

## KHALAJ LITERARY PRODUCTION IN AN ELECTRONIC CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY\*

### Kültürel Süreklilik Bağlamında Elektronik Kültür Ortamında Halaçça Yazınsal Üretim

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#### ABSTRACT

Living largely isolated for centuries in central Iran, the Khalaj Turks have, in the last century, seen great changes in the person-to-nature and person-to-person relations which form the basis of their social order. Because of a deterioration of the social conditions of their villages, and attracted by city life, many Khalaj have left the lands of their ancestors and migrated to the big cities. This has made it difficult for the Khalaj to pass on their cultural traits to new generations, as their culture is largely oral. Negative attitudes towards the Khalaj language and culture have led to changes in Khalaj culture and particularly language. In the face of this, some Khalaj intellectuals have taken action. These people, who have a good knowledge of the language and culture, have created Telegram and Instagram pages sharing items on Khalaj language and culture. On these pages, about-to-be-forgotten traditions, rituals and games are described, and examples of folk literature like lullabies, sayings or poems are shared. Among the most important contributions in terms of digitalized culture are examples of new folk poetry which are appearing on Telegram and Instagram pages. Towards the end of the 20th century, the Khalaj had no literary texts apart from a few poems, but by the efforts of Ali Asghar Jamrasi and Abdullah Vasheqani in particular, they got to know folk poetry. Especially group admins such as Amir Mohammadbaygi, Hasan Talkhabi and Mahdi Hadigol, who have made good use of the new features provided by social networks such as Telegram and Instagram, have written poems in the Khalaj language which include many elements of Khalaj folk culture. As well as reflecting the internal world of an individual, the aim of the new poetry of Hadigol and Hossein Talkhabi is to present the Khalaj identity and to introduce Khalaj culture to new generations. For this, topics such as language, identity, traditions and patriotism are often dealt with in the poems. This study is concerned with the positive effects of digitalization in introducing Khalaj folk culture and traditions and transmitting them to new generations and different areas, and focuses on Khalaj folk poetry in the context of the sustainability of identity, cultural memory and cultural items. The Khalaj language is on the UNESCO list of endangered languages and is of great importance for Altaistic studies. This study contains examples of poetry written in the Khalaj language and mostly previously unpublished, and provides data to different areas such as literature, folklore and linguistics. It is supported with observations and interviews.

#### Keywords

Turks in Iran, Khalaj, folk poetry, cultural memory, electronic culture environment.

#### ÖZ

Orta İran'da yüzyıllar boyunca büyük ölçüde izole bir şekilde varlığını sürdüren Halaç Türklerinde toplumsal düzenin temel bileşenleri olan insan-doğa ve insan-insan ilişkisi son yüzyılda büyük ölçüde değişime uğramıştır. Köylerdeki sosyoekonomik koşulların kötüleşmesi ve kent yaşamının çekiciliği nedeniyle birçok Halaç, atalarının yüzyıllar boyunca yaşadıkları toprakları bırakıp büyük kentlere göç etmiştir. Bu durum, sözlü kültürün hâkim olduğu Halaç toplumunda kültürel özelliklerin yeni nesillere aktarılmasını zorlaştırmıştır. Halaç dili ve kültürüne yönelik negatif tutumlar, dil başta olmak üzere Halaç kültürünün değişimine yol açmıştır. Bunun üzerine bazı Halaç aydınları harekete geçmiştir. Dil ve kültür bilinci yüksek bu kişiler internet ortamında Halaç diline ve kültürüne ait öğelerin paylaşıldığı telegram ve instagram sayfaları oluşturmuşlardır. Bu sayfalarda, unutulmaya yüz tutmuş gelenekler, ritüeller, oyunlar tanıtılmakta, ninni, atasözü, mâni türünde halk edebiyatı örnekleri paylaşılmaktadır. Dijitalleşmenin kültürel boyuttaki en önemli katkılarından biri de telegram ve instagram sayfalarında yeni halk şiiri örneklerinin ortaya çıkmasıdır. 20. yüzyılın sonlarına kadar birkaç şiir dışında herhangi bir edebi metne sahip olmayan Halaçlar, özellikle Ali Asger Cemrasi ve Abdullah Vaşqani'nin çabaları ile halk şiiri ile tanışmışlardır. Özellikle telegram ve instagramın sağladığı yeni özellikleri iyi bir şekilde kullanan Emir Muhammedbeygi, Hasan Telhabi ve Mehdi Hadigol gibi grup adminleri Halaç halk kültürünün birçok unsurunu içeren Halaçça şiirler yazmışlardır. Hadigol ve Hossein Telhabi'nin bireyin iç dünyasını

