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ENVIRONMENT AND AZERBAIJANI ETHNIC POETICS: QUESTIONS OF GENESIS AND TYPOLOGY

ENTORNO HISTÓRICO-GEOGRÁFICO Y POETA ÉTNICO AZERBAIYANO: CUESTIONES DE GÉNESIS Y TIPOLOGÍAS

Asif Hajiyev ^{1*}

E-mail: asif.hajiyev@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9462-511X>

Gulnar Rzayeva ¹

E-mail: gulnar.rzayeva@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0584-0781>

Khayala Jafarova ¹

Email: khayala.aliyeva@au.edu.az

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8288-5759>

¹ Azerbaijan University, Azerbaijan.

* Author for correspondence

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ABSTRACT

Geography influences culture and identity by shaping a community's practices, beliefs and values, as the physical environment defines resources, climate and shared history, creating an emotional bond and a sense of belonging to the territory. While much has been written about the general influence of geography on culture, few studies have delved into the specific ethno-cultural and geographic symbiosis that defines the Azerbaijani identity. Additionally, the role of space perception and its symbolic significance in Turkish and Azerbaijani thought remains underexplored, especially in terms of how these elements shape national consciousness and literature. Therefore, this article aims to examine how geographical factors influence the formation of national identity and ethnic poetics, particularly in Azerbaijan. By analyzing the works of prominent thinkers like M.A. Rasulzade, A. Agaoglu, and Z. Gökalp, the paper seeks to uncover how geographical and cultural elements intertwine to shape the worldview of Azerbaijani Turks and their ethnic consciousness, while investigating the philosophical and symbolic significance of spatial concepts in their thought. It was found that Azerbaijani ethnic identity is deeply intertwined with its geographical environment, from its perception of space and time to the symbolic meanings of mountains, water, and settlements. Geographical perceptions in Azerbaijani thought are not only aesthetic but also philosophical, shaping national consciousness and contributing to a unique cultural identity. These ideas are influenced by socio-political factors such as the division of historical Azerbaijani territories and the resulting impact on national culture and literature.

Keywords: Historical geography, Ethnopoetics, Azerbaijan, Geopoetics, Artistic space.

RESUMEN

La geografía influye en la cultura y la identidad al dar forma a las prácticas, creencias y valores de una comunidad, ya que el entorno físico define los recursos, el clima y la historia compartida, creando un vínculo emocional y un sentido de pertenencia al territorio. Si bien se ha escrito mucho sobre la influencia general de la geografía en la cultura, pocos estudios han profundizado en la simbiosis etnocultural y geográfica específica que define la identidad azerbaiyana. Además, el papel de la percepción del espacio y su significado simbólico en el pensamiento turco y azerbaiyano sigue siendo poco explorado, especialmente en términos de cómo estos elementos dan forma a la conciencia y la literatura nacionales. Por lo tanto, este artículo tiene como objetivo examinar cómo los factores geográficos influyen en la formación de la identidad nacional y la poética étnica, particularmente en Azerbaiyán. Al analizar las obras de pensadores destacados como M.A. Rasulzade, A. Agaoglu y Z. Gökalp, el artículo busca descubrir cómo los elementos

geográficos y culturales se entrelazan para dar forma a la cosmovisión de los turcos azerbaiyanos y su conciencia étnica, al tiempo que investiga el significado filosófico y simbólico de los conceptos espaciales en su pensamiento. Se ha descubierto que la identidad étnica azerbaiyana está profundamente entrelazada con su entorno geográfico, desde su percepción del espacio y el tiempo hasta los significados simbólicos de las montañas, el agua y los asentamientos. Las percepciones geográficas en el pensamiento azerbaiyano no son solo estéticas sino también filosóficas, dan forma a la conciencia nacional y contribuyen a una identidad cultural única. Estas ideas están influenciadas por factores sociopolíticos como la división de los territorios históricos azerbaiyanos y el impacto resultante en la cultura y la literatura nacionales.

Palabras clave: Geografía histórica, Etnopoética, Azerbaiyán, Geopoética, Espacio artístico.

INTRODUCTION

The roots of Azerbaijani ethnic poetics lie in ancient oral traditions, where poetry, music, and storytelling played a pivotal role in cultural expression. These early poetic forms originated within the diverse cultural interaction of the region, Iranian speakers, Turkic nomads, Kurds, etc. (Allworth et al., 2024). However, it is impossible to imagine the evolution of Azerbaijani poetics without close contact with the development of the Azerbaijani language (Jalilbayli, 2022), which emerged from the so-called Eastern Oghuz Turkic branch and gradually began to replace local Iranian languages. Such a linguistic transformation introduced novel poetic structures and themes that defined the peculiar features of Azerbaijani poetics. Thus, by the 17th century, Azerbaijani literature had already consolidated and although it always relied a great deal on Persian and Arabic literary traditions this symbiosis of local and foreign features allowed enriching Azerbaijani poetic expression.

It is accepted that the typology of Azerbaijani ethnic poetics reflects the cultural diversity and historical depth of the country since it contains, but it is not limited to:

1. Folk Literature and Oral Traditions: These are rooted in epic tales and folklore. Examples include the famous Dede Korkut tales (Koniratbay et al., 2023), which tell heroic stories of the Oghuz Turks that form the very foundation of Azerbaijani identity (Agazade, 2024).
2. Aşiq Tradition: This is a form of poetry combined with music and storytelling by aşiqs, similar to bards. Though it is grassroots in origin, it is widely used, showing its popularity among the nation at large (Baghirova, 2015).

3. Divan Literature: Heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic models, this tradition uses formal poetic genres like ghazal and qasida, given in the aruz meter, showing its classical tendencies.
4. Sufi and Religious Poetry: Many of those spiritual works took a musical form in religious gatherings, dealing with mysticism and spiritual themes, indicating the role of Sufi orders within Azerbaijani poetic heritage.
5. Modern and Contemporary Poetics: Modern Azerbaijani literature represents the link from traditional to modernly oriented thematic content, corresponding with cultural and political ups and downs of this country while retaining its dynamic core (Dessiatnitchenko, 2022).

