

WOMEN AND FAMILY RELATIONS IN CRIMEAN TATAR PROVERBS: AN ORAL TRADITION ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study looks at the cultural representations of family, femininity, and motherhood in the oral tradition of the Crimean Tatars, with a particular focus on proverbs as key transmitters of moral codes, social norms, and collective memory. Issues such as women's rights and physical and sexual violence against women, which remain pressing concerns in the contemporary world, have deep historical and cultural dimensions. One of the factors that has historically shaped the moral and social stability of societies is their treatment and perception of women. The folk memory preserved in oral tradition encapsulates national and local codes related to women, motherhood, and family, offering valuable insights into the resilience or decline of communities over time.

Drawing on a corpus of proverbs compiled from historical Crimean Tatar sources, this research employs a qualitative, thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring motifs related to women, motherhood, and family relations. The selected proverbs encapsulate the worldview, customs, and traditions of the Crimean Tatars, reflecting their moral values, family ethics, concepts of femininity, love of homeland, kinship, and broader humanitarian ideals.

The findings demonstrate that the Crimean Tatar oral tradition preserves a nuanced vision of womanhood and family, encompassing roles as daughters, brides, wives, mothers, and widows, emphasizing virtues such as wisdom, loyalty, and moral integrity. These proverbs also reveal the reciprocal influence between women and the stability, prosperity, and moral fabric of society. By situating the Crimean Tatar experience within the wider context of Turkic cultural history, the study highlights the enduring relevance of traditional wisdom in informing contemporary gender discourses and promoting social cohesion.

Keywords: sexual violence, family, proverbs, Crimean Tatars, tradition

KIRIM TATAR ATASÖZLERİNDE KADIN VE AİLE İLİŞKİLERİ: SÖZLÜ GELENEK BAĞLAMINDA BİR ANALİZ

Özet

Bu çalışma, Kırım Tatarlarının sözlü geleneğinde aile, kadınlık ve annelik kavramlarının kültürel temsillerini incelemekte; özellikle atasözlerini, ahlaki değerlerin, toplumsal normların ve kolektif hafızanın temel taşıyıcıları olarak ele almaktadır. Günümüz dünyasında hâlâ önemini koruyan kadın hakları ile kadınlara yönelik fiziksel ve cinsel şiddet gibi meseleler, derin tarihi ve kültürel boyutlara sahiptir. Tarihsel süreç boyunca toplumların ahlaki ve sosyal istikrarını şekillendiren temel etmenlerden biri, kadına bakışları ve kadına yönelik muameleler olmuştur. Sözlü gelenekte korunan halk hafızası, kadın, annelik ve aileye ilişkin ulusal ve yerel kodları yansıtarak toplumların zaman içindeki direncine veya çözülmesine dair değerli veriler sunmaktadır.

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Tarihî Kırım Tatar kaynaklarından derlenen atasözleri bütününden hareketle yapılan bu araştırma, kadın, annelik ve aile ilişkilerine dair tekrar eden temaları belirlemek ve yorumlamak amacıyla nitel, tematik bir analiz yöntemi kullanmaktadır. Seçilen atasözleri, Kırım Tatarlarının dünya görüşünü, gelenek ve göreneklerini yansıtmakta, ahlaki değerlerini, aile anlayışlarını, kadınlık kavramlarını, vatan sevgisini, akrabalık ilişkilerini ve daha geniş insani idealleri ortaya koymaktadır.

Elde edilen bulgular, Kırım Tatar sözlü geleneğinin kadınlığı ve aileyi, kız evlat, gelin, eş, anne ve dul gibi roller çerçevesinde bilgelik, sadakat ve ahlaki bütünlük gibi erdemlerle ilişkilendirerek çok katmanlı bir biçimde yansıttığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca atasözleri, kadın ile toplumun istikrarı, refahı ve ahlaki yapısı arasındaki karşılıklı etkileşimi de gözler önüne sermektedir. Kırım Tatar deneyimini Türk kültür tarihinin geniş bağlamı içinde ele alan çalışma, geleneksel bilgelik öğretilerinin günümüz toplumsal cinsiyet tartışmalarına ışık tutmadaki ve toplumsal dayanışmayı güçlendirmedeki kalıcı önemine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: cinsel şiddet, aile, atasözleri, Kırım Tatarları, gelenek

