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The cultural baggage of Khorezmian identity: traditional forms of singing and dancing in Khorezm and in Tashkent

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After Uzbekistan gained its independence from Soviet rule, important political and economic changes took place. The mobility of the population has since then increased drastically and created new spaces for the negotiation of social identities as well as new strategies for identity politics among the culturally and regionally diverse population of Uzbekistan. This article aims to contribute to the discussions on social identity and its 'contents' in the light of migration processes. The main argument centres on the importance of what Barth called the 'cultural stuff' of social identities when maintaining boundaries during identification processes. The analysis focuses specifically on certain singing and dancing practices of Khorezmians. It shows how these practices survive, but are also transformed in the context of Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbekistan, where people from different regions reside together and are engaged in performing and presenting their own group identity in reference to 'others'.

Keywords: Khorezm/Uzbekistan; social identity; cultural baggage; traditional singing

Introduction

After the founding of the independent state of Uzbekistan in 1991, both internal and international migration from the culturally diverse regions of the country increased. Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, has attracted most of the internal migrants from the various provinces. This has resulted in the diversification of the population of Tashkent and the articulation of new discourses and practices pertaining to both regional and national identities. The migration of people from the Khorezm region to the capital has become an important factor in shaping a new discourse and practice for Khorezmian identity outside their home region. This article focuses on cultural practices, especially on traditional forms of singing, in the region of Khorezm and among Khorezmians in Tashkent. There is an attempt to tease out changes in the context and the content of traditional singing and dancing of Khorezmians in order to show how they are instrumentalized in identification processes in the multi-ethnic context of Tashkent. In this regard, *bahshi*s and *halpa*s are important figures at Khorezmian social events and celebrations of life cycle ceremonies. When Khorezmians identify themselves they stress Khorezmian *madaniyat* (culture) and *san'at* (art) as part and parcel of a prized Khorezmian identity. When Khorezmians talk about *madaniyat* they imply manners and traditions or customs and *san'at* refers to art, which includes music and dancing.[1] The cultural practices and everyday life arrangements of Khorezmians in Tashkent resemble their practices at home, but not without significant changes. This can serve as a classical example of maintaining boundaries between culturally and regionally different groups in a cosmopolitan context.

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Since the publication of the classic study by Barth (1969), many social anthropologists have focused on the way in which certain elements of cultural identities are emphasized and negotiated in the process of drawing boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. This initially led to the disregard for the 'cultural stuff' enclosed by social boundaries. However, later on Barth corrected himself by stating that cultural content can be very important for the maintenance of group identities (Barth 1994).

The article is based on fieldwork data collected in 2005–2006 for my dissertation project focusing on the role of language in the construction of social identity in contemporary Khorezm and Tashkent. The data were obtained through established qualitative methods such as participant observation, open-ended interviews and group discussions. The arguments developed here are intended to contribute to the general discussion of internal migration and identity politics in Uzbekistan by examining the Khorezmian case study. As a native of Khorezm, I have both a deeper understanding of local meanings in everyday life, but I may also be subject to such typical disadvantages as taking many things for granted and having difficulty in maintaining a distanced perspective (Erikson 1995, pp. 19–20). However, I hope to strike a positive balance between these advantages and disadvantages.

After a brief theoretical look at debates on social identity in relation to 'cultural contents', the article presents Khorezmians and their cultural background and provides a brief introduction to singing traditions in the Khorezm region. Finally, examples will be provided from Khorezmian life in Tashkent to illustrate the importance of keeping or reshaping religious and traditional practices in everyday life and life cycle events.

