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ETHNOCULTURAL FEATURES IN THE CREATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS

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Abstract
This article explores the ethnocultural characteristics in the portrayal of female characters in Eastern historical-biographical literature, focusing specifically on the novel Yulduzli Tunlar by Pirimqul Qodirov and its English translation by Carol Ermakova. It examines how female figures such as Khanzoda Begim, Gulbadan Begim, and Qutlug' Nigorxonim are depicted not only as historical personalities but also as cultural archetypes, political intermediaries, and bearers of ethnic and religious identity within the Timurid and Babur dynasties. The study highlights the translator's strategies in preserving cultural specificity through transliteration of names and titles, and in maintaining somatic and emotional metaphors essential to the original text's meaning. By employing a feminist and postcolonial translation framework, the article argues that Ermakova's translation acts as a cultural bridge that resists orientalist stereotypes and restores the voices of historically marginalized women. The translation is presented as a form of cultural rehabilitation and feminist historiography that fosters intercultural dialogue between Eastern and Western readers, emphasizing the importance of cultural context and ideological sensitivity in literary translation.

Keywords: Ethnocultural identity, female characters, Eastern literature, historical-biographical novel, Yulduzli Tunlar, Carol Ermakova, translation strategies, feminist translation, postcolonial theory, cultural rehabilitation, somatic metaphors, cultural specificity, transliteration, political intermediaries, Timurid and Babur dynasties, intercultural dialogue, orientalist stereotypes, feminist historiography.

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Introduction

In Eastern literature, particularly in historical-biographical novels, female characters are shaped not only by personal experience but also through broader social, political, and cultural contexts. This is vividly exemplified in the novel *Yulduzli Tunlar* ("Starry Nights"), where figures such as Khanzoda Begim, Gulbadan Begim, Mohlaroyim, and Qutlug' Nigorxonim are portrayed not simply as historical personalities but as cultural archetypes, political intermediaries, and bearers of ethnocultural heritage within the Timurid and Babur dynasties.

These female characters embody ethnic identity, religious values, patriarchal resistance, the social construction of femininity, and national aesthetic ideals—each carrying symbolic significance rooted in Eastern literary traditions. For instance, Qutlug' Nigorxonim is depicted not just as the mother of the state founder Babur but as a wise woman, cultural promoter, and

symbol of political stability, while Gulbadan Begim is recognized through her poetic talent as both an artist and a preserver of cultural heritage.

The translation into English by Carol Ermakova goes beyond mere linguistic transformation, addressing ethnocultural differences encountered when transferring these images into another culture. Ermakova's approach preserves cultural polyphony, maintaining historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity while introducing these female characters to a modern Western audience.

Significantly, key expressive tools such as names, tone, metaphors, and religious and political connotations are retained as important semantic elements in the translation. This aligns with Lawrence Venuti's concept of "foreignization," whereby the translator preserves the source culture's specificity rather than adapting it to Western readers' expectations.

Thus, the translation of *Yulduzli Tunlar* creates a broader cultural bridge rather than simply a linguistic one, facilitating dialogue between two cultures—the patriarchal historical memory of the East and feminist historiography of the West. This exemplifies contemporary translation practice at the intersection of postcolonial, feminist, and cultural translation theories.

Preservation of National-Cultural Identity through Names and Titles

In Eastern historical-biographical literature, names and titles are not merely identifiers but complex socio-political and cultural codes. Titles like "Begim," "Sulton," and "Khanzoda" in female characters indicate lineage, ethnic identity, religious etiquette, and gender hierarchy. These titles hold semantic weight in Uzbek historical memory, essential for full character comprehension.

In Ermakova's translation of Pirimqul Qodirov's *Yulduzli Tunlar*, names and titles are transliterated (e.g., Khanzada Begim, Gulbadan Begim) rather than directly translated. This "foreignization" strategy, as described by Venuti (1995), preserves allegiance to the source culture instead of adapting to the dominant target culture.

This transliteration invites readers to engage directly with the source culture, preserving the specific political, intellectual, and familial connotations of titles like "Begim" that "princess" in English cannot fully capture. For example, while "princess" in Western culture implies royal inheritance, "begim" in Muslim Turkic traditions symbolizes authority, intellect, and family unity.

This approach aligns with André Lefevere's (1992) concept of translation as cultural and ideological "rewriting," emphasizing fidelity to source cultural codes rather than domestication. Supplementary explanations of these titles' historical and social functions enhance readers' cultural understanding, merging linguistic fidelity with cultural mediation, consistent with Bassnett's (2002) "cultural turn" in translation studies.

The Harem as a Cultural Space (The Inner Court)

The translation and interpretation of the term "haram" (Arabic for a sacred and enclosed space) carries not only linguistic but also cultural and ideological weight. In Western culture, this word is often stereotypically associated with the eroticized, isolated, and passive lives of Eastern

women. This stereotype is largely shaped by orientalist discourse, which obscures the real political, social, and intellectual roles played by women in these settings.

Carol Ermakova challenges this stereotypical view by translating "haram" not as "harem" but as "the inner court." This term reflects a multilayered cultural space that was not only the physical domain where women lived but also the center of family relations, social interactions, and political consultations within the palace. Through this approach, the translator distances Western readers from exoticized perceptions and restores the authentic historical context.

