



Gabriele Mentges, Lola Shamukhitdinova (Eds.)

# TEXTILES

as National Heritage:  
Identities, Politics  
and Material Culture



WAXMANN



Gabriele Mentges,  
Lola Shamukhitdinova (Eds)

# Textiles as National Heritage: Identities, Politics and Material Culture

Case studies from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan,  
Algeria and Peru

Assisted by  
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Gabriele Mentges and Lola Shamukhitdinova



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## Introductory Remarks

This edited volume discusses textile heritage in relation to the dynamics of nation building, cultural identity, nation branding and the globalization of markets.

The publication has been sparked by our research project investigating the role of textiles in the post-soviet society of Uzbekistan. The main part of this book thus focuses on the position of textile heritage in Uzbekistan as a cultural and economic resource, while a smaller part expands the perspective by introducing similar developments in other Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, as well as countries outside of Central Asia which are also undergoing transition, like Algeria and Peru. Other possibilities and processes to help question established narrations of modernity are highlighted here<sup>1</sup>, concerning the relations between textile cultures and tradition building and the concept of cultural heritage. Further questions discussed in this publication include the conception and development of neo-traditionalism in heritage formation and the idea of “self-orientalization,” as well as investigating the ways how heritage building and nation branding are different from each other, or if they, in fact, describe similar procedures.

The term “textile culture” is used in a broader sense as implicit historical experience and knowledge, lived practice and potential future<sup>2</sup>, including contemporary and former textiles and fashion alike – it is understood as an arena of conflict and negotiation within particular habitats of time and space, and as an open, ongoing process.

The emphasis on the case of post-soviet Uzbekistan shifts the publication’s focus to the specific materiality, the producers and the mediating practices within

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1 For a discussion of concepts of modernity see S. N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick et al.: Transaction, 2002); J. Arnason, *The Future That Failed: Origins and Destinies of the Soviet Model* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Regarding the problem of ambivalence about the modern project, see Z. Baumann, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); for the role of ambivalence in modernity also see Z. Baumann, ‘Modernity and Change’ in H. O. Luthe and R. E. Wiedermann (eds), *Ambivalenz [Ambivalence]* (Opladen: Leske-Budrich, 1997), pp. 109–122; concerning tradition, modernity and disembeddedness see A. Giddens, *Konsequenzen der Moderne [The Consequence of Modernity]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1995); U. Beck, A. Giddens and S. Lash (eds), *Reflexive Modernisierung [Reflexive Modernization]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996). In a rather pointed manner it would be possible to say that the role of reflexivity in Uzbekistan has been replaced by the post-colonial discourse as well as the discourse relating to tradition. See S. Lash, ‘Reflexivität und ihre Doppelungen: Struktur, Ästhetik und Gemeinschaft [Reflexivity and its lamination: Structure, aesthetic and community]’ in Beck et al., *Reflexive Modernization*, p. 204.

2 This concept is inspired by Ernst Bloch’s definition of heritage as implicit knowledge, gestures and artifacts etc., see E. Bloch, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit [Legacy of these times]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1962).

socio-political contexts and particular experiences of colonization. The comparative analysis of different case studies will open up new perspectives for decolonizing the conception of cultural heritage in order to embed it into a broader and deeper academic discussion about discourses of tradition and heritage construction in the light of theoretical frameworks such as Hobsbawm's and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, Benedict Anderson's concept of nation building and of interactions between heritage regimes.<sup>3</sup> Due to the specific genesis of the Central Asian states the existing concepts of state formation – by and large relying on Western developments – need to be questioned.

Hobsbawm emphasizes the different ways of nation building relating to states that came into being after 1989. He argues that these new kinds of nation building predominantly relied on separation instead of unification. Kaschuba is even more precise when he talks about an identity politics led “in the face of national and ethnic principles”.<sup>4</sup> This observation fits precisely the reality of the Eastern and South Eastern European states.

A similarity Eastern European states share with Central Asian nation states is that these states also employ the political, ideological and cultural devices of an imagined past and use the recreation of the past and of their history as a key strategy for nation building. Both in Eastern Europe and in Central Asia processes of decolonization from the Soviet Era are an important part of nation building. Specifically in Uzbekistan, the attempts to distance the country from Soviet concepts of modernization are strongly present.<sup>5</sup> However, there are further factors characterizing the specific Central Asian situation.

Central differences in comparison to Eastern and Southeastern European processes of nation building are rooted in the different history of state foundation. What constitutes the present-day Central Asian states, including their national borders,

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3 E. Hobsbawm and S. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 1988); see also B. Anderson, *Die Erfindung der Nation: Zur Karriere eines folgenreichen Konzepts [The Invention of the Nation: On the Career of a Concept Rich with Consequences]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1996). Regarding the terminology of property and heritage see F. A. Weigelt, ‘Von ‘Cultural Property’ zu ‘Cultural Heritage’ and R. F. Bendix, ‘Kulturelles Erbe zwischen Wirtschaft und Politik: ein Ausblick’, in D. Hemme, M. Tauschek and R. Bendix (eds), *Prädikat “Heritage”. Wertschöpfung aus kulturellen Ressourcen* (Berlin: Lit, 2007), pp. 129–146 and pp. 337–356. For nation branding see K. Dinnie, *Nation Branding. Concepts, Issues, Practice* (Oxford/Burlington: Elsevier, 2008).

