditional modes of education and is thus not so easily controlled by the government. Nor does it make claim to the same forms of expert knowledge that dominate the heritage discourse. It can be much more grassroots and community based than other forms of knowledge. It is no wonder then that some of the most popular online Islamic "influencers" attract way more views than the official government versions (Schmitz, 2023). The government has also had a much harder time controlling these individuals since the internet does not fall under any direct government supervision. And the sheer popularity of some of these preachers makes it difficult to take direct action. Instead, action is taken mostly against individuals consuming Islamic content online rather than the popular preachers themselves. It is unclear how this development will continue. What is clear however is that the government has started incorporating more elements into its historiography. The new focus lies on the Jadids and their supposed vision for a future Uzbekistan. Also called the "third renaissance" A future that is an artificial construct based on the knowledge of these glorious ancestors. Knowledge that is heavily promoted through a new propaganda campaign. A new newspaper ("Jadid Newspaper Published", 2024) was founded and the state hosted a scientific conference on the topic ("Unity in language, thought, and work", 2023). A state museum on the Jadids is also being planned (Xushvaqtova, 2023). In addition to many other news articles written by professional academics. Promoting a very specific historiography framing the Jadid movement as inspiring the youth to trust in their ancestors and to believe in the system. (Abibullayev, 2024;

Xudoyberdiyev, 2024; Komilova, 2024; Madaminova, 2024; Rakhmonova, 2024). All of this must be seen in the light of government intervention in public discourse. Heritage is once more utilized as a way to seek to reinsert control over public opinion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Religion, heritage and the state all have a closely tied relationship in Uzbekistan. When answering the research question. It is important to understand that the way the discourse surrounding heritage and religion functions, is shaped first and foremost by the needs of the state. Especially its own survival and continuation stands high on the list of priorities. When viewed through this lens the contradictory nature of Islamic heritage in Uzbekistan is resolved.

The Uzbek government found itself in a unique position to shape and control its past. Soviet education and authoritarianism had led to the degradation of knowledge about the past. both in a historical and cultural sense. It was replaced by an official Soviet version. A version focused on secular concerns and loyalty to the regime. Whatever remained of Uzbek cultural identity on a ground level was a mix of household traditions rooted in Islamic practices. Something that was not allowed to be expressed during Soviet times. The anti-religious attitude meant that these traditions had to be enacted behind closed doors. But the eventual meaning was forgotten due to a lack of religious education. What maintained was a general feeling of “Muslimness”. When the Soviet Union fell, the old communist party successfully held on to power as the leaders of the new Republic of Uzbekistan. By declaring a seemingly democratic national republic, the government had successfully taken the wind out of the sails of the liberal democratic opposition of Erk and Birlik. But this left the country without its former stability. As the old legitimacy of the communist state was gone, the new government needed a new way to legitimize their existence. As is common amongst nation-states, this legitimacy lays in assumptions about heritage (Anderson, 1983). Justifying the existence of the modern nation-state as a natural byproduct of historical and cultural processes that inevitably lead to the independent nation-state of Uzbekistan. Putting the origins of the nation into a primordial past that is in direct relation to the present and even the future through a narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1992). This narrative identity is made up of building blocks that put identity and history into one convenient story, the truth of which is only secondary to the belief people have in it. The particular story echoed here is one of a long and illustrious Uzbek history. Drawing more on the land itself than any sense of Uzbek ethnic identity. Due to the fact that there was a very real sense of culture embedded in Uzbek social practices this is what shaped the concept of the nation and its identity the most. It had to be Muslim because that is what people identified themselves with, based on their household experiences. Despite if the government wished it or not.

Armed with this vision of the past, the Uzbek government quickly focussed on creating a new state ideology. Incorporating Muslim elements. But framed in a way that would maintain secular control over the country. This became Ma’naviyat va Ma’rifat or Spirituality and Enlightenment. This fits very neatly into the concept of the authorized heritage discourse (AHD) as described by LauraJane Smith (2006). The government holds on to the view that there is such a thing as a correct version of the past and that this version can and should be propagated by experts in the field. The government sees itself as the rightful protector of the nation and its culture. And through this perspective it is the government’s purpose to educate its “ignorant” citizens on their history and culture, lest they are led astray.