This not only reflects the rich poetic legacy of Azerbaijan but also underlines the inspiring adaptability of its literary tradition in a changing world. On the other hand, the geography of Azerbaijan (as any other country) - along with many other factors, especially history, social structure, type of economy, and culture - is one of the main conditions that determine the ethnic face and national character of the people. In fact, in many ways, the geographical environment shapes the people and turns them into a unique nation. The role of natural conditions is more obvious in the material layer of national culture: climate affects homes, clothing, transport, planting, and harvesting; flora and fauna influence construction, households, and nutrition; geographical relief influences settlements and farm types; natural boundaries are related to ethnic boundaries (Saint, 2023).

At the same time, the geographical homeland is also a concept related to ethnic-national self-awareness, the spiritual world of the people, their attitude to life, and their ethnic worldview. Many spiritual values are largely determined by geographical conditions, nature, and climate. In other words, the country essentially becomes spiritual, and ideas about geographical space become intertwined with the deep layers of national psychology. As a result, the study of geographic imaginings becomes the basis of ethnic studies in general, including ethno poetic studies and geopoetics formed in the modern era: firstly, the most complete information about the historical geography of the country and thus the ethnogenesis of the people is engraved in these images; secondly, the geographical sense is connected with solving the problem of ethnic autochthony in historical space; and finally, this perspective allows us to reveal the ethnic worldview as a whole, that is, the typology of national culture (Bargohain & Mokashi-Punekar, 2022).

The connection between Azerbaijan's historical-geographic environment and its ethnic poetics is defined by a vibrant interaction of cultural exchanges, historical contexts, and geographical diversity, that have given birth to a multi-directional poetic tradition—the historical journey of the Azerbaijani people and their never-fading link with their motherland. As mentioned before, Azerbaijan turned into a cultural crossing in which traditions from the Turkic, Persian, and Islamic world were combined, nurturing and deepening its poetic style and themes.

Thus, it is common for example that Azerbaijani poetic language, linguistically, is molded with the peculiar phonetic structure of its Turkic roots, whereby vowels are made to cut across between front and back sounds that shape rhythm and tonal quality for their poems. From the sublime mountain peaks to the serene coastal areas, the salient geography of Azerbaijan has been the poetic metaphor for the emotional and spiritual landscape of its people. Throughout, the Azerbaijani poetics followed the seismic changes in the ages: from the laced fuzziness of socialism and patriotism in the Soviet period to the preoccupation with national identity and historical trauma in post-independence literature. Such linguistic and cultural synergy underlines depth and resilience in Azerbaijani poetics, changing with experiences and landscapes.

Taking the above elements into account, in this article it is explored the profound influence of historical-geographic environments on the ethnic poetics of Azerbaijan. It is highlighted how geographical factors shape the ethnic and national identity of a people, offering a foundational framework for understanding the connection between space, culture, and identity in the context of Azerbaijani culture and broader Eurasian thought. Our findings underscore the importance of understanding geography as a key factor in the formation of national identity, not just as a physical space, but as a critical element of cultural and literary expression. This approach offers new insights into the intersections of geography, culture, and national consciousness, and can inform future studies on the role of space in shaping ethnic and cultural identities in the broader Eurasian context.

DEVELOPMENT

Studies on ethno-geographic perceptions of Azerbaijanis and Turks in general are very few and require extensive research. The ethno-cultural characteristics of the Turks, including their location in the Eurasian space and their relations with other peoples, were among the main issues addressed in the works of M.A. Rasulzadeh, A. Agaoglu, A. Huseynzadeh, Z. Gökalp, Y. Akchura, I. Gaspıralı, M.S. Aran, B. Chobanzadeh and others.

Considerations about Turkish psychology can also be found in the research of Eurasians, especially prominent scientists such as P.N. Savitsky, N.S. Trubetskoy, G.V. Vernadsky, E. Khara-Davan, N.P. Toll, and L.N. Gumiyov. The Turanian psychological profile (Turk, Mongol, Finno-Ugric) "is most clearly visible in the Turks who played the most important role in the history of Eurasia" (Hajili, 2018, p. 90). Eurasian scientist Nikolay Trubetskoy considers the Turkish character, formed by geographical factors, to be the foundation for creating a single statehood and unifying different peoples. He believes it has the power to bring harmony to Eurasia, which has suffered from wars and revolutions. These scholars confirm that Turks love "symmetry, clarity and stable balance," are characterized by mental stability and ease, and that these traits are based on a "subconscious philosophical system."

N. Trubetskoy, who found that the Turan psychological type had deeply impacted Slavic consciousness and passed into their blood and ethnic memory, confirms the need to be proud of such partnership and kinship with Turan brothers. He shows the necessity of understanding Turan psychological type belonging for every Russian working toward "personal and national self-awareness" (Trubetskoy, 2018, p. 82).

In this study, which considers the entire Eurasian space as a special historical-geographical environment, the culture of the peoples is studied from geographical, historical, political, cultural, ethnographic, and other perspectives. From a geographical point of view, Eurasia is understood as a unity of three main topographical (cultural-geographical) parts: 1) Belomor-Caucasus (Transcaucasia, Eastern Europe), 2) Siberia, and 3) Turkestan (South Asia) regions (Hajili, 2018, p. 83).

