

# ‘The Oil is Sizzling in the Pot’: Sound and emotion in Uyghur Qur’anic recitation

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## Abstract

*How do Muslims in different parts of the world recite and how do they hear the sound of the Qur’an? What are the purposes of their recitation, and what meanings do they associate with it? In this article I analyse one ritual performance of Qur’anic recitation and dhikr conducted by Uyghur village women in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of north-western China, exploring the ritual performance of emotion, emotional responses to the sounded Qur’an, local and global styles and meanings. The women engaged in this ritual draw on the wider tradition of Islamic culture and practice, yet their access to, interpretation of, and even the way that they embody this rich tradition, is particular to their time and place, their social class and their gender. I consider the relevance to this context of the literature on Qur’anic recitation and dhikr in other parts of the world, and discuss some of the wider musicological and anthropological approaches to emotion, arguing that emotional responses to the Qur’an are contextually situated social practices, part of a habitus of listening, best explained by a focus on the embodied experience of sound.*

*Keywords: Qur’an (Koran); Music and Emotion; Uyghur; Dhikr; Gender; Body*

In a small village in Chinese Central Asia, sixty women have squeezed themselves into the guestroom of a village house. In a three hour long ritual, they recite from the Qur’an (*khātmā*), they sing *hikmāt* lyrics (lit. ‘pieces of wisdom’) attributed to the 12th century Central Asian poet and mystic Ahmad Yasawi, they chant *dhikr*<sup>2</sup> and perform *sama*<sup>3</sup> dance, and they weep copiously and demonstratively.

They are led by Bu Sarem, an elegant woman in her sixties, who sits in the place of honour at the centre of the back wall, flanked by her apprentices (*shagird*). The other women sit around her in roughly concentric semi-circles. In this all-female gathering Bu Sarem draws back her sequined face veil and conducts the proceedings, almost as an orchestral conductor directs an orchestra. She also

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<sup>2</sup> Arabic: *dhikr*; a practice associated with Sufi ritual; ‘the repetition, individual or collective, aloud or silently, with or without movements, of a divine name or a litany’ (Dähnhardt 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Often defined as ‘spiritual concert’, *sama* forms a part of Sufi *dhikr* rituals across the Islamic world. It is usually understood as a means to achieve ecstasy and involves more or less formalised rocking or circling movements. See the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam: ‘Sama’*.

[http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2088?\\_hi=0&\\_pos=3](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2088?_hi=0&_pos=3) (accessed 09/08/2014)

leads the performance, giving the opening solo section of recitation herself and leading the other women in repeated rhythmic chanted *dhikr* that include phrases from the Qur'an and well-known Arabic language prayers (*du'a*). She points to her apprentices to perform longer sections of individual recitation and shepherds the whole group through emotional peaks and troughs towards the climax of the ritual. After around an hour she leads into a new chanted *dhikr*: *Subhan'Allāh wa bihamdihi, subhan'Allāh il adhīm* (Glory and praise to Allah, Glory to Allah the supreme).

The women gradually settle into a regular rhythmic pulse, repeating the text to a short, falling melodic phrase in a narrow range of a minor third. Many of them are rocking backwards and forwards. After two minutes, when the rhythm is established, Bu Sarem calls out, 'Come close, hold hands. Speak at the same time together, as if with one voice'. The women shuffle forward, and begin to rock more actively. Their chanting takes on a new urgency, though the effect is hardly of unity. Sixty voices overlap, reciting the same phrase slightly out-of-sync and slightly off-pitch, forming a wash of sound. After another minute, one woman begins to cry out and jerk her body, crying, 'Woy Allah!' The others maintain the chant under her though they are now very scattered. The trancing woman calls out a rhythmic 'Woy, woy', not keeping to the rhythm of the chant. Other women restrain her and fan her to cool her down. Many women are now weeping loudly.

How do these women perform and how do they hear the musical sounds of the recited Qur'an, and what is the goal of their recitation? This article takes as its starting point Anne Rasmussen's assertion that 'musical techniques and aesthetics' are 'preserved and promoted throughout the Islamic world community (*umma*) through the melodically recited Qur'an' (Rasmussen 2010: 9). To what extent do contemporary performances of the recited Qur'an in different contexts around the world share in a commonly-held body or draw upon global flows of musical techniques and aesthetics, and what aspects of these performances are specific to their locality? I consider these questions with attention to the meanings of, and emotional responses to, the sound of the recited Qur'an. The article draws on fieldwork undertaken between 2009 and 2012, working with Uyghur village women in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of north-western China. I analyse one ritual performance of Qur'anic recitation (*khätmä*), which I attended and recorded in August 2009, in order to explore issues relating to musical sound, ritual performance and emotion, local and global styles and meanings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Interviews in the field were conducted in the Uyghur language, which belongs to the south-eastern branch of the Turkic language family. Uyghur terms are given according to the Romanisation system adopted in Komatsu (2005). Our conversations about religious practice included many terms drawn from the Arabic language which I have given, where appropriate, in the Uyghur version followed by the original Arabic.



<Figure 1. Drinking tea before the start of the ritual. Photograph by Rachel Harris.>

### **Approaches to music and emotion**

Can musicological approaches to emotion cast light on Qur’anic recitation and its reception? Much of the research in the sphere of musicology has been framed by the question, ‘How does music evoke emotion?’, giving a central role to ‘the music’ usually as represented by the notated score, thus according an odd form of agency to these notes on a page.<sup>5</sup> Leonard Meyer’s influential thesis that ‘emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited’ (1956: 14) linked understandings of music and emotion firmly to the analysis of musical structure. John Sloboda and Patrick Juslin argue that most compositional systems provide a set of dimensions that establish psychological distance from a ‘home’ or ‘stability point’ (2001: 92). Proximity or approach to this resting point involves reduction of tension; distance or departure involves increase of tension. Distance is measured by a number of dimensions including rhythm and metre (strong beats are stable, weak beats or syncopations are unstable), and tonality (the tonic is stable, non-diatonic notes are unstable).

A further layer of research based around Western classical music explores the psychological processes involved. Sloboda and Juslin discuss the notion of ‘vitality affects’: a set of qualities intrinsic to ‘the music’ which are related to musical intensity, shape, contour and movement, and which produce affective responses in listeners. These qualities are not emotions, since emotions need to be about something; rather they are abstract ‘forms’ of feeling. They grow into ‘true emotion’ only through further mental processing (2001: 79). To what extent do these culture-

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<sup>5</sup> See Cook and Dibden (2001) for a historical overview of research in this field.

specific findings have relevance in other cultural contexts and musical-aesthetic systems?<sup>6</sup> Could it be that the affective qualities which this tradition of scholarship sees as intrinsic to music have broad relevance across cultures, and that 'culture-specific' responses only come into play in when we start trying to process those vitality effects? In terms of tonality, clearly any sense of stability or instability is dependent on the structure of modality within a particular musical system, but do the broad links between tension and distance from a stability point remain valid? Is it possible, for example, to extend the notion of the tension induced by syncopation in Western art music to the asymmetric or 'limping' rhythms of Central Asian traditions, or should we expect that a completely different set of aesthetic and emotional parameters are at play?

