Kafkasya Calışmaları - Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi / Journal of Caucasian Studies
Mayıs 2021 / May 2021, Yıl / Vol. 6, № 12
ISSN 2149–9527 • E-ISSN 2149–9101

Women, Patriarchy, and Tradition in Adil-Girei Keshev's *Scarecrow* (1860) and Zarina Kanukova's *The Bridg*e (2006)

Lidia Zhigunova[*]

Abstract

This article closely examines two literary works written by Circassian authors – one is a nineteenth-century short story Scarecrow [Chuchelo] published in Russian in 1860 by Adil-Girey Keshev (1837-1872), and the second work is Zarina Kanukova's play L'emizh (The Bridge), an adaptation of Keshev's story, published in 2006 in Circassian language. The article aims to demonstrate how these authors, in their attempts to challenge the colonial representations of Circassians, introduce a new subjectivity, a new interpretation of self as they see it through their own eyes and self-representations. The article attempts to answer the following questions: How do both indigenous authors frame and articulate their relationship to the gendered and racialized histories of Circassian men and women in the colonial and in the post-Soviet context respectively? How do they address colonial experience and representation? What are the modes of self-representation and how are colonial language and imagery are being (re)appropriated, or not, by the Circassian writers? To what extent do indigenous writers resist, revise, or transgress colonial ideologies and representations, and in what ways do they reinforce such discursive constructs? To the extent that they revise or rebel against colonial representations, what new models do they offer, and how do these new models, tied to current Circassian political and cultural projects, raise problems and contradictions of their own?

Keywords: *Circassian literature, indigenous writers, colonial representation, North Caucasus, post-Soviet literature, the literary canon, decolonization, women and insanity, female body.*

---

[*] Lidia Zhigunova, Professor of Practice in Russian Studies, Tulane University, New Orleans, USA. E-Mail: lzhiguno@tulane.edu

(Received/Gönderim: 06.05.2021; Accepted/Kabul: 19.05.2021)

Adil-Girei Keşev'in 'Korkuluk' Öyküsünde (1860) ve Zarina Kanukova'nın 'Köprü' (2006) Oyununda Kadın, Ataerkillik ve Gelenek

Özet

Bu makale, Çerkes yazarlar tarafından yazılmış iki edebi eseri yakından incelemektedir. Biri, 1860'da Adil-Girey Keşev (1837-1872) tarafından Rusça olarak yayınlanan bir 19. yüzyıl kısa öyküsü 'Korkuluk' [Çuçelo] ve ikincisi, Keşev'in hikayesinin bir uyarlaması olan ve 2006'da Çerkesçe olarak yayınlanan Zarina Kanukova'nın 'Lhemıj' (Köprü) oyunudur. Makale, bu yazarların Çerkeslerin kolonyal temsillerine meydan okuma girişimlerinde, yeni bir öznelliğe, kendi gözlerinden ve öz temsillerinden gördükleri haliyle benliğin yeni bir yorumunu nasıl ortaya koyduklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale şu soruları yanıtlamaya çalışıyor: Her iki yerli yazar da Çerkes erkek ve kadınlarının toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı ve ırksallaştırılmış tarihleriyle sırasıyla kolonyal ve Sovyet sonrası bağlamdaki ilişkilerini nasıl çerçeveliyor ve ifade ediyor? Sömürge deneyimini ve temsilini nasıl ele alıyorlar? Kendini temsil etme biçimleri nelerdir ve kolonyal dil ve imgeler Çerkes yazarlar tarafından nasıl (yeniden) sahipleniliyor ya da sahiplenilmiyor? Yerli yazarlar kolonyal ideolojilere ve temsillere ne ölçüde direnir, onları gözden geçirir veya ihlal eder ve bu tür söylemsel yapıları hangi yollarla güçlendirirler? Sömürgeci temsilleri revize ettikleri veya onlara karşı çıktıkları ölçüde, hangi yeni modelleri sunuyorlar ve mevcut Çerkes siyasi ve kültürel projelerine bağlı bu yeni modeller kendi sorun ve çelişkilerini nasıl ortaya çıkarıyor?

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Çerkes edebiyatı, yerli yazarlar, kolonyal temsil, dekolonizasyon, kadın ve delilik, kadın bedeni.*

Nascent counter narratives to homogenizing imperialist discourses began to appear in the North Caucasus in the first half of the nineteenth century with the emergence of a generation of indigenous writers who were engaged with European/Russian literary forms in articulating the particularities of Circassian culture. Most prominent among them were Sultan Kazy-Girei (1807-1863), Adil-Girei Keshev (1837-1872), Khan-Girei (1808-1842), and Shora Nogmov (1794-1843) who were writing both within and against the empire, although not directly opposing it. They were the first Circassian writers who laid the foundations of Circassian literature by inaugurating the written forms of literary expression that replaced the oral forms of cultural transmission. Educated within the Russian imperial system, that just like the British Empire regarded education as instrumental for the successful governance of its newly acquired territories,[1] these early colonial writers participated in the imperial project by producing an array of texts written in Russian and ranging from fiction to ethnographical and historical accounts.