Introduction

Proverbs represent the most ancient and widespread genre of folk oral creation, as they are defined as “a short, but deeply meaningful phrase of the text that summarizes the people’s vast social-historical experience and enters its vernacular language” (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 3). The proverbial sayings of the ancestors, as articulated in this particular sentence, serve as poignant expressions that have been meticulously transmitted from generation to generation, reflecting the collective sentiments of anger, joy, sorrow, dreams, and aspirations of the populace (Puskulluoglu 2002: 5). These proverbial utterances facilitate the comprehension of the national ethos and moral principles, thereby enriching our common language by illuminating the way of life and governance of our ancestors.

The collection and scientific study of the words and expressions of the Crimean Tatar ancestors commenced in the middle of the 19th century, with notable scholars such as A.K. Khovadja (Kyrym-Khovadja 1850), I.N. Berezin (Berezin 1856), V.H. Kondaraki (Kondaraky 1875), and V.V. Radlov (Radlov 1896) pioneering the endeavors. In the year 1914, a collection of proverbs and sayings collected by A.A. Bodaninsky, E.L. Martino, and O. Murasov was published by famous orientalist - A.N. Samoylovich and P.A. Falev (Poslovichy 1914). The analysis of Crimean Tatar proverbs was carried out by the Turkologist V.A. Gordlevsky (Gordlevsky 1921).

In the 20th century, scholars and writers such as R. Muzaferov, M. Ulkusal, and R. Fazyl contributed to the collection and publication of proverbs (Ulkusal 1970; Fazyl 1971). Notable folklorist J. Bekirov’s books on Crimean Tatar folklore include sections dedicated to proverbs and sayings (Bekirov: 1988). Presently, ongoing research endeavors are underway to identify Crimean Tatar proverbs and sayings. A notable example of this ongoing research is the 2013 publication by Sh. Asanov of a collection comprising over 4,000 proverbs and sayings (Atalar sözleri... 2013). In the pages of the newspaper “Yeni Dünya” (New World), researcher E. Bekirov runs a special column dedicated to proverbs. The contributions of these scholars

serve as invaluable resources for the study and comprehension of Crimean Tatar folklore.

We should also remember that in the forties of the last century, the Crimean Tatar people were brutally deported from their homeland. The prevailing political climate during the years of deportation imposed significant impediments on Crimean Tatar researchers, hindering their capacity to engage in rigorous folklore studies and undertake fundamental research, a phenomenon that pervaded numerous scientific disciplines. Consequently, the scholars' profound knowledge was not substantiated in their own work. The unrelenting period of exile shattered the fundamental principles of oral folk creativity. For example, variability in oral literature is a characteristic of most folklore genres. As in other genres, the existence of several variants of the same literary samples in proverbs is an ordinary phenomenon, which is in accordance with the specific feature of folklore invention. From this perspective, during the period of deportation, the relative distance between the natural progression of folk literature, which has existed in the collective memory for millennia, and literary expressions conveying analogous meanings in diverse forms was disrupted. Vivid expressions and variability were artificially interrupted. Indeed, throughout the course of historical development, individuals endeavored to generalize their conclusions, long-term observations, and evidence of their accomplishments into wise expressions.

The role of women in Crimean Tatar society is of significant importance. This is reflected in the abundance of songs, stories, and poems written about them. The role of women in our lives is so profound that it is difficult to overestimate. Because as Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "Paradise is under the feet of mothers". The names of women are inscribed in the history book of the Crimean Tatar people. During the period of the Crimean Khanate, they were known as Janike-khanim, Dilara-Bikech, and Nur-Sultan-khanim. In the early XX century, Ismail Gasprinsky's daughter, Shefika Khanim, published the inaugural Crimean Tatar women's magazine, titled "Âlem-i-Nisvan." This publication served as a platform for addressing issues affecting women, fostering unity among them to address challenges not only in Crimea but also throughout the Muslim world. During the Second World War, Crimean Tatar women participated actively in the war effort. They served on the fronts, in partisan units, and in underground resistance movements. In the years that followed, during the period of deportation, these women played a significant role in preserving their native language, as well as the traditions and customs of their people. They were instilled from an early age with the values exemplified by their grandmothers, mothers, and sisters. These women demonstrated remarkable resilience in their roles, not only fulfilling the conventional duties associated with child care, domestic responsibilities, and family management, but also actively participating in the collective struggle for the rights of the populace, often in collaboration with their male counterparts. Women were not only keepers of the hearth, but they became faithful allies and associates of their husbands. The first source of the Crimean Tatar people's female and maternal characteristics and qualities is proverbs and idioms, which are the mirror of the

experience of folk life in the oral tradition (Ayvazov: 1907; Ismailova: 2012; Seitbilyalova: 2013)

