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ETHNOCULTURAL CODES IN N. SCOTT MOMADAY'S AND T. KAYIPBERGENOV'S PROSE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: ethnocultural code, identity, N. Scott Momaday, T. Kayipbergenov, ritual, oral tradition, comparative literature, Karakalpak literature, Native American literature.

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Abstract: This article examines the ethnocultural codes through which national identity is constructed in the prose of the American Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday (House Made of Dawn, The Way to Rainy Mountain) and the Karakalpak writer T. Kayipbergenov (The Legend of Maman-biy). Applying a comparative-typological method, the study identifies six recurrent code types shared by both authors — ritual and sacred space, naming and genealogy, landscape and toponymy, orally transmitted narrative embedded within the written text, material culture and dress, and religious syncretism — and shows how each writer transforms these codes according to the individual or collective nature of the identity being represented. The results suggest that ethnocultural coding functions in Momaday primarily to reconstruct an individual consciousness fractured by colonial displacement, while in Kayipbergenov it functions to construct a continuous collective memory of a small nation caught between two empires.

N. SKOTT MOMADEY VA T. QAYIPBERGENOV NASRIDA ETNOMADANIY KODLAR: QIYOSIY TADQIQOT

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MAQOLA HAQIDA

Kalit soʻzlar: etnomadaniy kod, identitet, N. S. Momadey, T. Qayipbergenov, urf-odat, ogʻzaki anʼana, qiyosiy adabiyotshunoslik.

Annotatsiya: Maqolada amerikalik qayova yozuvchisi N. Skott Momadeyning («Dom, iz rassveta sotvoryonnyy», «Put k Gore Dozhdey») va qoraqalpoq yozuvchisi T. Qayipbergenovning («Skazaniye o Maman-biye») nasrida milliy identitet qanday etnomadaniy kodlar orqali shakllantirilishi koʻrib chiqiladi. Qiyosiy-tipologik metoddan foydalanib, ikkala muallifga xos toʻrtta kod turi aniqlanadi — urf-odat va muqaddas makon, ism va nasl-nasab, landshaft va toponimika, yozma matnga singdirilgan ogʻzaki rivoyat.

ЭТНОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ КОДЫ В ПРОЗЕ Н. СКОТТА МОМАДЕЯ И Т. КАИПБЕРГЕНОВА: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ

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О СТАТЬЕ

Ключевые слова: этнокультурный код, идентичность, Н. С. Момадэй, Т. Кайыпбергенов, обряд, устная традиция, сравнительное литературоведение.

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются этнокультурные коды, посредством которых конструируется национальная идентичность в прозе американского писателя кайова Н. Скотта Момадэя («Дом, из рассвета сотворённый», «Путь к Горе Дождей») и каракалпакского писателя Т. Кайыпбергенова («Сказание о Маман-бие»). С применением сравнительно-типологического метода выделяются четыре типа кодов, общих для обоих авторов, — обряд и сакральное пространство, имя и генеалогия, ландшафт и топонимика, устная традиция, встроенная в письменный текст, — и показано, как каждый писатель трансформирует эти коды в зависимости от индивидуального либо коллективного характера репрезентируемой идентичности.

Introduction. The category of the ethnocultural code has become one of the central analytical tools of comparative literary studies dealing with postcolonial and minority literatures, since it allows the researcher to move beyond thematic description toward the identification of concrete textual mechanisms — ritual, naming, landscape description, embedded oral genres — through which a literary text constructs the identity of a people. Within the framework of the

broader dissertation project on the concept of "identity" in the works of N. Scott Momaday and T. Kayipbergenov, the present article addresses one specific research question: what ethnocultural codes do the two authors employ, and how do the functions of these codes differ depending on whether the identity being constructed is that of an individual protagonist or of a national collective.

The relevance of the comparison lies in the structural similarity of the two authors' historical situations: both Momaday, writing as a Kiowa author within the literature of the United States, and Kayipbergenov, writing as a Karakalpak author within the literary space of Central Asia, represent small indigenous peoples whose cultural continuity was placed under pressure by a dominant power — respectively, the United States federal government and, in different periods, the Khanate of Khiva and the Russian Empire. No comparative study of the ethnocultural coding strategies of these two authors has previously been undertaken.

