
THE STUDY OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL FEATURES OF THE NORTH CAUCASIAN PEOPLES IN THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF FICTION

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Abstract

The study of the description of national spiritual, religious, cultural, ideological features of any people through the analysis of national fiction is an important way of understanding society, since the reality is an object of its representation. This paper aims to look into national and spiritual characteristics of the Northern Caucasian peoples through the analysis of their fiction.

Speaking about the peculiarities of the national novel as an analysed source, it should be emphasized that it recreates a holistic picture of the ethnocultural development of the people, reflects its rich spiritual heritage, which allows it to take a worthy place in the literary process of the twentieth century. The article examines the issues of national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples through the analysis of the contemporary Kabardian novel, including the poorly studied works of Kabardian prose writers K. Khavpachev, B. Zhurtov and A. Keshokov. Based on the results of the study a conclusion is made on the diversity of creative approaches of writers to the issue of national spiritual features of the people, on the role of bright creative personality in the evolution of artistic consciousness. The results of the analysis of the novels written by K. Khavpachev, B. Zhurtov and A. Keshokov can be used to develop the issues of North Caucasian literary criticism. They help researchers better understand various social processes in the study of history, religious studies and other social-humanitarian research areas.

Keywords: spiritual, religion, mentality, historicism, psychologism

1. Introduction

The end of the 20th century was a turning point for Kabardian literature (Kabarda is a historical region in the central part of the North Caucasus), when

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crisis of artistic consciousness strengthens links with folklore and myth, searching for the lost self-identification. Simultaneously, the forms of these links become more complicated and enriched. They can be considered as one of the ways to restore a holistic view of the world. National consciousness, including artistic consciousness, undergoes serious transformations, approaching the main characteristic of mythological thinking – its creativity, i.e. the capacity for mythmaking, in this case – literary mythmaking [1].

As is known, the national literary process continues only in the case when there are successors to national literary traditions. Considering the Kabardian Roman studies in terms of depicting the life activity and the national spiritual development of the Kabardian people, the period of 1980s-1990s can be regarded as rather fruitful. One thing should be added here: if national literature has managed to preserve its aesthetic values and focus on the biography of compatriots, this is a great contribution of Alim Keshokov, since A. Keshokov could reflect new trends of the era of change in his works, preserving the people's roots and the universal basis.

However, despite the fact that North Caucasian researchers repeatedly turned to the creative heritage of national writers, studied various stages in the formation of the novel genre in 'young' literature of the North Caucasus, and the specifics of recreating myth-folklore and ethnographic features. Nevertheless, the issues of artistic representation of the whole ethnos in terms of its spirituality, ethnofolklore, social, linguistic and gender aspects, creating the aesthetic integrity of the national picture of the world, have not yet become a subject of special research. Therefore, in this article much attention is paid to the multidimensional study of the national-aesthetic novel prose features characterized by close attention to the national spiritual features of the described society, genre, stylistic and thematic diversity, artistic ethnographism, the presence of wide canvases for real life depiction in a genre of an epic novel [A. Akhmatova, *ud skor v delakh, v suzhdenyakh ostorozhen* (*Get Faster at Doing Things but Be Careful with Your Thoughts*), <http://www.Impearls.ru/511954>, accessed on February 18, 2016].

2. Method

In this article the research subject includes national spiritual features of the Kabardian people presented in the following novels – 'Cruelty' by K. Khavpachev [2], 'Whirlwind' by B. Zhurtoev [3] and 'Roots' by A. Keshokov [4], in which the ontological essence of the epoch of the 1990s was especially revealed. The authors focus on the issues associated with the beginning of the formation of new socio-ideological determination of national consciousness.

The scientific novelty of the work is linked to the study of the characteristic features of the North Caucasian peoples represented in the prose of the specified period. For example, it is noted how the attraction of attention to the spiritual growth of literary characters in the context of events becomes dominant in the works, how writers direct all their efforts to study the causes that led to such

serious shifts in public consciousness and spiritual self-identification of the people.

The following basic postulates became the methodological basis of this study:

1. Orientation of the Kabardian novel to the holistic perception of national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples;
2. Consideration of national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples in the context of the development of all North Caucasian literature.