Ruby Lal (2005) supports this perspective, emphasizing that the Mughal harem was not a place of female isolation but rather a crucial node of socio-political activity, where political advice, inheritance issues, correspondence, and even diplomatic decisions were made. This view reinterprets the harem as a space of female agency rather than restriction.

Feminist historians such as Afsaneh Najmabadi and Fatima Mernissi also regard the harem as a structure reflecting gender order in society. Their research frames the harem as a site of information exchange, women's education, and the formation of informal political networks.

This nuanced approach preserves cultural sensitivity and encourages readers to engage in contextual thinking—inviting them to recognize the space where women lived as a political arena, not merely a site of confinement.

Somatic and Emotional Expression as Cultural Codes

In Eastern literature, especially historical-biographical novels, female emotions are frequently conveyed through somatic metaphors, where physical expressions of the body symbolize deep emotional and cultural meanings. For example, the phrase "yuragida dard olovi" (literally "a fire of pain in the heart") signifies not only emotional suffering but also an inner explosion of the soul, reflecting the woman's internal struggle against social constraints and oppression.

Carol Ermakova translates this as "a furnace of grief in the breast," a choice that preserves the somatic connotation of female emotion while making it resonate deeply with English readers. This translation strategy aligns with Sherry Simon's feminist translation theory, which argues that women's experiences should be reflected not only linguistically but also through bodily, emotional, and social contexts in translation.

Such an approach treats the female body not as a mere metaphorical image but as an active subject—a site of political and cultural experience. This view echoes Judith Butler's theory of the body as a "field of cultural and political formation," where the female body becomes a symbol of social resistance and identity construction rather than just aesthetic metaphor.

Susan Bassnett also emphasizes that the cultural connotations of the body, linked to national aesthetics and gender roles, must be preserved rather than erased in translation. In Eastern literature, references to a woman's heart, chest, eyes, tongue, and breath express her psychological state, personal suffering, or social pressure. Ermakova's use of "furnace," "grief," and "breast" is more than literal translation—it combines somatic experience with emotional and political sensitivity, reflecting a creative and context-aware role of the translator as a mediator between cultures.

In *Yulduzli Tunlar*'s English translation, the ethnocultural layers of female characters are not only preserved but sometimes even more deeply revealed. Ermakova's translation is an act of

cultural reconstruction, awakening gender awareness and feminist historical consciousness, which can be analyzed through the lenses of Lawrence Venuti's "foreignization," Bassnett and Lefevere's cultural mediation concepts, and feminist translation theories by scholars such as Gayatri Spivak, Sherry Simon, and Ruby Lal.

Ermakova employs distinct foreignizing strategies, such as transliterating women's titles ("Begim," "Khanzoda," "Sulton") instead of translating them, supplementing with cultural explanations when needed. This strategy reflects Venuti's approach of loyalty to the source culture rather than domestication for the dominant language. For instance, Mohim Begim's infertility is not rendered as simply "the fault of being childless," but as "the curse of barrenness," signaling societal reproductive pressure and violence imposed on women's bodies—an echo of Spivak's re-interpretation of the subaltern female voice.

The translation of "haram" as "inner court" similarly reflects Ruby Lal's perspective, recognizing the harem not merely as a place of female isolation but as a political and familial decision-making center.

Ermakova's rendering of somatic and emotional imagery like "a furnace of grief in the breast" allows the female body to be read not only aesthetically but also as a text of social critique and political meaning. This approach corresponds with Sherry Simon's feminist view that female experience is "language stored in the body," requiring translation strategies that preserve this embodied dimension.

Thus, Ermakova functions not merely as a linguistic translator but as a cultural mediator and creative interpreter who bridges languages, histories, cultures, and gender positions. Her translation acts as a form of cultural resistance, giving voice to silenced women—an act highly valued in postcolonial feminist theory.

In conclusion, Carol Ermakova's translation work holds exceptional significance in the fields of national identity, women's historical representation, and ethnocultural awareness. Her approach transcends mere linguistic substitution, engaging deeply with the cultural, social, and political dimensions embedded in the source text. By preserving and conveying the complex historical voices of women within their specific cultural and political contexts, Ermakova's translation acts as a form of cultural rehabilitation, restoring marginalized female perspectives that have often been overlooked or simplified in mainstream narratives.

Moreover, her translation functions as a feminist historiographic intervention, illuminating the intersections of gender, power, and culture within the broader historical discourse. Ermakova's careful retention of cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and symbolic references enables a richer intertextual dialogue that bridges Eastern and Western literary and cultural traditions. This fosters cross-cultural understanding and challenges dominant orientalist stereotypes by presenting Eastern women not as passive figures but as active agents within their socio-political realities.

Ultimately, her translation creates a dynamic cultural and political conversation that encourages readers to reconsider historical narratives through a feminist and postcolonial lens. This makes her work not only a linguistic endeavor but also a transformative cultural act that contributes to the ongoing dialogue between diverse worldviews, promoting inclusivity and mutual respect across cultures.

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