\* Geliş tarihi: 19 Aralık 2021 - Kabul tarihi: 9 Mart 2022  
Güzel, Hasan. "Khalaj Literary Production in an Electronic Cultural Environment and Cultural Sustainability" *Milli Folklor* 136 (Kış 2022): 94-108

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yansıtan şiirleri olmakla birlikte bu yeni şiirde amaç Halaç kimliğini ön plana çıkarıp Halaç kültürünü yeni nesillere tanıtmaktır. Bunun için şiirlerinde dil, kimlik, gelenekler, yurt sevgisi gibi konular sıklıkla ele alınır. Bu çalışmada dijitalleşmenin Halaç halk kültürünün ve geleneklerinin tanıtılması, yeni kuşaklara ve farklı coğrafyalara aktarılması noktasındaki olumlu etkisine değinilmiş ve Halaç halk şiirine kimlik, kültürel bellek ve kültürel öğelerin sürekliliği çerçevesinde odaklanılmıştır. UNESCO tarafından tehlikedeki diller arasında yer alan ve Altayistik çalışmaları için büyük öneme sahip Halaç dilinde yazılan ve çoğunlukla daha önce herhangi bir yerde yayımlanmamış şiir örneklerinin yer aldığı bu çalışma edebiyat, folklor ve dilbilim gibi farklı alanlara veri sağlamaktadır. Çalışma alandan gözlemler ve mülakatlar ile desteklenmiştir.

#### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

İran'daki Türkler, Halaçlar, Halk Şiiri, Kültürel Bellek, Elektronik Kültür Ortamı.

### **Introduction**

Human beings are not only biological but also psychological and sociological entities. Despite a lack of agreement on the definition of the cultural element which this multifaceted being has constructed, the inclusive descriptions of some researchers have seen acceptance. According to Malinowski, culture, which is a holistic statement of humankind's successes, forms an artificial entity in addition to nature. Different functional elements such as interrelated ideas, habits, beliefs, traditions, social organisation, technical advances and values form this artificial entity, and within themselves form a well-balanced system (Malinowski 1960: 36). Bauman puts humans into the focal point when making a definition of culture. According to him, talking about culture, which is a field of human action, means talking about human activities and production (Bauman-May 1996: 127-128). Marshall states that culture includes "everything in human society that is transmitted by social, not biological, means" (Marshall 1999: 152).

Humankind is in a permanent state of production. According to Malinowski, individual needs are at the base of this production. He sees culture as a society forming by coming together to meet their basic needs, and satisfying these needs. In order to achieve an aim, people must organise. To Malinowski, permanent organisations form from for basic features of culture (Malinowski 1960: 150-176).

Permanent organisations emphasise the collective aspect of culture. The most important element of this is communication, because like other aspects of society, culture is focused on communication. For this reason, cultural and communication processes are interconnected. Each type of communication opens up a change in human consciousness. When the type of communication which shapes human thought patterns changes, there is also related cultural change. Today, the rapid change in everything in culture is related to the rapid change in means of communication. Cultural change has existed in all societies and all cultural environments, but its speed has been further increased by the addition of the all-embracing internet to media and means of communication such as radio, TV and the telephone. This study will focus on the Khalaj, a Turkic people who live in Iran. In the past century in particular, various factors such as urbanisation and migration have brought about significant changes to Khalaj society. This group, who have no written language, have not produced much written material. However, with the coming of the internet, a national consciousness has increased, and significant efforts have been made in sharing cultural items and new production. Facebook, Instagram and Telegram pages have been created, and cultural elements are being presented to new generations.

In this study, an evaluation will be made of the efforts by the Khalaj to maintain cultural elements in an electronic cultural environment. Our focus will be the examples of folk poetry created with the effect of internet pages by the Khalaj, who have no significant tradition of writing or poetry.

### **Methodology and Data**

This research is a qualitative study, and depends principally on analysis of the formation and content of Khalaj folk poetry. It will show how elements in the cultural memory are transmitted, what motifs they represent, and how recollections of them mediate. In that connection, the concepts of cultural memory, nostalgia and cultural change perform the function of a theoretical framework for the study. For this purpose, both descriptive methods and textual thematic analysis are used to explore the concepts specified above.

The Khalaj language, which is on the UNESCO list of endangered languages, and is of great importance in comparative studies of Turkic culture, is not a written language, and as a result, written texts in Khalaj are so few as to be almost non-existent. In this study, texts were used which were found in field studies or on sharing platforms such as Telegram or Instagram, and which were previously unpublished. In selecting the poems, purposive sampling was used. The selection criteria for the poems are mostly based on themes of identity, cultural change, nostalgia and cultural memory.