Judith Becker provides a trenchant critique of these traditions of research, noting that it is crucial to emphasise cross-cultural differences in the uses and meanings of musical expression (2001: 136). What constitutes 'listening' to music? What are the appropriate emotions to feel? What kind of subjectivity is assumed? Who is 'having' the emotions? How is the event framed? Becker further proposes that we should focus on the ways in which groups of listeners develop 'communities of interpretation', shifting the object of enquiry shifts from the individual listener to the social group:

The scripts of music and emotion, the habitus of listening, can be helpfully understood as a process which is supra-individual [...] in which the relationship between music and emotion needs to be understood as extending beyond the minds and bodies of single musicians and listeners, that is as a contextually situated social practice. (Becker 2001: 151)

Becker's approach is rooted in anthropological approaches to emotion, expressed in the seminal formulation by Michelle Rosaldo: 'Just as thought does not exist in isolation from affective life, so affect is culturally ordered and does not exist apart from thought' (Rosaldo 1984: 137). Such perceptions have also become mainstream in approaches to religion and emotion. In his introduction to a major edited volume, John Corrigan elaborates:

The emotional lives of people - thought by some to be part of an inaccessible interior of self - are in fact socially dictated performances, social scripts, as it were, grounded in shared understandings about the meaning of social events and actions. ... Emotions are the result of a person's engagement of highly complex social codes governing such things as status, authority, relationality, life passages (eg. birth, marriage, death), and contact with outsiders. An emotion in this sense is given by culture, that is, made normative through 'feeling rules' that dictate the proper linkages between social experiences and emotional states. (Corrigan 2004: 11)

Thus, in any study of music and emotion we are dealing with a dual set of related forms of habitus: musical-aesthetic, and emotional.<sup>7</sup> The Uyghur women engaged in the *khätmä* ritual partake in and draw on a widespread, centuries-long tradition of Islamic practice, writing and oral transmission which includes instructions concerning the techniques of reciting the Qur'an, commentary on the Qur'an and its emotional impact, Sufi philosophy and practice, and debates on the permissibility of

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<sup>6</sup> Cook & Dibden (2001: 54), for example, argue that analyses of 'affective lexicons' focus on expressive meaning as a product of historical usage, deliberately deployed and understood by audiences, and are therefore restricted to specific genres.

<sup>7</sup> See Feld (1990) on the Kaluli Gisalo ceremony and Yano (2002) on Japanese enka popular song for rich, culture-specific ethnographic approaches to music and emotion.

musical sound in Islam.<sup>8</sup> Yet their access to, interpretation, and embodiment of this rich tradition is particular to their time and place, their social class and their gender. In order to explore their particular habitus of sound, meaning, and emotion, I begin by introducing some of the participants in the ritual described above.

### ***Büwi* ritual specialists**

Ritual gatherings of this type are led by a senior ritual specialist (*büwi*), often accompanied by her apprentices (*shagird*) and normally between ten and twenty pious women from the local community (see Figure 1). They are typically held in the guest room of a family home. Amongst the Uyghur, informal women's ritual groups exist quite separate from the world of male-dominated institutional Islam. Women are excluded from the mosque in Uyghur Islamic custom, so the *büwi* tradition provides the main channel for women's religious association, instruction and expression. Folklorists have documented hundreds of informal groups across Xinjiang and suggest that in every locality—a group of villages usually centred on a small town bazaar—there is an active group (Zhou 1999). The *büwi*'s ritual practices continued (though for some periods they went underground), right through the social and political upheavals of the commune period and the Cultural Revolution from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s.<sup>9</sup> From the 1980s they were able to practise more openly and in the 1990s the numbers of women attending these meetings were swelled by a general rise in religiosity in Xinjiang. A more recent crackdown on Islamic practice by the authorities, beginning in 2011, has once again driven their practices underground, but their crucial role in community life and death means that they are hard to eradicate.<sup>10</sup> Many groups meet weekly on Fridays. They gather for a vigil (*tünäk*) after a death at the home of the deceased and *büwi* prepare the bodies of deceased women for burial. They are invited to people's homes to recite and pray in order to dispel misfortune or illness, and they perform large-scale rituals at key points in the Islamic calendar. Bu Sarem explains:

We seek for blessings (*sawaplik*) during Ghäjäb (Rajab, the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the Islamic calendar) and Barat (Sha'baan, the 8<sup>th</sup> month), and Ramazan (Ramadan: the 9<sup>th</sup> month, the month of fasting), and on *äzinä küni* (the day of the call to prayer: Fridays). On Thursdays or Mondays we recite for people who request it. If you do a *khätmä* in your home it will dispel the danger that comes from the seven sides, and your wishes will come true. (interview, August 2009)

Turaysem details some of the types of illnesses and misfortunes which they may be called on to heal:

We say *chätinäp kätti* [similar to the evil eye]. If a child gets the evil eye then the doctor's medicine is no use. You have to use Allah's power, and pray for the sick child using the Qur'an. We recite *ay ishpar* ['moon cure'; might be indicated for a persistent headache, or for people recovering from illness; the *büwi* blow into bowl of water during their ritual then give it to the patient to drink]. This is a special medicine for the weak and ill; it's Qur'an medicine. If someone is jealous of you and prays against you then you can get sick. We call that *ayat ichiwaptu* [drinking a verse of the Qur'an; often used against rivals in love]. If this is a problem

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<sup>8</sup> See al Faruqi (1985) and Nelson (2001) for excellent overviews of these topics.

<sup>9</sup> From 1958–1982, village land could not be owned by individual families, but was farmed collectively by the commune. In interviews, older women remember the early years of the commune as a time of hunger and hard labour.

<sup>10</sup> See Harris (2013b) for a detailed analysis of state policies on local Islamic practices in this region.

I can do for you *ay ishpar* or *yandurar* [send back the curse]. I have to repeat it 71,000 times.  
(Interview July 2009)

The role of *büwi* is often thought to be attached to the wives of male religious clerics, but the four women I worked with during fieldwork were married to peasant farmers or small traders and had either inherited the role from their mother or had found their own path towards the role of ritual specialist. Turaysem, a tall woman in her late thirties with an air of authority who was already regarded as a *büwi* of exceptional power, explained her own development in terms of a physical crisis marked by a dream encounter:<sup>11</sup>

After I had my second child I was not well, and I had no time for my prayers for a few years. Then, one morning, around three a.m. I had a dream. An old man with a beard came towards me from the sky sitting on a carpet. I was in a graveyard. He lectured me about the Qur'an. I was very afraid. I had developed a liver illness and I thought I would die. At that time my youngest child was only six months old and I was so scared. When I woke up, I understood myself. This was twelve years ago. Since then I have been praying and reading the Qur'an.  
(Interview, August 2009)

Bu Sarem gave a more straightforward account of her own history. Married at fifteen, she became a *büwi* aged twenty-four; when I knew her she was approaching seventy and was the senior *büwi* in the locality. She recounts:

I learned Qur'an from Timur Haji Mullam (a local male religious cleric). For *büwi* work, I learned from a woman in the county town, Ishan Qushnach. She was famous throughout the whole county. I learned washing bodies with her (*meyt uzutish*). We washed the bodies together then we wrapped them with proper material and got them ready for the funeral. She could recite the Qur'an (*talawät*), recite the *tähhil*,<sup>12</sup> explain the Qur'an (*täpsir*, Arabic: *tafsir*), and chant *dhikr* (*zikri sukhpät*). (Interview, August 2009)

She was described to me by the women in my host family in different terms: 'Bu Sarem became a *büwi* after seeing ghosts. She is a real *bakhshi* (a shamanic healer).' They also commented, 'When she was young she was wild, she had a lover. Even now she likes to talk and laugh.' This type of gossip echoes the popular Uyghur saying, 'When a 'slag' gets old she becomes a *büwi*' (*jalab kerri bolghandin keyin büwi bolidu*), which points to the problematic status of such women who vocalise in powerful, albeit semi-hidden form, and who possess the authority and charisma to lead large-scale rituals. But such gossip was muted and within village society *büwi* were largely respected and feared for the role they play in dealing with sickness and death. Notions of faith, sin and redemption, and emotional expression—specifically weeping—are central to their ritual practice and their position within village society. As Bu Sarem states:

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<sup>11</sup> A process which local scholars link to Central Asian shamanic traditions. Such dreams, however, can also be linked to a much wider Islamic culture. See, for example, Edgar and Henig (2010) on dreams and divination in Bosnia; van Nieuwkerk on Egyptian belly dancers' dreams (2003: 277–78), and Doubleday's account of an Afghan healer (2009).