While the self-expression of these early colonial writers did not pose much of a challenge to European/Russian cultural authority, it did change the homogeneity of that culture and authority, and thus contributed to a new and more volatile political and cultural climate. These writings are examples of how colonial intellectuals participated in the narratives of the imperial center, and how they claimed agency in order to give a conceptual shape to their history, culture, and society. Their works try to convey to readers an indigenous Circassian identity while at the same time allowing an implicit social critique to arise within Circassian society. Their writings encompass self-reflection and self-critique, as well as some critical reflections on Eurocentric views, however, since they were forced to participate in the dominant culture in order to make their case, early national writers could sometimes find themselves supporting the oppressive regime and its symbolic system. An interesting case in point here is Khan-Girei who wrote his ethnographic sketch *Notes about Circassia* (1836) on the direct order of the Tsar Nicholas I. Khan-Girei, who expressed his doubts that he would be able to do the job properly because of his insufficient knowledge of Russian, was ordered to take an assistant. While the *Notes* contain some valuable ethnographic information, one should be wary of the ideological goals of this project, and take into account the history of its production and specifically how much of it has been "corrected."

---

[1] Considering how Britain might effectively administer India, Thomas Macaulay in his "Minute on Indian Education" (1835) praises the superior values of the English language and literature in creating "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Ashcroft et al. 2006, 375).

In addition, the internalization of the values of the colonizer caused a damaging split in the subjectivities of these writers, reshaping how they think about themselves and their culture – a process that has been closely analyzed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). Operating within the colonizer's structures, and often mirroring the authoritative poses of the colonizer, colonized writers started to appropriate European genres, symbolic conventions, and modern structures to express their own identities. As Elleke Boehmer points out:

From the moment of their genesis…nationalist elites were caught in a situation of *split perception* or *double vision*. Bilingual and bicultural, having Janus-like access to both metropolitan and local cultures, yet alienated from both, the elites who sought to challenge aspects of imperial rule also found they might gain advantages from making compromises with it…European ways were believed to bring income, status, and the possibility of sharing in power. Nationalists in particular reached for that which was progressive, 'modern,' and improving in a Western sense as vehicles of political mobilization. (Boehmer, 110-111)

This split is especially evident in Adil-Girei Keshev's stories that contain some autobiographical elements and are marked by self-reflection and self-critique. As a son of a Circassian nobleman, Keshev received his education in Russia and at a fairly young age became prominent as a Circassian writer. According to Keshev's biographer Raisa Khashkhozheva, up until the 1840s the children of the nobility were sent to study at the St. Petersburg Cadet Corps (Khashkhozheva, 1976). Then it was decided by an executive order to allocate these families 65 seats at the Stavropol Grammar/High School, which was created by the Russian colonial administration in the Caucasus. Keshev was enrolled into this institution in 1850 and graduated with honors in 1858. Upon the recommendation of the school's administration, Keshev was sent to Saint Petersburg State University to continue his studies. But his studies in St. Petersburg did not last long. During the years of 1861-1862 there was student unrest at the university caused by the repressions of the tsarist administration. The students were denied freedom of assembly and many were placed under police surveillance. Keshev took an active part in the protests, and not wanting to put up with the new rules, he petitioned to withdraw from the university. He returned to Stavropol where he worked first as an interpreter, and later as a teacher of Circassian language at the Stavropol gymnasium. In 1866, however, the Circassian language was excluded from the school's curriculum, and Keshev moved to Vladikavkaz where he worked as an editor-in-chief for the regional newspaper until his death in 1874. During this period of his life, Keshev worked mainly in journalism and published several scholarly articles on Circassian folklore (Khashkhozheva, 1976).

Keshev published literary works under the pseudonym Kalamby[2] in the well-known Russian literary journals of the time, such as *Russkii Vestnik* and *Biblioteka dlya Chteniya*. Especially popular among the nineteenth-century Russian readership was his famous collection of short stories entitled *The Notes of a Circassian* (1860). The stories gathered in this collection are *Two Months in the Village*, *The Disciple of Genies*, *The Scarecrow*, and *On the Hill*; they all contain some autobiographical elements and are narrated for the most part in the first person. The self-reflection of the main protagonist and his critique of contemporary Circassian society found in these stories offer a unique insight into the state of mind of Circassian intellectuals of the time. Whether or not we can use Keshev's stories to reconstruct the reality of ordinary life of Circassians and the nature of their social relations at the time, as the author himself seems to suggest and as some of his critics claim, is doubtful, firstly, because we would then gain a very partial view of Circassian society, and secondly, there was nothing ordinary about that period of time during the last years of Circassian resistance to the Russian colonization. Circassia would subsequently disappear from maps, its population would be drastically diminished; the Black Sea shore would be completely cleansed of the native population in order for the new settlers to settle the "empty lands," and Circassians would be made foreigners in their own homeland.

---

[2] Translated from Arabic, Keshev's pseudonym means "the one who is wielding the pen" or "the one who is literate."

In a private correspondence with his Russian publisher, Keshev made an effort to affirm the authenticity of the materials presented in his stories as he claimed that he offered a realistic account of life of his countrymen, deliberately avoiding romanticizing them:

In my stories, I tried to avoid anything that goes beyond the everyday life of Circassians, so no one can accuse me of deliberate distortions. I would like to portray the Circassian not on his horseback or in any other dramatic positions in which he has been represented in the past, but in his home, with all his human side.[3]

But contrary to his own statement, as I will argue in this article, Kehshev's portrayals of his countrymen and countrywomen are quite dramatic, and not without a touch of orientalism and Romantic mysticism – they make us doubt his statement about the authenticity of the presented material. This declaration of authenticity rests on the authority of Keshev's own claim to an indigenous heritage, reflected in the title of his collection.