### **The Khalaj and Cultural Change**

It is known that the Khalajs have lived for centuries isolated in a few dozen villages of various sizes in Iran, between the cities of Qom, Saveh and Hamadan. In censuses in Iran, ethnic origins or characteristics are not recorded, and so there is no official information on the number of ethnic, language or religious groups. Therefore, in order to estimate the Khalaj population, information must be obtained from other sources, interviews and observations. Doerfer, in studies conducted approximately 50 years ago, reported that 20 000 Khalaj lived in 50 villages (1978: 17-33). Ali Asghar Jamrasi, who is himself Khalaj, states that the total Khalaj population is 25 000. Jamrasi depends for this information on observations made during field studies in the region, and it is not a certain figure (Jamrasi 2016: 61).

The Khalaj have described themselves in interviews as a distinct ethnic group bound by a common root, especially of language, traditions, and a different culture. As Khajeh (2013: 34) also states, it is possible to speak of the Khalajs' culture as a mixture of that of the place they migrated to and that of their homeland. It is known that the Khalaj have lived for a long time under the influence of other Turks and particularly Fars people. At the same time, it has been observed that they are aware of different cultural values, and that they want the young generations to be taught these characteristics.

Living for hundreds of years in the geographical area of Iran has directly affected the lives of the Khalaj people. In the efforts at modernisation by the government founded by Reza Shah Pahlavi, the cultural life of the Khalaj, like that of other peoples, was affected. In the cultural and modernisation reforms carried out by the government, some nomadic groups of Khalaj changed to a settled life. In the Khalaj community, families' economic structure changed from a nomadic to a settled type. Along with a settled life, both the economic and cultural lives of the Khalaj changed (Khajeh 2013: 36-37). Fars centred language and culture policies brought about important cultural changes. One of the important results of this in terms of cultural change was making Farsi central with its powerful social function, and not transmitting the Khalaj language from parents to children. The Khalaj language and culture, reduced in social function, was disregarded, and this made intergenerational cultural transmission difficult.

## Preservation of Khalaj Cultural Elements in an Electronic Cultural Environment

The cultural elements of tales, traditions and rituals, which have existed throughout human history in three different settings – oral, written, and now electronic – are now appearing in different forms in different sociocultural contexts. Oral culture, arising as a result of oral communication, takes shape so as to reinforce the experiences of current patterns which are the common property of society, and because there are no written texts, it develops over centuries in the memory of the society, and continues to exist in the consciousness of the people (Ong 1995: 14). Ong describes cultures which do not even know of the existence of the concepts of writing and printing and which communicate only through spoken language, as ‘primary oral cultures’. Today, the advanced technology of telephone, radio, television and other electronic media has entered our lives, and their ‘oral’ qualities form a ‘secondary oral culture’ in which production is in the form of a written text which is later converted to spoken language (Ong 1995: 23-24). Until the invention of writing, accumulated history and experience were committed to memory and passed on through oral sources and channels. In time, as the oral and written media combined and continued, a new medium was added, ‘electronic media’. For thousands of years, people had passed on their knowledge and experiences to coming generations by means of oral tradition, without the benefit of writing. In the modern age, it must be accepted that oral tradition, along with written and electronic cultural media, have evolved into something new. Alongside the negative effects of the digital media, there is also a positive side of it in making culture and tradition known, and making it easier to pass it on to different generations and areas. Özdemir says that effective use is made of the internet in globalisation. This sometimes takes the form of making the local global, and sometimes making the global local. In the digital-electronic medium, especially in the channel known as the social media, long-lived habits change, and a new era opens up in publicity and accessibility (see Özdemir 2006: 23-46).

Although the oral tradition existed before written culture, its function continues today in the modern world. In a digitalised and globalised world, the preservation of the products of traditional or oral culture is an important problem. For this, the most important step taken is the *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. This agreement is of great importance in that it creates international awareness of finding a way for the knowledge and experience passed from generation to generation to come to the present day. This agreement started from the discomfort felt that societies are slowly losing their cultural values from the effects of globalisation and industrialisation and the thought that in this way cultural diversity in the world was being lost. According to Oğuz, the Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation Agreement has been pushed to one side and an attempt has been made to erase its traces for many reasons such as local or oral cultural products which accord great importance to their preservation and transmission to future generations, lack of awareness, inferiority complex, the mutual negative effect of the 19th and 20th century nationalist and classist interpretation of folklore, or the lack of knowledge technologies to re-create national cultures (Oğuz 2009: 60). This agreement is an attempt to resolve these kinds of problem. In line with this effort, it is seen that although many countries are moving forward, with every passing day in different parts of the world elements of traditional culture are succumbing to modern life. The situation of the Khalaj Turks is an example of this. As in other cultures where a traditional lifestyle is influential, tradition, custom, folklore, proverbs, stories and fables among the Khalaj people, especially those living in villages, are extensively used in daily life. In addition, many

ceremonies, rituals and products of oral culture have disappeared in the last century, and they were only discovered in interviews with old people in field studies.