<sup>12</sup> The chanting of the *shahadah* (profession of faith) *lā ilāha illā-llāhu* as a *dhikr*, progressively shortened until the final consonant 'hu' is repeated rhythmically, accompanied by dancing; see Sells (1991).

[*Büwi* are] women who really believe in Allah, that Allah created us. If people doubt their faith, and wonder if it is true or false then they will not cry and the sin will not be relieved. (Bu Sarem, interview, August 2009)

### History and transmission

Muslim women in many parts of the world gather in groups to perform rituals related to healing and spiritual benefits.<sup>13</sup> Many of these gatherings are emotionally saturated. They typically involve reading of the Qur'an, prayers, group singing of religious songs, and a form of *sama* dancing. Yet the specific form and meanings of the rituals vary considerably in different contexts. Women's rituals do not form an exclusive tradition; they draw on (what are typically regarded as) mainstream Islamic practices (which are usually gendered male). They are often structurally similar to all-male ritual gatherings, though not always in straightforward ways.<sup>14</sup> Some parts of the Uyghur *büwi*'s practice bear direct points of resemblance to rituals performed by Uyghur male Sufi groups. These Uyghur groups are allied to Central Asian Sufi orders and practice a type of 'loud' *jahri dhikr* which comprises the rhythmic repetition of short phrases in Qur'anic Arabic, praising Allah and the Prophet.<sup>15</sup> Over the group chants, a *hafiz* (reciter) sings a melodic counterpoint (*hikmat* or *talqin*), set to a text by one of the major Central Asian Sufi poets.<sup>16</sup> These practices closely parallel the *hikmät* and *dhikr* performed by the *büwi*. In her description of a men's *dhikr* in the northwestern Xinjiang town of Ghulja, Mukaddas Mijit describes an 'explosion of emotions' and states of spiritual ecstasy amongst the participants (Mijit 2012: 308). Weeping as part of ritual practice in this region is not confined to women although, as I will argue, the meanings of the women's emotional expression are significantly different from those of the male Sufi groups.

It seems reasonable to suggest a historical process of transmission from the Sufi lodges which has filtered outwards into rural communities. Once, when we were listening back to a recording of the *khätmä*, Turaysem explicitly linked their practice to Sufism. Her account situates their practice clearly in terms of historical flows of religious ideology and links it to particular ways of knowing which evade literate forms of transmission:

Educated religious people (*qarilar, kitap oqughan alimlar*) wouldn't understand this. If they don't follow a Sufi order (*tärikät*, Ar. *tariqa*) they won't understand. *Tärikät* is like a secret movement (*mäkhpi suluq*). Religious scholars have a Jadidist (early twentieth-century Central Asian religious reformist) understanding. They are two different paths. So if there are people

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, accounts by Elizabeth Fernea (1965) based on fieldwork in an Iraqi village; Eleanor Doumato (2000) on early-twentieth-century women's healing practices in Najd and the Gulf Region of Saudi Arabia, Catherina Raudvere (2002) on *dhikr* in contemporary Istanbul, and Deborah Kapchan (2009) on French Moroccan groups.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Raudvere comments that Fernea's account of women's *kraya* in Iraq is similar choreographically to traditional standing *zikir* in Turkey, which is common among men in some Sufi orders but very rare among women (2002: 177).

<sup>15</sup> The major Sufi lodges of Xinjiang trace their genealogies back to the 17th century, when the Naqshbandiyya order flourished under the patronage of the Khoja dynasty of Kashgar (Zarcone 2002: 534; see also Papas 2005).

<sup>16</sup> See detailed descriptions of contemporary *sama* rituals performed by Sufi groups in Uzbekistan (Pasilov and Ashirov 2007) and Xinjiang (Mijit 2012; Zhou 1999: 31–34).

who understand Islam well, and know *tārikāt*, they may understand this. (Turaysem, interview, August 2012)

The process of transmission of religious knowledge and practice is not exclusively gendered, as girls often learn basic prayers from their fathers within the home and many *būwi* learn Qur'anic recitation from male clerics, bringing this sounded practice into the female sphere of the village rituals.

The *būwi* identify four parts to their ritual practice (*töt suluq*): reading verses from the Qur'an and praying (*khätmä*); singing Uyghur language *hikmät*; reciting the *tāhlil*, and doing *sama*. Their *sama* rituals are performed separately or after the conclusion of the *khätmä*, and involve sung Uyghur language texts and a slow form of circling dance. The *sama* adheres quite closely to the structure followed by Sufi groups in the Central Asian region but the derivation of their particular form of *dhikr* and Qur'anic recitation (the *khätmä*, and the focus of this article) is less clear. Bu Sarem's husband commented, 'they recite this *khätmä* because the *sāhābilār* [Ar. *sahabah*: companions of the Prophet] and the wives of the Prophet recited it' (interview, August 2009). Other *būwi* would only say that it was 'handed down from olden times' and 'part of our customs'. The published accounts of Sufi *sama* gatherings in the region mention in passing that they begin with some Qur'anic recitation but this appears to be very different from the practices of the *būwi*, where recitation of the Qur'an is the longest and most emotionally powerful part of their ritual. In the following section I give a closer analysis of the *khätmä*.

### **Reciting the Qur'an in a Uyghur village**

The local term *khätmä* is derived from the Arabic, which more commonly describes a ritual reading of the complete Qur'an, divided into its thirty *juz*, either all recited simultaneously by different reciters, or separately recited, one on each night of the month of Ramadan (Graham & Kermani 2006). The practice is widespread in many parts of the Muslim world although it is criticised by reformists. In his ethnography of Islam in Kashgar in southern Xinjiang, Edmund Waite describes recitals of the whole Qur'an by (male) religious elders of the mosque community (*jāma'āt*) during Ramadan and *māw'lud* celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (Waite forthcoming). However in my experience, and as Waite also acknowledges, Uyghurs interpret the term *khätmä* broadly as recitation of the Qur'an, without necessarily implying that the whole text is recited from start to finish.

Experiencing this *khätmä* ritual live was for me almost overwhelming. It was the first ritual I had attended as well as the largest and most powerful. I was quite unprepared for the extreme heat, claustrophobia and waves of emotion which washed over me. Several people have since asked if I joined in with the weeping, but not knowing what it was all about I simply did not feel qualified to participate, so I swallowed my tears, concentrated on breathing and holding the camera steady, and tried to pick up on the rhythms of the repeated chants. In fact, I might have done better to give way to tears. Chatting with a fellow researcher from Xinjiang University about this, she told me that in the same situation she had been overcome by tears and the assembled women were delighted and said, 'See, she is a true Muslim!' (Rahile Dawut, p.c. August 2012). Bu Sarem later teased me that I sat in that ritual with my camera 'like a police spy'.

I began the process of analysis by working with Huriyet Nizamidin, a London-based Uyghur, practising Muslim and Arabic language graduate. We worked through the video recording trying to identify the texts: no easy task given the overlapping voices and local pronunciation of the Arabic.



Huriyet caught snatches of Arabic and typed the transliteration into Google. Aided by the many websites devoted to the Qur'an and popular prayers (*du'a*) which the search engine brought up we were able to piece together the complex jigsaw of the *khätmä*.

### Structure of the ritual

As is normal in Qur'anic recitation, the women recite unaccompanied and do not refer to any written texts. The ritual opens with a group recital of the first *surah* (chapter) of the Qur'an, Al Fatiha. The women move into the first five *ayat* (verses) of the second *surah* (Baqara, The Cow) which focus on the attributes of God, then skip forward to verses towards the end of the *surah*. They continue with several popular *du'a* (prayers) from the beginning and end of the third *surah*.