Materials And Methods

While extensive research has been conducted on proverbs and sayings in general, the systematic investigation of themes related to women, family, and femininity in Crimean Tatar proverbs, particularly from regional and comparative perspectives, remains limited. Consequently, the present study contributes to this field by expanding the range of illustrative examples. The collections of proverbs on women and family published by the aforementioned authors provide the theoretical and practical foundation for our research. This study primarily proceeds on the basis of selected proverb sources.

A qualitative content analysis approach was employed to systematically categorize and interpret the proverbs based on the social roles and statuses of women, including daughters, brides, wives, mothers, and widows. The methodology involved careful transcription, translation, and thematic grouping to reveal underlying cultural values and social norms.

Due to historical disruptions such as deportation and political repression, some variations and oral transmission dynamics were reconstructed through cross-referencing multiple sources to ensure reliability.

An Analysis Supported by Examples

Oral traditions constitute a vital medium through which communities articulate and transmit their conceptions of gender and identity. Within this framework, proverbs in particular reflect nuanced perceptions of femininity and social expectations. Initially, Crimean Tatars' proverbs and sayings pertain to girls. These proverbial expressions illuminate the essence of femininity, delineating its distinctive qualities and the nurturing environment that fosters it:

Qız degeniñ naziktir, qızğa tiyme, yazıqtır (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 116)

A girl is gentle, don't touch her, it's a shame.[†]

Qız qarnı qın qadar, oğul qarnı quyu qadar (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 116)

A daughter's belly is as deep as a well, a son's belly is as wide as the sea.

Qız yüregi qaranlıq gecedir (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 117)

A girl's heart is a dark night.

Qız erke osse ana-babasını xor yeter (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 117)

[†] The Crimean Tatar proverbs cited in the text have been translated from the original into English by myself.

When a girl grows up, she will beat her parents.

The customs of the people, which have been preserved for centuries, are also reflected in the parables. For instance, the dowry for a grown woman frequently encompassed numerous embroidered towels, a white headscarf for religious observances, and other accouterments. The family would commence preparations for the dowry upon the girl's birth. This practice is encapsulated in the proverb, "*Qız beşikte, ciez sandıqta*" (The girl is in the cradle, the dowry is in the chest) (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 116).

Following the national custom of the girl's wedding, the bride leaves her parents' home and becomes a member of her husband's family. This transition is accompanied by specific proverbs that underscore this cultural shift (*Qız bala musafirdir* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 116)/ The girl child is a guest; *Qız bala – el eviniñ çırağı* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 116)/ The girl child is the apprentice of the house she is a bride to).

The second part is a proverb about this bride. These phrases articulate the essence of bridal qualities and characteristics (*Kelin qaynana toprağından, kiyev – qaynata toprağından* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 96)/ The bride is from the mother-in-law's soil, the groom - from the father-in-law's soil), what characteristics should be considered when choosing a bride (*Kelinniñ altınısını araştırma, aqıllısını araştır!* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 96)/ Do not look for the golden one of the bride, look for the wise one). In the context of daily life, it is not uncommon for individuals to voice discontent regarding their daughter-in-law. The subsequent proverb offers counsel to such individuals (*Keliniñ yaman olsa, oğluñdan kor, kiyeviñ yaman olsa – qızıñdan kor.* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 96)/ If your daughter-in-law is bad, ask your son. If your son-in-law is bad, ask your daughter). Many proverbs about the bride also mention the mother-in-law (*Kelin de qaynana olur.* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 96) / The bride is also the mother-in-law). The relationship and the concoutradiction between the two is often manifest when the peculiarities of his nature are taken into account (*Kelin çeçek, er aytqanı kerçek, qaynana yılan – er aytqanı yalan* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 96)/ The bride is a flower, everything she says is true, the mother-in-law is a snake – everything she says is a lie; *Qadınıñ aytqanını ur başqa, ananıñ sözüni ur taşqa* (Ana ve babanen bağılı... 2016: 7) / Hit the woman's words on the head, the mother's words on the stone). The relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law has been a subject of interest for centuries. Previously, women were the wives of their households, but in modern life, even though each of them had her own house, the claims initially posited have not been refuted, and they continue to be a subject of various works and proverbs. The following proverbs and sayings illustrate the role of a woman as a companion and a housewife. In these parables, the characteristics of the woman's nature (*Yaxşı qadın işli olur, yaman qadın tişli olur* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 203) / A good woman is busy, a bad woman is toothy), her duties (*Qadınıñ ömürlik yoldaşını* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 105) / Your wife is your life partner), their value (*Qadın evniñ gulyu, erkek evniñ diregi* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 105) / Woman is the flower of the house, man is the pillar of the