In the national imagining, history begins only after the Islamic conquest of the region and the focus lies heavily on contributions made to “Islamic Civilization”. Even if there is a rich

culture and history to pull from before this period as well, it does not play a part in the national imagination. Uzbekistan is posited as being one of the centres of Islamic culture and science. Just like in Soviet times, the secular definitions of culture and science are maintained here. The religious nature of national heroes is usually discarded or trivialized. This is a common occurrence in most official heritage discourses (Rico, 2021). Heritage has an inherently secularizing effect on religious history. And long-standing Soviet pressure on religion made this effect doubly as strong in Uzbekistan. The state ideology focuses heavily on traditional norms and values which are supposed to come from an ancient “national spirit”. But in reality it is a combination of surviving Soviet traditions and certain pre-Soviet historical figures that can be moulded to fit the state’s purposes. The state ideology posits this national spirit as leading the nation to new heights. Through the concept of the third renaissance, a link is established to the Islamic and Timurid Golden Ages. The current Uzbek state is seen as a continuation of this illustrious Islamic history. Emphasis is placed on the unique Uzbek development path that will once again make Uzbekistan a great country of science and culture. But only if the people stay on the correct path dictated by the state’s ideology and its president. This national ideology was originally adopted by the first president Karimov but it has made a significant comeback in the last 2 years under Mirziyoyev. With the opening of the “Centre of Islamic Civilization in Uzbekistan” being a major milestone. Ma’naviyat va Ma’rifat is propagated in government news channels through frequent publications by educated professionals. This is done on purpose as to give the government vision more credibility. Additionally the website of the MBU is used for similar purposes but with a more religious twist. Recently news articles have started focusing on the need to “protect” the new generation from outside influences. The solution has been to promote the wisdom of the ancestors. Invoking the past to influence the present. The thought of these ancestors is shoehorned into fitting a certain narrative that fits with the national ideology, making it appear timeless and inevitable. Going against it would be almost treachery to both the nation and to your forefathers.

When it comes to religion, Islamic values and a sense of “Muslimness” stand at the centre of the heritage discourse in Uzbekistan. Hanafi Islam has always been the foremost stream of Islamic thought in Uzbekistan. And preserving this traditional Islam is seen as crucial in the heritage discourse. The government was quick to start influencing Islam after the fall of the Soviet Union. The previous Soviet system was essentially copied. Which centralized all official mosques under one semi-independent organization, monitored by a secular government department. Sermons in mosques are limited to approved government scripts and imams have to pass tests on the government ideology before they are allowed to preach in a legal capacity. This is all justified through the entanglement of heritage and religion. Since the values of Hanafi Islam are seen as the values of the Uzbek nation. The government has the right to ensure that it is properly disseminated as the arbiters and protectors of heritage. The government uses this discursive power to propagate a version of Islam that is apolitical and promotes loyalty to the regime. In effect, it mirrors the goals of the Soviets quite closely. The only major difference is that controlling religion is now even more important to the Uzbek state than it was to the Soviets. As it now ties in with the national ideology and its focus on national traditions. It can even be said that religion is now more controlled than ever. During the Soviet Union, alternative views on Islam did exist both inside and outside of SADUM. Uzbek Islamic scholars challenged the traditional Hanafi doctrine and argued for a return to more scriptural interpretations of Islam rather than a focus on tradition. This is a view that is absolutely not tolerated by the Uzbek government post-

independence. As it threatens their own legitimacy through undermining the national ideology. If the traditional version of Islam is under attack, then so is the national ideology. This is also why those who are celebrated by the Uzbek state as heroes of the nation must be secularized. Because especially the Jadids, who are framed to have started the third renaissance, issued similar arguments to reject tradition in favour of Islamic scripture.

Aside from threatening the national ideology, the government fears that if Islamic doctrine is not sufficiently controlled it can lead to a radical Islamic takeover of the country. To counter both threats, the government employs a harsh anti-extremist rhetoric. Radical Islam has become almost a bogeyman in official government discourse. It is something that must be avoided at all costs. But more often than not it also provides a convenient scapegoat to do away with secular opposition as well. Arrests on extremism charges are common in Uzbekistan. Every year several human rights violations are reported over seemingly trivial things. This has all been codified into laws that limit religious freedom, targeting mostly Muslim communities. These laws have been sharpened again and again. Even with the ascend of Mirziyoyev and his promises for reform, the situation has not gotten much better. Normal practicing Muslims may be harassed at any opportunity if the police or secret service wants to. This all shows that while people should identity as Muslim, actually following Islamic doctrine out in public is frowned upon. This is justified through fighting extremism but in reality, it is to discourage any political Islam from taking root in society. Anyone who falls outside of the established national ideology can be targeted by the state. This does not always have to relate to extremism however. In the case of the mahala, the government has officialised a morality police that acts against any who fall outside accepted Islamic social norms. And aside from the mahala, not identifying as Muslim can also lead to interest from the security services. So it is a double edged sword that cuts both ways.