After six minutes Bu Sarem begins to recite alone. She recites *du'a* drawn from various *surah*, all beginning '*Rabbana!*' (Our Lord). A common theme emerges of hellfire and the Day of Judgement [see Musical Example 1]. Some of the women are already beginning to cry quietly. Bu Sarem concludes this solo section with the whole of Surah 109, one of the shorter Meccan *surah* towards the end of the Qur'an.

All the women join her for repeated recitation of Surah 112 (Ikhläs: Purity), a short *surah* which is widely used in daily prayers, followed by repeated '*Allāhu akbar*' (God is great), the profession of faith (*lā ilāha illa'llāh,*) and the final two *surah* of the Qur'an. They pause for silent prayer, then recite together prayers of repentance. The women are now twenty minutes into the recitation, and they move into the phase of *dhikr*: short phrases from the Qur'an or prayers in Qur'anic Arabic repeated collectively on a rhythmic falling motif for a set number of times. Bu Sarem counts off the repetitions on her beads as they recite. The women begin to sway from side to side and the emotional atmosphere is heating up.

From here they move into another round of repetitions of Surah Ikhläs, maintained for six minutes. A short prayer for the Prophet follows, and then another *dhikr* which also lasts for six minutes. They pause briefly, and then resume with Surah Al Fatiha. This is followed by prayers for the Prophet, and for Naqshband, the founder of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order.<sup>17</sup> Many of the women are now rocking rhythmically from side to side and crying loudly. They move off into another six minute *dhikr* on a curious asymmetrical rhythm (*Ya rabi*; see Musical Example 4). A series of short prayers glorifying God and the Prophet follow; then they settle into a six minute chant on the attributes of God. With this chant on two rising and falling phrases the atmosphere becomes less intense, turns distinctly more cheerful and there is no crying. Two short *du'a* link between this and the final *dhikr*, *Subhan'Allāh wa bihamdihi, subhan'Allāh il adhīm*.

Described at the start of this article, this seven minute chant marks the emotional high point of the ritual. Bu Sarem brings the excitement under control by pointing to Turaysem, who recites Surah 55 (Al Rahman; see Musical Example 2). As she recites, the women sob quietly in a sustained way. They are noticeably punctuating phrase endings with louder sobs and sighs.

Bu Sarem concludes with a group prayer; then the women begin to sing melodiously and spaciouly. The style of this is very different from the rhythmic *dhikr*; here the women are performing perfectly in tune and in time, indicating clearly the difference between what I gloss as 'singing' of religious songs and 'chanting' of the *dhikr* where the text is supreme and melody is not overtly prescribed. This song marks closure of the ritual.

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<sup>17</sup> Suggesting a clear line of transmission from Naqshbandi Sufi orders into this *büwi* tradition.

*Allāhu akbar! Allāhu akbar! Lā ilāha illā-llāhu wa Allāhu akbar wa lillah'ilhamdu*  
God is most great! God is most great! There is no god but God; God is most great and praise be to God.

For the next few minutes they move around the room slowly, shaking hands and embracing each other, accompanied by copious noisy tears. Then it is time for lunch (see Figure 2).

The content and order of prayers is specific to this ritual which is performed during the month of Barat. Other *khātmä* performed, for example, to combat illness, include a different combination of excerpts from the Qur'anic recitation and prayers, but they display a similar overall structure, starting with short excerpts from the Qur'an recited solo and as a group, moving into group repeated *dhikr* chants that rise to an emotional peak, followed by a longer solo recitation. Weeping and trancing are common to all the rituals I have attended.



<Figure 2: Posing for a group photograph after the conclusion of the ritual. Photograph by Aziz Isa.>

#### **Analysis: sound and emotion in the *khātmä***

For Muslims, the Qur'an is Divine Revelation, the fixed Speech of God as revealed in the Arabic language to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an as text is inseparable from its recitation as solo vocal performance. Muslims rarely read the Qur'an without reciting it and the experience of the Divine text is therefore primarily auditory (Nelson 2001: xiv). For non-Arabic speaking Muslims like these Uyghur village women, the experience of the sound of the recited Qur'an takes even greater precedence over the lexical meanings. In my lessons with a village *büwi* the lexical meanings of the prayers and sections of the Qur'an were entirely absent from what she taught me, and when I

specifically asked her and other *būwi* about the meanings of what they recited, their answers focused instead on the uses and efficacy of these phrases.

Recitation of the Qur'an is governed by a set of rules called *tajwid*. As Kristina Nelson describes, *tajwid* preserves the nature of the revelation and guards it from distortion by a comprehensive set of regulations which govern many of the parameters of the sound production, such as duration of syllable, vocal timbre and pronunciation. The science of *tajwid* is itself primarily transmitted orally, though supplemented by teaching texts, the student imitating and practising the sounds produced by the teacher (Nelson 2001: 14).

Many other aspects of Qur'anic recitation are not fixed by *tajwid* and may vary from place to place, among different reciters, or according to context. Variables include pitch, pace (although relative durations are prescribed), dynamics, melisma, mode, choice of passage, inclusion of *du'a* prayers, context and audience responses. The significance of these variables—many of which may be described as musical—is primarily expressive and affective; they emphasise and colour but never change the cognitive meaning of the text. The way that they provide spontaneous, situational expressivity enables the affective power of Qur'anic recitation.

### *Mode*

Nelson places special emphasis on the links between mode and emotion in Qur'anic recitation. She argues that the ability to correlate the *maqām* of Arabic classical music to textual meaning is an essential element of the ideal recitation, citing a remarkable appreciation of the recitation of the renowned *qari* Shaykh Rif'at:

I heard him once evoking *huzn* [sorrow and awe] in his reciting, and I heard the *nagamat saba* [which is famous among the Arabic modes for *huzn*] coming out of his throat as if it were drowned in tears. Then he came to verses which required zeal and enthusiasm in their execution, and suddenly *nagamat rast* burst out like the beating of drums. (al-Najmi, cited in Nelson 2001: 63)

This Egyptian connoisseur's appreciation of an outstanding performer emphasises that—in this particular context—Qur'anic recitation is act of modal improvisation. In this, religious meanings and aesthetic norms coincide. Nelson argues that according to religious thought the melodies of the Qur'an should not be fixed in order to underline the primacy of the text (2001: 110).

The aesthetics of improvised performance and emotion are explored by Ali Jihad Racy in his study of *tarab* (ecstasy) in classical Arabic ensemble performances in twentieth-century Egypt. Racy describes how the feeling of a 'true *sama'* event (note the borrowing of Sufi vocabulary) rises and descends in an arc. The singer (*mutrib*) is a psychologist who gauges and plays with the mood of the audience. Light 'signal' pieces or 'musical aphrodisiacs,' throw the audience into an instant 'participatory frenzy'; repeated phrases with variations are especially likely to lead to *tarab*. But above all, Racy places the musical evocation of emotion in the sphere of the deployment of mode. Cadences are very important, he says, a test of skill; they may be calm or burning, provide closure or uncertainty. Modal improvisation is 'the most ecstatic' for the performer who manipulates familiar material or modulates in artful or surprising ways (Racy 2003: 54–104).