In the past century, the Khalaj have had difficulties in practicing and passing on their traditional culture. Because of a deterioration in rural socioeconomic conditions and the attractions of city life, many Khalaj people have left their land and moved to the big cities. This has prevented the oral culture of Khalaj villages from being passed on to new generations. In addition, negative attitudes to Khalaj language and culture had an effect. However, some Khalaj people who are aware of the power of the internet and social media today have moved into action. These people, who have a good knowledge of language and culture, have created pages relating to Khalaj language and culture on Telegram (*qanal-e qavm khalaj o zaban-e khalaji*) and Instagram (*khalejestan.new, khalaj\_tribe*, etc.) By dint of efforts under the leadership of Ali Asghar Jamrasi, Abdollah Vasheqani, Mahdi Hadigol and Amir Mohammadbeygi, many products of oral culture which were on the verge of being forgotten have been recorded and shared, to be passed on to new generations. On these pages, dances, customs relating to weddings, deaths and *ayud* (religious holidays), lullabies and proverbs are shared and passed on to new generations. For example, in interviews conducted in the village of Talkhab, some young people stated that they had learned Khalaj proverbs which they did not know before from these pages. A 16-year-old participant shared the following proverbs, learned from the Telegram page:

*beride qorqulu, quzu saqlamaz.*

“He who fears wolves doesn’t keep lambs.”

*kelin oyniye bilmezerti, hayırtarı yer eyriri.*

“When the bride can’t dance, they says the floor is sloping.”

In the book by Doerfer and Tezcan, a transcription was made of a song recorded in the village of Mansurabad (see Doerfer-Tezcan 1994: 307). The authors recorded only three verses of the song. The complete recording of this song, which according to native speakers has at least 300-400 years of history, was shared in the Telegram group by the villagers. This text attracted great attention. The full text is as follows:

*matal matal maştı matal  
dukkân-e attar matal  
qend u şeker vara matal  
Keble Sefer halva satar  
bi haz un boça satar  
bi haz un yolca hatar  
bisi kelir barmaq hatar  
ugli kelir bacada vaqar  
qizi kelir qolbada vaqar  
torbasiy deq eşikçe hasar*

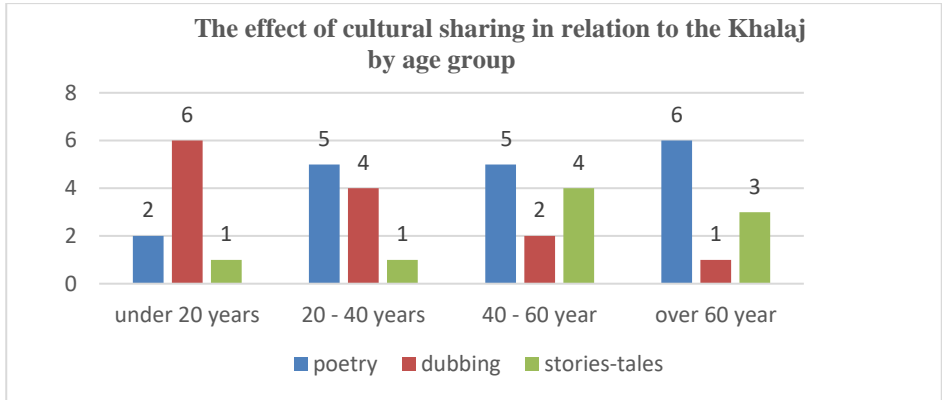
A story, a story, a handful of stories  
A story like a perfume shop  
A story like sugar  
A Kerbela pilgrim selling sweets  
He sells some here  
He throws some on the road  
Someone comes and sticks his finger in  
His son comes and looks from the upper window  
His daughter comes and looks from the water pipe.  
He hangs his bag on the door.

As will be seen from the above examples, changes in type and means of communication have naturally affected processes such as the production, transmission and consumption of elements which bring about culture, and this causes their transformation to another form or their complete loss, according to the changing conditions (Binark 2015: 10). Thus, the electronic cultural medium naturally both uses the possibilities of the oral and written cultural media which appeared earlier, and also develops methods of its own. Social relations, which cannot easily be established in the city, can easily and safely be set up over the internet in a virtual environment, and people can express themselves more freely. As Özdemir says, with the virtual world of the internet, means of culture sharing change, and face to face conversation is replaced with virtual ‘chat rooms’ (2008: 290). With the Khalaj, these virtual environments have provided an opportunity to meet and speak with people in their own language. In this environment, as in the examples given above, elements of traditional culture are frequently shared. Also shared is newly written poetry. With poetry sharing, especially on the Instagram and Telegram pages of Jamrasi and Vasheqani, interest in the Khalaj language has increased, which has led many Khalaj people to write poems in their own language.