However, the political aspect of Eurasianism reveals an imperial doctrine that denies the independent statehood of peoples. This is evident in its focus on the historical creation of a single state by the Turkic peoples in this region, the continuation of this tradition in the modern era under the influence of first the Russian Empire and then the USSR, and the suggestion that some hypothetical state will be established afterward. The Eurasian scholar G.V. Vernadsky distinguishes four hegemonic stages in the political history of Eurasia and thinks this pattern will continue: 1) Unified state: Scythian state; system of states: Sarmatian, Goth; 2) Unified state: Hun empire; system of states: Avar, Khazar, Bulgarian, Russian, Pecheneg, Polovtsian; 3) Unified state: Mongol Empire; system of states: Golden Horde, Jigatai, Lithuanian, Russian, Kazan, Kyrgyz, Oirat, Mongolian; 4) Unified state: Russian Empire, USSR...?(Andreev, 1996, p. 41).

As can be seen, by placing three dots after “USSR,” the text instills the idea of the continuity of this political union and indirectly overshadows the independent political destiny and statehood of the peoples in this area. This is why the political aspect of Eurasianism is not accepted by the politicians and ideologues of nations that have gained independence.

Lev Nikolayevich Gumilyov was a researcher who systematically studied the exceptional role of the geographical environment in the cultural, social, economic, and state development of nations, especially in the Eurasian space, and promoted cooperation among nations based on friendship and mutual respect. The scientist evaluates the importance of the geographical landscape as follows: “Humanity’s dependence on the surrounding nature, that is, the geographical environment, is undeniable. Although the degree of this dependence is evaluated differently, in any case, the economic activity of peoples settled on Earth in all periods is closely related to the landscape and climate of the areas where they are located. The peoples of the earth live in certain landscapes, and the more different the landscapes, the more diverse the peoples are (Gumilev, 1972, p. 44).

The role of the environment in forming national consciousness and culture has also come to the fore in cultural-historical schools (I. Ten, De Sanctis, G. Brandes, M. Mendes-i-Pelayo, V. Scherer, N.S. Tikhonravov), anthropological schools (Spengler, Toynbee, Levi-Bruhl, Leroy-Quran, Radcliffe-Brown), and comparativist schools (T. Benfey, E. Taylor, I.V. Höte, A. Veselovski, V. Jirmunski). The East-West question and the reciprocity of specific traditions in different geographical and cultural environments under modern globalization have attracted the attention of philologists. Unfortunately, the geographical ideas, ethnogenesis, and ethnic culture of the Turks, who historically owned and controlled large areas of Asia, Europe, and Africa, originating from plain and mountain environments, have not been sufficiently studied.

Ethno-geographic imaginations have played an exceptional role in the culture, ethnic identity consciousness and psychology, social life, and family relations of the Turkish people, beginning with the ancient Turks who saw humans as the center of the nation. These ideas come primarily from the space and time concepts of the Turks from the archaic period. Geographical information and ideas have taken an important place in Azerbaijani folklore and classical literature, particularly in the epic “Kitabi-Dada Gorgud,” Mahmud Kashgari’s “Divani-lughatit Turk,” Nizami’s “Khamsa,” Zakariyya Al-Qazvini’s “Asar al-bilad and akhbar al-ibad” (About the monuments in the countries and the servants of God), Abdurashid Bakuvi’s “Kitab

talkhis al-asar wa ajaib al-malik al-gahhar” (“Summary of the monuments and miracles of the rulers”), Fazlullah Rashiduddin’s “Oghuznama,” Maragali Awhadin’s “Jami-Jam,” the astrologer and poet Assar Tabrizi’s “Mehr ve Kidizma,” and Mohsun Nasir’s “Tutinama.” In such works, geographic and cosmogonic concepts and travel in real or symbolic sense are developed. Such sources are of interest as sources of East-Azerbaijan geopoetics methodology that is currently being formed.

Kenneth White, the creator of the term and concept of geopoetics, established the Institute of Geopoetics in Paris in the 1980s, while Igor Sid established its Moscow counterpart in 1995. Important theses of this doctrine include the integration of Eastern and Western versions of geopoetics and the synthesis of geography and historical poetics in the activities of the Crimean Geopoetics Club, which Sid called “the transmitter of the doctrine created by the Parisian culturologist Kenneth White.” The following statement by Igor Sid, founder of the Crimean Geopoetics Club, clarifies this doctrine: “Geopoetics (Greek: γῆ - ‘land’ + ποίησις - ‘creator’) is an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary concept that outlines forms and ways of intellectual and aesthetic appropriation of geographical areas, landscapes, and topographical places. This universal and multi-meaning cultural term encompasses their images and various geographical and spatial aspects in myths, artistic, scientific, and non-fiction works, the colorful connections between the worlds of geography and literature (and broader art), and summarizes the set of these phenomena and experiences (Sid, 2015, p. 153).

The term geopoetics emerged in the 1990s primarily due to political factors. It should be noted that Eurasianism, which was formed in Russian émigré circles in the 1920s and studied Turkish-Russian and Turanian-Russian relations in Eurasia, as well as the ethnic psychology and culture of these societies in relation to geographical factors, also originated from the political-ideological processes of its time. Since the Slavs, primarily Russians and Ukrainians, have been the main ethnic group in contact with Turks throughout Eurasian history, the book we have presented pays special attention to Turkish-Eastern Slavic relations. But also, some researchers connect geopoetics with specific political events, primarily with the reconstruction of European political geography after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 and “the desire to read, interpret and project the geographical space (old and new)” (Marszalek & Sasse, 2013).

However, the concept of “geopoetics” itself was not created in Eastern and Central Europe, but by Kenneth White, a Scottish-French scientist and founder of the International Institute of Geopoetics. This researcher, inspired by

poststructuralist philosophy, presented geopoetics in his essay "Elements of Geopoetics" as a project combining scientific and poetic discourse. He sought texts where poets help geographers and geographers help poets in the discovery, study, and description of lands, presenting geopoetics with esoteric-ecological pathos as existing on the border between poetry and science, concrete geography and "spiritual space." He found examples of this in the works of Rimbaud and Whitman (White, 1987, pp. 272–293).