4 E. Hobsbawm, *Nationen und Nationalismus. Mythos und Realität seit 1780 [Nation and Nationalism since 1780]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1991), p. 193. W. Kaschuba makes a more precise argument: He addresses a societal identity politics which is “led in the face of national and ethnic debates” (translation Julia Sattler), see W. Kaschuba, ‘Geschichtspolitik und Identitätspolitik’, in B. Binder, W. Kaschuba and P. Niedermüller (eds), *Inszenierungen des Nationalen. Geschichte, Kultur und die Politik der Identitäten am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln et al.: Böhlau, 2001), pp. 19–43.

5 See for example the newly founded museum of resistance (2014) in Tashkent based on the idea to represent Soviet times in Uzbekistan as a time of complete suppression.

is a result of administrative regulations by the Soviet Union, which subdivided the formerly Tsarist Turkestan into the five “-stans”. In this context, the Soviet power supported an ethnic ‘folklorism’ that forms the basis of today’s ethnic essentialism. Soviet rule tried to turn ethnicities into nations and thus invented and pushed forward the concept of the nation for the purpose of better differentiation between the various cultural groups.<sup>6</sup>

An additional difference that is of importance here is that the path toward independence of the contemporary Central Asian states was not the result of an existing movement towards freedom, but that it resulted from the breakdown of the Soviet Empire – it occurred rather unexpectedly and unwillingly, at times with disastrous political and economic consequences, especially in the early years. The new situation posed a significant challenge, namely to re-define and re-create the Soviet concept of ethnicity to be used in the resulting processes of nation building.

The current evolvement of nation building is additionally rooted in the context of the growing globalization of markets, which also impacts and infuses Central Asian societies significantly. At the same time, local traditions are emphasized and a return to traditional values such as family, religion, patriarchal structures and also textile heritage, which is of specific interest here, is propagated.

Overall, a different conception of ‘state’ in all five Central Asian States is the result of these specific constellations: “Post-communist states are a ‘bricolage’ built on existing formal structures inherited from the Soviet past but also informal ones, which are Soviet legacies of a different kind.”<sup>7</sup>

This assessment stated in recent research efforts can be understood as a call to look critically at constructivist approaches to nation building. These tend to neglect those actors and groups not part of the governing class. They also do not ask about the reception by the different actors.<sup>8</sup> This rightful criticism however does not take into account that Hobsbawm and Ranger do not understand every process in this context as an achievement by way of construction, but that they differentiate between so-called “real ways of tradition” and conventions as agreements of unclear duration. To understand these real ways of tradition, Hobsbawm looks to ethnology.<sup>9</sup>

By way of a possible answer to questions regarding the meaning of tradition, we refer to the eminent position of material culture, which supports a sensory, physical and visual awareness of imaginations of tradition and nation in its very material-

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6 F. Hirsch, *Empire of nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca et al: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 190. See further L.L. Adams, ‘Can we apply Postcolonial Theory to Central Eurasia?’ *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 7 (2008), pp. 1–7.

7 J. Rasanayagam, J. Beyer and M. Reeves, ‘Introduction’, in J. Rasanayagam, J. Beyer and M. Reeves (eds), *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia. Performing Politics* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 6.

8 J. Gimono-Martinez (ed.), *Design and National Identity* (London/New York: Bloomington, 2016), pp. 22–23.

9 E. Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Tradition’, in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 10.

ity<sup>10</sup>. Due to its inherently entangled quality, it also allows for insight into spaces of relation and spaces of memory, as well as into the structures behind established cultural patterns: “All made things partake of intentional and systematizing thought, and potentially serve as vehicles of knowledge that bind things and people via things to one another.”<sup>11</sup> Based on Benedict Anderson’s imagined community, it would be possible to establish the notion of a materialized community of artefacts, materials and fabrics. Materiality and dress practices provide a sensual memory and bond shared by different people..

With this intention, this edited volume looks at the nature, practices and discourses in dealing with material, and specifically textile, cultures in their historical as well as in their contemporary forms. The volume aims to show how textile heritage is adopted, interpreted and presented as part of national culture.

## Decolonizing Heritage

This strategy seems to respond to the concept of nation branding as the “practice of constructing and communicating a unique image of a specific nation”<sup>12</sup>, as a form of symbol-oriented economization of society – a strategy often enacted through the use of textile histories and artifacts as economic resource. However, as Dinnie put it, “national identity plays a key role in nation branding”, presupposes an “awareness and understanding of the core features of national identity” and also derives from the country’s culture.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the process of nation branding can be located next to the concept of heritage, which always includes an economic dimension.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Uzbekistan, it is of interest to understand how contemporary textile culture is defined as history and continuation of the Silk Road in order to covert it into a commercial brand in the tourism industry, through the revival of old crafts such as *ikat* weaving, velvet embroidery, embroidered *suzani* wall carpets and covers, dress made of *ikat*, head wear and so on.

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10 Here, materiality is also understood to include the material and technical conditions for the creation of textile culture. See for example H. Kahlhoff, T. Cress and T. Röhl, ‘Einleitung: Materialität in Kunst und Gesellschaft’, in H. Kahlhoff, T. Cress and T. Röhl (eds), *Materialität. Herausforderungen für die Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Paderborn: Fink, 2016), pp. 10–11.

11 S. Küchler, ‘Threads of Thoughts’, in M. Elliott and L. Chua (eds), *Distributed Objects. Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell* (New York et al.: Berghahn, 2013), p. 25.

