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EROTIC IMAGES AND MOTIVES AS A BROADCAST OF THE DOMINANT SOCIAL STATUS (BASED ON THE “KAZAKH EROTIC NOVEL” BY BERIK DZHILKIBAEV)

ABSTRACT: In the time leading up to and immediately following the collapse of the USSR, processes of national self-identification in the formerly Soviet republics were revived anew. Ideologues and culture workers mined the distant past for the raw materials with which to re-activate new forms of national identity, and also to distance themselves from the traumas of imperialism. Written and published in the midst of these processes, Berik Dzhilkibayev’s 2001 work “Kazakh Erotic Novel” is something of a mythological text, with ritual elements symbolizing the constant evolution of the fate of nations. This article analyzes “Kazakh Erotic Novel” from the perspective of psychoanalytic and cognitive literary criticism, while also situating the work historically in post-independence Kazakhstan. The novel narrates the emergence of the newly-independent Kazakh state, with its heightened energy potential, onto the world stage, while simultaneously exploring the act of returning to one’s roots – to the origins of one’s ethnic group – by replicating the act of creation of a society and its accompanying sovereignty. To broadcast the competitiveness of a young Kazakh country on the world stage, the author uses erotic images and motives that have an increased aggressive potential. In Dzhilkibayev’s novel the image of the enemy, the hated Soviet Empire, which served as a unifying force for the Kazakhs, takes on the form of another opponent – the West – which is presented as fundamentally opposed to an imagined Eastern mentality. This difference is attributed to structural differences between Western monotheism and Tengrism, the animist religion of the Kazakhs, which took on renewed significance in the post-Soviet era.

KEYWORDS: rite of passage, genesis, archetypes, image of the enemy, totemism

During times of social and political upheaval and ideological degradation, such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, new power relations are activated in formerly marginal communities by revisiting archaic forms of socio-genesis. The resurrection of archaic ideas and cultural stereotypes is known as the ‘archaic

syndrome',¹ and is typical for any ethnic community that has been controlled in some way. This active process of self-identification began when the former Soviet republics asserted their independence from the so-called center, and it continues to reshape itself into new forms of initiation (Mikhailin 2003).

The abrupt transition of the former Soviet republics into sovereign political and economic entities turns out to be fatally bound up with various kinds of ethnic aggression, which consolidates a society while it is emerging, developing and maturing (Mikhailin 2003). Archetypical cognitive structures are reactivated through reliving the act of Creation, thus cementing the coherence of the ethnic group. Meanwhile, reactivation takes place through oral folklore, which forms the collective subconscious of an ethnic group. As Dzilkibayev writes in the introduction to his novel, this process begins on the subconscious level, but it must be translated into action: "The time for fables is over. The time to bring them to life is approaching" (Dzilkibayev 2001, 11). Our conscience distances itself from the traumatic dependence upon the former Empire by referring to folklore because the symbolic distance de-demonizes the past. Simultaneously, a reference to the genesis implies a society that has gained its independence is going through its Creation once more, and it exposes its homage to the kindred. As the contemporary cultural scholar and psychoanalyst V. Rudnev writes, "Reality is the substance that should be constructed retroactively to be able to explain deformations of the symbolic structure" (2007, 202).

A folklore text means that the fate of a nation is polyvalent; that it is an open-ended narrative, and it can be lived through or interpreted differently under the current political circumstances.

Usually, the cultural psychology of creativity reacts earlier than anything else to social changes by expressing social processes through metaphors that are still unconscious at the intellectual level. During the 1990s, which were life-changing for the Kazakh state, Berik Dzilkibayev's "Kazakh Erotic Novel" captured this period of transition in an exemplary way. The mission of the novel is to symbolically extrapolate the Kazakh state's new independence – to present a fresh "combat unit" – to the global political stage. The novel addresses the de-colonisation of the Kazakh nation, and the inferiority complex of Kazakh culture, which has all the universal attributes of the evolution of an ethnicity, including the existence of intimate (erotic) folk tales.