Here, then, we find elements of a culture of musical performance and emotion which spans Arabic classical music and Qur'anic recitation in twentieth-century Egypt. But to what extent is this culture shared in other parts of the Muslim world? In sound worlds where the Arab *maqām* system

is unfamiliar, how can listeners respond emotionally to the subtle manipulation of *maqām*? In Anne Rasmussen’s study of Qur’anic recitation in Indonesia, again the emphasis is strongly on the ability of top Indonesian reciters to artfully manipulate the Arabic modes. She describes how her own recitation teacher would urge his students to listen to the ‘great singers from the Arab world: Umm Kulthum, Fayruz, Warda’, describing their songs as ‘the music of the Qur’an’ (Rasmussen 2001: 35). The focus on the artistry of top reciters is high on the agendas of both Nelson and Rasmussen, but it may be less relevant in other, less elite contexts. In contrast, another study of Qur’anic recitation in Indonesia by the scholar of religion Anna Gade questions the usefulness of Racy’s ecstatic model in the Indonesian contexts in which she worked (2004: 165). Gade, working several years earlier than Rasmussen and less focused on elite reciters, found the Indonesian habitus of recitation in transition. In the 1990s, the ‘classical’ twentieth-century Egyptian style of recitation—that studied by Kristina Nelson—was just beginning to achieve dominance in Indonesia, supplanting the local style. As the new sounds were becoming widespread, new ways of listening to the Qur’an were also being introduced. Gade suggests that the older local style was at that time more strongly linked to emotional responses.

In this rural Uyghur context, we find a situation where multiple styles of recitation currently compete, and where different contexts of recitation demand specific habitus of listening. Let us take a closer look at the context of the Uyghur *khātmā* through a short section of solo recitation by Bu Sarem near the beginning of the ritual:

ra ba na (i)srif an na aa tha ba ja han na ma in na a tha ha ba ha ka na gha ra man in na ha sa  
 at must a qar an wa mu qa man ra ba na igh pir lee wa li wa li day ya wa li mu min ee na  
 yaw mu ya qoo mu al his ab(u) ra ba na igh pir lee wa li wa li day ya wa  
 li mu min ee na yaw ma ya qoo mual his ab(u) ra ba na igh pir lee wa li wa li day ya  
 wa li mu min ee na yaw ma ya qoo mu al his ab(u) ra ba na tha lam na an a pu sa na wa in lam ta ghu pir la na  
 wa ta ru ham na la na koon an na min al kha si reen  
 ra ba na pu ri ghu a lay ya na sa ba ran wa ta wap pa na mus li meen

<Musical example 1>

Solo recitation by Bu Sarem [8’31-9’56, video recording, August 2009] Where Bu Sarem begins in the middle of a line, the missing words are given in brackets. The lyrics under the transcription are roughly rendered as she pronounces them; the correct Arabic transliteration of the Qur’anic text is given below with the translation.

Q25: 65–6 [*Wa al-ladhīna yaqūlūna*] *rabbānā aṣṛif `annā `adhāba jahannama. 'Inna `adhābahā kāna gharāmāan. 'Innahā sā'at mustaqarrāan wa muqāmāan*  
[Those who say] 'Our Lord! Avert from us the Wrath of Hell, for its Wrath is indeed an affliction grievous. Evil indeed is it as an abode, and as a place to rest in.'

Q14: 41 *Rabbānā aghfir lī wa liwālidayya wa lilmu'uminīna yawma yaqūmu al-ḥisābu* (x3)  
O our Lord! Cover (us) with thy forgiveness—me, my parents, and (all) believers, on the day that the reckoning will be established.

Q7: 23 [*Qālā*] *Rabbānā ḡalamnā 'anfusanā wa 'in lam taghfir lanā wa tarḥamnā lanakūnanna mina al-khāsirīna*

[They said]: 'Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: if thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us thy Mercy we shall certainly be lost.'

Q7: 126 [*Wa mā tanqimu minnā 'illā 'an 'āmannā bi'āyāti rabbīnā lammā jā'atnā*] *Rabbānā 'afrigh `alaynā ṡabrāan wa tawaffanā muslimīna*

[But thou dost wreak thy vengeance on us simply because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they reached us!] Our Lord! Pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto thee as Muslims.'

Bu Sarem recites in a distinctively local style. Her pronunciation of the Qur'anic Arabic is localised, she replaces 'f' with 'p' as is common in loan words from the Arabic into Uyghur; she does not distinguish between 'dh' and 'z', and does not consistently follow the rules of *tajwid*, not distinguishing, for example, between 'open mouth' and 'closed mouth' letters. Structurally this section is highly idiosyncratic: this is not a recitation of a full *surah*, or section of a *surah*, but a series of supplications (*du'a*) drawn from several parts of the Qur'an. Often—to the consternation of my research assistant Huriyet—she begins in the middle of a line, with '*Rabbana*' (Oh lord!). However, in terms of the *khātmā* there is a clear logic to this choice of words: the repeated, insistent '*Rabbana*' is an appeal to God, and the emerging themes of sin and repentance prefigure the core meaning of the ritual. This is the point at which the women's emotional responses begin to build, even before they enter the *dhikr* stage.

Bu Sarem's melodic line is unmetered but it has a strong pulse. Her delivery is mainly syllabic and fairly brisk. She includes three longer sections of melisma in the middle of phrases; these correspond to the indications of *tajwid* in the text which prescribe emphasis at these points through the use of *shadd* (discussed in more detail below) on the syllables '*inna*', '*qarrāan*' and '*dayya*'. The core pitches here are A<sup>b</sup>, C, D<sup>b</sup>, E<sup>b</sup>, and she traces a distinctive melodic arc, beginning each time on C and ending on a sustained A<sup>b</sup>, with each successive phrase reaching a semitone higher. This type of melodic arc and gradual movement towards a climax (*awaj*) in pitch and intensity is familiar in Uyghur classical music, notably in the Uyghur Twelve Muqam repertoire, where it is a device for heightening emotion. As yet I have limited evidence to argue for a direct relationship between the local style of Uyghur recitation and the Twelve Muqam repertoire, but clearly we are in a Central Asian sound world here, not in the realm of Arab *maqām*.<sup>18</sup> In this tradition, we do not find the emphasis on improvisation which is so central to Arab classical music. However this sound world is not exclusive or fixed. Towards the end of the ritual, the younger *būwi* Turaysem recites a passage of the Qur'an (Surah al Rahman) in a rather different style.

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<sup>18</sup> See Harris (2008: chapter 4) for discussion of melody and mode in the Uyghur Twelve Muqam.

bis. mill ah e rah man e ra him e rah man all am a al qur an khal a qa-al in san  
 al a ma hu al ba yan al sham su qa ma ru bi hu du ban waal na ja mwaal sha ja ru yas ju dan  
 waal ssa ma ra fa aa a ha wa da aa a al mee zan a a ta ti ghaw fee al mee zan  
 wa qe moo al wa zu na bil qi si tuy wa al la tukh si roo al mee zan waal ar da wa da a ba a ha  
 lil a ha nam fee ha fa ki ha tun wah na khu lu tha tu al a ki mam  
 wa al hab bu thool aa as fi waal ray han fa bi ay i a la i ra bbi ku ma tu ka thi ban

<Musical example 2>

*Bismi al-lahi ar-rahmāni ar-rahīmi / `Allama al-qur`āna / Khalaqa al-`insāna /  
 `Allamahu al-bayāna / Ash-ahamsu wa al-qamaru biḥusbānin /  
 Wa an-najmu wa ash-shajaru yasjudāni /  
 Wa as-samā`a rafa`ahā wa waḍa`a al-mizāna /  
 `Allā taṭghaw fī al-mizāni / Wa `aqīmū al-wazna bil-qisṭi wa lā tukhsirū al-mizāna /  
 Wa al-`arḍa waḍa`ahā lil`anāmi / Fīhā fākihātun wa an-nakhlu dhātu al-`akmāmi /  
 Wa al-ḥabbu dhū al-`aṣfi wa ar-rayḥānu / Fabi`ayyi `ālā`i rabbikumā tukadhhibāni*

