

## **Turkic-Language Ethno documentary: The Author's Specificity of Observation of National Culture**

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### **Abstract**

We should consider ethno-documentary film a cultural phenomenon. It is emphasized by the fact of the author's intention to give global significance and value to the reflected culture, which allows it to take its place in the world history and on the ethnographic map of the Earth. The author's intention is based on his observations supported by the accumulated knowledge that bears a special representatively authorial character. Ethno-documentalism implies the representation of the unique conditions of encounter with a culture under unique circumstances.

Films of this genre produced by cinematographers from Turkey and two Russian regions - the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Bashkortostan - demonstrate the idea of culture representation through a number of national images created with the help of film language; these images characterize different ways of seeing the world, the diversity and richness of world perception.

We highlight two main methods that allow filmmakers to solve the tasks of ethno-panoramic presentation of national culture. 1. The method of observing the life of one or more families as representatives of the ethnic community allows the author to reveal the specificity of the whole ethno culture, its uniqueness and identity through an experience of everyday life. 2. The method of ethnic film journey allowing him to cover as many territories of residence for ethno cultures as possible, as they become a natural factor of ethnic formation and reproduction of ethnicity as a basis of world perception. Both of these methods are used on the basis of the principle of inclusion (ethno-fiction) to conduct intercultural dialogue. Among the main features of Turkic-speaking ethno-documentary films are anthropological nature of the representation of man of culture based on detailed accentuated consideration of everyday life; interpretation by the artist-author of the documentary based on his participation in the shooting process; features of directing the collective perception in the

process of designing the perception in the film programme with the creative use of cinema as a channel for cultural representation; creation of genuine navigation of screen information and social regulation of the content of an ethnographic film on the basis of involvement in the process of ethno film production; transfer of the aura of culture based on the consonance of the film aesthetics to the aesthetics of culture.

**Keywords:** ethno-documentary cinema, ethnicity, national culture, Turkic peoples, representation of national culture.

## Introduction

The multitude of local cultures of the contemporary world is reflected in documentary films as in a mirror. All of them strive to preserve their own identity and system of values despite the processes of cultural homogenization and identity crisis. Cinema art contributes not only to the preservation of national and cultural identity, but also it affirms the identity of cultures.

Documentary filmmaking is an essential element of the modern view of the world. To define documentary, we should turn to its reliance on filming authentic events and persons, which makes this form of cinema capable of grasping fragments of reality as they exist. The term “documentary” was applied to a new genre of film by British director John Grierson in the 1920's, his statement about the documentary film as a creative development of reality has become classic. And it is noteworthy that the origins of documentary films lie in the travel movies revealing new cultures to the world; in our time these travel movies are developed in the ethnographic cinema. Ethnographic cinema is closely connected with an ethnic component which in documentary filmmaking involves the reflection of real events and real people in the context of the national traditions inherent in a particular people. The national tradition is manifested in the way of life, dress and character. Thus, ethno-documentary film is a reflection of the realities, lifestyle, everyday life, national and cultural traditions of a particular nation.

Actualization of ethnocinema art in the contemporary world is related to the fact that the language of cinema is accessible and pervasive, artistic images created through this language allow authors (on the basis of the representation of ideal and material objects in the act of cultural cognition, as well as through language and cognitive models, material objects) to represent ethnic national values, convey meanings and fix ethno-realities defined as traditional, ethnically marked, but, at the same time, prone to extinction. Cinema has specific means of expression contributing to the affirmation of the identity of cultures, the embodiment of the identity of ethnic groups.

The ethno-documentary filmmaker solves a number of issues, namely, he identifies and describes a complex of distinctive features of national and cultural identity which many representatives of different nations identify themselves with; he creates the features of national character that determine collective and personal levels of identity; he creates an image of the territory based on its artistic paradigm grasped in a whole system of visual images; most importantly, he reflects processes of regional self-identification based on thematic, artistic and ideological components; he builds and represents ethno space that bears

symbolic characteristics conditioned by the nature of the national and cultural identity.

Such multifunctionality of ethno-documentalism reveals various aspects of the development of the nation, which contributes to its development and self-knowledge. The features of the representation of national culture in ethno-documentalism is the subject of research in this article; its aim is to determine the methods of representation of national culture in ethno-documentalism of Turkic-speaking peoples.

## Methods

Ethno-documentary films created by cinematographers of Turkic-speaking countries such as Turkey, Federal Subjects of Russia (the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Bashkortostan) were studied with the help of methods of observation and phenomenological analysis. The analysis was based on the principles of interdisciplinary scientific research, the subject of which lies at the intersection of several sciences, primarily, ethno-cultural studies, ethno-communication and ethnocinema studies.

