

# An Analogy between Karakalpak Rites and Bakhtin's Carnival\*

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## Abstract

Karakalpaks furnished some of their traditions with the rites that praise and demand fertility for their women and earth, that convey the society's acknowledgement of the integration of death and birth, and that depict the importance of threshold. Mikhail Bakhtin's observation of the carnival and the grotesque reveals similar concepts: fertility, juxtaposition of death and birth and the idea of threshold. This article draws an analogy between some of Karakalpak rites and Bakhtin's carnival in terms of these three concepts. It concludes that Karakalpak traditions and rites, as well as carnival as discussed by Bakhtin, were formulated as a consequence of the society's infallible unity which was firmly subordinated to the privilege of people's collaboration with nature and their negation of the absolute one-sided truth and certainty.

## Keywords

Karakalpaks, Karakalpak rites, Mikhail Bakhtin, carnival, grotesque.

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## Introduction

Karakalpakstan<sup>5</sup>, which occupies the north-western part of Uzbekistan and the south coast side of the Aral Sea, is an autonomous republic with a population of almost two million. Karakalpaks' establishment of high cultural heritage, which can be seen in such ancient sites like Toprak-Kala, Koy-Kirilgan-Kala, Mizdahkan even in the present, is a praiseworthy achievement because they were always under the threat of invasion and famine in the past. The rural economic context of the region where Karakalpaks used to live made them advance agriculture, farming, fishing, and hunting. These backbones of Karakalpak economy obviously did not conflict with Karakalpak traditions; on the contrary, they profoundly influenced their culture. Many traditional rites of Karakalpaks imbibed the elements of this lifestyle. Of course a society's culture is not only the accumulation of economic experience; it is, as Tokarev states, the outcome of the relationship that these people had<sup>6</sup> (1964: 32-33). Yet, the aim of this article is not to dwell upon Karakalpaks' cultural relationship with their neighbours, but to focus on some rites that are determined by Karakalpaks' perception of nature grounded in the total integration of nature and human beings and by their spirituality. It will be accurate to state that the rites analysed in this article reflect the features of a very distant pre-Islamic era. The advance of Islam in Central Asia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD could not wipe out the rites modified by Karakalpaks' bonds with their environment. That's why, even though Karakalpaks' official religion is Islam in its Sunni form, they have elements of such beliefs like animism<sup>7</sup> and totemism<sup>8</sup>. The dominance of these pre-Islamic rites in Karakalpak culture which include the principles of animism and totemism can be felt in the fact that ethnographers had to establish an independent branch of Russian ethnography that deals with these pre-Islamic rites (Basilov 1992: 3). What is more, though not as strong as they were in the past, some of the elements of Karakalpak rites can still be felt in Karakalpak culture.

A prerequisite of a scrutiny of Karakalpak culture should be a comprehension of it as one of the fundamental structural bricks that are combined to create a basis of Turkic people. Therefore, an idea of the indivisibility of Karakalpak culture from other cultures like Uzbek or Kazak should be promoted. Hence, as Zelenin states, the background cultural structures of many contemporary

societies have been cemented in one frame for a long period, which prevents the possibility of an independent analysis of each historical branch of society (1916: 12). Yet, there are a number of similarities in terms of some rituals between societies who are very remote from each other both geographically and culturally. The aim of this study is to contribute to the study of an analogy between histories of communities that are rarely characterised as similar. The analysis of some of the Karakalpak rites in this article is accompanied by a scrutiny of Karakalpaks' preoccupation with fertility, their collective wisdom forged on the acceptance of a circular movement of life and death and their reverence for the threshold. These are espoused by the discussion of parallel ideas from Bakhtin's carnival concept. Karakalpak rites and rituals receive elaborate expression and analysis in three main parts in this article: fertility, the juxtaposition of death and birth and the idea of threshold. Analogous ideas from Bakhtin's theoretical oeuvre will be examined accordingly. The article will conclude that although Karakalpaks and the Europeans whose carnivalistic rites Bakhtin investigates are very distinct communities, they have the same ways of coming to terms with life; a strong unity of the community should be based on strong bonds with nature and the ability to negate certainty and stability.