Comparative approaches to ethnocultural coding in postcolonial and indigenous literatures have been developed across several distinct traditions: the semiotics of culture associated with Yu. Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school, which treats a culture's ritual, dress, and spatial practices as a coherent secondary modelling system; Anglophone postcolonial theory (H. Bhabha [8], E. Said), which foregrounds hybridity and the discursive construction of the colonised subject; and the historical poetics tradition inaugurated by A. Veselovsky [10], which traces the persistence of formulaic, ritually derived narrative units across genres and periods. The present study draws selectively on all three traditions, treating them not as competing paradigms but as complementary instruments suited to different code types: semiotic analysis for ritual and space, postcolonial theory for the politics of naming and hybridity, and historical poetics for the survival of oral genre within the modern novel.

Materials and methods. The material of the study comprises N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) [1] and his ethnographic-lyrical work *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969) [2], together with T. Kayipbergenov's novel *The Legend of Maman-biy* (1985) [3], the opening part of the trilogy *Dastan about the Karakalpaks*. The comparative-typological method [4] is used as the principal instrument of analysis, supplemented by elements of the semiotics of culture in the sense developed by Yu. Lotman [5], E. Meletinsky's and V. Toporov's theory of myth and ritual [11; 12], and J. Assmann's theory of cultural memory [6], which together allow ethnocultural codes to be treated as units of a text's cultural "language" rather than as isolated ethnographic details.

For the purposes of this study, an ethnocultural code is defined as a recurrent textual unit — a ritual action, a name, a place, a material object, a religious practice, or an inserted oral genre — that carries condensed cultural information recognisable to a member of the represented ethnic

community and that performs an identity-constructing function within the narrative. Six code types were identified inductively through close reading of the primary texts: (1) ritual and sacred space; (2) naming and genealogy; (3) landscape and toponymy; (4) orally transmitted narrative embedded in the written text; (5) material culture and dress; (6) religious syncretism.

Results. Ritual and sacred space

In *House Made of Dawn*, ritual functions as the code through which the protagonist Abel's fractured identity is periodically, if incompletely, restored. The kiva — the partly subterranean ceremonial chamber of the Pueblo — recurs as the spatial centre of the community's sacred life, while the concluding ritual of the "dawn runners," inherited from Abel's grandfather Francisco, provides the novel's structural and symbolic resolution: it is not speech but ritual running at dawn that finally gives Abel access to an identity he cannot otherwise articulate. The novel also incorporates the Christianised feast of Santiago and the Native American Church peyote ceremony conducted by the preacher Tosamah, so that ritual in the text is never a single, "pure" indigenous form but a layered field in which Pueblo, Spanish-Catholic, and Pan-Indian elements coexist and compete for the protagonist's allegiance.

In *The Legend of Maman-biy*, ritual and sacred space take a markedly different, more socially normative form: oath-taking, the swearing of allegiance — an oath which the text explicitly attributes to the ancestors of the Karakalpaks, the Black Klobuks, addressing Yuri Dolgorukiy [3] — functions as a code of political rather than mystical identity-formation. Burial custom performs an analogous sacralising role at the level of collective memory: the novel's closing image of the shared grave of Maman-biy and a Russian shipwright, submerged at the point where the fresh and salt waters of the Amu Darya and the Aral Sea meet, transforms a physical burial site into a permanent ethnocultural code of alliance between the two peoples.

Naming and genealogy

Momaday's texts code identity onto the level of the personal name only sparingly and elliptically — Abel remains largely undefined by patronymic or clan affiliation, which is itself a code of rupture, since traditional Pueblo identity is normally inseparable from lineage and clan. By contrast, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* opens with an explicit etymological genealogy of the ethnonym itself: the Kiowa are said to have called themselves *kwuda*, then *tepda*, and later *gaigwu* — "two sides of a thing which are different in appearance" — with each name a discrete stage in the tribe's self-understanding [2].