(Allah) Most Gracious / It is He Who taught the Qur'an / He has created man /  
 He has taught him speech / The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed /  
 And the herbs and the trees both (alike) prostrate in adoration /  
 And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice) /  
 In order that you may not transgress (due) balance /  
 So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance /  
 It is He Who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures /  
 Therein are fruit and date-palms, producing spathes /  
 Also corn, with leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants /  
 Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?<sup>19</sup>

This recognisably follows the 'classical' twentieth-century Egyptian style. Huriyet is impressed by Turaysem's grasp of *tajwid*, especially her pronunciation of the Qur'anic Arabic. In terms of melody, here again the delivery is primarily syllabic, with a few sections of melisma, notably a descending pattern on the final note of a phrase in contrast with the simple sustained phrase endings used by Bu Sarem. What is noticeably different musically is her use of mode, which is reminiscent of the Arab

<sup>19</sup> Translation by Yusuf Ali (1938) *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf. Accessed through [http://quranexplorer.com/index/Sura\\_055\\_Ar\\_Rahman\\_THE\\_BENEFICENT\\_THE\\_MERCY\\_GIVING.aspx](http://quranexplorer.com/index/Sura_055_Ar_Rahman_THE_BENEFICENT_THE_MERCY_GIVING.aspx) (28/07/2014)

mode *bayati* with its distinctive half flat on E.<sup>20</sup> Her use of melodic contour also contrasts with Bu Sarem. The opening three phrases are based on a higher trichord, rising from F or G to B $\flat$  or C and descending, but in the later phrases on the pitches D, E $\sharp$ , F, G the melodic arcs are inverted: phrases descend from F to C or B $\flat$  and rise to D. Turaysem emphasised the importance of *tajwid* in interview:

I learned *tajwid* from a *damolla* (religious cleric), a young guy, in Kashgar. If you don't pronounce the words properly the meaning is lost ... I learned the melody (*ahang*) from recordings (*dai*; from the Chinese). I bought them from the bazaar in Urumchi. I just listened to them a couple of times. I like imitating people, so I picked it up easily. I am illiterate and I never went to school, but I studied the Qur'an for twelve years so I can copy a voice when I hear it ... I learned this one from a recording of Sadiq Ali [a prominent, Egyptian-trained, Pakistani reciter]. He's a top student of Abdul Basit. (interview, August 2012)

Qari Abdul Basit 'Abd us-Samad (1927–1988) is one of the best known mid-twentieth century Egyptian reciters whose recordings were strongly promoted under the Nasr regime via state media,<sup>21</sup> and are still extremely popular on YouTube.<sup>22</sup> His style is still today being eagerly imitated by younger Uyghur reciters who find that it is 'powerful' and brings them respect from listeners. In this remote Uyghur village, as Gade found in Indonesia some years earlier, we find a situation in which new styles of recitation, digitally transmitted from the Middle East, are entering local practice. Turaysem is faithfully reproducing the melody of a recording rather than improvising within a known modal framework, and yet her mimetic performance of the Egyptian style seems to fit comfortably into the ritual and produces a strong emotional response from the gathered women.

### *Rhythm*

It seems, then, that outside the Egyptian context we should leave aside the focus on mode and modal improvisation as a key locus of emotional content. It may be more fruitful to focus on the textual structure of the Qur'an as the basis for the rhythms of its recitation. This aspect should be fixed by the rules of *tajwid* and consistent wherever the Qur'an is recited, or at least where it is recited correctly. Anna Gade argues that the stylistic and rhetorical features of the recited Qur'an, what she calls the 'internal music of the Qur'an', create affective states of unanticipated tension (2004: 88–90). As Kristina Nelson notes, Qur'anic textual style is characterised by 'abrupt and progressive shifts in rhythmic patterns and length of line... [and] shifts between regular and irregular patterns' (2001: 10). Gade suggests that these:

... moments of syntactic rupture, when the Qur'an's poetical and expressive patterns are shattered and can no longer be anticipated, may be a constructive aspect of the emotive power and experience of its recitation' (2004: 91).

These theories provide an interesting echo of the literature on (Western classical) music and emotion, notably Meyer's theory that 'emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited' (1956: 14). It is also interesting to note how in Qur'an scholarship, just as in the field of Western art music, the focus is on 'the work'.

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<sup>20</sup> Although normally one would expect an A natural in *bayati*, rather than the flattened A that Turaysem uses.

<sup>21</sup> See Michael Frishkopf's (2009) excellent study of style and ideology in Egyptian recitation for further details.

<sup>22</sup> See Charles Hirschkind's (2012) discussion of appreciation of Qur'anic recitation on YouTube.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يُشْكِرْ لَآرَائِبَ فِيهِ

'Al if – lām mīm, dhāli ka al-ki tā bu lā rayba fihi

<Musical example 3> Opening phrase of Surah Baqqara: Arabic text with *tajwid* markings, transcription, transliteration.

A simple example (musical example 3) may serve to illustrate this notion of arrested response. In this popular opening section of the second *surah* (the transcription is of a group recitation near the beginning of the *khātmā*) the first words are simply the vocalisation of letters of the Arabic alphabet: *alif*, *lam*, and *mim*. Their inclusion is interpreted as one of the miracles of the Qur'an, as their meaning is unknown to any except Allah. Sonically underlining this sense of mystery, the syllables *lam* and *mim* are recited with *madd* (indicated by the symbol ~ ' placed over the syllables) meaning that they are lengthened to four syllable durations. The following phrase is suddenly contrastive and fast, stimulating what Sloboda and Juslin might term a 'vitality affect' (2001: 79). We may speculate that this rhythmic structure is intended to underline the textual message which contrasts the mystery of the letters with the sure guidance provided by the Qur'an.

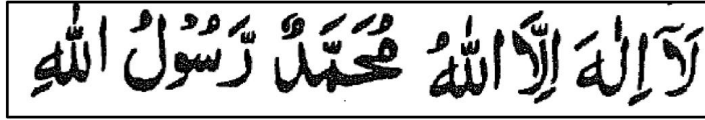
This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah  
*Dhālika al-kitābu lā rayba fihi hudāan lilmuttaqīna*

But, if we continue the music psychologists' analysis, then the next step in terms of processing affect and transforming it into recognisable emotion is, for these non-Arabic speakers, unlikely to be influenced by the lexical meaning of the text. Again, we must fall back on a broader sense of the local habitus of listening.

#### *Timbre*

Another important aspect of the links between Qur'anic recitation and emotion is its vocal quality, the grain of the voice, in particular the use of nasality. In the recitation of the Qur'an, the use of nasality (*gunnah*) is prescribed by the rules of *tajwid* (Nelson 2001: 21–2). The diacritic *shadd* (ّ) over a letter prescribes a doubling of the consonant. It indicates stress and a nasalised delivery which has affective force. I have already noted above the correspondence between Bu Sarem's use of melisma and the use of *shadd* in the Arabic text. Consider the thick deployment of *shadd* in the declaration of faith (see figure 3), which is often described as the most 'powerful' phrase in Islam:





<Figure 3> The Shahadah, Arabic text with tajwid markings.

*lā ilāha illa'llāh, muhammadun rasūlu'llāh*

There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.

To my ears, the aspect of vocal quality has the greatest explanatory force in the communication of emotion in these longer solo sections of recitation. Turaysem's recitation of Al Rahman is notable for the nasal timbre which she uses throughout, most forcefully in the higher pitched opening four phrases, which produce a spine-tingling response in me every time I play back the recording. This nasal quality, combined with melismatic motifs, is also deployed at the end of each musical phrase and is answered by the assembled women with heightened sobs and gasps.