Bakhtin's two seminal works, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*, have been acknowledged as his touchstones of the discourse on carnival. Bakhtin's concept of carnival grew out of the medieval cultural carnival, which attempted to promote the ideals of freedom, pleasure, body, fertility, nature and which subjected human beings to the governance of absolute unity and harmony. Medieval carnival addressed people's desire to deal with certain issues that were antithetical to human nature governed by the spirit of freedom and pleasure. In other words, medieval carnival was an activity of dissemination of this spirit to everyone who enjoyed the unlimited freedom from the suffocating atmosphere of strict rules and norms. This medieval carnival that used to be an escape from all everyday problems of the medieval society appears as background for Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. This notion of freedom and unorthodox outlook of the medieval carnival have become touchstones for Bakhtin's concept of the carnival, which, of course, is not completely similar to the medieval carnival of the Europeans. The essential project of Bakhtin's theory of carnival is to provide a frame for the activities and images that accommodate the sense

of the ritualistic medieval carnival with all its scepticism towards authority, social laws, hierarchies and truth. When Bakhtin analyses the works of Dostoevsky and Rabelais, he looks for the activities of the characters and the images that give the impression of this absolute and ubiquitous scepticism. In order to understand what Bakhtin means when he discusses carnivalistic activities and images, it is useful to realise the importance of the grotesque for Bakhtin. According to Bakhtin's conceptualisation, the grotesque possesses many of the basic concepts of the medieval carnival because grotesque image absorbs the sense of freedom, gaiety and fluctuating spirit.

The term *grotesque* comes from Italian words *la grottesca* and *grottesco*, which are derived from the word *grotta*, meaning a cave, and which “were coined to designate a certain ornamental style [of painting] which came to light during late fifteenth-century excavations” (Kayser 1981: 19). Principles of plurality can be easily applied to this style of painting as it comprises the bodies of two different creatures in one scene. As Kayser states, this style was innovative because it merged the worlds of animals, plants and human beings. Thus, in grotesque images “the natural order of things has been subverted” (Kayser 1981: 20-21). And this conscious recognition of the subversion of the common order of life is precisely what Bakhtin's carnival addresses because the medieval carnival itself operated on a principle of an undermining of the common, everyday and routine standpoint towards everything. Such a style of painting fulfils its duty of securing an effective background for Bakhtin's exploration of the grotesque which necessitates the mirroring of the carnival sense of the world.

### **Fertility**

Because Karakalpaks were always on the sharp edge between life and death because of the invading forces of the neighbours, they always tried to survive in harsh weather conditions and to maintain the fertility of their women and nature. Some rites that show the importance of fertility in Karakalpak culture and that bear some similarities with Bakhtin's carnival sense of the world can be analysed under two main categories: having children and the bounty of the earth and rivers. First, having children was always the aim behind every marriage in Karakalpak culture, which is full of rites that either show that the women are ready for reproduction or heal from infertility. That's why Karakalpak wedding ceremonies are replete with the symbols of

fertility and the rites that signify reproduction because a newly-wed couple is the main source of new life and beginnings. One of the symbols is “kalim”, the money or the gifts that are given to the bride’s family for the bride by the bridegroom’s family. It is usually paid with the bulls or cows, and the name of this sum of gifts is “tuar”. Tuar can be translated as she will give birth, which is a promise of the continuation of the bridegroom’s family. Among many rites that are closely related to the idea of fertility, the rite of consuming cattle should be definitely mentioned here. It is performed when a bridegroom visits the village of the bride for the first time. His family has to send a cow to the bride’s family and the meat of this cow is divided among all the neighbours and consumed in a collective way. Besides being the sign of the newly created unity between two families (Toleubayev 1991: 16-17), it is also a rite that promises bounty and fertility. Indeed, as Esbergenov and Atamuratov claim, this rite is the symbolical empowerment of the unity of the whole community because animals are consumed by everybody (1975: 81).