'Cultural stuff' matters

In his ground-breaking study on ethnic groups and boundaries, Barth observed that it is 'the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses' (italics in original, Barth 1969, p. 15). While this position set the stage for contemporary social anthropological research on social identities, Barth was also criticized for his neglect of cultural contents of social identity. Twenty-five years after his initial essay, Barth revisited his position on ethnic groups and boundaries and modified his categorical statement by noting that:

> The issue of cultural content versus boundary, as it was formulated, unintentionally served to mislead. Yes, it is a question of analyzing boundary processes, not of enumerating the sum of content, as in an old-fashioned trait list. But . . . central and culturally valued institutions and activities in an ethnic group may be deeply involved in its boundary maintenance. (Barth 1994, pp. 17–18)

Using the term 'cultural stuff', Barth referred to language, religion, customs and laws, tradition, material culture, food, etc. (Barth, 1969). Other authors such as Handelman (1977), Cohen (1985), and Cornell (1996 cited in Jenkins 1997, p. 107) emphasized the importance of the cultural contents for social identity, the elements of a social biography, symbolic construction of community, or for what is 'within the boundary'. In the same line of argument, Jenkins (1997, p. 122) suggested that 'the ritual symbolization of identity – as in *rites de passage*, but in many other forms too – is an effective procedure for making collective identities matter to individuals, affectively and cognitively' (italics in original). Jenkins also distinguished between internal group identification and external social categorization. According to him, group identification is the identification of individuals with others within the group to which they themselves belong. Social categorization, on the other hand, is the categorization of the group by non-members, that is, those from outside of the group. He stresses that neither of these two modes of identification or categorization can be said to have priority in a kind of temporal sequence; rather, each is shaped by their interplay.

However, it is suggested that before making the distinction between external and internal identification processes, it is important to be clear about the cultural contents that provide the basis for group identification or social categorization and in reference to 'what' a group is being categorized and/or a group identifies itself. The content is subject to change and also open to negotiation when used for negotiating social identities in the context of cultural and regional differentiation. Some cultural elements take different forms or can even transform, for example, from actual practices into discourses of pride in the process of identification. *Bahshi* singing practices in Khorezm can serve as a good example here. As outlined below in more detail, this tradition became rare in the region itself. Yet it is highlighted and emphasized by Khorezmians when talking about their traditions in relation to other cultural and regional groups in Tashkent. My informants commonly described parties with *bahshi* singing as 'gatherings of close friends, enjoying not only meals and conversations together, but also accompanied by aesthetic pleasure from enjoyment of classical and folk epic literature introduced by the *bahshi* himself'.

However, flexibility, fluidity and the dynamic character of the contents mentioned are implied. This opens up the space for situational and flexible identification as well as possibilities to make choices on the strategies of identity politics. Consequently, the focus here is on the process of identification and its contents. It is argued that Khorezmian identity is not just 'out there' to go and study; rather, it has always been in use, it has always been reasserted, and it is always changing. It is difficult to provide a snapshot of Khorezmian identity in Tashkent, because it requires the wider context to understand it. Social scientists often consider identity to be either fluid or situational, or something static and 'given'. This article makes an effort to open up a space for negotiation of the extremes in the identity debates in order to allow a look at the 'cultural content' of social identity, not as a static form, but as something that can always be influenced by outside 'categories' and change.

Khorezmians and their 'madaniyat' and 'san'at'

Khorezm region is situated in the western part of Uzbekistan between two deserts near the Aral Sea. It is an old cultural region with a variegated history. The settlements there date back to the Bronze Age (Tolstov 1948, Snesarev 1958, 1974, Koroteyeva and Makarova 1998). The region that is now known as Khorezm used to be part of a larger territory belonging to the Khiva Khanate before Russians arrived in the region (Tolstov 1948, Becker 2004). Khorezmian art forms such as singing and dancing date back to pre-Islamic times. However, there were many dramatic turns in the history of the region related to various conquests. Current practices of Khorezmian singing and dancing are mainly inherited from the practices during the Khiva Khanate. When talking about the history of their musical traditions, Khorezmians today mostly refer back to the times of Khiva Khanate and Khiva Khan's fame to cherish these traditions. Memories of Khorezmians' 'great' past are mostly employed in the process of stressing and producing their difference vis-à-vis other regional groups in Uzbekistan. In this context the term *madaniyat* is used, for example, in such sentences as '*Khorezm madaniyati san'ata boi'* (Khorezm culture is rich in art). The art forms that are of special interest in this article are traditional singing and dancing, which are necessary accompaniments of life cycle events.