In the same letter to the publisher, however, Keshev indicated that the contemporary situation in the North Caucasus created people with fragmented identities who were no longer part of their homeland, but neither fully integrated into their adopted community:

The current state of the Caucasus gave rise to a significant number of people who strayed from their native soil, and never got attached to any other ground. The shallow half-education that they received causes the development of a hostile attitude to everything around them, destroys faith in the dignity of the old customs, but does not give them enough strength to successfully combat the real evil.[4]

Keshev's main protagonist experiences an extreme alienation when he says in the *Two Months in the Village*:

All that I have taken from my school years is a striving for goodness and a hope to apply my knowledge in the wide field, but my half-education cost me too much: it formed an indestructible wall between my compatriots and me, and made me a stranger among my own people. They looked at me, as if I were an alien; even in my own family, I was a guest rather than a family member.[5]

---

[3] *Biblioteka dlya Chteniya* (SPB, vol. 159, 1860): 1. Quoted in R. Khashkhozheva's "Foreword," Keshev 1976, 52; translated from Russian into English by me [L.Zh].

[4] Ibid., 52.

As we can see, Keshev does signal the incredible changes in the Circassian psyche and the pain caused by these transformations, but he attributes these changes to the unsurpassable gap between his "modern" self and the "savage" other. As he indicated in his letter, on the one hand, the education that he received destroyed faith in his own value, or the value of traditional systems of knowledge; on the other hand, he wanted to apply this new system of knowledge that he acquired to "modernize" his compatriots.

The colonial education system, with its emphasis on the superiority of the Russian culture, devalued the indigenous cultures. It generated alienation and ambivalence in the mind of the colonized and became the source of anxiety, confusion, and marginalization. This alienation could also become an effective source and a site of resistance to the colonial order, and Keshev's texts contain some instances of "speaking back." However, Keshev was not critical of the Russian empire as such; he kept the colonialist divisions and dichotomies in place without contesting the stereotypes of the barbarian and the savage. He did not criticize the colonial practices of the Russian empire and the Russo-Circassian War (1763-1864) was mentioned only in passing in his works. The author/narrator identifies himself as a Circassian and expresses a typical imperialist rhetoric in many instances. He adopts and mimics the colonizer's point of view through the I-narrator in his stories by criticizing the "savage" practices of his "barbaric" countrymen and supporting the Russian "civilizing" and "modernizing" missions, which were their justifications for the war and the colonization of the Caucasus.

After enjoying some short-lived success at the time of their publication, Keshev's works were republished only once during the Soviet period. In 1976, a collection of his stories, "Izbrannye proizvedeniya" [Collected Works], appeared in the North Caucasus with a long foreword by the literary critic Raisa Khashkhozheva. In her foreword, Khashkhozheva praises Keshev as an extraordinarily talented Circassian writer. She goes on to say that Keshev, following the traditions of Russian Realist writers such as Ivan Turgenev, Nikolay Nekrasov, and Nikolay Chernyshevsky, offered a realistic portrayal of Circassian society that was in dire need of modernization. She also discusses some of the autobiographical features in his works and touches on the ambivalent position of the author as a native writer assimilated into the culture of the colonialist. However, mainly as a proponent of Socialist Realism herself, Khashkhozheva devotes most of her analysis to the ways Keshev depicts the class struggle between Circassian peasants and the members of Circassian nobility, as well as the savageness of the traditions of his compatriots, and the oppression of native women. Khashkhozheva also emphasizes the notion of ‘progressive’ relations with Russia as reflected in Keshev’s works, and mentions Keshev’s later disappointment with Russia’s reactionary czarism. She concludes her essay with the notion that despite his critical stance against the backwardness of his society, Keshev was unable to understand the necessity for revolutionary change: “Standing on the ideological positions of the liberal camp Keshev did not rise to the need for a fundamental understanding of the revolutionary upheaval of the social system of mountaineers and confined himself to criticizing some of its significant shortcomings, preaching educational ideas of his time” (Khashkhozheva, 50).

---

[5] Ibid., 53.

In the post-Soviet period, Zarina Kanukova, a contemporary Circassian-Kabardian poet and playwright addressed Keshev’s literary legacy in new and innovative ways. Kanukova rewrote Keshev’s short story *The Scarecrow* [Chuchelo] renaming it to *L’emyzh* [The Bridge] and reimagining the plot and the characters. In this article, I will first analyze the ways in which Circassian menn and women are represented in Keshev’s texts. In my analysis, I will draw mainly on the image of Nasika, one of the main protagonists in Keshev’s short story *The Scarecrow*, and then compare it to Kanukova’s reinscription of the same character and the same plot. Originally written in Russian, Kanukova re-writes the story in her native language, in Circassian, and changes the genre from a short story to a drama. By doing so, she gives each character an opportunity to speak up in his or her own voice and thus, completely transforms the whole dynamics of the original story.

Keshev's story is narrated for the most part in the third person by a traveling male narrator, who interjects at the end of the tale as an I-narrator. He tells the story of a young Circassian girl named Nasika[6] who was married off by her father to a much older man with a higher social status. The narrator describes Nasika in conventional terms as a beautiful girl: the most beautiful and virtuous girl not only in that village but in the whole region – "her beauty and her virtues are praised in songs" (Keshev, 1976: 105, 113). Nasika is further portrayed as a very traditional and obedient girl. She does not protest against her parent's wish to marry her off to an old man, even after she has learned that her future husband was so old that he could be her grandfather. A few days before her father arranged her marriage, Nasika had fallen in love with a young man, whom she met at her father's house. The young man named Zheraslan had been wounded in one of the skirmishes between the natives and the Cossacks and then brought into the house by a *kunak.*[7] According to Circassian tradition, any visitor who comes to your house seeking shelter becomes your guest of honor and should be treated as such. Since ancient times, Circassians built guest houses next to their own homes, in order to receive guests and provide shelter to any traveler. Zheraslan and his friends spent a night at the guest house of Nasika's father while

---

[6] Translated from Circassian, the name of the heroine means the "blinding beauty."