Bakhtin’s theory of the carnival and the grotesque embrace the same preoccupation with fertility. It should not be left out that when Bakhtin discusses grotesque images he stresses the importance of the “figurines of senile pregnant hags” of the Kerch terracotta collection<sup>9</sup> (1984b: 25). The figurines suggest the idea of renewal and continuity and at the same time they symbolise fertility because despite the old age, these women have a new life within. As Bakhtin states, “[o]ne of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image . . . is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born” (1984b: 26). And this is very like the idea that Karakalpaks have when they use the term tuar; in the examples above the focus is strictly on the aspect of women’s ability to give birth. As regards Karakalpaks’ sharing of the cattle during the wedding ceremony, it has a similar meaning with the consumption of food in a collective way in Bakhtin’s carnival. For Bakhtin, feasts are carnivalistic activities at the core of which lays the idea of abundance (1984b: 9). Collective consuming of food plays an important role in Bakhtin’s concept of carnival and the grotesque because when people eat, they take the world in. So a unity of human beings and nature is established. The act of eating in a collective way is a “healthy transgression of the body’s confines and the enlargement of the individual’s self” (Vice 1997: 172). It is an act of

becoming a huge whole body with the rest of the world. That's why Bakhtin identifies the body that "can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the entire universe" (1984b: 318). It is the body that ignores differences and embraces everything. Consequently, this body is one with the bodies of the animals. "[T]he combination of human and animal traits is, as we know, one of the most ancient grotesque forms" (Bakhtin 1984b: 316). So it is impossible to separate the world of animals from the world of human beings. That's why Bakhtin states that grotesque is "festive," "cosmic, social;" the image is not "private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life"; it represents all people and links these people to the whole world (Bakhtin 1984b: 26). Therefore, under the light of this information, it can be said that Karakalpak rite of eating the cattle in a collective way is their demonstration of their strong dependence on nature and their desire to show that they are a part of this nature.

As regards cattle, from the examples of the symbols and rites symbolising fertility that are given above and from the whole Karakalpak culture it is obvious that these animals are sacred for Karakalpaks. The importance of the cattle in Karakalpak beliefs is similar to Zoroastrian<sup>10</sup> belief that the first human being comes from a half-bull, half-human being creature called Gayomard<sup>11</sup>, that was created out of earth (Knorozov 1949: 91-92). In this vein, it is possible to grasp the importance of cattle for many societies in pre-Islamic era. It is not only a symbol of fertility, it is life, or the beginning of life, itself. A little statuette of a human being with huge cattle horns, which look like a crescent, was found by Karakalpak archaeologists on the site of Kurgancha in Tahtakopru district in Karakalpakstan. The statuette dates back to the 7-8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The statuette confirms the Zoroastrian belief that human beings and the cattle have the same beginning. Indeed, both the Zoroastrian belief and the statuette have the bodies of human beings and animals in one image, which is similar to the grotesque style of painting. As regards the image of the horns in a shape of a half-moon on the statuette, it should be noted that the image of crescent is also accepted as a sign of fertility and reproduction in Karakalpak culture. And the young Karakalpak girls used to fasten ear-rings with a crescent in their ears in the past to show that they are ready to get married and have children. The image of crescent is not only a sign of readiness for reproduction it is also a kind of treatment

against infertility. If a woman cannot become pregnant, she wears special silver jewellery around her neck with an image of cattle horns that resemble a crescent.

Of course, cattle are not the only animals that symbolise or cause fertility. Such animals like camels, dogs, chicken, birds and some plants often play a role in the rites related to fertility. A camel serves a function of healing women who cannot become pregnant (Esbergenov et al. 1975: 124-125). Women pass under the camel, for example, because they believe that this act will help them become fertile. A newly-wed pair sleeps in a place surrounded by camel's leather which is believed to accelerate the process of an initiation of a new life. The rite called "kutluayak", which can be translated as happy paw, is also performed during wedding ceremonies to show that the bride should have children. During this rite a puppy is put onto the bride's laps. In fact, the word "kut" in Karakalpak language means fertile and happy. The adjective "kutlu", derived from the word "kut" is widely used by Turkic peoples. Indeed, a dog, according to Karakalpak oral legends, also has the same beginnings with human beings as it is seen in the belief about cattle. It is believed that human beings and the dogs have the same clay. It was thought that a dog initiated a circle of life; and after this initiation, a soul of a human being could pass from one animal to the other and vice versa (Snesarev 1969: 319-322). In the same vein, Bakhtinian grotesque "represents the body as unbounded, in transformation" (Dentith 1995: 80). It means that grotesque is not limited to a specific image; it symbolises change and, as a result, it depicts "fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance" (Bakhtin 1984b: 19). That is why, according to Bakhtin, the grotesque images are "ugly, monstrous, hideous" (1984b: 25).