12 E. Marat, ‘Nation Branding in Central Asia. A new campaign to present ideas about the state and the nation’, in S. N. Cummings (ed.), *Symbolism and Power in Central Asia. Politics of the Spectacular* (Oxford/New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 40. She mentions the different policies of the nation states: Kyrgyzstan, for example, wanted to become a brand for the geographical origin of Santa Claus. See also J. Gimono-Martinez, ‘Top-down Approaches to National Identity’, in Gimono-Martinez, *Design and National Identity*, pp. 93–146.

13 Dinnie, *Nation Branding*, p. 111.

14 See Weigelt, ‘Von ‘Cultural Property’ zu ‘Cultural Heritage’’, p. 143.

However, such tendencies and strategies may also point to other explanations: In “Dreams of Small Nations”<sup>15</sup>, Lise Skov refers to strategies used by particular nations to construct national images via fashion. These then claim to be part of the global showcase of fashion. One of her main arguments stresses the point that economic interests are to a lesser extent the driving motivation for national fashion design than the concern for modern image building and the participation in the global showcase of fashion. Fashion proves to provide an entry point to global participation and to obtaining international recognition and attention.

The concept of “self-orientalization” put forth by Sandra Niessen et al. also must be reconsidered in this context, since it highlights processes leading to the deconstruction of colonial images.<sup>16</sup> The practice of self-exoticizing according to Leshkowich and Jones signifies a measure of gaining control “over the process of defining who is Other, so can producing and consuming an exoticized image of one’s own cultural identity be a technique of asserting discursive control that can seem to turn the negative narrative of Western Orientalism on its head.”<sup>17</sup>

However, all conceptual frames need further and deeper investigation and must consider the very different national and cultural backgrounds out of which such strategies emerge in each case. This includes questions regarding the formation of underlying “types” of colonization or modernization and the different ways of deconstructing colonialized heritage, but it also needs to take into account which publics or communities the new textile or fashion strategies address: How are these processes meeting state expectations or even found direct support of the state? What kinds of discourses of nationhood are nourished by textile or fashion strategies, and how so? And how do the different actors (including institutions and organizations) participate in or contribute to these state policies?

Through the process of neoliberal globalization, traditional fashion hierarchies between old fashion centers and the periphery have changed considerably, generating new patterns of relations and by implication a new order of fashion cultures and economies. They seem to require new types of performance, representation and relations with state and nation. However, as in the Uzbek case, they have also a strong impact on society. The processes we observe here raise a number of new questions, including the following:

- Which objects and materials are “nationalized”? Which discourses are employed and by which actors?
- How can we question the dichotomy between modern versus traditional?
- If strategies of distinction are transferred to a national level, how should new concepts of so-called “modernization” be conceived?

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15 L. Skov, ‘Dreams of Small Nations in a Polycentric Fashion World’, *Fashion Theory* 2 (2011), pp. 137–156.

16 See S. Niessen, A. Leshkowich and C. Jones (eds), *Re-Orienting Fashion. The Globalization of Asian Dress* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 2003).

17 S. Niessen, A. Leshkowich and C. Jones, ‘Introduction’, in Niessen, Leshkowich and Jones, *Re-Orienting Fashion*, p. 28.

*Textiles as National Heritage: Identities, Politics and Material Culture* will take these questions as a starting point in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the formation of textile heritage in small or new nations, asking how and for what kinds of purposes textile heritage is restored or enacted, revitalized and integrated into both a national concept and global fashion policies. This volume inquires in what ways and forms “historical legacy” is incorporated into textile crafts and techniques, fabrics, ornaments, symbols, colors or dress styles, for example when looking at regional dresses.

Textile cultures encompass a broad range of objects, practices (rituals, consumption) and actors such as designers, craftspeople, merchants and customers. Textile cultures furthermore include knowledge, technologies, discourses, and concepts, especially time and place and space respectively. Therefore, textile cultures often play a crucial role in processes of nation branding or in nation building, and are sometimes even labeled as world cultural heritage.

The contributions to this volume relate to different national textile cultures, but the case of Uzbekistan is highlighted and looked at in most detail. Articles focusing on Kazakhstan allow for an understanding into how a different Central Asian country works with its textile memory. The examples relating to Algeria and Peru in turn show how radically different strategies for the preservation of textile heritage can be from each other and how this heritage is communicated to the broader public.

Since Uzbekistan was the outset for this volume, this introduction will also take a particular look at developments there. This still rather young nation state makes for paradigmatic insights into the relationship between textile heritage and processes of nation building.

## **Narratives of the Silk Road: Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan became an independent nation in 1991 following the break-up of the Soviet Union. It emerged along with other Central Asian states such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

The route towards independence was different from how this process played out in the Eastern European states as, for instance, the Baltic republics, Belarus, Ukraine and far-off Georgia. This is due to a different history of colonization. Under the Czars, Russia annexed Central Asia between 1850 and 1870 in order to create the large territory of “Turkestan” in the Great Game. With the takeover by the Soviet Union in 1924, new borders were established within this territory, which exactly match the borders of Central Asia’s state formations today.<sup>18</sup> The current Uzbek borders follow

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18 J. Bell, ‘Redefining National Identity in Uzbekistan: Symbolic Tensions in Tashkent’s Official Public Landscape’, *Ecumene* 2 (1999), pp. 183–213. The concept of the nation was in no way alien to the Soviets. Rather, it was part of their public internationalization strategy; on the history of today’s Uzbekistan see N. J. Melvin, *Uzbekistan. Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 2000); L. L. Adams and P. Jones Luong (eds), *The transformation of Central Asia. States and Societies from Soviet Rule to*

ethnic and linguistic lines as well as political border demarcations established by the former feudal Khanates.<sup>19</sup>