Generally, in Uzbekistan traditions and customs such as life cycle celebrations differ greatly from region to region. Some rituals during marriage celebrations are absent or differ in the content and meanings in other regions, as my informants observed in Tashkent and as far as I know from other regions. Examples would be *Quda Danishma*,[2] *Qiz Yigin, Yigit Yignar, Ögri Patir*[3], and *Guyov/Galin Salom. Quda Danishma* is a small ceremony of meeting both sets of

parents in the house of the groom on the third day after the wedding where the food is provided by the family of the groom. The wedding rituals and ceremonies in other regions of Uzbekistan, as far as my informants told me, do not include this evening of parents meeting on the third day. Instead, they usually have the tradition that the bride's family sends food to the groom's family for 20 or 40 days after the wedding. *Qiz Yigin* is a girls' party that takes place on the evening before the wedding. Here, friends and relatives of the bride gather for a big wedding-size event. On the same evening, the groom has a smaller party with his male friends in his house. Simultaneously, most of his female relatives generally pay an official visit to the girls' party bringing lots of presents. There are small rituals involved in *Qiz Yigin* including putting henna on the hands of the female guests of the girls' party. This event is typically Khorezmian and it is absent or at least staged quite differently in other regions of Uzbekistan. On the other hand, *Challar* is usually celebrated by non-Khorezmians. It takes place after the wedding in the bride's house where the bride performs the so-called '*kelin salom*', the bowing in the centre of the gathering to the guests. Among Khorezmians, '*kelin salom*' takes place in the groom's house where the bride bows mostly in front of the friends and relatives of the groom's family. The '*kelin salom'* or '*galin salom*' in Khorezmian is performed in two parts in Khorezm. Before entering the house, the bride, accompanied by her relatives, stands at the gate of the groom's house and performs the bowing/greeting under the announcement of the speaker of the wedding. It takes place on the day of the wedding, around 3pm or 4pm and lasts about half an hour, since the list of persons to bow to is usually very long and includes all the relatives and close friends of the groom's family. The second part takes place the day after the wedding at around midday, when the bride receives presents from the guests, and she continuously bows during the whole process, which lasts about two and sometimes more hours. She sometimes takes breaks of one or two minutes in between. Generally, among Khorezmians the groom's side mainly carries the financial burden of the wedding and all its ceremonies, whereas it is exactly the reverse among the other regional groups in Uzbekistan.

All of the above-mentioned rituals are strictly followed by Khorezmians. They tend to be organized in Khorezm rather than in Tashkent due to the difficulties that result from the complexities and density of the rituals. One of the main difficulties is that all or at least all close relatives should be present during the ceremonies. Moreover, as many of the elderly relatives as possible should be present. It would be impossible to bring all of these guests from Khorezm to Tashkent due to the length and the cost of the journey. In addition, the prices for food and other items and services needed at the ceremonies are much lower in Khorezm compared to those in the capital city.

These arrangements, especially in bigger ceremonies require special knowledge, experience, a certain environment, more intensive meetings and contact, the participation of relatives, kin and close, old friends, labour and time. That is why almost all Khorezmians in Tashkent, even those who have lived in Tashkent for more than 10 years, go back '*home*'[4] to organize weddings and other large life cycle events, starting with child birth.

In what follows, the article will focus on the traditional *bahshi*s and *halpa* singers in Khorezmian social life. They play important roles in social gatherings as well as in life cycle events and can be considered to be a central part of Khorezmian culture.

*Bahshi*s and *halpa*s

Religious rituals and traditional singing were united under the religious practice of the Khanate and earlier (Basilov 1992). A closer look into traditional singing in Khorezm reveals elements of pre-Islamic religious practices or rituals such as shamanism. The term 'shamanism' and all its derivatives should not indicate a concrete set of practices that belong to a certain category, as

Humphrey (1996, pp. 192–193) argued. The term 'shamanistic' is used here as an adjective denoting the type of rituals connected with the calling of spirits, soul of the dead, healing and performance of certain religious rituals, reciting prayers, singing and dancing.

According to Basilov (1992, p. 37) the term *bahshi* is used for traditional singers and story tellers among Turkmens, Uzbeks and Karakalpaks and for local shamans among Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Uyghurs and many groups of Uzbeks. He explains that this overlap is the result of the earlier union of both practices in one figure. Basilov argues that the term *bahshi* meaning 'shaman', appeared in Central Asia after the Mongol conquest.