### **Khalaj Poetry in an Electronic Cultural Medium**

This language does not have its own alphabet or writing system, and therefore its use and function are very restricted, and the number of people speaking the language is declining day by day (Doerfer 1999: 308, Bosnalı 2010: 68; 2012: 45-67, Gökdağ-Doğan 2016: 185, Ragagnin 2020: 573-575, Rahimi 2020: 138, Güzel 2020: 429-440; 2021 45-51, Akkuş 2021: 73-74). In order that the Khalaj language, which is of great importance to Turcology and Altaistics, should not disappear, some writers have written books in that language. The first products of Khalaj literature are poems written by Mosayeb Arabgol with the encouragement of Semih Tezcan during an exploratory trip of the Gottingen Turcology team to Khalajistan in 1968 (Doerfer 1999: 307). Until the beginning of the 21st century, no more works were written in Khalaj apart from a few poems by Arabgol. Then, with the realisation of the importance of the language by some Khalaj people, works in Khalaj began to appear. The foundations of written Khalaj literature were laid by two researchers, Abdollah Vasheqani from the village of Vasheqan, and Ali Asghar Jamrasi from the village of Talkhab. The most productive representative of written Khalaj literature is Ali Asghar Jamrasi, beginning with his book of poetry *Karşu Balukka Selam*, written in 2006 (see Gökdağ 2012).

The Khalaj share on the internet pages which they have set up particularly to break down the prejudice of young Khalaj people to their language and culture and to instil a liking for Khalaj culture. Undoubtedly, one of the most effective means used on this platform is poetry. As Khalaj people in the city are distanced from their own culture and people in the villages stop speaking the language, this new poetry is full of meaning. Khalaj people were asked in interviews about their feelings on the content shared on the internet pages.



The first condition in protecting a people's language and culture is related to the attitude which they show. People usually have a positive view of sharing related to their language and culture. At the same time, each age group shows interest in different cultural content, as the above table shows. Young people show interest in videos and dubbing, while it was seen that all groups over 20 years of age focused their interest on poetry. Interest in content involving stories and tales increased with age. It is for this reason that the number of Khalaj-language poets, of whom there were only a few in the past twenty years, has recently grown. Malinowski states that culture forms specifically to meet needs, and it is a sociocultural function of that society. He says that culture is formed in a process involving need, function and social reality (1960: 171-174). Poetry, as a product of oral tradition, like other forms of narration, acquires functionality, and can continue its existence as needed.

Above everything else, this poetry, which contributes to the continuation of the national identity of the Khalaj, a people without a written tradition, often deals not only with personal topics but also with nostalgia and cultural change.

### **Identity in Khalaj poetry**

The ability of societies to continue their existence is related to the coming together of various dynamics. Individual or collective identity is an important vehicle for continued existence. One of the most important characteristics of Khalaj poetry is the Khalaj identity of those with a common language and culture. Here, the principal role is played by the *language*. This is because the Khalaj language is distinct from other Turkish or Iranian languages spoken in Iran. This is always emphasised in Khalaj language poetry, which is an indicator of Khalaj identity. The focus of the following four lines by Vasheqani, who writes under the name of Saba, which is frequently shared by users on social media, is consciousness of language and homeland.

*Vaşqan baluqum xeleş teq var tilim  
canumda yiter baluqum o tilim  
til o baluqumu dunyalan teyişmem  
Vaşqan turpaqum o xeleş teq tilim*

Vasheqan my village, Khalaj my language  
Better than my life, my language and village  
I wouldn't change my language and village for the world  
Vasheqan is my land, and Khalaj is my language.

Jamrasi, working to have Khalaj language culture liked and preserved by new generations, often mentions this in his poetry.

*qurbān olum tātluğ helec tiliye,  
tāmarzursam baluquya, éliye,  
kêçe kündüz yalvarom men yéliye,  
tiltaşlarqa mende selām yétgeri,  
ullarda bi mene habar yétgeri.*

I love my sweet Khalaj language  
I miss its village and its land  
Day and night I beg the wind  
To send my greetings to my fellow language speakers  
To bring me news of them.

To Hasan Talkhabi, another young poet with a high level of linguistic knowledge, the most important characteristic of Khalaj identity is the language and the traditions practiced in village life, and he constantly emphasises these in his poems. In the following poem, he both praises the village of Talkhab where he was born, and gives important information on the social linguistics of the place. Talkhabi sees other Turks as of the same race, and says that Turks and Khalaj people can speak each others' languages well.