[7] The word *kunak* is of Tatar origin and means a friend or a trusted man. This word along with the word referring to the guesthouse itself *kunatskaya* was mainly used by Russian colonists; the natives used different words – *hashesh*, *hasha*, *blagha nybzheghu* – but since they were more difficult to pronounce, Russians substituted them with the Tatar and Turkish words. The Tatar/Turkish language was also used as a language of intercultural communication in the region. Following the established colonial-linguistic discourse, in his stories Keshev used words that the Russians were more familiar with instead of the native Circassian ones. He provides explanations of these terms in the footnotes designed to inform his readers about Circassian customs and traditions.

Nasika and other young people (both male and female) held vigil over him and kept him company. In order to entertain Zheraslan and prevent him from falling asleep, they engaged in conversation and played games making a loud clamor and chanting songs by his bedside. This Circassian ritual that Keshev briefly describes gives the reader an opportunity to glimpse at the ways young men and women interacted with each other. As seen in this episode, young men and women freely mingled, but since they were not given much voice in the story, there was no depth to the characters and to their representations.

Zheraslan, the wounded young man with whom Nasika fell deeply in love, happened to be the son of her future husband, Aitek. After spending four years in Aitek's house, Nasika met Zheraslan who just returned from the *atalyk*[8] where he had spent the last seventeen years of his life. Nasika recognized him immediately as that same wounded young man who stole her heart at her father's house. Once, when her husband was away at a meeting of the Circassian military council, Zheraslan secretly visited Nasika, who was now his mother-in-law. Nasika confessed to him that she loved him and still wore her *corset,* the sign of her virginity. While she was trying to convince Zheraslan to take her and run away together, they were both discovered in her room by the old man who unexpectedly returned home.

The author pauses here for a moment without revealing the immediate outcome of this scene and creates a highly suspenseful situation. The reader learns of the outcome of this story from the I-narrator who suddenly appears in the narrative as an eyewitness to the most dramatic and disturbing scene in the story. The travelling narrator, who, as he explains, was "driven by his curiosity and passion for the nomadic life" (138) happened to be in that village where he witnessed the following scene on the bridge: several men standing on top of the bridge lowered the body of an insanely screaming woman with her arms and legs tied with a rope into the river. After keeping her under the water for a while, they pull her up and repeat this action several times until the screaming ends. Finally, the body of the unconscious woman was brought up and placed on the bridge, where the narrator could see her: "The water gushed from the mouth and the nose of the woman. Her black braid cut in half and heavy from water was lying around in ugly lumps in the dust. Her blue face and her swollen stomach were disgusting to look at" (140). After asking the local men, why they were doing this to the poor woman, the narrator receives the following explanation from one of them: "'She is insane,' he replied with outrageous calm in his voice. 'This is the way our *khakims*[9] cure all of those who lost their mind…'" (140). The narrator further notes that all villagers who observed this action as bystanders agreed that it was the only way to calm the woman whenever she was seized by insanity, the only way to "cure" her. In the beginning, the I-narrator who observed this scene – although he was at pains to clearly distinguish himself from his "barbaric" countrymen who indifferently watched the scene – admitted that he was "so disturbed by the desperate cries of the woman that he could not utter a word during the whole operation" (140). Later, however, he became a participant when he bent over the woman to check her pulse and stayed with her until she regained consciousness, thus clearly posing himself as a more civilized person.

---

[8] The institution of *atalyk*, whereby the children of Circassian nobility were entrusted at an early age to their vassals to be raised and trained in a military fashion, was a longstanding tradition in Circassia.

This was also the moment when the narrator had a chance to take a closer look at the woman:

I peered into her face for quite some time. It still had the traces of outstanding beauty. The thin line of her black eyebrows, her big eyes, delicately rounded chin and a tiny mouth clearly demonstrated that this woman was not intended for such a deplorable state. Her proportioned body was amazing. I was struck, however, by one feature which had awakened in me a terrible suspicion – the tip of her nose had been cut off. (140)

---

[9] Here Keshev uses the Arabic word for "doctor" in order to demonstrate the backwardness of Islamic traditions and practices, and their negative impact on his countrymen who, instead of healing the woman, basically subjected her to torture. It is, however, questionable that the Islamic practices described by the author had such an impact on Circassians who had their own indigenous practices of healing. The healers (*aza* in Circassian means not only "doctor," but also a "skillful person") as those who possessed all kinds of knowledge held a respectable position in Circassian society.

The narrator then reports that after the woman comes back to her senses, she starts looking for something, until one of the men hands her what she was looking for – a wooden stump wrapped in rags (a dressed wooden "doll" that looks like a scarecrow) that she passionately hugs and kisses. Shortly thereafter, the woman becomes quiet and ties the wooden doll to her back and takes off. The narrator who admits that he was "shaken to the core" by what he has witnessed asked the local men to tell him who this woman was and why she had ended up like this. And, the local men related the fate of Nasika and her lover. Upon discovering his wife and his son together, Aitek severely punished both: he killed his son with a dagger on the spot, chopped off his wife's nose, and, to make it worse, he tied his son's corpse to the naked body of his wife and left her in a locked room for several days. As a result, the woman descended into madness.