Another rite that Karakalpaks perform in order to evoke bounty in reproduction is to thrash women with different animals like chicken or birds and different plants; and the name of this rite is "kaktiru", which can be translated as beating. In fact, this rite is also performed in order to heal a person from various diseases. It is believed that the sick spirit is beaten by the animals or plants. The rite of kaktiru is similar to the act of thrashing in Bakhtin's carnival concept. As Bakhtin states, during carnivals people were beaten and thrashed, which used to symbolise the killing of old age. This act has a "deep meaning" as Bakhtin concludes. It represents the death of an

old age which should be destroyed in order to have a new one. According to Bakhtin's analysis in this regard, killing the old age is like "bodily sowing" which fertilizes the earth (1984b: 207) and brings forth a new life. In short, Karakalpaks have many rites that show the importance of women's ability to reproduce. They also have rites that heal infertile women. And all these rites can easily be analysed under the light of Bakhtin's theory of the carnival and the grotesque because both Karakalpak traditions and Bakhtin's discussion on carnival and the grotesque are preoccupied with the bodily function of reproduction and the urge to be a part of nature.

Second, cattle have been functioning as one of the main symbols of bounty of the earth and rivers. Earth has always been important for Karakalpaks because it is the source of renewal and rebirth. Karakalpaks believe that earth is their mother and call it "ana-*jer*", which means mother-earth. They believe that they should return mother-earth everything that it has given to them. For instance, during a wedding ceremony, the newly-wed couple is sprinkled by wheat, sugar or other types of food. Besides its being an act of respect for the dead, this rite, which is called "*shahu*" – sprinkling, is the rite of spreading the power to reproduce (Zelenin 1936: 32-33). Here, the dead represent earth because the dead bodies are put into earth. And, in this respect, this rite of sprinkling food particles symbolises feeding the earth so that it can become more fertile. And, as a result, mother-earth will help the newly married people initiate a fertile life. Bakhtinian grotesque is also closely related to earth. Indeed, one of the main features of the grotesque is bringing everything abstract down to the earth. Grotesque is degradation of everything to the level of the earth; "it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (1984b: 19-20).

According to Karakalpak beliefs, another concept a bull represents is power that creates rivers and lakes. That's why it is believed that river *Oguz-derya*, which can be translated as bull-river was created by a bull. Near *Khiva*, there is a lake called *Gouik*, which, according to *Snesarev*, can also be related to cattle (1969: 315). Cattle have usually been sacrificed for the bounty of rivers. A rite called "*kan-shahu*", which means spreading of blood, is widely used among Karakalpaks. The blood of cattle is poured into a river which is an act of asking for the wealth of water in rivers. Another version of a similar rite includes not a blood, but the bull's whole body. A dead bull's



body is sent into a new water channel in order to have bounty of water and agricultural harvest (Snesarev 1969: 310). Although a bull, or the cattle, is accepted as a sacred animal in Karakalpak culture, people sacrifice it. An act of killing their totem, a bull or another animal, is an act of getting its power and an act of regeneration (Tolstov 1948: 302). So by killing their sacred animal people get its power and fertility or pass it to rivers. If looked at this rite of the sacrificing of the cattle from a Bakhtinian point of view, it is eliminating the wall between a private body and the rest of the world. As it was mentioned earlier, grotesque body is one huge world. As Jung states, “the body is the initial insertion of the self into the world of others, other bodies” (1998: 97). The body is “unfinished” and outgrowing its own boundaries (1984b: 26). So the cattle whose blood fills the rivers in Karakalpak rites passes its fertility to water.

### **Death and Birth**

Karakalpak rites and traditions that are characterised by the interaction of death and birth attain specific understanding which finds its analogy in the carnivalistic rites and the grotesque in Bakhtin's oeuvre. Turkish-Mongol societies used to believe that death cannot be accepted as a determinant of total disappearance; it was interpreted as a transition from one realm to the other (Tleubergenova 1995: 105). Similarly, for Karakalpaks, life is an unbounded circular movement in which death takes its turn in order to guarantee a new beginning. Thus, they believe that the dead do not dissolve in the infiniteness but remain among them and have a considerable influence on the world of the living people. Therefore, Karakalpaks care about the dead by dedicating some activities to them; they foster the relationship with the souls of the dead by remembering their names when milking a cow for the first time, getting the first harvest, or having the first foods, for example.