*Telhabda siz her ne hayıyn tikenmez  
baluqumuz heç vaqt yadumda hinmez  
Turkler oda xeleş tili boşarur  
Xeleşler deq turk tiliçe danışur  
bebanuça bogda noxut hekerler  
bieş qomanla bogdalari biçeller*

However much you say about Talkhab it's not enough  
Our village is never out of my mind  
Turks can speak Khalaj there  
And Khalaj people speak Turkic language  
The farmers plant wheat and chickpeas  
And they cut the wheat with five combine harvesters.

Not all Khalaj people have a strong sense of identity. Therefore, the poets talk about typical elements of Khalaj culture in their poems in order to create a sense of identity. One of the best indicators of cultural memory and ethnic identity is Khalaj festive rituals. The inclusion in poems of the celebration of *çille kini*, *ayud kini*, and *kose gelin* or *kiden* ceremonies foster a feeling of "us". Shared tales and rituals establish a group past at a point of individuality and continuity. This is because there is a close and systematic relation between rituals and social awareness or social identity (Assman 2011: 124). Each ritual is a specific embodiment of an individual and social experience. Each society shapes nature in its own way, subjectifies it, sets rules, and interprets reality in its own way. Old and new societies mark events which are part of the natural flow of life such as birth and death with rituals in a new form, loading them with social and cultural meaning (Kasap 2021: 127). In order to imprint Khalaj ethnic identity on the awareness of the new generations, the contents of these kinds of ceremony are frequently shared on Telegram pages. At the same time, these kinds of ceremony are frequently mentioned by Khalaj poets to create concepts of identity and membership. In the following poem entitled *Shab-e Yalda*, Mohammadbeygi describes the ceremonies of *Shab-e Yalda*, celebrated on the longest night of the year. This special night is celebrated all over Iran, and is celebrated in Khalaj villages with rituals. The long winter is coming, food is set out with new hopes, and time is spent with the old people. The move from the old to the new happens on this night. In describing the longest night of the year, the poet reminds his readers of other



rituals. *Köse Gelin* is one of these. *Köse gelin/geldi* is celebrated every year on the 40th day of winter in Khalaj Turk villages.

*çaqor yaz vardi o keldi hirin qiş  
kiçeler uzandı kinler kirilmiş  
yekeldi qiş o qar yurdi bizim dam  
çaqor yaz keçti o oldi çelo şam  
uzanlıq kiçeler munda bere yoq  
kinler uzanor o yir kiyin yeyyor toq  
ayud şamu ki ta yiz kin kalmuş  
qırq vardi kose zengulasi çalmuş  
qiş oldi o bulutlar qari saldi  
yovan yaktin hotuniy kursi altı  
hotuniy yakiy o heviniy histi  
mecmuan aritiy o koyi kürsi isti  
çayı an ta demleyi o hevi sipiri  
hadaqin gussalar istiçe çipiri  
kineler kuzesi ki taş vurdun  
bidikler ki bu yovan o baş vurdun.*

Yellow summer has gone and white winter has arrived  
The nights have grown long and the days short  
Winter has come and snow has settled on our roof  
Autumn has gone and Yalda Night has come  
Now the long nights will shorten  
Days are lengthening and the world is happy with the sunlight  
A hundred days are left to the (Nowruz) festival night  
The fortieth day, the bell of köse gelin is rung  
Winter has come and the clouds are raining snow  
Go and light the fire under the korsi  
Light a fire and heat your house  
Clean the meal tray and set it on the korsi  
Sweep the house and make tea  
Forget and crush your pains  
Break the jars of hatred and enmity with stones  
Go to your elders and make them happy.

In the process of cultural change which occurs along with the differentiation of cultural environment, the continued existence of a thought, a behaviour or an attitude depends on functionality within the social structure. If at this point the preservation of group identity becomes important, this means the construction of a culture-related identity. In an environment of oral culture, memory which is enlivened by festivals, ritual, etc. can be brought to life by means of a poet or author who is the architect of a fictional structure in an electronic culture medium.

### **Cultural Change and Nostalgia in Khalaj Poetry**

Khalaj poetry passes on knowledge about the past on the one hand to city Khalaj who feel nostalgia for the past, reminding them of the life which they miss and from which they are cut off, and on the other to young Khalaj people who have not experienced the spirit and the atmosphere of those times. This is because the past is a time of plenty, full of good things, which is missed. Hasan Talkhabi emphasises in the following poem that the village people used to live a happy and wholesome life. The past is a shelter from a rapidly changing and worsening world.