3. Literature as a mirror of national spiritual features

The creative depth of literary works lies in the ability to comprehend human experience at the level where it simultaneously appears both as universal universality and as unique individuality, due to which it becomes possible to attract every person to the world of the artistic reality. Consequently, artistic-creative knowledge includes age-old traditions of national culture, reflects the characterological features of the ethnos and, at the same time, is not confined only to the national space. The artistic-creative activity has always been and will be an integral part of the spiritual self-creation of the nation, since it consolidates the experience of the whole national culture and reflects peculiar constant features of the people's psychology, its moral qualities and spiritual ideals.

Literature as an art form is also an integral part of the spiritual self-creation of the nation, since it consolidates the experience of national treasures, reflects moral qualities of the people, and that is why the art of writing (artistic creativity) is aimed at revealing the essence of the community and solving the problem of providing internal opportunities.

The value of a particular literary work in the aspect of depicting the national spiritual features of the people is also determined by its stylistic and genre features, topics and the author's level of competence. Due to its specific features, fiction has several advantages over other types of written sources. "The inner, spiritual life of the era can only be reflected in a literary work. For this reason, some similar works are among the most valuable historical monuments" – D. Pisarev wrote [5].

4. The role of historical transformations of national prose in revealing the national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples

It should be noted that in modern realities against the revival of national self-consciousness of the Adygeans (Adygeis, Kabardians, Circassians), honouring traditions, simultaneously begins with the process of literature involvement into the spiritual world of the people in all its diversity. National literature "begins to fight confidently for true and profound depiction of the past" [6], without which it is impossible to truly understand the national spiritual features of the Kabardian people. This is evidenced by the publication of the monumental historical novels of the Kabardian prose writers [7], in which the

authors deviate from traditional themes of socialist realism associated with the artificial exaltation of a 'man of labour' and focus on the spiritual world of a contemporary person with his/her joys and sorrows, surrounding reality and his/her attitude to what is happening.

Speaking about the depiction of national spiritual features of the people in the Kabardian literature, it is impossible to ignore the numerous factors that played a decisive role in the development of the novel genre: historical and literary works of the first Adyghe enlighteners, the experience of Russian literature, artistic ethnography, folklorism, historicism, psychologism, territorial and cultural commonality of the peoples of the North Caucasus.

The issues of the fate of indigenous peoples, the disclosure of the essence of their life and traditions receive deeper development in national prose, when each literary work carries 'genetic information' about the people, the evolution of public consciousness. Writers solve these issues through the prism of their own worldview. The novel genre, which has been developing at a rapid pace since the 1960s, is the best way to reveal these aspects and show their versatility and magnitude. The novelists' appeal to mythological folklore traditions and many aspects of 'Adygea Khabza' in North Caucasian literary criticism are called 'artistic ethnographism', which is the main component of the national worldview [<http://www.Impearls.ru/511954>].

Democratic transformations in the mid-1980s, the advent of the publicity era gave new strength to national prose and a tendency towards "reviving standard problems" has appeared [8].

Major historical and philosophical works appeared by the mid-1990s. The events of the Caucasian war, the mass movement of Adygs to Turkey, the period of repression, stagnation, and the Chechen war, the present and future of the Kabardian people constituted the basis of these works. The characters of these works are different, like their creators. Both of them do not immediately find the truth, but they are in constant search of it: on this path they make mistakes, realize them and start all over again, i.e. they live. The last novel of A.P. Keshokov, with a significant title 'Roots', is a vivid example of such vital search [4, p. 25]. The path of searching for truth, that the writer followed his whole life, has eventually led him to a worthy result corresponding to his wisdom - the characteristic instructive nature of the work.

Kabardian literature of the 1980s/1990s is characterized by deideologization and "a gradual transition from excessive ethnographism and folklorism" [9]. And the most difficult here is to find numerous links of national literature with the changing world, reflect the spiritual world of man in it, the appearance of plot narrative multilayeredness, when writers introduce into their works tough life conflicts linked with national, religious, social conflicts. However, the creativity of the Kabardian literary process in this period is still characterized by certain wariness of the authors, "... their incomplete freedom from the shackles of the recent past, looking back at the established relations between people and society and changes in a new life" [10].

This became especially noticeable in Kabardian literature in the novel genre, in every facet of which the desire of the authors to impart historical and national colouring to their narrative and even to the flow of life of their characters was reflected. The titles of the works also confirm this. Cruel times for the Adygeans, unbearable trials for the mountaineers, their bleak future are presented to the reader (for clarity) by means of some parallels, for example, with natural disasters or the habits of wild animals – ‘Whirlwind’ [11], ‘Furious Flame’ [12], ‘The World Flood’ [13], ‘Bear Claws’ [14], ‘Cruelty’ [2]. Not only titles have allegorical meanings, they are only a message to the main disclosure of the topic and the main idea of the novel.