The state of alertness, preparedness for battle, ability to defend, especially in terms of initiation, is often expressed with erotic euphemisms: "[...] words should be like ants in our enemies' pants", "when your bayonet is blunt you can't penetrate", "a soldier is always a soldier, day or night", "I impaled enemies and pretty girls",

¹ "Archaic syndrome is a return to the 'youth' of a person or ethnic group, due to stress or a psychological trauma".

“my bayonet still works” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 11). It is no surprise that the male sexual lexicon has military overtones all over the world.

Expressions of “a spherically pretty Southern Hemisphere” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 16) are also commonplace among ethnicities. However, the Kazakh reality of the early years of independence brought about specific forms of folkloric erotic expression. The “Kazakh folk charm” arrived on the international cultural and geopolitical scene via the donor Russian culture, the Russian language, and, as a result, through the Russian mentality. As a result of their colonisation by Russians, Kazakhs gained access, through the Russian language, to international culture and science.

The Kazakh and Russian cultures “encounter each other as two stray storylines in a fairy tale” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 6), sharing a common morphology: the author’s “tale”, as an erotic one, mocks a fairy tale (Smirnov 2008, 68). Although the cultural code of the Kazakhs, as one of the ethnic groups on the periphery of the USSR, is almost the opposite of the ‘official’ Russian code emanating from Moscow, they share an essential structural similarity. The contrast between the economically and politically important Moscow and the marginal Kazakhstan was a pressing issue for as long as the ethnic minorities of the Soviet periphery were dependent on the center to acquire any kind of capital. As soon as the Kazakh territories realized that they had their own sources of substance, they started to display more similarities with the former center, Russia. In particular, they both found themselves searching for their previous identity and a return to their Paradise Lost – idealistic images of their past.

According to the Kazakh-language press in Kazakhstan, the hated center – in essence, the old image of the Soviet Foe – continues to be a unifying force in Kazakh society. Under new political circumstances, it has been transformed into another enemy – a vague notion of the western world, which is very different from the Kazakhs and their nomadic mentality. “Such little storylines closely echo the literature of West and East [...] where the erotic narrative common to mankind is transformed into a specific ethnic image” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 6).

“Sin sneaked to the Carmelite convent through the lattice frame of fencing and so it did to a posh felt tent through the lattice frame of the venting opening” (ibidem). “This way a Kazakh village did not fall behind civilization and had everything that others had” (ibidem, 18). The phenomenon of social, even anthropological comparison and contrast is always crucial for a social and cultural rite of passage. The image of Foe is just one of the ways to look through the archetypical antipode into the dark side of the ethnic group itself. In a wider context, the style of comparison and contrast expresses the major cognitive function that is the process of proactively creating a system to establish and strengthen the state.

“Allegations that Kazakh literature lacks erotic trope are unfounded. Kazakh literature does have an erotic novel, of which any nation can be proud, and today

this is the most important thing for our culture!”, the author-narrator says. The erotic component of the culture of the young Kazakh state described in Dzikibayev’s novel is associated with its growing potency; an acute need to be fit for combat / defense, and with a special kind of ‘divine inspiration’ as an inherent property of masculinity, which is positively framed by any cultural tradition during the initiation period (Mikhailin 2000).

Self-assertion is a natural urge for both an individual and an ethnic group. In normal circumstances, the aggressive behavior associated with self-assertion is what the psychoanalyst E. Fromm called pseudo-aggression or passive aggression (Fromm 1994, 165). That is why in the Kazakh Erotic Novel, Don Quixote, a leading spiritual character, was positively depicted, while Don Juan, an accentuated body character, was negatively portrayed as Spanish sexual expansion into the world. Don Juan became an erotically aggressive – that is to say, a symbolically dangerous – foe, with a huge national potency that was subconsciously interpreted by other ethnic groups as a metaphorical threat from Spain to the world.

The first symbols that a primal man used to express and pinpoint his attitude towards the world and society were parts of his body. These bodily archetypes are again activated for rites of passage, symbolically enouncing both the cosmos principles and pressing social issues. “In the archaic picture of the world and society, certain parts of a body, limbs and physiological acts symbolize the principles of the Universe, those that transform and preserve the vital energy. Mainly, it is the association of the phallus with the cosmic body in the collective subconscious of ethnic communities carrying out extreme rites of passage” (Bannikov 2002, 115).