A historical exception regarding national movements becomes evident in the case of the Jadids, an Islamic reform movement at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which first favored the idea of a Central Asian nation.<sup>20</sup> Around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of present-day Uzbekistan was, in Russian terminology, part of the “Turkestan” region, including the emirates of Kokand, Bukhara and Khiva. This was a landscape shaped by cities as well as rural regions inhabited by different populations (merchants, traders, peasants, nomads) and different ethnic and social groups. Power relations depended on economic activities and always had to be negotiated between the nomadic organized groups: the Kyrgyz, sedentary peasants and the urban population and rulers. Central Asia is situated and crossed by the former network of trade roads commonly called “Silk Road”, passing by cities such as Andijan, Marghilan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent – cities located in contemporary Uzbek territory. The Sovietization put an end to the Czarist structures in 1924 via the division into and the creation of five separate national territories: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (stan = country). These are the foundations of the national territories of today’s nation states.<sup>21</sup>

This is of enormous importance for understanding the processes described here. Viewed historically, the societies of Central Asia were unfamiliar with the organization and structuring of their population according to the criteria of a territorial state. Instead, the many multi-ethnic and national groups were identified by criteria relating to their commercial occupations (nomads, city traders and sedentary farmers), kinship, Islamic community, geographic affiliation or dynastic loyalty (to one of the existing local khanates): “The inhabitants of the region could be identified in different grades as ‘Muslims’, ‘Turks’ or even ‘Persian’ or ‘Russian’, but these categories did

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*Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). Specifically on the issue of transformation see W. Fireman (ed.), *Soviet Central Asia. The Failed Transformation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); I. Baldauf, ‘Some thoughts on the making of the Uzbek nation’, *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 1 (1991), pp. 1–32; S. Akbarzadeh, ‘Nation-building in Uzbekistan’, *Central Asian Survey* 1 (1996), pp. 23–32.

- 19 A Khanate is a historical, feudal state formation that was ruled by a Khan (“ruler”, “chief” or “lord”).
- 20 For a general history of Uzbekistan see E. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks. From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990); concerning the role of Jadids in the reform movement see Allworth, *The Modern Uzbek*, pp. 122–140; Melvin, *Uzbekistan*; J.M. Eckert, *Das unabhängige Usbekistan. Auf dem Wege von Marx zu Timur. Politische Strategien der Konfliktregulierung in einem Vielvölkerstaat [Independent Uzbekistan. On the way from Marx to Timur. Political Strategies of Conflict Regulation in a Multi-ethnic State]* (Münster: Berliner Studien zur Internationalen Politik, 1996).
- 21 See J. Critchlow, *Nationalism in Uzbekistan. A Soviet Republic’s Road to Sovereignty* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

not necessarily involve an identification link or any stronger social cohesion than the local affiliation, district, tribal, clan, dialect or even religious brotherhood.”<sup>22</sup>

The allocation of strictly demarcated territories to particular groups is part and parcel of Western processes of establishing national identity. In the Uzbek case, as with its neighboring states, these territorial border demarcations enacted by colonial powers led to divisions and to the fracturing of former territories, family networks and other ways of doing business and creating cultural customs.<sup>23</sup> Above all, the Central Asian populations share a common material cultural heritage, also concerning textiles.

Uzbekistan, with a population of approximately 32 million inhabitants (2016), is today home to numerous groups of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. (Admittedly, the term “ethnicity” always has to be used with some reservation and thought). You can count about 120 groups, among which the largest are the Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Tajiks, Russians, Koreans, Uighurs, Crimean Tatars, Kyrgyz, Turks, Germans, Jews, Kurds, Chinese, Arabs etc.

The Uzbeks descend from a group of Turkic tribes that had become nomadic and whose origins are unclear. Once again the Soviet Union played a role in the emergence of clear ethnic distinctions. That is because in order to achieve a more efficient system of control – and often in ignorance of ethnic relations – it roughly divided the existing population into urban and rural populations. The rural population – since they were ideologically easier to control – was crudely described as Uzbeks; the urban population was described as the so-called “Sart” – a population politically and ideologically less reliable. For the longest time, “Sart” was considered a common designation. The Sarts were created and maintained as a group through exclusive intermarriage, cultural assimilation and linguistic adaption.<sup>24</sup> Soviet policy very successfully aimed to “essentialize” and reinforce ethnic identities, albeit while always remaining subject to the primacy of socialism and the collective, not of the national<sup>25</sup>.

22 F. S. Massansalvador, ‘The Process of Nation Building in Central Asia and its Relationship to Russia’s Regional Influence’, *Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series 5* (2010).

23 The term “ethnicity” must therefore be used with caution. See in this respect N. Megoran, ‘On Researching ‘Ethnic Conflict’: Epistemology, Politics, and a Central Asian Boundary Dispute’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 2 (2007), pp. 253–277; see M. Liu, ‘The Perils of Nationalism in Independent Uzbekistan’, *Journal of the International Institute* 2 (1997).

24 For Sarts see Baldauf, ‘Some Thoughts on the Making of the Uzbek Nation’, p. 70; A. Segars, ‘Nation Building in Turkey and Uzbekistan’, in T. Everett-Heath (ed.), *Central Asia. Aspects of Transition* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 91; R. Krumm, C. Günther, M. Klingenberg et al., *Geschichte und Identität II. Usbekistan und Deutschland im XX. Jahrhundert* (Tashkent: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2007).