Researchers show that geographic space is represented not only through specific territories but also through travel essays and prose, "fictitious country studies," semi-scientific expeditions, fiction, and fairy tales. After the ideological-utopian stylization of the Self and the phobic slander of the Foreigner during the period of real socialism, there followed a re-reading of territories through literature and a rediscovery of the heterogeneity of Eastern Central Europe. It is emphasized that geopoetics originates from these political-historical processes. In research in the field of geopoetics, scientific and poetic discourses intersect, revealing it as "an esoteric-ecological pathos project created between poetry and science, between concrete geography and 'spiritual space'". As the author notes, "White, who combines scientific and poetic discourses during the study and description of territories, looks for texts and projects where poets become geographers and geographers become poets (as exemplified by Rimbaud and Whitman)" (Marszalek & Sasse, 2013, p. 112).

Regarding the relevance of the concept of travel, we should mention the rich literary traditions of Azerbaijani literature. Many medieval Azerbaijani poets, including Zulfugar Shirvani, Maraghali Avhadi, Mahmud Shabustari, Saib Tabrizi, Gazi Burhaneddin, and others, traveled for various reasons, including political and personal factors, or with the aim of learning theology, science, and art. During that time, they visited various parts of the Islamic East, mainly the Middle East, Central Asia, India, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, Damascus, Iraq, Hijaz, Isfahan, Tabriz, Baghdad, Kerman, Mecca, Medina, Mashhad, Qom, Qazvin, Yazd, Ardabil, Ganja, Barda, Shirvan, and Caesarea, recording their observations. It should be noted that our classical poets and thinkers, who knew many languages, were deeply familiar with ancient culture and the works and philosophical views of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. These facts prove that there is sufficient ground for incorporating geopoetic teaching into our philology. In "Dastani-Ahmed Harami," a 13th-century Azerbaijani literary work with a renaissance spirit that features an adventure plot and a negative main character (the first such story in the native language), the protagonist Ahmad Harami takes his wife

Gulendam on a pretext and travels from Baghdad to the Crimea, and then to Shiraz (Harami, 2004).

Prior to that, the genius Nizami Ganjavi incorporated most of the known places of his period into the poetic space of "Iskandernama" in accordance with the Eastern Renaissance's world citizenship and the universal character and activities of Genghis Khan and Alexander, who aimed for the idea of a single just state that Amir Teymur tried to create. In Nizami's works, as in "Kitabi-Dada Gorgud" and our classical folklore and written texts, Georgian, Lezgi, Tat, Laz, Kurdish, Arabic, Persian, Abyssinian, Indian, Chinese, Farian, Urum, Russian, Jewish, and other cultures are discussed. This aspect can be explained by Azerbaijan's historical lands being located at the intersection of civilizations, in the geography where East and West meet. This feature of our national culture corresponds to the main concept of Igor Sid's activities, one of the first representatives and creators of geopoetics, and his Crimean Geopoetic Club - the idea that geopoetics should combine Eastern and Western versions.

Geopoetics is also related to political and, to some extent, statehood issues. In this regard, the historical territories of Azerbaijan provide a fertile historical and cultural space for applying this concept. The independent Republic of Azerbaijan, with its multicultural society and culture, social tolerance, provides abundant material for conducting geopoetic research in folklore, literature, society, and geographical environment. This primarily relates to Azerbaijan's geographical diversity and, accordingly, the convergence of different ethnographic and social groups' peculiarities in our people's mentality. According to the regional characteristics of Azerbaijani folklore and classical literature, distinct ethnographic, literary, and cultural environments and Ashiq schools were formed in Shirvan, Karabakh, Baku, Nakhchivan, Darbend, Tabriz, Irvan, Ganja, Zangezur, Aghbaba, Borchali, and other regions. Additionally, Azerbaijan is surrounded by diverse cultural environments - Islamic, Christian, Semitic, Indo-European peoples, and Eurasian, Caucasian, Anatolian, Middle Eastern, and European regions. In our country, elements of deity, shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity can be traced in the ethnic memory of our Muslim people.

Azerbaijan is a tolerant, multicultural, and polyconfessional country. Although the vast majority of our population is Muslim, Christians - including Udins of Albanian descent, Georgians, Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, Greeks - and a large Jewish community also live in our Republic. There is mutual understanding among all these peoples and religions. Temples and monuments of all religions are protected, and religious ceremonies are

performed freely. In the country, where the majority of the population is Muslim, there are 17 Christian, 7 Jewish, 2 Baha'i, 1 Krishna communities, 13 churches, and 7 synagogues.

In the territory of the country, 925 religious communities have been registered, 33 of which are non-Islamic (Christian - 22; Jewish - 8; Krishna - 1; Baha'i - 2). Despite the fact that 96 percent of its population is Muslim, representatives of all religious denominations live together in peace and tranquility (Gurbanli, 2019).

Turkish culture in general, including Azerbaijani culture, has historically been distinguished by its religious and ethnic tolerance. This tolerance is evident even in "Kitabi-Dade Gorgud," a heroic epic of the Oghuz based on warrior culture: Ganturali's lover, Seljan Khatun, is the daughter of a Christian tekur of Trebizond; Uruz's father tells Ghazan Khan that he will go to the land of Gan Abgaz, kiss the priest's hand, put his hand on the cross, and marry an infidel girl. Regardless of the motive behind this statement, it reveals such a possibility.

In the epic "Asli and Karam," the love between Muslim Karam and Christian Asli, the opposition of Asli's Armenian parents, and the lovers' tragedy are described. This plot was developed in Huseyn Javid's "Sheikh Sanan" tragedy, Nariman Narimanov's "Bahadir and Sona," Gurban Said's "Ali and Nino," and Elchi's "Mahmud and Maryam" novels, revealing the tolerant nature of the Azerbaijani people and culture. It should be noted that all these align with the essence of Islam. The religion of Islam promotes tolerance and friendship between people, peoples, and tribes ("... We have divided you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other..." (Holy Qur'an, al-Hujurat).