The unending circle of life and death can be seen in many ceremonies and one of them is the one that is dedicated to the newly born baby. These ceremonies show the belief that birth and death are identical (Tleubergenova 1995: 105). A sick baby is usually healed by being washed in water that is used for washing a dead person who had a very long life. The act symbolises the passage of the same long and healthy life to the baby (Esbergenov et al. 1975: 54, 142). In Turkish-Mongol beliefs, a baby and an old man are identified with each other and the rite of covering a baby's cradle with an old

man's clothes in Karakalpak traditions depicts this. The old man's life passes on to the baby and vice versa (Tleubergenova 1995: 105). Karakalpaks are always afraid of losing their babies and the most important image of the death of small babies is a mythological female creature called Albasli, a naked woman with red hair and huge breasts, who is believed to attack women and take away the babies. However, Albasli is also regarded as a goddess of reproduction. The women from Samarkand region used to wear jewellery with the images of Albasli in order to have fertility. Such a double-faced attitude towards Albasli suggests the juxtaposition of death and life (Mambetullayev 1990: 81).

There are other Karakalpak ceremonies in which the juxtaposition of life and death becomes obvious. For example, clothes of a dead person who had a long life were usually given to the young in order to pass his/her long life to them. It is believed that this rite is a softened version of an ancient rite of consuming the dead body of an old person. This was a rite of passing of the dead person's soul into the living bodies of the young representatives of Karakalpak society. The element of "bakan", a long stick with two points at the top that was used for closing and opening of the top door of "yurt"<sup>12</sup>, plays an important role in the relationship between the living people and the dead. When somebody dies, his/her clothes are hung on bakan during the funeral. Bakan is also put on the road when a bridegroom is coming to his bride's home to take her during a wedding ceremony. It is also seen in a room where a woman gives birth to a baby. In short, bakan creates a close relationship between something new and old, life and death.

"Kempiroldi", which can be translated as an old woman is dead, is a Karakalpak rite that is performed during a wedding ceremony and reminds all the participants of the presence of death. An old woman who symbolises death lies in front of the door and when the bridegroom enters he has to give some money to the old woman. In other words, he has to respect death in order to start a new life. As Arginbayev states, giving money to the old woman symbolises giving a life to the death (1973: 195). The three-level structure – life-death-life – of such rites like kempiroldi can be seen in nearly all agricultural societies where fertility is significant (Veletskaya 1978: 5). So, it again specifies Karakalpaks' belief in a circular movement of life in which death brings fertility. It is even recorded that there used to be an

unnatural death act for the old people among Karakalpaks. Old people were put to death by the young ones in order to bring wealth, energy and vitality to their society. Ayimbetov records a story about this rite and states that some sons were unable to perform this rite and had to hide their parents from the others (1977: 195).

Bakhtin was also engaged in the discussion on death to which he responded in a positive way by seeing it not as a “negation of life” (1984b: 50), but as a part of it and as a new beginning. The grotesque, being the distinctive carnivalistic image, depicts the necessity of bringing the idea of death and birth in one scene. As a result, the grotesque is “an active subject, an event-making agent” (Jung 1998: 98) and the event is the birth of a new life which is close to death. Therefore, as Bakhtin says, the image of the body is usually shown close to the borderline, “in immediate proximity to birth or death, to infancy or old age, to the womb or the grave, to the bosom that gives life or swallows it up” (1984b: 26). As Emerson states, Bakhtin does not see a “blank space” after the death of somebody or something as a “void,” but as “a space that is waiting for new meaning to flow in along newly available perspectives” (2002: 17). As a consequence of such an attitude to death, Bakhtin’s notion of time is that of constant death and rebirth. As Knowles claims, this conception of time is based on the “materialist principle” of “the cyclical year” in which the images of the agricultural world play an important role (1998: 37). Earth devours to create a new life and this goes on again and again; this process knows no end. So, a human being’s life is somewhere in-between. So it is possible to create a link between Karakalpak rites and Bakhtin’s carnival and grotesque in terms of the juxtaposition of death and birth because both sides have accepted the idea that life has a circular movement.