25 See L. L. Adams, ‘Invention, Institutionalization and Renewal in Uzbekistan’s National Culture’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 2 (1999), p. 356; on the “essentialization” of ethnicity see Liu, ‘The Perils of Nationalism in Independent Uzbekistan’, p. 3; see I. Baldauf, ‘Tradition, Revolution, Adaption. Die kulturelle Sowjetisierung Zentralasiens [Tradition, Revolution, Adaptation. The cultural Sovietization of Central Asia]’, in M. Sapper (ed.), *Machtmosaik Zentralasien. Traditionen, Restriktionen, Aspirationen [Central*



It is to be assumed that it was a colonial construct, but one which over time transformed to shape an Uzbek ethnicity. Ethnic and national folklore was part of the Soviet Union's idea of a multi-ethnic state. Thus, contemporary Uzbekistan remains in many ways a legacy of the Soviet Union: culturally, but especially also economically. The independent Uzbek state also held on to the Soviet Union's concept of citizenship, but according to J. Rasanayagam replaced it by national traits: "They are phrased in the terms of the unique cultural and spiritual heritage."<sup>26</sup> The Soviets began a politics of "modernization" aiming to abolish feudal and patriarchal relationships and to establish an efficient administration. This included campaigns in the 1920s against full concealment by the *paranja* – the so-called Hujum-campaigns – which in their radical views were met with significant resistance by the mainly Muslim population and which often worked to the disadvantage of the women affected by it.<sup>27</sup> While the Central Asian population at first reacted to the measures taken by the Soviets with a positive attitude, this changed for the worse and finally turned into rejection.<sup>28</sup>

The Soviets also reinforced the already existing culture of cotton, finally transforming the country into a monoculture of cotton with disastrous ecological results. In independent Uzbekistan however, specifically in the early phase of its independence, the amount of land devoted to cotton has been reduced for the benefit of wheat cultivation and cattle breeding.

Nevertheless, cotton remains Uzbekistan's "white gold" and its cultivation is still steadily placed in the hands of the state (Uzbekistan is the world's third most significant cotton producer).<sup>29</sup> The problem of forced labor, a phenomenon criticized internationally, remains current. It is a legacy of the Soviet Era, where school children and students were recruited for the collective harvest in large numbers.

Officially, the Uzbek state commits itself to the idea of a market economy, but factually, the state still controls relevant areas of the economy, and specifically of cotton production, as well as of the production of silk. Uzbekistan produces about 5% of the silk fabricated worldwide.<sup>30</sup>

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*Asia: Mosaic of Power. Traditions, Restrictions. Aspirations*] (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007).

26 J. Rasanayagam, *Islam in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: The Morality of Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 109.

27 Publicly celebrated rituals of unveiling did not relate to the realities of women at that time. They were later rejected or even killed in these strongly traditional communities. For the anti-veiling campaigns see these two fundamental studies: M. Kamp, *The new woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, modernity, and unveiling under communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006) and D. Northrop, *Veiled Empire. Gender & Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

28 Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, p. 19

29 J. Stadelbauer, 'Zwischen Hochgebirge und Wüste [Between the Highlands and the Desert]', in Sapper, *Machtmosaik Zentralasien*, p. 21.

30 According to the report "Silk Loop for Uzbek Farmers" (2015), output of cocoons exceeded 26,000 tons in 2015; by comparison, China's production is about 80%. Silk cocoon cultivation was known even before czarist reign, and the Soviet Union too developed the silk in-

The Uzbek cotton industry, which significantly contributes to the country's wealth, suffers from the fact that most of the raw materials are exported. At the same time, increasing efforts are undertaken to establish a textile industry oriented towards cotton inside the nation's borders.

This is not Uzbekistan's only claim to a textile tradition. Uzbekistan benefits above all from the fact that many of its key cities such as Marghilan, Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva and the capital Tashkent were at one time key points of the former Silk Road.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the core narrative of Uzbek culture building is based on the claim that it is the historically legitimate heir to the Silk Road and its unique culture. This is done also specifically to emphasize how the country differs from its Central Asian neighbors. Based on this historical background the idea of heritage is mostly related to traditional dress items and techniques such as *ikat* weaving, headwear, ritual dress etc.

Given the areas of tension that have recently emerged in Central Asia it is, however, important to realize that national identity is not an inevitable form of collective identity but rather a "construction of the collective in the area of tension between culture and politics"<sup>32</sup>.

This Uzbek option for the classical form of state building allocates to textile culture a central place in order to encapsulate – materially – the difference between what is its own and what is not.<sup>33</sup> It becomes potentially useful in numerous ways in the discovery of a national identity: as lived memory, i. e. as a performative memory technique looking back to a Central-Asian past preceding both, phases of Czarist colonization and Soviet modernization; as visualized history, as specific commercial tool and finally as medium for the display of national "brands" on the global market.

The efforts to revive and strengthen textile traditions, which are also supported by the state, should also be understood as an attempt to move on following the Soviet Era and to get over what is now defined as colonial heritage. On the basis of this material heritage and the material achievement behind it, the goal is to define a national and cultural identity, or as March has called it, to invent history.<sup>34</sup>

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dustry, however this report states today: "The Uzbek government considers silk a strategic export, and it serves as a key source of hard currency for the government. The government maintains total control over the silk sector, as it does with the cotton sector, establishing production targets, imposing quotas on producers, and setting the price at which it buys silk from producers.", p. 4.