It is worth noting that Keshev's protagonist admits at this point, at the end of his narrative:

I knew Nasika's story in general, with the inevitable errors and exaggerations, even before this incident. In the guest house of Karabatyr, I asked people to tell me her story, and for the first time I heard the terrible ending of this grim tale. I cannot doubt the truthfulness of my host's [the master's[10]] narrative. (141)

Thus, the narrator points out that his account of Nasika's story presented to the reader could be inaccurate, marking him as unreliable source of information, but he insists on the authenticity of his host's narrative. This position of the narrator contradicts the statement of the author himself who indicated that his primary goal is to give a realistic account of the ordinary life of his countrymen. Instead, the author creates a conventional romance that turns into a horror story. He also clearly uses this scene to distinguish his main protagonist, the I-narrator or the male traveler, as a Europeanized and civilized individual from his "barbaric" compatriots, thus mimicking the colonizer's position and the "master's narrative." The narrator ends the story with the following comment:

---

[10] Keshev uses the phrase "*khozyaiskikh rasskazov*" [the host's or the master's narrative]; *khozyain* has a double meaning in Russian: the host and the master.

Nasika's lot, however, was much more enviable than that of many others of the same sex. She gave her first passionate kiss to the very same young man who flashed in front of her like a dream and had taken possession of her heart ever since. (142)

This remark conspicuously reminds us of Pyotr Vyazemsky's description of the Circassian maiden in his 1822 review of Aleksadr Pushkin's poem *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* - "a woman who has loved has fulfilled all that she was destined for in this world, and she has lived in the fullest sense of the word" (Vyazemsky, 48).

It is important to understand how the Circassian woman is constructed in Keshev's texts, what functions she serves, and in what ways she is necessary to his discourse. The story focuses on one of the most recurring and dramatized themes in literary texts, namely a marriage arrangement and the devastating consequences of a love affair. The woman in this case becomes the center of scrutiny (her lover is dead and out of the picture) revealing the patriarchal tendency to objectify her. Her sexuality becomes a basis for a multitude of dramatized complications that emphasize her contradictory or dichotomous nature – she is categorized socially, literally, and artistically as both virgin and whore. In the beginning of the story, she is portrayed as young, beautiful, and virtuous, but as the story progresses, she is reduced to a deceptive, sick, insane, and physically altered or ugly woman. Nasika's identity is defined strictly in sexual terms with an emphasis on her femininity, her beauty, her physical appearance, her sexual encounter(s), but her *self* remains unknown and mysterious.

In a typical colonial representation of the relations between indigenous men and women, Circassian men, who represent the "dark side of modernity," patriarchy and backward traditions, are portrayed as perpetrators of violence against Circassian women. In Keshev's narrative, Nasika is transformed from a beautiful, pure, and angelic person to an ugly, insane woman with a disfigured body, who from the very beginning is under the total control of men in her society. Her dramatically deformed appearance is very disturbing. Symbolically speaking, her body was first beautifully assembled and then disassembled. She is marked by insanity and disfigured as a result of her rebellion – her love affair. By choosing love over the obedience to her much older husband, Nasika resisted the patriarchal order, and she is severely punished for challenging the existing order and disobeying the authority – as is her lover. This excessive violence, perpetrated by the patriarchy, as well as the excessive preoccupation with beauty and femininity, are characteristic of colonial representations of indigenous peoples. The metaphors employed by Keshev are thus allied with culturally defined roles: native men are marked by excessive violence and cruelty, they are Muslims, and plunderers; native women are marked by excessive beauty and passion, they are voiceless and relatively static. Such representations of colonial masculinities and femininities imposed certain gender constructs.

Keshev seems to criticize the male-dominated society with its obsolete practices. He calls for modernization, but disregards the traditional values, because to his mind tradition equals regress. Thus, his image of the Circassian woman as a passive victim, and the culture in general as barbarian reflect Russian imperial views, but in many instances, the author also contradicts himself through his ambivalent position. The main protagonist in Keshev's story is fascinated with the European rhetoric of modernity and juxtaposes it with the patriarchal nature of the traditionalist society that in his view inevitably oppresses and harms local women. He shows that in a patriarchal world, men develop a sense of entitlement to women; they have a right to women that women do not have to themselves. Keshev's women are domesticated and seen as objects of exchange between male partners.

Yet even as he perpetuates the mythology about the Circassian women, he also inadvertently unmasks it, and in doing so lays bare the structures that bind women. Describing Nasika's virtues and how much she was loved by everyone around her, Keshev writes, for example:

Our mountaineer appreciates a woman while at the same time he oppresses her. Circassian man enslaved the woman; following the example of the dissolute East, he degraded her to the level of the toy. But at the same time he made her the object of his enthusiastic praise and hymns. Any offender who comes under the protection of a woman is considered to be untouchable. (113)

In this passage, Keshev combines the rhetoric of the "oppressed woman" with the notion that she is being constantly praised by men in her society and possesses certain powers that are socially important. In the last sentence of the quote above, he refers to the enormous power that a woman was able to exercise by stopping the deadly disputes between her countrymen. What Keshev mentions here in passing is the right and the power of women to stop a duel or other types of revenge and violent situations, such as blood feuds between men, and to reconcile enemies. It is this ancient Circassian tradition, still preserved and practiced in the nineteenth century that testifies to the fact that women were structured differently in the indigenous societies than they were represented in imperial texts. Not only were they "mingling" into the supposed affairs of men, but they also had certain responsibilities in maintaining and restoring social order in the society. It is this ambivalent position and the threads of counter-hegemonic thoughts that make Keshev's narratives at once very simple and extremely complex.

In his story *The Two Months in the Village*, for example, the author describes an encounter between the main protagonist (the I-narrator) and a young Circassian woman named Zalikha at a "berry picking" party. The episode portrays a group of young men and women spending the entire day together interacting with each other, and entertaining each other while picking berries. The I-narrator, who immediately took a liking to Zalikha from the moment he saw her, expressed his surprise by her "courageous behavior" several times, first when she openly chose him to accompany her during the walk by directly rejecting another suitor, and then when she jumped with him on his horse and embraced him tightly when he lost control of his horse. And, yet the narrator poses a question: "Could one expect from such a lowly being as a Circassian woman such an open and bold expression of her ideas?" (57) This statement stands in stark contrast to the scene's description, making evident the dissonance between the assertive actions of women and the degrading comments of the narrator.