### **Threshold**

The element of threshold in Karakalpak culture exhibits a possible connection of this rite with some assumptions that Bakhtin’s carnival and the grotesque encompass, too. Threshold is the most important part of a Karakalpak yurt, which is understood as the centre of the realm of this community because yurt is the place where Karakalpaks establish their small and coherent particle of their society. Hence the entrance to this coherent world has distinctive features which are respected and considered sacred.

Some rites that are performed on the threshold in Karakalpak culture are driven by this respect. The mechanism of the construction of Karakalpak yurt is based on the threshold as it is the first part that is erected, right after which, as Tleubergenova states, an animal is sacrificed on the spot of the threshold (1995: 103). The sacrifice accounts for the respect for the dead and at the same time for the new beginning. Here, threshold emerges as the point of in-between two distinctive worlds: the world of the inside with an atmosphere of peace and the world of the outside which Tleubergenova judges as the realm of death according to Karakalpak beliefs (1995: 102). So threshold carries the significance of erasing the sharp contrasts between two realms in order to regulate the smooth transition from one into the other. Threshold's importance is accompanied by its being the bond between life and death, which testifies Karakalpaks' circular movement of life that was mentioned earlier. This recognition of the superiority of the threshold over other parts of the yurt is an urge to see this place as vastly influential in terms of change because it encompasses the forces of both realms. Manifestations of respect for threshold appear in wedding and funeral ceremonies. A bride's act of bowing for several times in front of the threshold of the bridegroom's yurt is an apparent exhibition of her readiness for a new life. In turn, when a dead body is taken out of the yurt, the head is put on the threshold for several times to signify the dead body's readiness for death (Tleubergenova 1995: 104). The sublimation of a threshold in Karakalpak society is furthermore confirmed by its being the burying point for a baby's placenta or even dead babies. The function of this tradition is to ease the passing of the dead baby's soul into the mother's body each time the latter steps on the threshold. As Tleubergenova adds, this belief communicates Karakalpaks' profound engagement with the idea of fertility (1995: 104). In other words, threshold cannot be reduced to be regarded as a mere place for a door because it has been assigned a role of a holy attribute of a home. It is deeply informed by remarkable powers to influence people considerably because it is impregnated by such categories like change, uncertainty, and instability. Karakalpaks' positive identification of the threshold as a primary place in their rituals and beliefs is their demonstration of their comprehensive understanding and acceptance of life's constant flux.

Carnival cannot be observed in abstraction from the condition of being in-between two different realms if Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival

is taken into account. In fact, medieval carnival itself is an assemblage of incoherent elements which designates its ability to throw people into a state that cannot be characterised by their everyday activities; hence carnival is a threshold between a normal everyday life and the life of freedom and pleasure. The notion of a carnivalistic time can be conceptualised as a time of in-between because it does not correspond to biographical linear time; as Bakhtin claims, this time acquires features of a “crisis” and a minute may become years (1984a: 171). It was formulated on the basis of perpetual change and shifts. This carnivalistic time ushers the concept of threshold in Bakhtin’s works because thresholds are the places with the concentrated sense of change and instability which is the opposite of everything “comfortably habitable, well-arranged and stable” in the remote places from thresholds (1984a: 169). Mihailovic seizes the importance of the idea of threshold for Bakhtin and states that the terms referring to a “boundary” can be heard again and again in Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and His World*, so they gain “almost incantatory quality” (1997: 153). So for Bakhtin threshold is a sacred place as well as it is for Karakalpaks. So within the framework of the idea of threshold, it is possible to draw an analogy between Karakalpaks’ beliefs and Bakhtin’s carnival.