Multiculturalism and tolerance are among the main moral values in modern Azerbaijani society and culture, and are also part of state policy. As early as 1918, in the first independent state, the democratic Azerbaijan People's Republic, the rights of all peoples, confessional and social groups were guaranteed, and women were given the right to vote. In 1992, when the independent Republic of Azerbaijan was re-proclaimed, national rights were fully guaranteed.

Perception of space and time in ancient Turkish thought

Historical space and geography are particularly important concepts in Turkish ethnic consciousness, defining ethnic psychology and, in many ways, culture: space is inseparable from humans - individuals see and perceive themselves in nature. Therefore, the ethnic world model is formed based on spatial perceptions. In Turkish ethnic

psychology, it is known that spatial ideas appear before the sense of time. The main form of societal movement in the ancient Turkish space, plains, and desert environment was migration, and the way of living was nomadism. In contrast to sedentary life, the nomadic sense, which ensures the vitality and change of culture, is alien to stagnation, stasis, and inertia, and perceives the world in constant cycles, flow, and movement. As Yusuf Akçuraoğlu, the author of research on the history of Turkism, wrote, these characteristics brought a certain national consciousness to Turkish ethnic thinking from ancient times:

Each nation and even each tribe felt its different characteristics in relation to other nations and tribes and mostly claimed its superiority. This feeling and claim is the first beginning of the idea of nationality, formed by instinct. We can confirm without fear that this feeling and claim has always existed among the Turkish people and tribes. (Akchuraoglu, 2006, p. 11).

Spatial changes in the nomadic sense, passing through different geographical areas on a very large scale, and the sense of the sublime Motherland that balances these changes are especially prominent. Thus, one of the main factors that protected the few Turks, who were constantly on the march, from being erased among numerous ethnic groups, was precisely the sense of a common beginning, an idealized past, and a sublime point of departure. As a result, the Turks, who perceived horizontal space in constant movement, preserved the signs of originality on the vertical plane - mountains, forests, shaman trees, mounds, stone inscriptions, statues, and running water became sublime. Perhaps that is why in Turkish folklore, the sea - the barrier that cuts off the march and keeps people away from the homeland - is very little decorated.

In the mind of Turks, who perceive the earth, sky, and universe in constant motion, the eternal beginning, the departure point of migration, and the ethnic unity of the sacred motherland live as forces protecting the national image. Humans and society derive their power from their roots, from time immemorial, primarily from the native country, the elders of the country, ancestors, and elders.

In archaic Turkish thinking, the understanding of objective history differs from modern perspectives: real time and chronology are often replaced by abstract memories of an ideal past, sacred ancestors, and mythical origins. Turkish people evaluate the present and future largely based on past experiences and the examples of their great ancestors, thus perceiving the course of events retrospectively rather than prospectively ("I had the later mind of a Turk!"). This feature of Turkish consciousness indicates its orientation toward causes, essence, and sources. Therefore,

Turkish mythopoetic thinking is cosmogonic: each event is determined by its root and origin; the inscription on the forehead cannot be erased; primordial harmony becomes law and extinguishes destructive impulses: "madness" is balanced by "fear."

Plots about the tragic end of the world and eschatological motifs are either weak or absent in Turkish myths and culture. This perception is completely compatible with Islamic faith - while Christianity is based on eschatological grounds (Jesus came to save people from a tragic fate), Islam emphasizes cosmogonic motives.

However, changes in the natural environment and landscape are deeply reflected in Turkish consciousness, culture, and poetry. Natural disasters, severe climate changes, landscape destruction, and changes in ethnic worldviews have devastating effects. Lev Gumilyov writes about this:

Landscapes, like ethnic groups, have their own dynamics of development and history. When the landscape changes beyond recognition (whether due to human influence, climate change, neotectonic processes, or the emergence of destructive microbes that cause epidemics affecting animal and plant populations), people must either adapt to these new conditions, die, or find a new homeland. (Gumilev, 1972, p. 45).

Although this process is universal, Turks, who are closely connected to their native land, consider it a tragedy to leave their "wormwood-scented" deserts and "snowy mountains."

Retrospective perception and culture

Retrospective consciousness is observed in many examples of Turkish-Islamic culture. Ethnic thinking is consistently grounded in sacred beginnings - with special importance given to ancestors, fathers, mothers, elders, hearths, homes, houses, road cults, early time, past, and eternity.

This aspect is also an important feature found in the Turkish language. As N. Trubetskoy sensitively noted, the determination of word roots and the overall structure of words, including their "unusual proportion," harmony, logical structure, strict economy of linguistic means, and other such aspects are the main features characterizing Turkish languages (Trubetskoy, 2018, p. 91). The study of such typological correspondence between language and artistic text composition can lead to interesting results.

Mythological-artistic space and man

In Turkish consciousness, a unique category of space has influenced the concept of humanity: space is inseparable from humans - individuals see and perceive themselves

in nature. Identity and psychological parallelism arise between geographical landscape and person, and this unity is not merely an artistic metaphor, but a synthetic meaning related to magical consciousness, a sacred symbol.

In later periods - in epic and lyrical texts - ethnocentric perception weakens, the sense of individuality develops, and people begin to separate themselves from their environment and become independent. As L.N. Gumilyov showed, personality comes to the center of the Turkish ethnic world, nation, and broader world earlier than in many other cultures. Human behavior becomes conditioned by internal responsibility and does not always align with communal logic. Consequently, the duality of the hero - the sacral content derived from archaic ideas (white shaman, black shaman) - weakens, while religious and spiritual-psychological contrasts between inner self and environment, and the concept of the true lover, come to the fore.