*Bahshi*s in Uzbekistan are mainly found in the north-western part of the country, where it borders with Turkmenistan, namely in Khorezm and Karakalpakstan and to the south in Qashkadarya and Surkhandarya. Whereas *bahshi*s are known as healers elsewhere, in Khorezm they do not practise healing and are not expected to do so. The repertory and performance style of *bahshi* singing in Khorezm and Karakalpakstan differs from the ones of Qashkadarya and Surkhandarya. The *doston*s used by *bahshi*s in Khorezm are in the Shirvani style, which is similar to the style used by bards of the Western Oguz Turks (Azerbaijani, Turkmen, and Turkish) (Levin 1997, pp. 173–175). The content of the *doston*s recited and sung by *bahshi*s are mainly dominated by lyricism and heroism. The narrations of *bahshi* include telling the story in an emotionally heightened speech and singing melodic poems.[5]

People in Khorezm say that not everybody can become *bahshi* as he is initiated by God and given his gift in a dream. A *bahshi* is granted a good voice to be able to sing and win the affection of listeners. It is also a difficult task, since *bahshis* are expected to have very good, strong voices that are capable of singing through the whole night. *Bahshi* singing is a ritual type of male gathering that lasts all night long. Food and tea are prepared by women and served by men for the guests. The *bahshi* is given presents such as expensive shirts, food and money. *Bahshi*s can be invited to life cycle celebrations or other male gatherings. Sometimes *bahshi*s are invited especially for a night of *bahshi* singing, an event that is popular in the Shovot and Yangiaryk districts of Khorezm region. Zeranska-Kominek (1998) has connected the whole process of *bahshi* singing in Turkmenistan to the concept of *Yol* as a holy journey to a certain destination, whereas the journey is not an easy one. This metaphor is appropriate for expressing the whole ritual of this type of singing, considering the long period of singing and special arrangements made for it.

I attended an event in one of the villages in Yangiarik district, where a *bahshi* had been invited, which made it an important occasion that took place in the house of a well-respected family. The *bahshi* did not sing for the women; they had to enjoy his songs in the next room, where I was sitting as well. As far as I understood, the story of the singing started with a young man going on a very long journey with a holy mission to find the truth. The *bahshi* told the story and then sang the part he narrated. The host family looked very proud to be hosting a *bahshi* night in their house. There were approximately 25 men sitting in the living room plus three younger men serving refreshments. The host's wife said that her husband's best friend's friend knew the *bahshi* personally and that he helped to invite the *bahshi* for the night. According to her the *bahshi* was from Shovot district of Khorezm. She also indicated that '*ozi hamma bahshilar Shovotda*' (usually all the *bahshi*s are in Shovot district).

It adds to the status and honour of the family to host a *bahshi* evening or night. This is one of the symbols of cultural traditions, and signals not only the capacity of the family to afford this special evening, but also indicates their interest in the art of music and singing. Usually families are respected for their accumulated wealth and their titles that are seen as sources of possible support in cases of necessity by other people. However, age and wisdom as well as good education are valued and well respected and add to the status of the whole family, and a single member can gain respect for the whole family. 'Cultural interest' in traditional music

and singing is seen as particularly valuable, both as a sign of wealth and good education. Hosting *bahshi* at one's house adds to the above-mentioned aspects, willingness to share food and enjoyment from singing and oral introduction to the traditional folk epic and poems. Small numbers of people are able to afford this type of food sharing for aesthetic reasons because normally there would be more practical reasons for sharing food such as life cycle event celebrations. There is, of course, another practical reason for hosting *bahshi* at home, which is entertaining close friends. Khorezmians are known for their being *tashkilchi* (party organizers) as they like to have small parties with their close friends. Normally live music is not brought to these types of parties, so hosting a *bahshi* on these occasions makes these types of gatherings even more special and valuable. Of course, it is also a matter of the taste of the people gathering for the event besides economic considerations.