In *The Legend of Maman-biy*, naming performs the opposite, cumulative function: the protagonist is called, successively, Maman, then Maman-biy (*biy* denoting a clan or tribal ruler), and finally, posthumously, Maman-russky ("Maman the Russian") [3] — a name that folk memory alone preserves. Each name marks a discrete social recognition (kinship, political authority,

imperial alliance), and the retention of the final, hybrid name in oral tradition is itself the clearest ethnocultural code of the novel's central thesis: that Karakalpak identity, as constructed by Kayipbergenov, is inseparable from its historical dialogue with Russia.

Landscape and toponymy

Momaday codes land as an animate, originating force: the prologue of *House Made of Dawn* describes the "house made of dawn" as a place "made of pollen and rain," where the earth is "old and everlasting," establishing land itself, before any human action occurs, as the primary source of identity [1]. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* reinforces this code through the actual migration route of the Kiowa people, from the forested Yellowstone region to the high, open Plains, presented not as mere itinerary but as a spiritual transformation of the tribe's collective character.

In *The Legend of Maman-biy*, landscape is coded historically and geopolitically rather than cosmogonically: the Aral Sea and the Amu Darya delta function as the fixed, non-negotiable territorial core around which the Karakalpaks' survival as a people is organised, while movement — toward Khiva, toward Russian outposts — is coded as political necessity rather than spiritual quest. The submergence of Maman-biy's grave beneath the Aral's waters at the novel's close functions as a final, elegiac ethnocultural code, uniting land, memory, and loss.

Orally transmitted narrative embedded in the written text

Both authors embed genuinely oral genres within their written prose, though for different structural purposes. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is explicitly organised as a triad — a fragment of tribal myth, an ethnographic-historical commentary, and a personal reminiscence — repeated across twenty-four numbered sections, so that oral myth is formally integrated into, rather than merely quoted within, the literary text [2]. *The Legend of Maman-biy* draws on the genre memory of the dastan, the Central Asian oral epic form, and periodically shifts into a declamatory, epic register — most visibly in its concluding elegiac passage on the fate of "the small nation" living at the mouth of the Amu Darya — that signals the text's genealogical relationship to oral heroic narrative even as it is delivered in the form of a novel [3].

Material culture and dress as an ethnocultural code

Material culture functions in both authors as a compact, immediately legible marker of ethnic belonging, though the two writers deploy it with different degrees of ritual elaboration. In *House Made of Dawn*, cornmeal and prayer feathers recur as small-scale, almost undramatic ritual props — offerings scattered before the dawn run, feathers attached to a captured eagle before its ritual killing — through which the text encodes the sacredness of ordinary material objects without any extended ethnographic commentary; the reader is left, like Abel himself, to reconstruct their meaning from context rather than explanation. The community's ritual calendar itself is coded materially through the Feast of Santiago, in which the rooster pull (a custom of Spanish origin

absorbed into Pueblo practice) becomes a syncretic object-ritual in which imported and indigenous material culture are no longer distinguishable — a fact that is itself an ethnocultural code of the community's long history of selective absorption rather than simple resistance.

In *The Legend of Maman-biy*, dress performs a more overtly classificatory function. The introduction of the young Maman is accompanied by a detailed description of his dress — a sand-coloured woollen chekmen without buttons or ties, worn over a plain shirt, and a black felt cap — presented not as incidental colour but as an ethnographic marker establishing the hero, from his very first appearance, as a recognisable type: the ordinary steppe herdsman who will become a historical figure [3]. Material culture in *Kayipbergenov* thus operates cumulatively with the naming code discussed above (3.2): the humble chekmen of the opening pages and the exalted posthumous name "Maman-russky" mark the two poles of the same biographical trajectory, from anonymous material similarity to distinguished historical singularity.