Movement in space: road image

In such sacred space, characteristic of ethnic thinking, movement itself becomes symbolic: the image of a road and a person's journey in Turkish thinking represents not merely spatial movement, but primarily a spiritual path. In ancient Turkish thought, the traveler is a dual, unknown, mysterious figure - a wanderer on a spiritual path whose beginning and end remain unknown: "I am the road with the traveler" (Nasimi, 2004a, p. 181). Setting out on the road represents a journey towards ascension, liberation, and exaltation. The concept of departure inherently contains the modality of ascending (combining the meanings of "exit" and "rising"). According to the vertical space model in Turkish myths, the road symbol is vertical, oriented toward the sublime - representing purity, freedom, and justice.

This motif, originating from the Sufi philosophical-poetic tradition, maintains its spiritual-psychological content in contemporary poetry as well. It represents the tragic expression of the desperate conflict arising from human alienation from self and environment, the contrast between the real world and inner essence, the unattainability of sublime ideals in reality, and the "suffering of the soul in the body" (Behrudi, 1988).

The sides of the world, right and left, east and west

From the earliest times, the spatial model of the world has been constructed according to the sun's movement - sunrise (east) and sunset (west). Following the archaic right-left opposition, sunrise - the right side - carried positive meaning, while sunset - the left side - held negative connotations. In Eurasian mythological systems, the sunset

- west - left side was considered foreign, ambiguous, unknown, and fearful, representing the place of salvation and the world of the dead. Hell was placed in the west and heaven in the east. Medieval Eastern and Western geographical imaginations included teachings about the passage of culture from east to west. Widespread beliefs held that wisdom, power, greatness, and life force resided in the east, while humanity's face turned toward the west - toward the world's end - with salvation destined to begin again from the east. Objects and characters associated with the West were considered dangerous, inspiring mystery, questions, and fear.

These perceptual models, typical of ancient Turkish thinking, appear in most ethnocultural and religious systems, revealing their universality. In the Holy Quran, people of the right and left are distinguished (Waqia 8-57, 90-91; Muddasir, 39, Balad, 18, 19). Right-hand people are destined for heaven, while left-hand people are bound for hell. "Left is Maghrib, right is East," and right leads toward truth:

"He changed his left to the right, to the right,
Who knows the left from the right"
(Nasimi, 2004b, p. 184)

The mythopoetic semantics of left and right are also reflected in the Turkish language: from the word "right" (sağ) derive terms like sağ-lik (health), sağ-almak (to recover), and sağ-lam (solid), while from "left" (sol) come words like sol-gun (pale), sol-mak (to fade), and sol-chu (leftist). In many languages, the word "left" connotes fear and danger, while "right" shares its root with words meaning "true" and "truth." Among the Slavs, the right side represents the masculine, the left the feminine. In the double graves of ancient Slavs, who were deeply influenced by the Turks (as noted in the observation of the genius writer F. Dostoyevsky, "scratch a Russian and you'll find a Tatar"), women were buried to the left of men.

The image of a stranger

An important character related to geographical-spatial ideas and the concept of the road in ethnic consciousness is the image of the stranger. This ambivalent image, with its connection to the alien world's spatial structure and dualistic nature, echoes ancient plots about the opposition between right and left sides, and between the Lower and Upper worlds.

The linguistic connection between the words "stranger," "west," "maghrib," "sunset," "strange," and "foreigner" clarifies the historical-poetic semantics of the stranger

figure and its relationship to early geographical concepts. Garib (the person from the west - from the sunset) represents the left side, the sunset and foreign space, a strange and frightening world. This figure is displaced, having lost their social position, bearing the shadow of death in their face - a tragic figure, a black lover - essentially a dual sacral character.

Following this tradition, classical Turkish poetry and folklore, especially epics and bayatis, portrayed the stranger as one who broke away from the unknown only to turn toward it again, thus acquiring spiritual and philosophical essence. Romantic duality renders the stranger-hero undecided, placeless, and timeless. For a person struggling between body and soul, cognition and heart, real and ideal ("My heart says go, my mind says stay"), both worlds become alien, creating the paradoxical feeling of "strangeness in the homeland":

Azerbaijan bayati:

"I am a stranger in this country,
When my eyes wander,
Work to the west
When the word is enough."

Similarly, Ahiska's mani:

"I am a stranger in this country,
When strange birds pass by,
My heart took a dove,
That cannot rest in a foreign country."

And the mani of Dobruja (Romania):

"A stranger in this country,
When strange birds pass by,
The strangeness becomes complete
When you reach the pillow."

(Hajili, 2019, p. 127)

Therefore, in the physical world, humans are strangers and lonely; their life is suffering and sorrow, their desire is to return to their real homeland, their spiritual home:

"If Nola wakes up, Fuzuli wakes and rises.

I'm tired, I'm crying, a stranger in my homeland."

(Fuzuli, 2005b, p. 70)

A person who descends from the higher realm and becomes imprisoned in the soul understands the falsity of ordinary communication and social life, recognizes the

alienation of the soul, feels its strangeness, and yearns with love to reach their eternal abode. The stranger who says, “The world is not a place to stay, oh soul, take a journey” (Nasimi, 2004b, p. 42) longs to go somewhere, yet knows not where these imaginary places lie. Thus, the spiritual and psychological upheavals of the Sufi truth-seeker, who walks through the stages of sharia, sect, enlightenment, and truth, intensify. Their strangeness manifests not only in their environment but in their inner world, becoming “strangeness in the body” (Fuzuli):

“My body is strange, I cry ‘homeland-homeland’

Jafayi-Gurbat has already broken all taboos”

(Fuzuli, 2005a, p. 264)

This path itself is tragic and endless - the sweet wine brings ecstasy to the lover who aspires to divine unity, yet human love lingers in their heart like the scent of wine; they cannot forget their lover’s true beauty. Thus, both worlds become confining, and strangeness transforms into an alienation of both soul and mind, becoming a wandering between two worlds, a tragic duality.