31 The Silk Road is understood as an ancient network of different trade routes which, from about 140 BC until the European Middle Ages, connected China with Europe via Central Asia.

32 B. Giesen, 'Preface', in B. Giesen (ed.), *Nationale und kulturelle Identität. Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewusstseins in der Frühen Neuzeit [National and Cultural Identity. Studies on the Development of a Collective Consciousness in the Early Modern Era]* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 11.

33 See in this relation W. Mignolor, L. Delgado and R. J. Romero, 'Local Histories and Global Designs: An Interview with Walter Mignolo', *Discourse* 3 (2000), p. 8.

34 A. March, 'The use and abuse of History: 'National Ideology' as Transcendental Object in Islam Karimov's Ideology of National Independence', *Central Asia Survey* 4 (2002), p. 374.

In fact, these endeavors are part of the Uzbek “symbolic politics of the spectacular”<sup>35</sup>, which is actively supported by means of traditional dress strategies and design. Textile cultures provide an appropriate field for these strategies because they offer opportunities for self-representation and for finding images of a new nation, as well as for the so-called counter-orientalism or self-orientalization.<sup>36</sup>

Since the country’s independence, Uzbeks make strong efforts to discover and restore their Central Asian traditional textile heritage, which had partly disappeared under the Soviet government. These efforts incorporate its textile traditions including technologies, fabrics as well as aesthetics fallen into oblivion. A new design landscape has by now established a new culture of fashion design nourished by Central Asian textile traditions.

Textile heritage therefore becomes a central component of this cultural narrative and of Uzbekistan’s depiction as a sovereign and bounded nation, a process of nation building for which Benedict Anderson coined the term “imagined communities”. One of the striking features of the developments in Uzbekistan seems to be the strong intermingling between state and different actors’ interests concerning textile culture.

## Textile Heritage and National Identity

This intermingling is addressed in G. Mentges’ contribution “Between Design, ‘National Dress’ and Nation Branding”. This article uses the example of Uzbekistan to show how the practical dealings and discourses of textile tradition and fashion practice are used in processes of nation building and in the quest for an identity. This contribution looks specifically at the individual actors, sellers, consumers of fashion, designers, craftspeople – those who deal with the idea of textile heritage, attribute meaning to it and establish new cultural orders (gender roles), which also correspond to strategies used by the state. The relationship between tradition and modernity, which is often discussed, proves to be ever-changing, open and dynamic. This manifests itself in contemporary fashion design as well as in everyday dress practice. In this context, the designers are in the position of re-interpreters.

Susana Aguirre highlights this particular role of designers, whom she quite fittingly calls *cultural mediators* in her paper “Fashionable Roots: Textile Heritage in Contemporary Fashion Design in Peru”. She emphasizes how these designers contribute to the construction of a Peruvian identity via fashion design through their specific re-use and marketing of indigenous design of the Indian groups. Thus they

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March mainly refers to the so-called “Tamerlane cult” industry” (p. 376); see also B. Manz, ‘Tamerlane’s Career and its Uses’, *Journal of World History* 1 (2002), pp. 1–25.

35 See Cummings, *Symbolism and Power in Central Asia* and L.L. Adams, *The Spectacular State. Culture and National Identity in Uzbekistan* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2010). Both stress the spectacular strategies of the Uzbeks State. Adams investigated the role of national holidays with regard to identity creation.

36 See Niessen, Leshkovich and Jones, *Re-Orienting Fashion*.

help to slowly overcome the urban and elite disdain of the original producers and wearers of indigenous design, namely the Indian native groups in Peru. Albeit, this pattern provokes the question of cultural property, it asks to question whom this heritage it belongs to – is it property of the Indian source community or part of the national heritage at large? The processes illustrated here simultaneously point to the high importance of fashion design for the creation of a national image and to better branding to represent the nation on the global market.

The other former CIS states also tend to focus on textile traditions as national emblems. For example, both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan refer back to textile traditions of the formerly nomadic cultures in order to re-create them in modern design and to undertake efforts to establish a culture of crafted souvenirs made of felt in the context of the growing tourism business (Kyrgyzstan). These countries' experiences during the Soviet Era were rather similar, but today, the citizens are not as negative when looking back to this past.

A similar role of fashion design and designer, but one that is even more explicitly underlined by a national tenor, is discussed in Ardak Yussupova's article "Contemporary Textile Art in Kazakhstan" and in Gulnar Soltanbaeva's contribution "The influence of traditional Kazakh textiles on contemporary fashion in Kazakhstan".

The development in Kazakhstan appears similar to the situation in Uzbekistan. In both nation states, a national discourse of creating difference via textile culture has become dominant. These contributions thus address how both conscious practices of memorializing and the active continuation of traditional textile handicraft in modern design support practices of national identity formation and how they at the same time strengthen the position of Kazakhstan in a globalized world. These processes unfold, similarly to what we can observe with regard to Uzbekistan, on the foil of the Soviet past, in which the traditional handicrafts were either forgotten or made part of a state-supported folklore. While these crafts saw a revival of sorts in the 1960s, the conditions were different and followed different goals when compared to the time of national independence. Today's memory of the different textile handicrafts, as evident in the contributions, takes traditional symbolism serious and includes the formerly ritualistic meanings of technical procedures.