The cardinal error of Freudism is ignoring the fact that a prerequisite for anything to become a language is only at the price of losing the actual reality and transferring the latter to the purely formal hollowed-out sphere that is ready for any content. Sex cannot become a universal language as long as it preserves an immediate emotional and always private reality that is its physiological basis. It has to become formalized, become fully separated from its sexual content, as displayed by a baboon accepting his failure. Attempts to return all those processes, that culture does, first of all, with a word, to physiological practices do not make culture a metaphor of sex but makes sex a metaphor of culture, as of Freud (Lotman 2000, 141).

We see the same connection between culture and erotica in Dzikibayev’s very concept for his novel. A typical moral feature within groups practicing extreme rites of passage is the de-tabooing of body parts (Bannikov 2002). Removing taboos around private parts is tantamount to the temporary decivilizing of social relations, and this occurred during the fall of the Soviet Union. In Dzikibayev’s novel, sexual potency is used to symbolize the new social potency of the formerly peripheral ethnicities of the USSR. However, the cultural traditions of the oriental, including Kazakh, ethnicities make the social potency more complicated: strictly

metaphorically implying creation in general; the domineering social status; the world axis; and so on.

Nowadays, ethnology includes an erotic accentuation – a demonstration of the phallus as an old form of social behavior. M. L. Butovskaya writes:

[...] Demonstration of the phallus is a demonstration of a higher social status. Such behavior is interpreted as a ritual threat to copulate. In some traditional societies, the phallic demonstration is displayed by means of an outfit that is combined with other signs of rank and status. Warlike societies often use phallocrypts that visually increase the size of the phallus and display constant erection and a threat to those around this person. The next stage of ritual threat is making figurines with erect phalluses to protect areas and homes (1999, 54).

Societies are consolidated when they cross their existential boundaries that are marked by polar opposites, such as life vs. death, friend vs. foe, and human vs. non-human. Usually, consolidation is enhanced by allegories, which are expressed in the universal archetypical code through animals and aliens. In Dzilkibayev's novel, this mythological arch-basis of subconscious emerges as a resurrection of the totemic cult of ancestors – Blue, or Sky Wolf. He is also known as Berserk, a metaphorical cosmic father of the Kazakhs and their martial symbol.

Sky Wolf is the ancestral totem of numerous Turkic tribes for a reason...the attitude of an alien tribe whose totem is a hare or a crow will naturally be very negative towards the wolf of an alien tribe. Apparently, a westerner will consider an eastern person as a wolf because of his wolf totem; the totems of westerners are eagles and ravens, and an encounter of these two persons is an encounter of a westerner with a wolf (Dzilkibayev 2001, 42).

In an archetypal situation of initiation, all males must gain the experience of surviving in a wolfpack (Mikhailin 2001). It results in the rise of his credibility, marital status, fatherhood and financial independence. This probably explains lycanthropic metamorphoses and the junkyard dog characters of the novel.

For centuries the Eurasian ethnopolitical mentality involved two key opposing images: Wolf vs. Dog. The extreme manifestation of their oppositeness is the wolves' nomadic lifestyle, with their perpetual change of territory, constant state of alertness to those who might attack, as well as a readiness to expand their territory whenever an opportunity arises (Dzilkibayev 2001, 48).

The rite of passage for young warriors was to be magically transformed into wolves. According to V. Y. Mikhailin (2001), ascribing dog-like features to an opponent was a serious magic spell. It led to the opponent being rejected by humans as someone who had no right to exist. For example, in Russian folklore there is a curse to destroy

a foe in this way: the person who is cursed is said to have neither a human father nor mother, none of the basic human privileges, and simply does not exist, because the person comes from a chthonic seed and is somehow magically dead.