In Bayatis, the stranger, as one of the genre’s main figures, maintains a dual character and expresses not only mystical-Sufistic meanings but broader, vital ones. This semantic breadth allows the stranger image in bayatis to carry motifs such as fate and death, freedom and slavery, exile and separation, homeland and exile, migration and displacement. Yet in all cases, the universal symbolism of the stranger persists:

“These mountains are great mountains,

Watery mountains with fountains.

A stranger died here,

The sky groans, the clouds cry.”

(Hajili, 2018, p. 58)

Here, the universality of the image of the stranger, as well as its paradoxicality and associativeness, can be observed. A “dead” person is a “stranger,” that is, “burial” (in this mortal world) is a guest and, therefore, belongs to “another” world—he is an inhabitant of the eternal (immortal, eternal, “heavens”). Thus, the lyrical hero becomes a sacred person who has accidentally fallen into the ordinary world. With this, the cry (“the sky is howling, this cloud wails”) becomes generalized and transforms into a protest against the mortality of the world. The hero (“stranger”) serves as an example of nobility and eternity—that is, although he was born, he came to the mortal world and remains between two realms, existing as both mortal and eternal, both a physical and a spiritual being. That is

why “garib” becomes a dual hero—a character who exists between the eternal and the immediate, the ideal and the material, serving as a mediator between the mortal world and eternity.

In contemporary Turkish poetry, strangeness emerges from within a person, enveloping their self, tearing them away from the constraints of time and space, and plunging them into an inevitable, hopeless vortex—a “strangeness inside the body”:

Pride is so bitter that everything is in me, and it is foreign to me, and it is in a different way. I am growing weary of hope! And my pride destroyed my identity, and I was wounded by my desires and desires. I’m not proud, I’m sleeping in it. (Kamu, 2024).

As can be observed, many elements of Turkish poetics are shaped by the characteristics of spatial and temporal concepts. The Turkish individual, who idealizes time and abstracts history, has aestheticized these elements by symbolically perceiving movement in space and the variability of spatial dimensions.

The peculiarity of modern geographical ideas of Azerbaijani Turks

As previously mentioned, one of the main factors in the formation of an ethnos and its transformation into a nation is the geographical environment and the homeland’s landscape. Lev Nikolayevich Gumilyov considers the geographical factor to be superior and decisive in the formation of ethnic groups:

It has already been proven that the natural form of existence of Homo sapiens is ethnos, and the differences between ethnoses are determined not by race, language, religion, or literacy, but only by the stereotype of behavior, which is the highest form of active adaptation of a person to the landscape. Landscape diversity is the reason for the strange ethnic mosaic of the anthroposphere. Since maps have been drawn since ancient times, they essentially reflect the diversity of behavior types and thus the diversity of the landscape. Consequently, the study of behavior belongs to the order of geographical sciences. (Gumilev, 1991, p. 6).

Another ethno-geographical quality of our homeland, culture, literature, and folklore relates to its position as a junction between fundamentally different cultures—West and East, Islam and Christianity, the Caucasus and Anatolia, Iran and Turan. In our view, our culture can be understood within four main contexts: Eurasian, Caucasian, East-Islamic, and European. Such breadth of context elevates the upper layer of our culture, enriching its supersaturated quality and fostering a certain polycultural identity.

Finally, the sense of the national homeland for our people is not an amorphous or imaginary concept but is deeply connected to the sense of historical-ethnic hegemony and patriotism in the region. It is this sense of patriotism that has instilled a certain positive provincialism and regionalism into national thinking (a nation without statehood is spiritually closed and divides people into “us” and “others”), fostering a socio-historical polycentrism in public consciousness. It should be noted that during the khanate period, which represented an initial form of statehood and was primarily based on a geographical-regional principle, the territory of Azerbaijan developed ethnically and culturally according to the Turkish-Islamic typology. It was during this period that folkism and realism began to emerge in our culture. This aspect is especially evident in toponyms, which is why Ahmed Zaki Validi, in his small-volume lectures prepared in the early decades of the last century, mentions up to 700 toponyms of Turkish origin from a single region of the country (Walidi, 2009).

A significant factor that has profoundly influenced our national potential, statehood, culture, and ethnic psychology over a long period is the division of our nation. The historical-ethnic territory of our homeland has been split into several parts for nearly two centuries, with the ancestral lands of Karabakh and East Zangezur remaining under Armenian occupation. The occupation of Shusha, one of the national symbols of our people, had a particularly severe impact on our national identity. The invasion of Shusha and the desecration of its purity and originality by a ruthless enemy delivered a devastating blow to the national consciousness. Shusha, symbolized by the great mountains regarded as sacred by the ancient Turks—the abode of God Tengri—carrying profound meanings, was never forgotten during the period of occupation. Our people experienced the loss of the Shusha mountains as deeply as Koroglu's longing for Çanlıbel, enduring the tragedy of separation from the “unreachable, unfathomable, snow-covered mountains.”