Today, *bahshi* singing is rare in Khorezm, so weddings or other life cycle events are not often 'crowned' by this tradition. People explain the rarity of the *bahshi*s by the fact that it is a difficult task to become a *bahshi*. Not only is a good voice gifted by God and continuous training by master-*bahshi* necessary, but a *bahshi* also has to acquire the knowledge of the old texts: *doston*s[6] and other epic poems written by famous Central Asian writers. *Bahshi*s and other people who are interested in the *bahshi* singing traditions say that it takes a long time to become a real *bahshi*. I was often told that 'nowadays *bahshi* singings are not learned as a separate profession (*hunar*) but rather are taken on as a kind of hobby alongside the main profession and that it is difficult to earn a living (*non topish*) from it now'. But this does not make them less important figures in Khorezmian singing traditions, and Khorezmians value the *bahshi* singing by organizing special *bahshi* singing events whenever they have the possibility to do so.

*Halpa*s are female traditional singers who use texts from local folklore usually composed by local composers and often by earlier *halpa*s, whose texts are passed from generation to generation. It is necessary to distinguish between different types of *halpa*s in Khorezm. Kleinmichel (2001) has written a detailed, comparative and insightful book on *halpa*s in Khorezm and *Atin Ays* in Fergana Valley. She focused on religious *halpa*s who read texts from religious sources and functioned as religious educators. Other types of *halpa*s are usually singer-*halpa*s who sing traditional Khorezmian folklore songs and entertain smaller circles in Khorezmian social events. *Halpa*s usually perform at smaller gatherings or celebrations during life cycle events such as *Sunnat toi* (circumcision party), wedding ceremonies such as *Qiz Yigin, Quda Danishma, Galin Salom/Barak*, birth-related ceremonies such as *Beshik Toi*, first birthdays of, usually, the first child, *Lachak Toi*[7] and other events that are arranged with live music. *Halpa*s usually sing in a small band and play the accordion. The band consists of the *halpa* with her accordion, another woman or man with a *doira*[8] who is called *doirachi* and a dancer. In times of strict gender segregation, which goes back to the pre-Revolutionary period, *halpa*s performed exclusively for women's gatherings. However, today, even though gender segregation in social spaces still exists, *halpa*s also perform for the male guests at the events. Men and women sit – at least at separate tables or in separate rooms – and *halpa*s perform for each group separately.

Both *bahshi* and *halpa* singing are part of the entertainment practices in Khorezm. Yet, to a certain extent *halpa*s have more or less replaced the entertainment role of *bahshi. Halpa*s cannot completely replace *bahshi*s because, first, the repertoires of *bahshi*s and *halpa*s differ tremendously and serve two different kinds of entertainment. Second, *bahshi* have a more serious and 'heavy' repertoire consisting of long love stories and other epic stories that require careful listening. *Halpa* singing, in contrast, is more 'easy going' and joyful. Their performances also include dancing by a professional dancer who even animates the audience to dance. This makes events involving *halpa* singing very colourful and entertaining.

Travelling Khorezmian cultural baggage

So far, the article has briefly introduced *bahshi* and *halpachilik* practices in Khorezm as important figures in celebrations of life cycle events and other social gatherings. The remainder of the article deals with the question of what happens when Khorezmians travel or move outside their place of origin. Will the traditions and culture of their region of origin matter at their new place of residence or do they accept those of the majority population at their destination?

Present-day Uzbek state ideology and policies have been directed at the recreation of a national historical heritage as a crucial part of the nation-building process.[9] All these developments have created favourable conditions for the use of public space for traditional and religious practices, free of stigmatization or prohibition in the interest of an atheist ideology as was the case during Soviet rule. During the Soviet period, the state system penetrated well into the private spheres of people's everyday lives. People were not free to practise life cycle events in the way they had learned. Traditional singing and dancing became the métier of *philarmonia*s where their contents could be better controlled. Wedding organizers had to ask the *philarmonia*s for musicians (Levin 1997). Spinnetti (2005) stated that:

> the state Philharmonia was the cultural organ which exerted certain degree of control over such unofficial activities [*toi*s – weddings and other performances in social gatherings and other celebrations of life cycle events] it imposed a system of registration and taxation for wedding troupes while also providing for transportation, announcements of booking opportunities and, occasionally, instruments. (p. 195)