In nomadic oral folklore it is the wolf who is praised, while in the post-renaissance western culture it is the dog. The Dominican Order, which was formerly called *Domini Canes*, which was connected to dogs, is an actual manifestation of the special cultural and theological status of the dog and its cult. This Order was the antithesis of the very antagonistic image of the wolf. The mission of Dominican friars was to expand their reach into the territory of the people who culturally and historically adhered to the cult of the wolf – the symbol of the nomadic world and nomadic way of living [...] (Dzilkibayev 2001, 48).

In marginalized communities, there is a kind of social muzzling. They form their “packs of wolves” or “packs of dogs” where “an alien soul is a dark soul that might be hiding a wolf”. The Kazakh writer, speaking about the symbolic Russian interpretation of freedom-seeking minorities who live on the outside of the Russian center, acknowledges that sayings such as “no matter how long you care for a wolf, it will always long for a forest”, “a wolf is untamable, you cannot win its heart by kindness”, “a good wolf is a dead wolf” and many more contribute to the negative perception of wolves in Russian folklore (Dzilkibayev 2001, 46-47).

In the “Kazakh Erotic Novel”, a wolf is a destructive “war machine”, according to Deleuze (1992). It opposes the domesticated dog of the western and Russian civilizations. “A dog is not longing for a forest. A dog should be fed. A good master knows when to feed his dog during the hunting season. A dog is valued for its unconditional service, obedience and readiness to die for its master [...] It is bad luck for a dog to get lost and live by itself” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 47).

The rite of passage is a journey to the chthonic territory, where an individual is sacrificed for the sake of consolidating the community whose ultimate goal is to survive. Priority goes to the horde, and this is the starting point in the polarity of two competing civilizations.

It is not correct to think that all eastern, specifically Kazakh, warriors were lonely wolves. No! They had families and homes. They left their elderly parents, their wives and children, when they started their campaigns. This is how the warrior Koblandy and other nomadic knights are seen. The ancient Russian epic knights, Ilya of Murom, Alesha Popovich and others are seen in a similar way. In contrast with them, we know nothing about the parents or offspring of [Crusade] knights except them being feudatory, bachelors [...] Dogs unconditionally obey their master, they do not have a sense of solidarity (Dzilkibayev 2001, 47).

The author writes that western people are united by territory. For him, this type of unity is artificial and unstable: such settlements also disturb the environmental balance, bringing chaos and poisonous natures. Nomadic civilization is a lifestyle that is in harmony with nature. “Uncle Hassan recognizes the voices of all birds and animals” – said Zaure – “He can imitate the sounds of a brook, the murmur of leaf trees in different weather, and the rustling of grass. He can make the voices of stars!” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 25). Remaining in the symbolic situation of *Wild Field*, because of their locations that are peripheral compared to the agrarian centers, nomadic tribes manifest a higher procreative bond with nature that is metaphorically expressed in Dzilkibayev’s novel through the pagan incest with Mother Earth.

Nomadic communities are united more by essential bonds than they are by territory. “The call of blood – true of a wolf’s nature – unites people by the bonds of their family, tribe and horde” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 49). Modern nomads often join together in tight tribal or horde-based associations. An individual’s association with a horde is still of utmost importance in describing him. “It is a sort of password [...] It is a permission to live with your kind, it is an entry to the ‘gates of opportunity’. If you are ‘one of us’, then you are welcome to share our way of life; if not, then you may go away empty-handed [...]” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 49). It goes without saying that there are negative aspects to tribalism; however, it is a significant protecting force for eastern people, which helps them to survive as ethnicities. “If all nations were one family, one unity, not a single son-of-a-bitch² could suppress them. Starvation would not happen; people would be able to defend and keep their bread for themselves. Exodus to China would not happen. Now everybody is loose, people are saving their skins, and suspect each other” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 49).

A utopian pack of wolves, the idealized symbol of *Wild Field*, has behavioral patterns that are the complete opposite of those of the dogs, who have territorial affiliations. This explains Dzilkibayev’s suspicious attitude, as a Kazakh, to cities, which are cradles of European civilization. The city, a great melting pot, is a place where elements of traditional social organization transform driven wolves into ‘turnskins’. This is a typical phenomenon for the archaic model of initiation. The original ambivalence to the status of a wolf / dog is revealed in this shapeshifting phenomenon.