## **Conclusion**

Many of the Karakalpak rites are premised on the idea of fertility which is congruent with some of the elements of Bakhtin’s carnival and the grotesque. The factor of a fusion of the world of the human beings and that of nature can be inserted into the contextualisation of the idea of fertility and the rites related to it in this regard. Nature’s peculiarity of renewal gives an impression of having the same features because people are a part of nature as they endeavour to depict through their rites. Thus, this fusion with nature gives people self-confidence and strength. Karakalpaks’ insistence on seeing death and birth in one place and their reverence for the thresholds, which is parallel to what Bakhtin says about the carnival and the grotesque, are permeated by the acknowledgement of the sense of uncertainty and constant change in life. Indeed, the idea of fertility and nature is closely related to this sense of instability. Both sides, Karakalpak culture and Bakhtinian sense of the carnival, are set in motion by people’s heavy dependence on nature, which is impossible to fix. Hence, disempowerment of any kind of certainty

is inevitable. That's why people from both backgrounds have to accept this inevitability. And only such an understanding of life can create a solid basis for a community's coherent unity. An investigation of Karakalpak cultural rites and rituals in the light of Bakhtin's theory of the carnival and the grotesque helped to observe that the traditions of both sides reveal similar concern: bringing people into a healthy togetherness.

An analysis of Karakalpak rites in the light of Bakhtin's carnival and the grotesque hails the idea that is implicit and is often absolute in many philosophical discourses; this idea challenges the assumption of the infallible categorisation of people into religions, nationalities and countries. This analysis articulates the dimension of the correspondence between two remote communities in terms of their concerns. Karakalpaks and the participants of the medieval carnival celebrated their integration with nature that provided them with the sense of togetherness and encouraged them to withstand the fluctuating essence of life. Yet, as Bakhtin anticipates, contemporary societies are under the threat of losing their sense of unity just as it happened with the sense of the carnival in the medieval Europe. The quickness and width of this loss has already grabbed Karakalpaks as they are embraced by the modern fundamental endeavour to isolate human subjects from each other. It is not possible to avoid the discourse on technology as one of the influential forces that drive human beings apart as well as from nature. An arsenal of ecological disasters that has fallen on Karakalpak region is believed to be connected to the community's estrangement from their traditions the essence of which was the conception of a human being as a part of nature. The limited power of water of two rivers, Amuderya and Sirderya, has caused a dramatic shrinking of the boundaries of the Aral Sea. As a consequence of the withdrawal of water from the region, the balance between human beings and nature is permanently upset; the childbirth rate in the Karakalpak region has fallen down dramatically. In short, as Bakhtin propagates, people should pertain to the primacy of nature and communal coherence in order to overcome the difficulties; and Karakalpaks should do the same.

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# Karakalpak Adetleri ve Bakhtin'in Karnavalı Arasındaki Benzerlikler\*

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## Öz

Karakalpakların bazı gelenek ve görenekleri, kadınların ve toprağın verimliliği, toplumun ölüm ve yaşamı bir olarak kabul etmesi ve eşik kavramının önemi ile ilgilidir. Mikhail Bakhtin'in karnaval kavramını incelemesi sonucunda da benzer fikirler ortaya çıkmaktadır: verimlilik, ölüm ve yaşamın bir arada oluşu ve eşik kavramı. Bu makale Karakalpakların bazı gelenekleri ve Bakhtin'in karnaval kavramı arasındaki benzerlikleri incelemektedir. Ayrıca, hem Karakalpak adetlerinin hem de Bakhtin'in incelediği karnavalın, insanların doğa ile olan beraberliğini ve onların tek taraflı gerçeği ve kesinliği reddetmelerini temel olarak gören toplumun ayrılmaz birlikteliğe dayandığının sonucuna varmaktadır.

## Anahtar kelimeler

Karakalpaklar, Karakalpak adetleri, Mikhail Bakhtin, karnaval, grotesk.

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# Обряды каракалпаков и теория карнавала Бахтина\*

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## Аннотация

Некоторые традиционные ритуалы каракалпаков прославляют плодородие женщин и земли, утверждают признание обществом единства смерти и рождения и важности порога. Исследование карнавала Михаилом Бахтиным также выявило некоторые похожие концепты: плодородие, единство смерти и жизни, и порог. Эта статья рассматривает сходство между этими концептами в некоторых каракалпакских обрядах и теории карнавала Бахтина. В статье также приводится заключение о том, что каракалпакские обряды и карнавал, исследованный Бахтиным, имели в своей основе слитность человека и природы, отрицание односторонней правды и определённости.

## Ключевые слова

Каракалпаки, каракалпакские обряды, Михаил Бахтин, карнавал, гротеск

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