Discussion of vocal timbre—surely a crucial aspect of the communication of emotion—is remarkably sparse in the literature on music and emotion, and likely related to the paucity of vocabulary relating to sound quality in the Western classical music tradition. However there are examples of links between timbre and emotion to be found in musical ethnographies of other cultures. Heather Willoughby's study of Korean *p'ansori*, for example, argues that in this tradition emotional catharsis is intensified by harsh vocalisations (2000: 20).

Where the text expresses a particularly painful experience, the dramatic vocal qualities intensify and the normally harsh timbre becomes even more accentuated. This is particularly true at the ends of phrases that culminate with relatively high pitches. It is in these moments that the performer's voice often 'breaks' - resembling crying - with increased use of vibrato, as if a type of ritualized lamentation is taking place. (2000: 24)

In Uyghur music, the most highly prized vocal quality is '*mung*' (melancholy), a type of emotional expressiveness which involves the same thrilling, nasal quality I hear in Turaysem's performance, although I have never heard this term used with reference to Qur'anic recitation. More directly linked to Qur'anic recitation is the sphere of Arab classical song, where the use of nasality is clearly important in communicating emotion. Virginia Danielson describes the use of vocal colour by the great twentieth century Arab singer, Um Kulthum, whose repertoire of vocal qualities included *bahha* hoarseness and *ghunna* [*gunnah*] nasality drawn from Qur'anic recitation and religious songs. These qualities were deployed by Um Kulthum in secular songs to heighten emotion, and convey, for example, the feelings of an abandoned lover (Danielson 1997: 148).

### **Dhikr and musical entrainment**

The aspects of recitation style considered above are useful in linking musical aspects of the longer solo sections of recitation to emotional response but it is obvious that the most significant aspect of musical style in the production of emotion in this ritual is the repetition of the chanted *dhikr*. In her insightful study of time in Sufi *sama* rituals in Pakistan, Regula Burckhardt Qureshi suggests that in Sufi traditions of Islam:

(A)ny portion or facet of the text message [of the Qur'an] can become the focus of intense mystical engagement, to the point of ecstatic arousal. For such engagement to actually take place requires dwelling on the particular text unit so that the full impact of its meaning can be allowed to unfold. This is achieved through repetition, so that the 'audible' present is filled with the single meaning of its message as in *zikr*. (Qureshi 1994: 507)

Like many of the critics of theories of music and emotion in Western classical music, Qureshi emphasises the meaningfulness of repetition, but she follows Sufi doctrine in emphasising the lexical meanings of the text and interpreting musical sound as secondary to text.<sup>23</sup> This focus is perhaps overly cerebral; it may be problematic in contexts where the texts are not well understood and it misses out the crucial dimension of the links between musical sound and the human body. The literature on musical entrainment, with its focus on the embodied experience of musical sound, provides useful insights.

In this approach, the human body—its limits, processes, capacities, and thresholds—is reconceived as an emergent and flexible entity, as reflexively linked to the material-cultural environment and what that environment may afford (De Nora 2000: 87). In a recent survey of the literature, Martin Clayton, Rebecca Sager and Udo Will summarise the approach of the early British ethnomusicologist John Blacking, teasing out the beginnings of a theory of musical entrainment in Blacking's writings:

According to Blacking, 'bodily resonance' (which he also referred to as 'bodily empathy') is the sensation or awareness of synchronising with the physical movements of others in a musical situation. Blacking described this as 'the experience of 'falling into phase' that players shared' (1983:57). Bodily resonance is felt by the body both as an emotional connection and the physical sensation of co-ordinated motion. 'Thus,' Blacking concludes, 'sensuous, bodily experience was a consequence of correct musical performance... and a correct musical performance was a way of feeling' (1983:57, cited in Clayton et al. 2005)

Judith Becker has also laid emphasis on rhythmic entrainment, which for her encompasses 'processes through which bodies and brains synchronize gestures, muscle actions, breathing and brain waves when enveloped in musicking'. For Becker, 'a musical event is not just in the minds of the participants, it is in their bodies', and this bodily practice lies at the heart of habitus. Embodied knowledge, often tacit and unconscious, may be transmitted across generations and forms the basis of culture (2001: 153). Tia DeNora has investigated specific examples of body-music interactions (including the use of recorded music in aerobics classes), observing bodies as they latch on to and become entrained by musical devices. In her approach, the bodily movements that music profiles may lead actors to identify, work-up, and modulate emotional and motivational states (2000: 107).

In the *khātmā* such body-music interactions are most evident in the *dhikr* phase when the women begin to sway from side to side, latching onto the rhythms of the chant. Here the strict rules of *tajwid* are far less significant, subsumed by the need for rhythmic, sounded togetherness. These recited *dhikr* blur the strict boundaries between Qur'anic recitation and other forms of sounded religious practice. All these *dhikr* are in Qur'anic Arabic, but some of them are phrases or short whole *surah* from the Qur'an while others are well known *du'a* supplications. All of them conform to

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<sup>23</sup> See Richard Middleton (1983) on the pleasures of repetition in popular music.

the same musical style, with a rhythmic falling phrase within the range of a third or a fourth, although the rhythms may not be regular. Take, for example, this chant performed towards the end of the *khätmä* (see musical example 4):<sup>24</sup>



**Ya rabi ell** u - ti     **ha** drikni **benutbi kel** rabi ye

(each syllable in bold indicates a movement)

<Musical example 4> Ya Rabi

As they recite the women sway from side to side or backwards and forwards, some more actively than others, physically locking into the asymmetrical rhythm. It is worth noting that the Uzbek musicologist Alexander Djumaev picks out the ‘limping’ (*aqsaq*) asymmetrical rhythms which are systematised in Central Asian *maqām* traditions as most closely linked to the trance-inducing rhythms of Sufi *dhikr* rituals (2002: 937). Arguably, these asymmetrical rhythms form part of a musical-emotional vocabulary which is particular to this region.<sup>25</sup>

The simple transcription in musical example 4 expresses too little of the experience of this repetitive chant which begins weak and scattered and gradually builds in intensity as the assembled women latch onto the rhythm, together but never in perfect unison, their voices always slightly overlapping, slightly out of sync, until the sound palpably reverberates within the listeners, drawing them along. Deborah Kapchan—herself a practitioner of *dhikr*—also notes this overlapping quality: ‘I was profoundly aware that the longer we chanted, the more each of us swirled into a unique tempo and tonality that nonetheless manifested an awareness of and response to all the others’ (2009: 19).<sup>26</sup> In the Uyghur *khätmä*, this *dhikr* marks the transition from weeping to, for some women, trancing.

The *dhikr* also serve to collapse the boundaries between reciter (performer) and audience. Here it is evident that all the women are involved in both vocalising and embodying the sounded Qur’anic phrases, but some of the wider literature on Qur’anic recitation alerts us to the fact that even where an apparently passive audience listens to the Qur’an, they are performers in a religious act.

<sup>24</sup> The meaning of this text is still obscure to us. Just a few of the many *dhikr* employed by the Uyghur women in this ritual have escaped us in terms of being a recognisable Arabic phrase: a remarkable degree of consistency given the marginalised position of these women within the wider Islamic world, and the fact that the whole ritual is transmitted orally.

<sup>25</sup> See During (1998) for further discussion of asymmetric rhythms in Central Asian music.

<sup>26</sup> Compare this with Charles Keil’s well-known theory of ‘participatory discrepancies’ (1987) argues that the ‘best music’—that which has the greatest affective power—must be full of discrepancies: out of tune and out of time. In the formulation of this theory, Keil set out to overturn Meyer’s theory of meaning, emotion and syntax, arguing that music is about process not product.