In her contribution, Ardak Yussupova emphasizes the difference between the earlier revival during the Soviet Era and contemporary practices of textile design which attempt to change old techniques and aesthetic patterns while at the same time continuing them into the present time.

These processes of transformation become especially clear in Gulnar Soltanbaeva's article. Contemporary fashion design attempts to find a modern design vocabulary for traditional designs; it looks for new technical equivalents to recorded material qualities. The articles both show how Kazakhstan represents itself to the outside, and specifically how it uses tradition in design in order to define its role within a globalized aesthetic.

Design processes are examined from a national perspective here. Just like in the case of Uzbekistan, there is a clear attempt to unify cultural pluralism under the cloak of the national state in order to represent the country and its heritage to the outside.

## Crafts in Motion

In “Of Dyes and Colors – Cultural Change in Uzbek Textile Crafts” Melanie Krebs highlights how the invention of tradition could potentially play out in Uzbekistan’s postcolonial setting. She follows how the return from industrial ways of dyeing used during the Soviet Era and relates how traditional textile crafts strategies operate in an independent and present-day Uzbekistan embedded into the global market. Using the example of natural dyeing, she follows the practices and discourses through which the discovery of ancient, but forgotten techniques of vegetal dyeing are re-employed by the Uzbek craft actors. Their view of tradition is shaped also by the orientaling gaze of Western spectators (tourists and social workers) who help construct the image of the Silk Road by fusing images and re-invented practices into a homogenous idea of “their Uzbek culture”.

Different ways of re-inventing and re-using are described by L. Shamukhitdinova in her article “The Rehabilitation of *Khon-Atlas*” regarding this ancient and precious fabric. Even during Soviet times, the *khon-atlas* remained popular and was considered as a signifier of Uzbekness, though the quality of the fabric (technically) was slowly diminishing. Today, in connection to the global markets, things have changed again: Its specific pattern and colors with former local significations are appreciated as an independent ubiquitous design for the global flood of commodities, whereas the expensive craft technology of the *khon-atlas* is slowly disappearing. According to L. Shamukhitdinova, different and independent reasons may be responsible for the decline, like the appearance of a new great variety of other authentic ikat fabrics or the complicated technical procedures needed for *khon-atlas* production. However, all of this attests the huge impact of the touristic gaze on domestic textile culture which might lead to a new hybrid of textile aesthetics in the near future, including different global tastes, usages and ways of consumption, thus creating a new aesthetics of everyday life. It is also proof for the importance of the agency of material culture which opens unforeseen perspectives, spaces of negotiations and autonomous actions to all actors.

These developments once again point to the problem of cultural property, which is negotiated differently from Peru here, but still represents an open question.

## Signifying Identity

The historic importance of textile culture as integral heritage of the former Silk Road is used in order to market Uzbekistan to tourists. In the ongoing process of identity formation, tourism does not only play a passive and receptive role, but it becomes

integral part of the discourse about identity. It constantly includes new objects and images (see Shamukhitdinova in this volume) and aids in reordering and restructuring material culture. How exactly this process manifests itself is shown in Lola Shamukhitdinova's article about Uzbek skullcaps. Looking back to the history of skullcaps their enormous importance in everyday dress practice as markers of Uzbek signifier, even and specifically during the Soviet Era, becomes evident. Today it is a recognizable head cover, which still have a large domestic market. Different from *khon-atlas*, contemporary Uzbekistan rediscovers and enhances the technical quality of *skullcap* production. The new orientation towards tourists as customers sometimes simplifies the design and leads to new solutions. These do not only change the technical and material quality of the *skullcaps*, but which leads to a differentiation between the cheap souvenir for tourists and the traditional and popular Uzbek head cover of excellent quality. Whether these different uses will continue to coexist or whether the new market will also change the traditional use of the *skullcaps* is still to be decided.

The observations by Zhazira Zhukenova regarding the *tuskiiz*, a spiritual and cultural treasure of the Kazakh people, as well as the article by Gayni Mukhtarova focusing on the *kurak* patchwork and the passing on of traditions in Kazakh textile culture look to the use of traditional textile handicraft to establish a line between the historic imagination of the world by nomadic populations and the modern nation state Kazakhstan.

Z. Zhukenova explores the technical procedures and the symbolic meanings of carpet ornaments (*tuskiiz*) in order to read them as artistic expressions of the Khazak nation.

Gayni Mukhtarova focuses on the value and meaning of the patchwork technique *kurak* in Kazakh culture. She also looks at the historical connections between its emergence, its symbolic language, its ritualization, its use in the context of rites de passage and reads the ornamentation as a symbolic language used to grasp cosmic unity according to traditional Kazakh understanding. According to her, this cosmic meaning is preserved even in modern-day *kurak* carpets. In this context it is interesting that she reads handiwork and art as one, without hierarchically differentiating – as it is common in the Western context, where one usually differentiates between applied art and art. This in turn refers to the high significance of textile cultures in Central Asian societies, as well as to other relationships between design, art and handicraft.

## Consumption Scapes: Bazaars and Other Shopping Sites

Spaces of consumption and the practices associated with them play an important role for the continuation and the successful marketing of the modern textile and fashion design produced in contemporary Uzbekistan. G. Mentges und L. Shamukhitdinova demonstrate in their article on “Bazaars, Shops, Malls: Points of Sale and their Meaning for Textile Culture in Uzbekistan” that bazaars still play a key role in the distribution of these textiles. This is possible because bazaars have learned to use

modern methods of distribution and sales. They are not limited to being places of trade, but they remain important sites of communication and encounter. They coexist with other forms of shopping, such as the large stores that remain from the Soviet Era, but they are especially successful because they skillfully combine domestic needs and markets with global offers.