The conflict of the wolf behavioral pattern with that of a dog as being a fierce fight, fathered not only ugly incarnations of an extreme display of their polarity, but also such intermediate mutations as a werewolf; dog + human; dog + wolf; wolf + dog. The most chimeric were the two last types of society where the dual nature, combining the psychology, ideology and way of life in the same social organism, created individuals who were egregiously dog-like and those who were egregiously wolf-like. These hybrid societies with their

² A pun referring to the governor of Kazakhstan from 1925 through 1933.

relevant turnskin citizens have played their role in the history of Eurasia that had not yet been rationalized by historians. They will echo for a long time and we cannot but sense by our skin their effect (Dzilkibayev 2001, 47-48).

“The Soviet power is their mother; the Kremlin Satan seed is their father,” writes the author about the genesis of therianthropy on the Kazakh land. (Dzilkibayev 2001, 26). He does not label it with negative connotations only because he extrapolates the axiology of this phenomenon to the future.

During the rite of passage, the foe is ascribed more aggression than it really has. This way the higher level of alertness and military potential is maintained by the opposing party. However, the level of internal aggression in society is negatively correlated to the ability of the society to evolve. “Communities with a high level of grass-root aggression are characterized by less sophisticated information that is culturally significant. Sophistication of informational systems in the ethnic community depends on the level of its social integration, which requires the society to overcome its internal and external destructive tendencies” (Bannikov 2002, 104).

Research on Russian slang – a territorially conditioned code of male speech – connects it with the fertility code. B. A. Uspensky (1996) derives the original formula of swearing from a storyline that is present in the majority of mythological systems: the union of Uranus and Gaia. Uranus is transformed into a chthonic deity with dog features, and Mother Earth is replaced by the mother of a foe. Wolf is a pagan opposition to the chthonic deity.

Korkut-Ata was wise to make his descendants the keeper of Sky Wolf – the enigma of human life and of the bond between the worldly and the celestial, the insight of power of a human word, of music, dance, sign, fire, water, wind, and plain yellow soil. Saints – Korkut’s descendants – spoke the language of flora and fauna. Only one old and wise Jew – King Solomon – had such knowledge. Our saints continue to hand over their knowledge to future generations, not to erect temples or suppress people, but to aspire to a better communication between Blue Sky and the children of Earth in order to withstand cruelty, lies, abuse, and humiliation by dark forces (Dzilkibayev 2001, 27).

In this way, the aggressive erotic discourse of Dzilkibayev’s novel, which stands for the Kazakhs during their transition period, reveals the Eurasian aspiration to create a new mythological epic based on folkloric and religious systems – Kazakh and Russian, with some western cultural influence as well. “My teacher was Mikhail Afanasyevich. He gave me good books to read. A lot of books! All are of high quality! Among others, I read ‘Manon Lescaut’ and ‘Aventure du Roi Pausole’, and ‘Ars Amatoria’ by Ovid, and ‘The Decameron’, and ‘La Picelle d’Orleans’, and ‘Roman de la Rose’” (Dzilkibayev 2001, 3).

The culture of mythology and ritual creates counter-positions to surmount antithesis. According to I. P. Smirnov the erotic “language within a language” is in the interchangeable relations with the language of philosophy (Smirnov 2006, 108). The ethnic erotic code of Dzilkibayev’s novel seems unique, although it is a model of the archetypical ‘sacred word’, which expresses the creative via the aggressive. It is that very pagan and mythological mentality which possesses the experience of resolving the conflicting counter-positions.

“Each of us has milestones, so we do not get lost in our mental space” (Chernigovskaya 2017, 28). The “Kazakh Erotic Novel” is a milestone of that kind for Kazakhs at the end of the 20th century. Berik Dzilkibayev announces the arrival of the new Kazakh state as it enters the global cultural stage. His declaration is made in the universal language of all civilizations – in essence, a consecrated and fundamentally erotic language serving to unite ‘the cosmogonic body common to all people’.

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