*qadimlerce baluq halqiy xoşerti  
yiraqlar kine bagzida buoşerti  
tepe o taq o dašt: abad o suvluq  
direhtler istiçe tola quşerti  
qarayaz bulut yaguş teker erti  
baluq halqiy ta bogda heker erti  
bereket varretti hikmekler iççe  
zalim ta çatmazzerti bizke kiçe  
halq yiraklariy birbirke qonar erti  
havulluqlariy birbirke erer erti*

The villagers were happy  
There was no ill feeling in their hearts  
The hills and mountains and plains had plentiful water  
The trees were full of beautiful birds  
And when it rained from the spring clouds  
The villagers began to sow wheat.  
And there was plenty in the sowing  
No tyrant oppressed us.  
People felt sympathy for each other  
And they were kind to each other.

It is seen that the way of life changed along with the urbanisation process. For Khalaj people who have been brought up or who have lived a significant part of their lives in the city, *homeland* is an important part of their identity. In answer to questions which we asked Khalaj people living in Tehran or Saveh, they stated that poems on village life were of interest to them. Thus, Khalaj poets frequently deal with village life in their cultural memory as against the change in place which has occurred through migration, to which they have given the name *baluq*. In a poem by Mahmood Nazari, who was born in Talkhab and lives in the city of Arak, even if the days we have seen pass, the memory of the village will always remain in the memory:

*künler keçor xatiralar kelyor  
baluqta bi bulutluk yad kelyor  
baluq fikri kiçe kiçe zihnimçar  
baluq yadu matal vara könümçar  
künler küçor matal vara varoor  
amma baluq yadu mene qalyoor  
baluq yadu baluq qal u adamlar  
künler keçoor cilk vara kişilor  
biçinçiler boqda biçor yorilor*

The days pass, and memories come  
A cloud of memories of the village  
Thoughts of the village are in my mind every night  
Memories of the village are like a story in my heart  
Days pass and go, like a story  
But memories of the village stay with me  
Village memories, the children and the people  
The days pass like a spinning wheel  
The farmers cut the wheat and get tired.

As Davis says, concepts such as membership, identity, missing home and collective memory, elements which provide the continuity given by the past against the uncertainties of the future, are of vital importance. Values, habits and lifestyles change quickly with

passing time, and no longer give people security, so that the past becomes their refuge (1979:8-9). In the following poem, Fayzabadi makes a comparison between the past and the present. He says that in contrast to today's generation who have grown up with computers and tablets in an age of technology, people in the past were happy with stories and legends.

*qadim medimler ki baliq sefarti  
yuraq moyraqlär tula ez vefarti  
mobayl o enterneti daq yoqarti  
mahvare vo tebleti daq yoqarti  
ovveli qış şamu bile cemertuq  
qisse vo dastanla biz xoşartuq  
qızlar işi qali tuqimaqarti  
derew işi oqulqa marbutarti*

In the old days, people had a good time in the villages  
Hearts were full of loyalty  
The were no mobile phones and no internet  
There were no computers and tablet PCs.  
In the old days we got together on winter evenings  
We were happy with stories and legends  
The girls' work was weaving carpets  
And field work was the boys' job.

### **Individual topics**

The Khalaj poetry which is flourishing in the electronic environment is generally directed at fostering a love for the Khalaj language or awakening national consciousness. At the same time, it is seen that with the increase in examples of poetry, some poems are written on personal topics such as love, fate and spirituality. The name of Hadigol must be particularly noted here. One of the poets making great efforts to introduce Khalaj culture to new generations is Hadigol. On his Telegram pages, Hadigol has shared Khalaj lyrical poems and poems on the personal spiritual world. The poem entitled *Nida* is a cry which deals with spiritual feelings:

*'azizem bilmorum qane deryaçe  
refiqim bilmorum elan ne xalçe  
hodad şemişem halu hoş olta  
temam düşmenlaru qol nahoş olta  
temam kiçe kindizler yaduçam  
ovqat ke yemişem ya vaqtiy uçam*

My dear, I don't know what sea you are on now  
I don't know what state my friend is in now  
I wish to God that he be well  
And all his enemies be unhappy  
Day and night in my mind  
When I'm awake or asleep.

The canal manager of the village of Baharestan Mahdi Hadigol, inspired by Mosayeb Arabgol's poem, reflects a sad personal internal world in a poem written in Khalaj and thought to be still unfinished.

*bo şam ney yirekem gussa tutmuş?  
yirekem berg o balgul solukemiş?  
bo şam ney yirekim bi ezi curer?  
tutulmuş boguzum o aramişum yoq  
kezimde uçmuş u o asayişum yoq*

*bu şam ney kezlerimde tekilir yaş  
bu şam ney gamluqar turpaq o hem taş*

Why is my heart sad tonight?  
Why is my heart pale and upset?  
Why is my heart different tonight?  
My throat blocked and no peace of mind  
I can't sleep and I have no comfort  
Why are tears falling from my eyes tonight?  
Why are the earth and the stones sad tonight?