house), and the impact of a woman on the prosperity of the home (*Yvni ev etken de qadın, erni er etken de* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 182) / It is the woman who makes the house a home and her husband a man; *Yaxşı qadın – dünya baylığı* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 203) / A good woman is the world reign; *Yaxşı qadın – evniñ gülü* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 203) / A good woman is the rose of her home) is described. In this way, the relationship between the husband and wife (*Qarı- qoca talaştı, yatqa bela yapıştı* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 106) / The husband and wife quarreled, and the trouble stuck to the bed; *Aqay-apay – yipektir, olarnıñ arasına kirgen – tentektir* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 17) / Husband and wife are silk, and the one who enters between them is fool), the life and happiness of the man is closely connected with the woman (*Apaysız aqay ölmey, lakin raatlıq da körmey* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 28) / A husband without a wife does not die, but neither does he find rest; *Qadının yaxşı etken qoca, qocanı da yaxşı etken qadın* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 105) / It is the husband who makes the woman well, and the woman who makes the husband well.; *Apaynıñ yaman olsa, eceliñ yetmey ölersiñ* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 28) / If your wife is bad, you will die before your end comes. Expressive phrases also deserve special attention. The fourth group of proverbs and sayings on the theme of women and femininity is the theme of maternity. In these wise sayings, the main characteristics of a mother are her love for her child (*Ana balağa eki köznen baqar, baba – bir köznen* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 27) / A mother looks at a child with two eyes, a father with one eye; *Ana içün bala baldan tatlıdır* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 27) / For a mother, child is sweeter than honey; *Balanıñ parmağı ağırsa, ananıñ yüregi ağırır* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 48) / If a child's finger hurts, the mother's heart hurts), her tenderness (*Ananıñ qolu yımşaq ola* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 27) / Mother's hand is soft), her magnanimity (*Balası içün ana ateşke kirer* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 48) / A mother will enter the fire for her child), a protector for her child (*Analı qız – qınalı qız* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 27) / The girl with the mother is the girl with henna) and the most precious person (*Anasız bala – baxsız bala* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 28) / Motherless child - unhappy child; *Babadan öksüz – yarı öksüz, anadan öksüz – tolu öksüz* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 43) / Orphan from father – half orphan, orphan from mother – full orphan; *Ana olgen soñ baba emce olur* (Ana ve babanen 2016: 7) / After mother's death, father becomes uncle) and so on are considered. Respect for the mother has been a fundamental tenet in various cultural and religious traditions across centuries. In the teachings of our Prophet (peace be upon him), the mother is regarded as the primary figure deserving of service and kindness. Some phrases emphasize the significance of the roles of both the mother and the father (*Ana qadrini ana olğan soñ, baba qadrini baba olğan soñ bilirsıñ* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 27) / You will know the value of mother after becoming a mother, the value of father after becoming father), also their importance in the world is determined (*Baba evlatqa – devlettir, ana – yürektir* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 44) / A father is the state for his children, a mother is the heart). According to Islamic principles, the importance of the mother and father is great. In fact, Allah commanded the following regarding this issue in the Holy Quran: “And your Rabb has decreed that you do not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say

not to them [so much as], “uff,” and do not repel them but speak to them a noble Word” (*sūrat l-isrā*, 17:23). The final section of the text concerns proverbs and sayings relevant to the subject of widows. Despite their limited scope, these proverbs offer fundamental insights into the life of a widow. For example, proverbs that indicate the situation of widows - *Yañğız qadın – qanatsız quş* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 201)/ A lonely woman is a wingless bird. Indeed, a bird without wings is incapable of flight and, consequently, cannot adequately fulfill its role in life. There is a proverb in our language that states - *Tul qadınñ oğlu erke olur* (Atalar sözleri... 2013: 161)/ The son of a widow becomes a fool. These proverbs, which are derived from life experience, reflect the actions of some widows in raising sons. In fact, in order not to let her child know about his father’s absence, the woman defends, spoils, and praises him more.