5. The analysis of national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples in Kabardian Roman studies

K. Khavpachev’s novel ‘Cruelty’ [2] dedicated to collectivization, repression of the clergy, forcible unification of small individual peasant farms into large collective socialist farms (‘kolkhozes’) in the early 1930s, is a rather vivid example of the foregoing. K. Khavpachev demonstrates that Kabardians follow ethical norms all their lives, and most significantly venerate their elders, which is a distinctive characteristic of all Caucasian peoples. According to highlanders, reverence for the elders is the basis of a highly-moral society. The elders in his novel are revered as guardians of ancestral and familial traditions, and are perceived as holders of the peoples’ memory and wisdom. The Kabardian cult of elders is closely connected with the cult of their ancestors. According to popular beliefs, even dead ancestors are invisibly present in the life of their descendants and exert influence on their earthly existence. If ancestors are satisfied with their descendants, they will give them all kinds of blessings (protect against drought, reward for a rich harvest). Therefore, ancestors are offered prayers, kindly remembered and brought the gifts they liked alive.

The author shows through the main heroine of ‘Nafisat’ how highlanders value female chastity, with femininity, beauty and mild character regarded as the most attractive feminine features. According to the Northern Caucasian traditions, it is indecent if a girl or a woman does not lower her eyes or look away from the person she’s talking to.

Special attention in the novel is paid to the place of elders in the Kabardian community who formed the council of elders and laid the basis of the local self-government. However, in the 1920s the Soviet government abolished the judicial process of elders. Members of such councils were evicted from their home; the newspapers of those years were filled with accusations against the older generation of its adherence to the past and bad influence on fellow citizens. As a result, folk traditions disappeared in cities.

The Kabardian novelist M. Emkuzha added an interesting accent to his ‘World Flood’ based on such a national trait as the veneration of a guest who was considered the messenger of gods, equally respected as elders. An act of disrespect towards a guest is treated as an insult of a close relative or disobedience

to the will of elders, which can provoke the wrath of gods in conformity with common beliefs of highlanders. It is a well-established tradition that one must welcome any guest at any time, host and feed them with the best food, as well as offer protection. A family incapable of fulfilling the duty of hospitality will be condemned and ridiculed. If a guest decides to stay for a longer time, they considered to be the guest not only of the host family but of all its relatives, so the guest can settle in any of their houses. Upon welcoming their guests, Kabardians give them the best rooms and try to provide the best accommodations. The most honourable guests are those who arrived from far away. Furthermore, great importance is given to their age and military or other merits. At first guests are not asked why they came, they must define the purpose of their visit the day after the arrival. Highlanders believe that the presence of a guest in a family is associated with the cult of ancestors since guests who tasted food in the house that hosted them entered this family for a while. The common table brought together a guest and a host. Therefore, the curse of highlanders read: "No one will eat the food you cooked" [13].

In Sarabi Mafedzev's novel 'Bear Claws' particular attention is given to the description of family ties among the Northern Caucasian peoples, which are divided into two types of sworn brotherhood – atalychestvo (fosterage) and kunachestvo (consecrated friendship). One of the novel characters is brought up by an atalyk (a foster father or educator), and the reader learns that this kind of relationship is traditionally closer than blood ties. Kunachestvo also refers to the connection of two people, which grew out of hospitality and developed into a close friendship, and the relations of kunachestvo can even become hereditary [14].

M. Bakov's novel 'The Furious Flame' showed that Kabardians did not turn into orthodox Muslims, which in many respects could be explained by their peculiar mentality and the Adyghe Code of Honour and Morality called *adyghe khabze*. Therefore, having perceived the most liberal Hanafi madhhab, which allows flexible adaptation in various ethnocultural environments, the Kabardian Islam has undergone ethnization. As a result, a peculiar 'local' form of Islam emerged characterised by an organic synthesis of Islamic and Kabardian traditions [15].

In the novel 'Roots', A.P. Keshokov [4, p. 25] completely departs from his style of folklore depiction known by the novels 'The Peaks Do Not Sleep', 'Broken Horseshoe', 'Pear Color,' etc. Now the author is not influenced by major historical events, violent conflicts between people and rapid changes of actions. The basis for displaying national-spiritual characteristics of the Northern Caucasian peoples is the life-story of their folk traditions and customs.