In this context *halpas* and *bahshis* were mainly included in the frame of regional repertoires of the *philarmonia* and other state-controlled musical programmes and institutions. Traditional ways of learning music such as *Ustoz-shogird*[10] institution and 'informal' apprenticeships was not welcome during the Soviet period. Music and other forms of art production were 'professionalized' through musical institutions of various levels and scales that ranged 'from centres of nation-wide import to peripheral theatres, houses of culture or music schools' (Spinetti 2005, p.194). As Jean During (2005, p. 144) argued, during the Soviet period 'there was a deliberate effort to academicise music that affected musical forms, traditional instruments, methods of playing, the contexts and purposes of performances and methods of transmission'; and according to him between 1956 and 1959 Uzbek music was even prohibited.

In taking up the freedom to express one's culture and traditions after the demise of Soviet rule, Khorezmians, like other cultural and regional groups, have rediscovered spaces for performing their cultural and religious practices. During my field research, I observed that Khorezmian music and dance as well as other traditions are the main markers of Khorezmian identity in Tashkent. One of the most important things Khorezmians are proud of is their *Lagan Lazgi* or *Syrnay Lazgi*. This is a dance with a very fast and specific rhythm. *Lazgi* is one of the most important types of dance in social events and life cycle celebrations; as some of my informants said: '*Lazgisiz toi, toi amas*' *(Toi*[11] without *Lazgi* is not a *toi). Lazgi*, of which there are several versions, is only one of the many Khorezmian dances.

Annual celebrations devoted to the Uzbek Independence Day take place on Independence Square in Tashkent with guests from all over the world; a large concert and festive performances are staged. All national dancers and musicians and other performers participate in a huge programme that is well prepared one or two months in advance. The groups perform different national musical traditions and dances including Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen variations. Khorezmians also perform their famous *Syrnay Lazgi*. The participation in the programme allows different regions to perform and represent their culture through specific styles of music or dance. Singers, dancers and other performers from all regions of Uzbekistan are given the opportunity to stage one or two performances.

I have heard Khorezmians commenting about the staging of Khorezmian *Syrnay Lazgi* on Independence Day: 'Even the president stands up to applaud during the Independence concert when Khorezmians perform *Syrnay Lazgi* because it fires up the hearts of non-Khorezmians'. The event is also widely broadcast live on national television. I argue that the emotions evoked during these shows and performances together with the display of pride in regional tradition serves to anchor and preserve these traditions even when living outside of the home region.

All of the Khorezmian families interviewed in Tashkent said that Khorezmian musicians are very important in organizing any life cycle event. However, not every small event is accompanied by live music for financial reasons. Only wealthy families can afford live music, usually with a *halpa*. The *halpa* singing tradition is the pride of Khorezmians in Tashkent since people from other regions and from Tashkent do not have traditional singers like the *halpa*s.

During 2005–2006 I attended almost all the different events within the Khorezmian community in Tashkent. All of them had taped Khorezmian music and in the best cases, live Khorezmian music was performed for the guests, usually with *halpa*s. As women and men always sat separately, the *halpa*s had to play separately for men and women. There are also Khorezmian cafes in Tashkent that offer not only Khorezmian food but also Khorezmian music and some of them can afford a full-time *halpa*, who sings for the guests of the cafe. Usually these cafes are rented by Khorezmians for smaller events such as birthdays, *gap*s,[12] holidays and other celebrations.

Smaller ceremonies such as *Patia Toi* (engagement party) and *Quda Danishma* (parents' meeting celebration) are celebrated either in Khorezmian cafes or, if families have large enough houses, in their homes, which is a traditional way to celebrate events in Khorezm. These events were organized with invited *halpa*s with an accordion and their group of dancers and a drummer with *doira*. In one of the *Patia Toi* I attended in a big house, the *halpa*s who sang for the guests had been hired from Khorezm. I asked the family if it was not too expensive to hire *halpa*s from Khorezm. The family was well off and they answered that real *halpa*s can only be found in Khorezm and that they do not usually come and live in Tashkent since non-Khorezmians do not appreciate them, given the fact that they do not have such a singing tradition. The attachment to Khorezmian musical tradition as well as other customs has proven to be very strong among Khorezmians in Tashkent. It is pertinent to ask why certain traditions of music, poetry and dancing persist. If people are simply used to certain things and a certain way of doing things, then it would be considered to be pragmatic to follow one's own traditions and culture. Obviously it is not that simple as that, and besides the pragmatic and rational factors in decision making there are also important factors such as relationships and the social environment as well as the social sphere where an individual spends her/his time.