As they show in their following contribution, “Istanbul Market. A reloading point for Uzbek textiles”, it is specifically the Istanbul market which forms a point of intersection between domestic crafts, the market in Uzbekistan and the global market. It also serves as means for the preservation and continuation of particular precious textile fabrics such as *bakhmal-ikat*, highly appreciated on the Istanbul markets by international customers. Thus, handicraft products and designer’s artifacts are separated from their domestic origins and merge into the flood of global commodities, while craftsmen are becoming unknown and nameless producers.

## Performing Cultural Heritage

Museums and other cultural institutions actively support the maintenance of textile heritage, but they also have the authority to define textile heritage and to determine the selection of textile artifacts. Today they have become part of touristic strategies, too, and as such not only transmit knowledge about material cultures but also images of cultures and societies as is the case for example of ethnographic collections in the West. In Central Asia, museums are acting as defining powers to share and designate the cultural textile property of Central Asia as national heritage. This presents a challenge to ethnographic museums in Europe in the post-colonial era: they need to work out how to define their collections in response to the newly emerged nation states of Central Asia.

Thus, Annette Krämer’s article deals with this question. She looks at the origins of Oriental textile collections in the ethnographic Lindenmuseum in Stuttgart, founded in 1911, the origins of which are closely linked to the expeditions to Central Asia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, she focuses meticulously on the history of those parts of the collection that from today’s point of view can be seen in relation to the young state Uzbekistan. This signifies a particular challenge, because the temporal entanglement between collecting and state-building processes has apparently also influenced the allocation strategies of the curators. Thus, the collection partly mirrors also the policies and problems of the establishment of the new political borders following the end of the Soviet Union in Central Asia, which have strong impact on the representation the material culture. In fact, the Linden-Museum’s 1996 exhibition about Uzbekistan realized with the support of the car company Mercedes-Benz and the Uzbek government – however unintentionally – became part of the efforts to construct or better to define retrospectively a national heritage of textile culture.

Binfasha Nodir addresses contemporary textile heritage from a present Uzbek position. In her article, she describes the history of traditional textile handicraft culture and its revival following the fall of the Soviet Union. She finds that during

the Soviet Era, these practices went into decline, one reason being that industrial technologies took over traditional handicraft. Following Uzbek independence, state measures as well as museum collections and the strategies used by UNESCO led to a situation where textile handicrafts such as weaving of carpets, embroidery etc. could bloom again and have positive effects on the employment situation in the country. These efforts also support local demand and strengthen the population's awareness of quality. At the same time, these textile handicrafts are also part and parcel of the national branding strategy.

Leyla Belkaïd-Neri's contribution looks to an innovative process of preserving textile heritage. In this case, she deals with wedding attire, and more specifically the *chedda* dress. This dress is a ritual element of major symbolic importance for the women and their families. It was selected to become part of the textile world heritage of UNESCO because of its essential role in the wedding celebrations in the Algerian city Tlemcen. Unlike in the Central Asian examples, the interest and efforts to preserve this textile heritage were not started by the state, but are due to individual initiatives of many different cultural actors, among them specifically designers, and various phenomena like the multicultural fashion inspirations present in Algeria and the vitality of the population itself. Stylistic changes do not hinder these developments, but by contrast, they revive the interest in these regional traditional styles of dress among the Algerian population. It was decisive that Algerian traditional dress culture stands as a material and mental bulwark against newly emerging dress codes impacted by Islam. This led an open-minded politician to pay attention to these developments. She, together with the writer of the article, helped move forward the application with UNESCO.

In contrast to the developments we can observe in Central Asia, Belkaïd's contribution describes a bottom-up process of discovering and preserving textile heritage. In this case, the state is of secondary importance only. The minister's initiative and efforts in this context, though, may be either an exception or a lucky coincidence.

The differences to be found in the examples discussed here are due to the different times at which independence occurred. They also relate to differences in the specific manifestations of colonialism and the forms of government in the various settings.

In Peru, designers act as interpreters of Indian heritage; an interpretation and mediation dissonant and heterogeneous in itself, especially concerning questions of the cultural property of the Indian source communities. The Algerian example shows an original connection between discovery, revival and cultural institutionalization, embedded into a polyvocal cultural politics.

The discussion around the textile heritage of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are infused by a strong national tenor, which also uses the global market as its addressee, meaning it is also focused on marketing (branding) and the economic use of the entire process with regard to jobs and consumption. Textile heritage politics is strongly bound to elites – educated groups and artists, designers, who use and employ the discourse of cultural property. At the same time, the context – the role of the au-



thoritative government – cannot be neglected here. Much of the existent research on contemporary Central Asia addresses and stresses the role of the spectacular, the conscious enactment of cultural and political content directed at the inside as well as the outside.<sup>37</sup> Discourses and practices relating to textile culture go beyond these efforts, though: They enter deeply into everyday life and living environment, since these fashion practices include the actors in a sensory as well as physical manner into the project of nationalization and thus inscribe the new norms and values onto their bodies.

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37 See in particular Cummings, *Symbolism and Power in Central Asia* and Adams, *The Spectacular State*.

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# **Textile Heritage and National Identity**