The novel reveals the attitude of highlanders to the formation of a family. According to their national traditions, highlanders believe that the formation of a family is the duty of any adult. The formation of a family is crucial because the circle of relatives, willing to help, expands. The society condemns the ignorance of family history. According to the Adyghe tradition, the formation of a family is closely connected with a wedding ceremony which must be once in life. The

proverb ‘the wife is created by the husband, and the wife creates her husband’ means that family members are obliged to support each other in any situation. The Adyghe tradition proceeds from the understanding that a family is an intimate and personal union of a man and a woman. According to Kabardians, household chores are not discussed outside the family circle because it undermines marriage ties.

In the novel there are many philosophical arguments about the value of life, the destiny of the people, the characters’ vices from the past and the present that led the author to use a ‘shift of times’ technique, similar to G.G. Marquez (‘One Hundred Years of Solitude’).

A. Keshokov combined in his novel two major and fateful periods in the history of the ethnos, which are the Caucasian War with innumerable victims and the present time when, following the author's fantasy, people have learnt to create clones. At the same time, the author made a woman the main character (by the way, for the first time) who brought together generations and preserved the gene pool.

Thus, the writer attached the theme of the violent eviction of Circassians during the Caucasian war to the dramatic years of the late twentieth century, when “such human vices as theft, crime, greed, drunkenness, drug addiction and deceit became evident” [4, p. 54]. A. Keshokov brought two plots together, each of them could become a separate book, thus embodying his main idea – to show live pictures of the past and the present.

Introducing the reader into the atmosphere of the historical epoch, which changed the destiny of the people, the author leads us to the main idea: “A woman is a basis of the people and she must be protected, due attention and respect should be given to her so that the hearth will not go out” [4, p. 139]. The author found an original way to convince us of the truth of his words, making one of the sayings (hadiths) of the Prophet Mohammed an epigraph to the scientific work and to the whole life of his character: “A woman is a basis of the state, its root. If a woman is happy – the state is happy, if a woman is humiliated – the state is humiliated.” [4, p. 81] This postulate discloses the reason why the author called his novel ‘Roots’.

A. Keshokov also places care for the future on the shoulders of a woman - it depends on her, whether the hearth will go out or not, whether she will be able to save it, as a grandmother Dafaradzh could save and carry the fire of life through all hard times. The author discommends the attitude of today’s youth to the fundamental values of the people: humanity, morality, traditions, good manners, faith; in this situation he blames the short-sighted policy of the authorities, but does not lose hope that all this will be revived.

The author is convinced and tries to convince us that “the crown may suffer, but if the roots are healthy, the tree will sprout again and give healthy shoots” [4, p. 97]. This idea is expressed by Dr. Dafaradzh as the writer’s will to us and future generations: “The Circassian race must clean itself of the dirt, obtaining its knowledge, preserving its customs and etiquette, thus remaining among the revered nations, physically and morally healthy, preserving its

language and roots - then we will be worthy people on earth, not temporary aliens” [4, p. 115].

Thus, all three novels considered in this article are created upon a change of epochs and generations, which led to fundamental changes in spirituality and morality. Among the major prose works published in this period there is no one that, in one way or another, would not resonate with these key novels, that could represent “the past of the people in modern terms based on new philosophical ideas” [16] and with the only difference in the level of the authors’ mastery.

6. Conclusions

Special attention to the analysis of national-spiritual features of the Northern Caucasian peoples in the Kabardian prose has been paid from the early period of its formation (namely, the 1950s–1960s). Due to the rapid development of the novel genre many researchers also note such shortcomings as oversimplification, predetermination and the polarisation of characters.

The literary works and other novels considered in this article are mainly aimed at revealing the national spiritual features of the North Caucasian peoples against the heroic and tragic pages of their history, In solving this task the authors choose a variety of literary approaches: some authors take folklore of the ethnos as a basis, others rely on historical facts and contemporary journalism; there are writers trying to show the psychological state of the people in certain historical periods through the inner world of their characters. At the same time, taking into account different approaches and styles of the writers, in the works of Kabardinian novelists there is something in common that unites them: unconditional love for the people, careful attitude to people and respect for their rights.

Up to now, the following eternal issues of national self-consciousness remain among the most important elements of Kabardian novel prose: good and evil, past and present, life and death, ethical and aesthetic values and material interests.

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