In the case of Khorezmians in Tashkent, these traditions and customs have undergone certain changes in the process of being practised in a different location and in a different social and structural environment. The main difference in the social gatherings and events of Khorezmians in Tashkent is, of course, the different audience. In Khorezm the audience consists mainly of relatives, neighbours and friends. In Tashkent social gatherings and events also include non-Khorezmians and far fewer relatives than in Khorezm attend. This makes a big difference, since, as my informants explained, now unrelated people and non-Khorezmian people share food and joy. The presence of the latter in the audience gives incentives to the hosts to make the events 'more Khorezmian' and to stress the differences between 'them' and 'others'. I observed that during such events in Khorezmians frequently explained to non-Khorezmian guests differences in food, music and other aspects of culture.

Moreover, particularities in singing and dancing traditions of Khorezmians are obviously related, not only to the audience of the events organized in Tashkent but also to pragmatic and structural factors outlined below. During my field research I did not meet any *bahshi* when visiting Khorezmians' events in Tashkent. Instead, *halpa*s were more or less known to sing at the smaller celebrations, some wedding ceremonies and social gatherings like a '*tashkil*'.[13] The absence of *bahshi*s in Tashkent is not a particularly remarkable change in Khorezmian singing practices considering their general scarcity in Khorezm itself. When looking at the practices of *bahshi* singing geographically, it starts to appear in the north of Khorezm in Yangiaryk, particularly in Shovot district which borders on Turkmenistan, where they are most important figures in big celebrations.

*Halpa*s themselves and many other singers come to Tashkent to make a career, often as pop stars. I interviewed one *halpa*, who was very famous in Khorezm and another singer, who became almost a number one pop star in Uzbek *Estrada*.[14] The latter indicated that only Khorezmians are interested in the *halpa* singing but not others. That is why she also had to develop a new repertoire of modern pop songs for a wider public in Tashkent and other neighbouring regions. These 'transformed *halpas*' sing pop songs for other Uzbeks or generally at Uzbek *toi*s. Nonetheless, at Khorezmian social events they perform traditional *halpachilik*. *Halpa*s do not perform in restaurants for guests in Khorezm but in Tashkent *halpa* performances seem to be one of the key attractions to please nostalgic Khorezmians. In Khorezm only the biggest events such as weddings or 50th or 60th anniversaries are celebrated in cafes or restaurants, where they bring Khorezmian singers, but not *halpa*s, who are usually invited to a home for smaller marriage ceremonies or other social gatherings.

With brief examples of Khorezmian singing and dancing traditions, it has been shown that they are not the same at 'home' and in Tashkent. The everyday practice of these traditions at home is not as significant as in Tashkent where they are selectively and variably used as instruments in identification processes. Not all of the traditions practised at home travel with migrants due to pragmatic and other reasons. *Bahshi* singing is considered to be a valued and sacred Khorezmian tradition, particularly due to the rarity of *bahshi*s even in Khorezm. The example of *bahshi* singing shows that despite the difficulties of keeping the practice alive even at home, it is used in the discourses on the richness of 'cultural stuff' of Khorezmian identity in Tashkent. It is also used as a signifier of historical value when talking about Khorezmian *madaniat* and *san'at*. The other singing and dancing practices such as *Halpachilik* and *Lazgi* dance have travelled to Tashkent, but not without transformation of their aims and contents. They have been used in different contexts in various forms with different aims and purposes as shown in this article.