While mimicking the colonizer and rehearsing the rhetoric of modernity, the narrator blames the "barbaric" East for the degraded position of women, but at the same time, presents instances in which the indigenous women are structured differently and do not conform to his own assessment of them. Keshev's narratives both support and expose the patriarchal and colonial power system that subjugates women. However subversive some aspects of Keshev's vision may be, his work carries the dominant ideology about women; he both participates in the mythologizing process and sets out to critique a patriarchal society that objectifies and victimizes women. The violent acts perpetrated against Nasika and other women represented in his stories are the symptoms of an intensification of the patriarchal tendencies in Circassian society. Some other Russian/European commentators also reported in their eyewitness accounts on the similar punishment of women who had committed adultery. However, what Keshev fails to demonstrate is what the source of this societal transformation is. He blames this transformation on the decadent East and Islam. Keshev's commentary on how Islam and Islamic practices influenced Circassian society are extremely negative – his portrayal of the imam at Nasika's wedding ceremony is dismissive and "demonizing," using terminology such as "lustful" and "dirty" (119). By the same token, he depicts a traditional Circassian wedding ceremony as barbaric (with an emphasis on dirt) including such "primitive activities" as dancing, horse racing, gaming, and shooting.

Hoping to change or reform his fellow mountaineers, Keshev fell "victim" to the rhetoric of the colonizer and to the "spell of modernity." He criticized the "primitive" ways of his own culture and praised the modernity introduced by the European/Russian cultures; he saw them as superior to his own. Keshev showed Circassians as being out of step with modernity and promoted union with Russia as the best way for Circassian people to survive and advance in the modern world.

And yet, to some extent, Keshev does attempt to unsettle dominant categories. Through one of his characters, for example, the author expresses the idea that Circassian culture does not lack either sophistication or spirituality and is not so inferior to the European enlightenment. In fact, even in the nineteenth century Islam and Islamic practices were not as widespread among the Circassians. The external Islamization of Circassians that occurred mostly under the late influence of the Ottoman Empire had never fully been completed. The Circassians partially preserved their indigenous belief system in *Tkha* (the supreme God), and *Khabza*, namely the Circassian traditional ethical code of behavior that regulated the relationships between men and women, adults and children in society, still remained very strong. According to *Khabza*, women, as well as men in Circassian society had rights and responsibilities. One of the woman's rights was a free choice of her future husband, and one of her main responsibilities was to ensure the continuation of her kin. If for some reason this did not happen, for example due to the age of her husband, she had the right to leave her husband.

The myth of modernity based on the idea of progress and development and the casting of tradition as its dark *other* lies at the core of Eurocentrism. It has undoubtedly affected the ways in which non-Western cultures were viewed and interpreted. Keshev supported the modernist ideology and the colonial project, which was part of this ideology. By demonstrating the barbarity and cruelty of local men, however, the author failed to mention the technologies of violence that were used by the Russian Empire during the colonial conquest of Circassia - the burning of villages and crops, the dispossession of their lands, and the expulsion of the majority of Circassian population to the Ottoman empire. According to Maja Catic, the Tsarist deportations were motivated by the logic of settler colonialism, aimed at permanently removing

Circassians as competitors for land and recourses (Catic 2015, 1698). This violent incorporation of Circassian territories was intended to permanently extend the territorial jurisdiction of the

Russian state over the North Caucasus. And, yet in typical Russian colonial narratives, only local Circassian men are represented as cruel, vengeful, and alien to humanism.

The association of the local men with violence - a stereotype that has been revived even today, in post-Soviet Russian society - and the subsequent “liberation” of the oppressed local woman served as justification for the Russian/Soviet imperialism. Russia, as an “enlightened and modern” empire, assumes, then, a supervising position over the “impulsive, quick to anger, self-destructive, excessively macho, and exhibiting a pronounced lack of personal self-control mountaineers” (Jersild, 104) who are clearly incapable of self-governance. The feminization of aboriginal males was never widely used in the colonialist interpretation of the North Caucasus, but local men were associated with violence. They were portrayed as violent, barbaric, and savage; therefore, the “gender and sexual problematic was used by the Russian imperial rhetoric in its justification of colonization coded as emancipation of the local women from the horrible male dictate” (Tlostanova 2010, 78).

Similar representations of Circassian men, we find in Keshev’s stories. In the *Scarecrow*, all village men are portrayed participating in violence against Nasika – the father, who loved his daughter so tenderly, but then decided to give her away to the old man; Aitek, who was overcome by his desire to the much younger woman; and even Zheraslan, who refused to run away with Nasika, stating that the “betrayal of his father would be something that he would not wish even upon his enemy” (137). And of course, Aitek and all other men in the village participated directly and indirectly in the physical abuse and the disciplining of Nasika’s body. Significantly, Zheraslan’s characterization is marked by ambivalence; he is the object of Nasika’s affectionate love and admiration, even after he was killed and turned into a piece of wood that resembled the scarecrow. The metaphor of the scarecrow that acquires a central position in Kehsev’s narrative is attributable then to both characters representing the disfigured body of Nasika and the dead body of Zheraslan, and to what happened to their love in this "primitive" society that supposedly did not attach any value to women and their feelings.