Aside from ensuring a secular and apolitical outlook in its citizens. The government also uses the fight against extremism to target other secular elements. Both the Tashkent bombings and the events in Andijon were pinned on extremist Muslim organisations and thousands of arrests were made in response to these events. Especially in the case of Andijon, secular concerns were marginalized and delegitimized by framing them as tainted by Islamic radicalism. And suddenly the deaths of hundreds of civilians were justified as a necessary measure to fight this great evil. Through these methods the Uzbek government holds on to power. Through effective use of worldwide fears of terrorism and by cultivating older communist secular attitudes. The Uzbek state has managed to lawfully marginalize its opposition to both the government and its ideology. It is however not a perfect system and recently with the rise of internet bloggers, opposing views have become more popular. These figures have proven to be too popular to be simply removed. Perhaps this foreshadows a more conservative Islamic trend in Uzbek society that will only grow in the next decade. But the government is not likely to just abandon its grip on public Islamic discourse. And has already has shown its willingness to intervene in limited ways. Both through discursive techniques and through involving law enforcement.

In the case of the Uzbek state, heritage is used to control elements of society to bolster the power of the regime. And control over society is necessary in order to protect the heritage discourse. Both support the other’s claim to legitimacy in a symbiotic relationship. This is then the final answer to the seemingly paradoxical nature of heritage and religion in Uzbekistan. simultaneously celebrating an Islamic identity and repressing Islam. Claiming to act as the guardians of pre-Soviet heritage while continuing Soviet systems of control. All of

this stems from the need of the government for control over its own populace. With the end goal of ensuring the stability and longevity of its own regime.

Controlling and using heritage as a tool plays a crucial role in this system. Something that has been understudied in literature focusing on Uzbekistan. More interdisciplinary studies are necessary to further deepen knowledge, and further the level of understanding of Uzbekistan's political situation. And especially the discursive constructs that govern its decisions. The way that the heritage discourse and the national ideology manifest itself in Uzbek public life is still subject to change. So further research is still necessary. nor have all the possible sources been analysed yet. A deeper study on the heritage field combined with a stronger political background can add much more to a more holistic understanding of heritage and religion in Uzbekistan. In general, this case study also shows that the consequences of heritage management are underestimated in academic literature. Heritage experts owe an obligation to be conscientious of the way that their field can be used by authoritarian rulers for their own purposes. Without further understanding, heritage can be abused. Used as justification for crimes against humanity. While this thesis outlines the real material consequences of the heritage discourse when used in this context. Other studies focusing on similar topics should be conducted and awareness raised.

Abstract

This study examines the relation between the state, heritage and religion in Uzbekistan. particularly focusing on the heritage aspect. This is done through an analysis of various government communiques. Consisting of state press agency articles, articles from religious authorities, and presidential decrees. Using the framework of critical discourse analysis, the government discourse is studied with a focus on the interconnection with the material world. The findings of this study portray a seemingly paradoxical situation concerning the status of Islam in Uzbekistan. On the one hand, Islamic heritage is celebrated by the state and a certain amount of Muslimness expected of its citizens. But on the other hand, Islam itself faces heavy repression and regulation. This is related to the need of the government to stay in power. The previous Soviet government managed to stay in power after independence. The transition to a national republic meant that now the source of legitimacy lay in national imaginings rather than the previous communist system. This is heavily tied with conceptions of heritage. And especially with the idea of the “authorized heritage discourse” as described by LauraJane Smith. Heritage serves as the foundation for the national ideology of Uzbekistan. this national ideology is based on the foundations of an Islamic cultural identity that survived Soviet rule mixed in with a secular vision of the past that ensures an apolitical populace loyal to the government. Rooting the current regime in a primordial Uzbek cultural identity that harkens back to the Islamic renaissance. This is condensed into a national spirit that will lead Uzbekistan to new heights as it had for its ancestors. This same ideology is used to ensure that Islam remains apolitical as to avoid any potential challenge to the government. Controlling the discourse around heritage and religion is seen as a crucial objective by the government for this reason. This is done through various laws and institutions that limit the freedom of religion and religious expression. Which mostly carries on the system that was already in place during the Soviet Union. Anyone who falls outside of the cultural norm, is liable to government scrutiny and/or harsh repression. It is the Uzbek government’s drive for its own preservation that has led it to combine existing ideas on heritage and its discursive power over both the past and present with the old Soviet dogma and systems of control. This leads to an effective system that penetrates deeper into society than any government before it.

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