Conclusions

The article began with Barth's early arguments on the maintenance of boundaries which he revisited 25 years later, stating that 'cultural stuff' matters when drawing boundaries, especially ethnic ones, in the process of social identification. After the demise of the Soviet Union, religious and traditional practices were revived and regained their importance. In addition, the mobility of people inside Uzbekistan increased. This led to increased and heightened cultural and social interaction between the different regional groups in Uzbekistan. In this context, particularly Khorezmian migrants to Tashkent began to stress more of their cultural identity by means of highlighting certain elements of cultural and other traditional Khorezmian practices.

Certain elements of these cultural practices are changed or even transformed into discourses of 'otherness' and signifiers of social identity when in contact with other regional and cultural groups. The fact that the *bahshi* singing tradition was stressed despite its rarity which added

further value and appreciation to the Khorezmian musical tradition supports the argument above. The transformation of *halpa*s into pop stars in the context of Tashkent is also noteworthy.

The 'cultural baggage' of Khorezmian identity carried from Khorezm to Tashkent is not necessarily the same as it was at the beginning of the journey. The journey itself is a dynamic process and the destination is rich in many different cultures of internal and international migrants. The content and purposes of the elements that make up Khorezmian identity change in the process of exposure to different traditions and cultural practices including social gatherings and celebrations. To study and analyse that change from a sociological perspective is important to better understand social identity politics and its dynamics in a multiethnic environment.

*Halpa*s and *bahshi*s are the 'national' pride of Khorezmians and are important figures or 'servants' (*hizmatda*) at social gatherings and celebrations in life cycle events. They are the ones who make these events colourful and joyful; they fill them with their music and dances and those gifts are considered to be in the 'blood' (*qonimizda yuguradi*) of Khorezmians. They are practised and instrumentalized in the process of cultural representation and performance of Khorezmian identity in Tashkent and Uzbekistan in general. These two figures, *halpa*s and *bahshi*s, embody the 'cultural stuff' and enact the cultural difference of Khorezmians among other regional groups in Uzbekistan.

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Notes

1. *Madaniyat* can also be translated as 'civilization'. However, when Khorezmians use this word in the context of explaining 'Khorezmianness' and when stressing their differences with regard to other regional groups, it acquires a meaning that can most appropriately be translated as 'culture'.
2. *Quda Danishma* is from Khorezmian translated as a meeting the in-laws. The ceremony takes place in the house of the groom.
3. *Ogri Patir* (Thief Patir) is a ceremony of bringing the bread non-official and small rituals are performed which is followed by the real engagement party, called *Patia Toi*, translated as blessing *Toi. Patir* is a type of bread that is used as a symbol of an official engagement.
4. When Khorezmians in Tashkent talk about Khorezm they say '*öyi yon*', meaning 'home side'.
5. For the texts translated into English and stories told in the *doston*s performed by *bahshi*s see Levin (1997). The book is also accompanied by CDs which provide recordings of the *bahshi* singing performances as well as *halpa* singing.
6. *Doston is* a folk epic story.
7. *Lachak Toi* is an event where a woman over 60 years of age celebrates the beginning of her wearing a *Lachak*, a special head scarf in many layers which looks like an Indian turban.
8. *Doira* is a traditional small round hand drum.
9. For a more insightful study on the nation-building processes in Uzbekistan, see Finke and Sancak (2002–2003) and Finke (2006).
10. *Utoz-shogird* or 'the "master-disciple" concept of transmission [of knowledge from the master-teacher to *shogird*-student], which implies a personal relationship, imitation and performing as a duo, enters into all serious discussions about the future of traditional music' (During 2005, p. 156).

11. *Toi* mostly refers to a wedding, but generally indicates any large life cycle event and is used in combinations, such as *Sunnat Toi* – circumcision event, *Patia Toi* – engagement party.
12. *Gap* is a party-like gathering of men or women who are united by different types of relationships such as ethnicity, friendship, kinship etc. This type of event, or at least the name, does not exist in Khorezm but was taken from Tashkent traditions of social gatherings.
13. *Tashkil* is a social gathering of any type in Khorezm, usually at someone's house.
14. *Estrada* is a variety of music style that can also be translated as modern pop music. See more detailed research on Uzbek pop music in Klenke Kerstin forthcoming, PhD dissertation.

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