Zheraslan's ambivalent position, however, marks him not only as a victim, but also as one of the local men who are always demonized in Keshev's narrative. In one paragraph, the author praises him for his bravery on the battlefield, in the next one, he stigmatizes and even feminizes him:

His facial features were not only exquisitely subtle, but also marked by an almost feminine tenderness: if he would be dressed in women's clothes, then no one would recognize him as a man... As a true child of this half-savage region, Zheraslan loved to brag to his friends about his amorous conquests, even though half of them were not true, at the same time however, this boaster never talked about his acts of bravery on the battlefield. (133)

Similarly, Aitek was characterized as a "very old man who was married five times before he took Nasika as his wife" (126), which seems to be another instance of gross exaggeration on the part of the author. His predatory nature is described as follows:

Aitek felt that he was a thief who stole a whole life of an innocent creature. But what tormented him was not his conscience - no! With his conscience he will never stand on ceremony. He was tormented by the belief that one who steals is in turn robbed. 'A man should not trust three things, - said prince Aitek – his horse, his rifle, and his wife.' …At the first sight of his wife, Aitek became convinced of the possibility of her betrayal." (131)

Aitek's distrust and his suspicion of his wife that intensified to the point that he forbade not only men but also women to visit her stands in stark contrast to the descriptions of the European travelers who visited Circassian lands. Most travelers reported that they have noticed that unmarried Circassian women have been freely interacting with the opposite sex and that the relationship between Circassian men and women, between husbands and wives was based on trust and respect. Certainly, the gender hierarchy presented in the story could be interpreted as evidence of the increased patriarchal tendencies and militarization of Circassian society at this pivotal point in its history, but it is the narrator’s position that makes us suspicious of his interpretation of this history. By reducing the Circassian men and women to absolute difference, Keshev also erased the possibility or the necessity of understanding or knowing them. By doing so, he also participated in the erasure of indigenous forms of knowledge and of the local cosmology, even though he refers to some of them in his texts. This self-orientalizing tendency of Circassian colonial subjects signals a deep internalization of the borrowed European Orientalist clichés and is said to be one of the major accomplishments of Russian colonization (Tlostanova, 2010).

Keshev adopts wholesale Romantic evocations of native life as a cruel anarchy and a recurring cycle of violence. His stories re-enact the colonial conflict between savagery and civilization, where savagery retains an upper hand. Even though his conviction of Western/Russian superiority is sometimes shattered, the hierarchies remain in place throughout. The colonialist consciousness or “mental colonization” of the national elites is usually attributed to the colonial education they received. Russian language and literature played a key role in naturalizing European/Russian values. Thus, the knowledge which made possible the advance of the colonized within the colonial system, and which furnished the terms of their protest, entrapped them at the same time.

The persistence of this kind of imagery in the texts of early colonial writers demonstrates the difficulty of transcending the dominant language of empire, literary and figuratively. Zarina Kanukova’s play *The Bridge* (2006), on the other hand, transcends this boundary. As I mentioned earlier, Kanukova re-writes Keshev’s story in the Circassian language, and thus disrupts the process of privileging Russian as the language of Empire and of the canon. By doing so, she strips the text of the cultural authority invested in it by the language; she contests and reconfigures the values, attitudes, and ways of seeing the world that inform Keshev’s narrative. The power of Nasika’s image created by Keshev is undeniable. The questions that arise then are: How does Kanukova reimagine Nasika and her story? How does she forge the relationship between men and women, between image and identity? And, how does the restaging of these relationships promote new ways of imagining the encounter between *self* and *other* or between self as other?

Kanukova devises several creative tactics for "misrecognizing" hegemonic imagery and for complicating the opposition between "subject" and "object" of the Orientalist, colonial, masculinist nationalist gaze. Firstly, she introduces in her play two girls named Nasika - the "first" Nasika is the one before she turned insane, and the "second" Nasika is the one who is "insane." They both appear almost at the same time on stage, thus disrupting the linear progression of Keshev's story and the objectification of the main heroine who gazes at her *self* as the *other* since the spectators also have a simultaneous view of both of them. Another subversive tactic deployed by Kanukova is the use of the *bridge* as a potent metaphor for transcending the static positionality of the characters and decentering the dichotomous constructions. It is an important element in the staging of the play, which is described as follows: the bridge hangs above the stage with several rooms around it; the one directly underneath the bridge is Nasika's room in Aitek's house; the other two are Nasika's own room and the guestroom in her father's house. The bridge as a metaphor is connected with the multiplicity of points of view that allow the object to be viewed from various different angles and therefore helps to overcome the singularity of the perspective. As metaphors, bridges also symbolize connection, communication, transition, and the states of in-betweenness, and are therefore a useful tool for accessing the relationship between image and identity.

The opening scene in Kanukova's play begins with several masked men dragging the screaming Nasika (the "second") onto the bridge, and as they lower her body into the water the screaming ends. So, right at the beginning of the play, the spectator is made uncomfortable by being confronted with a violent scene that is intensified by the sound of a woman's scream. This stands in stark contrast to Nasika's appearance in Kehsev's story, whose fame and beauty was mentioned in the text even before she appeared in the guestroom with the other girls and boys to entertain the wounded Zheraslan. Also, the men who perform this violent act in the play are unknown and unrecognizable because they are wearing “masks” – their true identities (their faces) are hidden from us.