Religious syncretism as an ethnocultural code

A further code shared by both authors, though realised through opposite trajectories, is religious syncretism. In *House Made of Dawn*, the peyote ceremony of the Native American Church, conducted within the novel by the part-Kiowa preacher Tosamah, is presented alongside — and in implicit tension with — the older Pueblo kiva ritual and the introduced Catholicism of Father Olguin; the text does not resolve this plurality into a single legitimate faith but presents religious multiplicity itself as a code of the modern Native American condition, in which no single ritual system can any longer claim to be the sole legitimate vehicle of identity. The historical erosion of the older Kiowa ceremonial complex — most visibly the Sun Dance tradition described in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, which depended on the by-then vanishing buffalo economy of the Plains — functions in Momaday's work as the historical precondition for this later religious plurality: ritual multiplicity is coded as loss compensated by improvisation.

In *The Legend of Maman-biy*, religious syncretism moves in the opposite direction — toward consolidation rather than fragmentation. Islamic practice and older steppe custom (oath-taking, the sanctity of ancestral graves) are represented as compatible layers of a single, historically continuous belief system rather than as competing options; the novel's closing sacralisation of the shared grave of Maman-biy and the Russian shipwright extends this consolidating logic even across the religious and ethnic boundary between the Karakalpaks and the Russian settlers, folding a Christian figure into a code of shared, sacred memory. Where Momaday codes religious plurality as fragmentation requiring individual improvisation, *Kayipbergenov* codes it as an expanding, inclusive continuity underwriting collective identity.

Discussion. The comparison of the four code types shows a consistent pattern: in Momaday, every ethnocultural code — ritual, name, land, embedded oral form — is coded as fragmented,

layered, or elliptical, which corresponds to the individual, traumatised consciousness of Abel and to the modernist, non-linear composition of *House Made of Dawn*. In Kayipbergenov, the same four code types are coded as cumulative, additive, and continuous, which corresponds to the collective, historically extended identity of the Karakalpak nation and to the linear, chronologically organised composition of *The Legend of Maman-biy* and the trilogy to which it belongs.

This structural finding refines the more general theoretical claim, established in the companion study of the narrative and discursive dimensions of the concept of identity in these two authors [7], that Momaday constructs identity at the level of individual consciousness while Kayipbergenov constructs it at the level of collective, national memory. The present analysis of ethnocultural codes demonstrates that this difference is not confined to composition and discourse but extends into the very selection and treatment of culturally specific material — ritual, name, land, and oral genre alike.

The addition of the material-culture and religious codes (3.5–3.6) to the four codes examined in sections 3.1–3.4 reinforces rather than complicates the central pattern identified above. In every one of the six code types analysed, Momaday's treatment is centrifugal — each code multiplies, fragments, or is left for the reader to reconstruct without authorial mediation — while Kayipbergenov's treatment is centripetal, each code consolidating around a single, cumulatively developing collective narrative. This consistency across six independently identified code types strengthens the claim that the difference is not incidental to particular scenes but constitutes a structural principle governing the two authors' entire ethnocultural poetics.

It should be noted that the present study is limited to one novel and one ethnographic-lyrical text by Momaday and to the first volume of Kayipbergenov's trilogy; the two subsequent volumes of *Dastan about the Karakalpaks* (Unhappy [Неприкаянные] and Not Understood [Непонятные]), which extend the same cumulative naming and genealogical logic across two further generations of national heroes (Aydos-biy, Yernazar), together with Momaday's later novel *The Ancient Child*, in which the bear-boy myth first outlined in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* receives a full novelistic treatment, fall outside the scope of the present article and are reserved for a separate study focused specifically on the comparative image of the national hero.

Conclusion. The comparative analysis of ethnocultural codes in the prose of N. Scott Momaday and T. Kayipbergenov demonstrates that, despite the substantial difference in cultural material and historical context, both authors rely on a structurally comparable repertoire of ethnocultural codes — ritual and sacred space, naming and genealogy, landscape and toponymy, and orally transmitted narrative — to construct national identity in the face of external cultural and political pressure. The decisive difference lies not in the presence or absence of these codes but in their treatment: fragmentary and individualising in Momaday, cumulative and collectivising in

Kayipbergenov. This finding provides a concrete textual basis for the further comparative analysis of the image of the national hero to be undertaken in the next stage of the present research.

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