Among the Khalaj, as in Iran in general, there is the widespread religious belief that the Mahdi, from the Prophet's family, will come and carry out religious reform and establish justice in the world, and this forms one of their principal beliefs. Hope for the coming of the Mehdi is reflected in Khalaj poetry. In the following poem, Calal Bahramyan from the village of Salefçegan expresses the wish and hope to see the Mahdi.

*arzo varum seni bi kin kergem ay mehreban  
sende bi zad algam ya kergem ay mehreban  
sen imam o sen veli men seni kergem mehreban  
mehdi-yi mev'udumuz qaçan keliy ay mehreban*

I wish to see you one day, o compassionate one  
May I receive or see things from you, o compassionate one  
You are imam and vali, may I see you, compassionate one  
Our Mahdi, who is to come at the promised time, when will you come, o compassionate one?

It has been observed that the number of people writing poetry in the Khalaj language in the village of Talkhab, where the language is in daily use, has increased in recent years. One of these people, and one of the educated people in the village, is Hamid Reza Talkhabi. In the following poem, shared on his Telegram and Instagram pages, he promotes goodness as a virtue.

*qiş çetiner amma varur yad olur  
ruzgariy pis künleri şad olur  
namerdlerke qebir hevi tar olur  
bo baluqda pis u havul vardular  
havullarda havulluqlar kaldular*

Winter is difficult but it goes and becomes a memory  
With time, bad days become happy  
For cowards, the grave house is narrow  
Good and bad things have gone from this village  
Of the good, good deeds have remained.

### **Conclusion**

The Khalaj people, who had pursuing an isolated existence for centuries, have in the past hundred years been significantly affected by Iran's political and cultural changes. At the head of the reasons for the great changes seen in Khalaj culture are industrialisation and modernisation. In the last ten years, the internet has started to be used by the Khalaj, as it has by other societies, to meet their socialisation needs. Social relations can easily and without danger be established in the virtual world when they do not exist in the real world, and people can express themselves more freely in this environment too. This virtual environment gives Khalaj people the opportunity to meet and chat with people who speak their language. At the same time, social networks have had an effect on Khalaj culture. In particular, pages set up on Telegram, Instagram and Facebook by intellectuals

have an important function in preserving and passing on to new generations the cultural heritage of the Khalaj. In these environments, historical documents are shared as well as material such as lullabies, puzzles, proverbs, jokes, stories and fables. The Khalaj population is about 40-50 000, and when it is thought that very many of these people are members of these pages, sharing elements of cultural memory on these pages is seen to be important. In interviews with people in different age groups who followed these pages, participants said that they had learned a lot about traditional Khalaj culture in this virtual environment. Not only traditional types of folk literature but also newly produced poems are shared in virtual environments. In particular, interest in the Khalaj language has increased in the past ten years with the sharing of the poems of Jamrasi and Vaşqani on Instagram and Telegram pages, and with this interest, many Khalaj people have started to write poetry in their own language. More than anything, when we look at the content of Khalaj poetry and the contribution it makes to the continuation of the national identity of this people without a tradition of writing, we see that it is full of cultural messages. In the new Khalaj folk poetry developing in the internet environment, identity, nostalgia and cultural change are frequently dealt with. One of the most important characteristics of this poetry is that the Khalaj identity, formed from a common culture and language, is made prominent. At the head of the distinguishing factors of the Khalaj identity is without doubt *language*. For this reason, the Khalaj language, which is the most important indicator of identity, is often mentioned in the poems. The poets also accord a place to one of the most telling indicators of cultural memory and ethnic identity, Khalaj rituals, to form consciousness of identity. Thus, the rituals of special days such as weddings, funerals or festivals are often dealt with in the poems. In Khalaj poetry, separation from the villages which are seen as the homeland, the discomfort given by urbanisation and cultural change are prominent. These poems present once again to the city Khalaj who are nostalgic for their past the life which they miss and have been separated from. Along with identity and cultural topics, the Khalaj language shares on the Telegram pages also include lyrical poems and ones on the individual's spiritual world by Calal Bahramyan, Hossein Talkhabi and Hadigol.

These poets, who revolted at seeing the Khalaj culture being seen for centuries as a sub-culture, have focused on making it easier to transmit the culture to new generations and people in different places. For this reason, writing poems in the Khalaj language, which is seen by UNESCO as in danger of extinction, has increased interest in the Khalaj language and culture. These poems, as well as helping to pass on Khalaj culture to new generations, also provide researchers working in different fields such as folklore and linguistics with important data.

**AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION LEVELS:** First Author %100.

**ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL:** Hacettepe University Ethics Committee Approval, 35853172-433/20, 02.01.2018.

**FINANCAL SUPPORT:** No financial support was received in the study.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST:** There is no potential conflict of interest in the study.

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