In the play, after the “second” Nasika is brought up from the water onto the bridge and regains her consciousness, she approaches one of the rooms on the stage and sees the “first” Nasika surrounded by her girlfriends who unsuspectingly engage in their activities – they are putting colorful ribbons into Nasika’s hair. From that moment on, the “second” Nasika tries to intervene and manipulate the action by asserting herself in bizarre and compelling ways. She encourages the other Nasika to disobey her father and not to marry the old man. And then she challenges the authority herself by appearing to the old man (Nasika’s husband) and aggressively confronting him. Her behavior is truly subversive, and in a way it reinscribes her attitude towards marrying this old man; she confronts him directly by questioning his behavior: “You are the age of my grandfather! Why did you take me as your wife?” She even tries to kill him - the “second” Nasika took out the old man’s dagger while he was asleep and pointed it toward him. Her defiant attitude is expressed by both her behavior and her language; she calls Aitek a “stinky old man.” Her dark humor and manipulative behavior, her sudden appearances and disappearances convey her trickster-like qualities.

Kanukova destabilizes the power hierarchy in her play by introducing multiple voices and transgressions. Nasika in Keshev’s male-centered narrative barely utters a word. The Nasika(s), and the other characters in the play, feel real, because they speak up and they speak their own language. In addition, men and women are presented interacting with each other. Kanukova uses vivid colloquial language in order to recreate the characters and their situations. In this play, the author engages in a conscious deconstruction of Orientalist stereotypes and moves towards a positive self-identification. She expresses a feminine sensibility that demands justice, and she examines love relationship from a woman’s point of view. The double character introduced by Kanukova could also be interpreted as the mirror image of

Keshev's alienated sense of self and the painful process of self-estrangement. But, it could also suggests that Nasika is no longer able to live inside that body; she feels the need to step outside the body which is both hers and not hers at the same time.

In Kanukova's play, the image(s) of Nasika are closer to the depictions of women in indigenous cosmology, where gender roles are more fluid and defined by non-sexual concepts. They are based on different factors, for example, on the age or social status of women (Shami 2000, Tekueva 2006, Tlostanova 2010). In contrast to Keshev's story, Kanunova does not focus exclusively on gender-based oppression, but instead highlights how an evil act of one individual – the desire for a young woman – destroys the lives of two people. Kanukova's heroine challenges the patriarchy differently. She puts more emphasis on the responsibility of an individual with regard to upholding the traditional values of Circassian society that considers certain actions that damage the lives of people and that tip the balance of the social order as being unacceptable. For example, an old man marrying a very young woman is considered to be a moral perversion and a loss of dignity on part of the man, because in Circassian traditions gender and age are more significant categories than sex. Circassian men recognize not only the feminine virtues of women, but also the masculine traits. Therefore, the disorder is caused by the older male's desire towards a much younger female who could be his granddaughter. Kanukova sees this condition of women as the consequence of the moral perversion of a man who failed to live up to the values of Circassian traditions – respect for women and the dignified position of elderly people in Circassian society. The play seeks recognition of women as females and exponents of the feminine but also as a reason to reform the distorted nature of men and of humanity in general – in the play people who participate in violence are all faceless and masked. While Nasika in Kehsev's story accepts the symbolic patriarchal order as it is, she lacks potency and agency. Her madness seems a natural outcome when it is viewed in the context of the gradual disintegration of the central character. Kanunova as a female author-dramatist transforms the novel into a performable and utterable work that, whether produced on stage or not, promotes a woman-centered resistance to the lack of female agency in Keshev's nineteenth-century novel and the powerlessness and objectification of Circassian women. Most importantly, Kanukova's construction of Nasika destabilizes the canonical representations of Circassian women in nineteenth-century colonial literary texts by presenting female characters as agents with complex identities that are no longer perceived as "aliens" or "victims" but rather as microcosms of the world (including, rather than excluding them). They are not fixed in any particular constructions of themselves; therefore, they are open to self-construction through multiple (trans)formations. In other words, these "new models" challenge the received concepts and notions of the female, of native Circassian women, and particularly the notion of submissiveness that has marked so much of the colonial literature and the Russian literary canon. Kanukova's counter-narrative with its focus on women's agency and authority, re-inscribes and re-signifies the representations and the experiences of Circassian women.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ashcroft, B. Griffiths G. Tiffin. H. (2006), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Second Edition). London and New York: Routledge.

Boehmer, E. (1995), *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Catic, M. (2015), "Circassians and the Politics of Genocide Recognition", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67/10, 1685-1708.

Fanon, F. (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press Inc.

Jersild, A. (2002), *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917*. Montreal and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Kanunova, Z. (2006), *L'emyzh* [*The Bridge*]. Nalchik: "Oshkhamakho".

Keshev, Adil-Girei. (1976), *Izbrannye Proizvedeniya* [Selected Works]. Edited by Raisa Khashkhozheva. Nalchik: Elbrus.

Khan-Girei. (2008), *Notes about Circassia*. Edited by V. Gardanov and G. Mambetov. Nalchik: El'Fa.

Khashkhozheva, R. Kh. (1976), *Adil-Girei Keshev, Izbrannye Proizvedeniya* [Selected Works]. Foreword by R.Kh. Khashkhozheva. Nalchik: Elbrus.

Shami, S. (2000), "Engendering Social Memory: Domestic Rituals, Resistance and Identity in the North Caucasus." In *Gender and Identity Construction: Women of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey*. Edited by Feride Acar and Ayșe Günes-Ayata, 306-332. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill.

Tekueva, M. A. (2006), *Muzhchina i Zhenshchina v Adygskoĭ kul'ture: Tradit͡sii i Sovremennost'* (Man and Woman in Circassian Culture: Tradition and Modernity), Nalchik: GP KBR "Respublikanskii poligrafkombinat im. Revolutsii 1905: Ėl'-Fa.

Tlostanova, M. (2010), *Gender Epistemologies and Eurasian Borderlands*. Comparative Feminist Studies Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vyazemsky, P.A. (1822), "On *The Captive of the Caucasus.*" *Syn otechestva*, LXXXII, n. 49, 115-26.