The psychological-aesthetic nature of Azerbaijani ethno-geographical ideas, the image of the Motherland

In the ethno-geographic imagination of Azerbaijanis, not only Shusha but the entire country holds spiritual meaning and is considered a living entity. Nature is humanized, transformed into an interlocutor, as vividly reflected in Samad Vurghun's poem “Azerbaijan.” A person engages in dialogue with the country and nature as if they were generalized individuals, creating a relationship that takes a dialogical direction: just as the environment influences the ethnos, the ethnos internalizes the environment, and the homeland becomes a spiritual entity—a nation that preserves the ethnic image and memory. For Azerbaijanis,

the land of Azerbaijan is seen as a living being with a distinct, intimate face and soul. This perspective contrasts with that of other peoples who later arrived in the country, including Armenians. For example, the perception of geographical objects or territories is unique to Azerbaijanis: our Deli Kura differs from the same Kura flowing through Tiflis, just as Pushkin's Caucasus contrasts with our images of Mount Gaf, or Borchali and Marneuli differ in sentiment from Baku or Ganja (formerly Kirovabad). Similarly, Jerusalem and Istanbul hold distinct meanings compared to the Armenian interpretations of these places. The Armenian-created place names, such as those invented during the Soviet era—Arsakh, Shushi, Stepanakert, Mardakert, Gegarkunik, Ararat, Tavush, Kotayk—do not correspond to historical or modern realities. On the contrary, the ancient Turkish-Islamic heritage reflected in ethnotoponyms like Karabakh, Shusha, Khankendi, Aghdara, Khojavand, Goyche, Zangibasari, Dilijan, and Kirkhbulag speaks to the historical truth that these places are rooted in Azerbaijani history and identity.

In other words, an Azerbaijani perceives the environment as part of their own being. A citizen sees their homeland as part of their identity, and a compatriot carries the homeland within their heart. Azerbaijan is not perceived as merely a geographical location; it is seen as a generalized individual, a supreme interlocutor, a living image that inspires love, responsibility, adornment, criticism, grief, and joy.

Ethno-geographic symbols: mountain, water, vegetation, settlements

In Turkish thought, height, mountains, and the sky symbolize spiritual purity, divinity, and the homeland. Mountains are imbued with profound significance, as seen in the epic of Koroglu, where the hero gains his strength by drinking from the waters of “inaccessible, impregnable” mountains, and Çanlıbel represents freedom, power, and humanity elevated above the mundane. The Turkish people's enduring connection to their homeland, often expressed through the imagery of mountains, reflects this deep symbolism:

“The snowy mountains lying opposite,

Mountains, you have my wife.

I don't have enough, I don't have enough,

The branch remained tender on the branch”

(Koroglu, 2005, p. 156)

Interestingly, clouds and darkness—symbols often prominent in other cultures—hold less significance in Turkish ethno-poetic consciousness. In “sedentary” and

“urban” cultures, the environment, including the sky, is often perceived as threatening or alien, with human habitation symbolized as closed, walled spaces separated from nature. This worldview, evident in classical Greek, Indian, Persian, and Chinese art, often depicts the natural world as antagonistic, with imagery of black nights, heavy clouds, or oppressive heavens. In contrast, Turkish shamanistic traditions view the sky, the dwelling place of Gök Tengri (God of the Sky), as a source of blessings, openness, clarity, and renewal, emphasizing vitality and the connection between nature and divinity.

Socio-cultural objects, including settlements, houses, and architectural structures, further enrich this ethno-geographical perspective. These elements are deeply influenced by Islamic traditions, as seen in the orientation of homes and tombstones toward Mecca and the spatial arrangements that honor elders or separate male and female domains. Certain buildings, imbued with cultural and historical significance, have evolved into ethnic symbols, reflecting the intertwined nature of geography, culture, and identity in Azerbaijani thought.

Socio-historical processes and the concept of homeland

The manifestation of historical-social processes in geographical imagination is a very broad and independent topic. Let's just note that Turkish history is deeply traced in the historical toponymy of the vast Eurasian space. The Turks have not only been mediators between the East and the West in the territories they have inhabited since ancient times, but they have also created a rich and original culture. The ancient Turks did not only play the role of mediators between civilizations in the huge Eurasian space, but also developed their own culture, which they considered capable of opposing the cultures of China, Iran, and India. This special steppe culture had ancient traditions and deep roots (Gumilev, 2003, p. 3). Since the Turks treat the land and the places they own as a spiritual entity, a motherland, they have given names to many geographical places throughout history and left indelible traces. During a great period of the Middle Ages, the south of the present Georgian territory was called Didi Turkoba – Great Turkistan. Even after the Avars themselves were erased from history, the greater part of central Europe was called the Avar steppe. Kipchak prince Basarab named Bessarabia. From the Bulgarians, Bulgaria, and the present-day Bulgarian state along the Volga River, as well as the name of the Volga River, the Bulgarian River in Azerbaijan, and many other geographical names related to other Turkic ethnic groups, have survived in most parts of Europe and Asia. These names, which are the memory

of history, help to reveal our ethnic past and the historical boundaries of Turkish lands.

CONCLUSIONS

Ethno-geographic perceptions are not a simple pragmatic attitude to the environment, but a philosophical-aesthetic perception, and they are closely related to national spirituality, ethnic psychology, literature, and, ultimately, contemporary social processes. The interpretation of all these geographical concepts can bring a lot of clarity to the issues we mentioned at the beginning – the historical borders of the country, the autochthonousness of the nation in the country, and the problems of the ethnic worldview.

Along with ethnic psychology, culture, and ethnic worldview, the ethnic geographical ideas of Azerbaijani Turks help to reveal our autochthonousness and historical borders in our homeland: in the sense of the national homeland, the territory of Azerbaijan is a single, complete, large country that covers the North, South, and East. The artistic toponymy of Bayatis and our songs includes Darbend, Tabriz, Savalan, Yerevan, Sarvan, Nakhchivan, Lankaran, Guba, Ganja, Zangezur, Goycha, and many other places.

As a whole, in the national perception, Azerbaijan is a living, indivisible, unified country with its own face. The country's snowy peaks, green forests, meadows, rivers, stones, buildings, balconies, and streets create a symbolic image – the image of the homeland. This living image exists as an eternal interlocutor in the hearts of every citizen. Of course, each individual perceives the homeland differently, and every compatriot dreams of his own Azerbaijan. And in fact, the immortality, eternity, and integrity of the motherland depend on living like this in the heart of the citizen.

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