Thus, while analyzing the words and phrases of the ancestors that describe the duties of womanhood and motherhood, we were able to learn how the Crimean Tatar woman at each social level (daughter, daughter-in-law, life partner-wife, mother, mother-in-law) carries special lines and how she is the embodiment of a secret.

In the parables previously referenced, the woman with a gentle body and a gentle eye, consisting of compassion, mercy, and kindness, is depicted in every aspect. In the proverbs and sayings of folk wisdom, many important duties and achievements of women are described to make this world beautiful. Also, both positive and negative aspects and actions that affected her family, her life partner, her children, and society were put into words.

Discussion

The findings from Crimean Tatar proverbs emphasize the pivotal role of women in maintaining family structure and societal continuity. These proverbs serve not only as linguistic artifacts but also as vehicles for transmitting cultural values, social norms, and moral expectations across generations.

The emphasis on qualities such as wisdom, chastity, and nurturing reflects broader Turkish and Islamic cultural values, highlighting women's integral position within both private and public spheres. Motherhood, in particular, is revered as a sacred duty, supported by religious teachings and social traditions.

The complexities of relationships within extended families, including those between brides and mothers-in-law, underscore the nuanced social dynamics at play and the importance of interpersonal harmony for community stability.

Moreover, the disruption caused by political upheavals, such as deportation, illustrates the vulnerability of oral traditions and the resilience of cultural identity amidst adversity.

Overall, this analysis underscores the necessity of preserving oral folklore as a critical repository of communal wisdom and a resource for addressing contemporary social issues such as women's rights and family relations.

Conclusion

Crimean Tatar proverbs are the logical mirror of folk wisdom, the rich thought of the people, a source of true humanity, generosity, and nobility. The subject area of Crimean Tatar proverbs is very rich, colorful, and appealing. These wise sayings have been tested in the public life of the Crimean Tatar people for millennia. Passed down from generation to generation and refined in memory, they encapsulate the collective wisdom of the people in all aspects of life. When we analyze Crimean Tatar proverbs, it is evident that there is a wealth of material on girls, mothers, womanhood, and motherhood. Through these proverbs, we can see a reflection of the Tatar family in the context of the general morality-family relations of the Turkish society. As a matter of fact, women in Turks have generally taken their place as the pillar of society, even as a *sine qua non*, with their chastity, sense of morality, sense of motherhood, loyalty to their husbands, wise and noble personality, superior skills in administrative, political, and social fields, and upright stance.

In the text of proverbs passed down from generation to generation in the Tatar oral tradition, the woman, who is the main pillar of society, has existed in life despite all the difficulties of nature and living conditions. Women have been in a constant struggle to maintain this existence. The extent of this struggle is reflected in Tatar proverbs in a literary way, combining the simplicity of folk language and the depth of folk thought. Tatar society has consciously and faithfully prepared the girls for the spiritual and cultural guarantee of its future. In the proverbs, it is noted that Tatar women are beautiful, clean, and very devoted to their chastity. In their father's house, they are well versed in Tatar traditions and customs, and after marriage, they are one with their men. A well-raised girl who follows the ethics of her upbringing is the reason for national resistance and existence against foreign elements and foreign powers. That is why in the text of the proverbs we often find expressions such as "motherless-unfortunate", "lonely woman-wingless bird", "good woman - the rose of her home" and others, which are clear messages about the family and moral values of Tatar society. While comprehending these messages, we concluded that even if societies are colonized, independent, or annexed, conservative societies that are fond of their traditions and beliefs can never be defeated by political-military or civil pressure or interventions. Societies with strong women have been victorious and successful in all kinds of fields in all historical periods. It should not be forgotten that family, also women, are the main transmitters of civilization.

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