### Interpreting ritual practice, emotion and meaning

In his study of the Islamic soundscape in Cairo, Charles Hirschkind is alert to the relevance of the body in Islamic practice. He describes a 'moral physiology': the 'affective-kinesthetic experience of a body permeated by faith (*iman*)'. To listen properly is to engage in a performance, the articulated gestures of a dance (2006: 75). Hirschkind helpfully collapses the divide between active performer and passive listener, an opposition which is so entrenched in the models derived from the Western classical sphere, as well as in studies of star Qur'anic reciters. The focus in terms of religious meaning is firmly on the listener, who is an active participant in the proceedings:

The word of God demands a range of ethical performances from the reciter/listener. She must not only seek to understand God's message, she must also make herself into an adequate 'host' for the presence of divine words, by bodying forth the attitudes and expressions corresponding to the verses heard or recited. Through practice, she must make her body and heart into an instrument capable of resonating (re-sounding) the words she submits to. (Hirschkind 2006: 81)

As Graham and Kermani (2006) argue in their overview of Qur'anic recitation, the sense of the holiness and the blessings (*baraka*) imparted by the sounded Qur'an—as the word of God—penetrates every corner of the Muslim world. Its power and spiritual function are quite apart from the understanding of every word of the Arabic text. Listening to the Qur'an is an aesthetic experience, a flesh-tingling auditory experience, and cathartic process that prepares one for remembering God. The primacy of the Qur'an as sound, and its affective power, are referenced within the text itself:

... And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth. (Surah 5: 83)<sup>27</sup>

In our conversations about their ritual practice, the Uyghur *büwi* expressed this same sense of emotional engagement with their faith. The act of weeping, and the emotional state which their tears express were consistently explained through the term '*ishq*' (passion or ecstasy), a trope which is also commonly found in Uyghur popular love song lyrics. They also drew on metaphors relating to cooking to convey the experience and the meaning of the ritual. On viewing the climax of a video recording of the ritual analysed above, Turaysem commented:

The oil is sizzling in the pot [*qazan kizip ketti*]. Their love for Allah is so strong, they can't stop themselves crying, just like the pot on the stove. When the oil is hot you must throw in the meat otherwise the oil will catch fire. It's just like that. Then you must put in the vegetables otherwise the meat will burn. So just like that the women cry a lot. ... Allah's passion (*ishqi*) is like the hot oil in the pot, their passion for Allah is so strong. (Turaysem, interview, August 2012)

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<sup>27</sup> Translation by Yusuf Ali, [http://quranexplorer.com/index/Sura\\_005\\_Al\\_Maeda\\_THE\\_TABLE\\_THE\\_TABLE\\_SPREAD.aspx](http://quranexplorer.com/index/Sura_005_Al_Maeda_THE_TABLE_THE_TABLE_SPREAD.aspx) (accessed 28 July 2014)

We know from other studies about the significance of cooking, and especially frying in oil, in Uyghur women's ritual practices. In Uyghur belief, the spirits of the dead are thought to be nourished by the smell of hot oil (Bellér-Hann 2001: 19). These explanations point to a highly localised and gendered interpretation of emotion and religious faith.

Another layer to the women's explanations provides a sense of the instrumentality of this emotional state. Their trancing and their tears perform an active function within their conceptions of religious faith, a form of weeping sometimes termed 'performative tears': those shed in rituals proper or ritualised social situations that perform cultural work (Ebersole 2000: 187). Bu Sarem explains:

When we recite, our ecstasy comes to the boil [*ishqi qaynap*]. Because in our lives in this world we can't always stick to doing good deeds [*sawab ish bilen otelmeymiz*]. We live, and we don't know if we are doing good. We fear Allah. Allah created us, and when we die we go to him, so we ask for mercy. We are sinful beings, so we cry to ask [forgiveness] for our sins. (Bu Sarem, interview, August 2009)

The instrumentality of their emotional expression is closely linked to Uyghur beliefs and ritual practices relating to the night of Barat. This falls on the fourteenth night of the Islamic month of Shabaan, the night when the contemporary *büwi* perform their largest and most significant rituals. According to Bellér-Hann's investigation of popular beliefs amongst the Uyghurs, the night of the fourteenth of the month was when the tree of life was shaken. Each person has their name written on a leaf of this tree and the leaves of those who were going to die in the coming year would fall to the ground. The fourteenth was also termed the Night of Forgiveness. This reflected the belief that for every person an angel sits on each shoulder, the angel on the right recording good deeds and the angel on the left recording sins. On the Night of Forgiveness the angels enter into the individual's book the amount of merit (s)he has accumulated during the year. Bellér-Hann notes that: 'Barat had a very important spiritual dimension rooted in local definitions of the moral person and in notions of sin and punishment, meritorious deed and reward' (2008: 362).

We know that collective weeping in some communities represents collective repentance and an appeal to God for forgiveness.<sup>28</sup> The historian William Christian, writing on public weeping in medieval Spain, argues that, 'Weeping was of vital practical importance to communities, as well as of spiritual importance to individuals. Without it God would not be moved... emotions were serious business' (Christian 2004: 46). The Uyghur *khätmä* is a vehicle not only for attaining individual religious merit but also an act of intercession for the whole community. One woman in the household where we stayed told me: 'They weep for our sins; when we die we don't know if we will go into water or fire.' What distinguishes the practice of these women from the male Sufi groups is that their purpose is not only an individual spiritual exercise: this is also a form of communal 'work'. Weeping, as a manifestation of *ishq* (passion for Allah), is a key part of the efficacy of their rituals, and part of the 'emotional work' that they perform for the village community.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, the (1987) study by Nancy and Richard Tapper of women's *mevlud* rituals (celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet) in 1980s Turkey.

<sup>29</sup> See Arlie Hochschild's theorising of 'emotional work' and gender in her ethnographic work on airline hostesses (2003). Deborah Kapchan also argues that Moroccan women's *dhikr* is a performance of community (2008).

## Conclusion

Although these women's rituals are commonly regarded as peripheral or marginal to Islamic practice and at worst as aberrant, arguably they are the mainstream: these groups are the most widespread form of Islamic practice in the Uyghur region and they can be linked to equivalent localised forms of religious practice across the Islamic world. The notion of a habitus of listening is crucial to understanding how they work. The women participating in this ritual give voice to the Qur'an and experience its affective power in ways which link them the wider culture of Islam but which are also in many ways specific to their particular time and place. Equally, the boundaries between the local and global are blurred and overlapping, as we see in a situation where local and imported recitation styles may both be deployed in the course of one ritual.

Emotional expression and emotional responses are key aspects of the performance and reception of the Qur'an across the globe and yet the way that it is sounded, experienced and understood varies from place to place. Even in the course of a single ritual performance I have been able to highlight several different ways in which the sounded affective power of the Qur'an is made manifest, in both structural and performative ways. All of these aspects, the silent listening to solo passages and the active chanting and movements of the *dhikr*, seem to be essential to the structure and cathartic process of the ritual. For many commentators and practitioners, emotion is situated within the text itself but, as I have argued, in many contexts where the Qur'an is recited, listeners and even reciters are not strongly engaging with its lexical meaning. Emotion may also be coded into the rhythms of the sounded text of the Qur'an as fixed and disseminated through the system of *tajwid*. Aspects of vocal quality indicated by *tajwid* may also play an important role. I find the use of mode, emphasised in previous studies, too closely tied to the Egyptian context to be relevant to emotional responses in this part of the Muslim world.

The repetitive chants of *dhikr* present a contrasting type of affective force, involving the body and the group in rhythmic entrainment. Attention to the performance of *dhikr* impels us towards an active view of emotional engagement which places the participants at the heart of the analysis, agents who makes emotion happen by their 'musicking' (Sloboda & Juslin 2001: 454). Shifting the emphasis onto these ritual participants—who are both listeners and performers—helps us to hear how they are actively engaged in a form of physical, emotional and spiritual work, which draws on globalised culture and engages it in very local ways in the service of the village community.

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