## Results and discussion

Theoretical foundations of ethno-documentalism studies are represented by such conceptual basis of integrative approaches in this sphere as ethnomethodology. The works of G.L. Morgan, A. Bastian, and J. Lebock became the basis for the methodology of anthropological studies, in which a stable formation "man - culture" preserving ideas about different aspects of social life significant for an ethnic society is given as a subject of research. The study of the techniques and methods of ethnos research in the process of ethno-documentary film creation is connected with the focus of the film author on the human experience and the search for methods of explaining this experience on the level of ethnics. The reflection of the mental, super-personal or intersubjective on the documentary screen is based on highlighting the value perception of what is solid and significant for the ethnos.

The term ethnomethodology was introduced by G. Garfinkel in his study dated 1967. The subject of ethnomethodology is communication between people as everyday speech [1]. Interpretation of actions and speech of the representative of an ethnos through film language becomes one of the main methods of ethno-documentalism. The big screen is the space of ethno-communication as a process of meaning exchange [2]. Ethno-documentary filmmaker studies the formation and implementation of everyday interaction of people, the way it is understood and interpreted. Socio-humanitarian knowledge obtained in the process of ethno-documentary film production contributes to the understanding of social interaction of the ethnos and its representatives as a social and cultural practice.

With the help of ethnomethodology, we explore the formation and implementation of everyday interactions between representatives of ethnic groups and ethnicity as a whole, and the understanding and interpretation of these actions grasped in the language of cinema. Ethnicity is presented here as a property of cinema, which allows us to speak about its ethno-cultural originality as a particular phenomenon.

The basis of ethno documentary is an ethnographic film, which is positioned as a unique repository of knowledge about the people and culture, a significant part of ethno discourse, expanding the understanding of cultural diversity and cultural tolerance. The structural analysis of the films allows us to single out one of their main components - observations of the author based on the collected knowledge, which has a special,

representative and authorial character. And since ethno-documentalism involves representation of unique conditions of the encounter with cultures under unique circumstances, this, according to E. Miskova, makes the author a unique figure that causes trust to his/her representation [3].

The ethno-fiction method is important for the development of ethno-documentary art, which also denotes a type of ethnographic film in which the characters are included in an improvisational game, acting as representatives of an ethnic group. The French director Jean Rouch discovered the process of the operator's intrusion into the depicted event, said that the camera in this case cannot be objective, since its mere presence affects the behavior of the people being filmed. [4]. According to V.L. Krutkin, Rouch's ethno-fiction contributes to the development of humanitarian ideas through film means [5] and is made in the framework of "culture studies". Ethno-fiction blurs the boundaries between documentary and artistic elements of cinema, allowing actors to depict and represent ethnological processes. Ethno-fiction researchers (M. Durlington, F. Ginsburg, M. Gruber, P. Henley, A.M. Jorgensen, P.A. Zoetl, etc. [6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12] emphasize the possibilities of the included video to show feelings, intimate and intimate experiences that would be difficult to achieve otherwise [12]. The very process of film-making generates anthropological and cultural knowledge, and that allows F. Ginzburg to consider ethnographic cinema as an additional means of "representation, mediation and understanding of culture" [13].

Thus, ethno-documentary studies fulfill the tasks of explaining and understanding certain cultural phenomena. It is important to emphasize the idea highlighted by S.V. Nikiforova that any visual representation, if made by a person about a person, is anthropological in nature, it is based on the detailing of the everyday life of the characters and the inclusion of the viewer in the reflexive activity [14].

As it is widely known, the Turks are an ethno-linguistic community, a group of population that is one of the most ancient. Representatives of this group settled on the territories of many countries. The ancient culture of the Turks is unique, it is influenced by a nomadic way of life of the peoples with original folk tales, fairy tales, belief in mythological beings: the brownie Bichuru, the wood-spirit Shurale (for example, in Bashkir and Tatar folklore), etc. One of the important features of Turkic ethno culture is the cult of family and elders – the elders are mentors and teachers, and that is the basis of contemporary Turkic family. Traditions and increased attention to the rituals of Turkic peoples is the basis for ethno-documentary studies. It should be noted that ethno-documentary films of Turkic peoples are in the same vector of development as the whole ethno-cultural cinematography. The main idea of films of this genre is the representation of cultures through a number of national images created with the help of film language. The task of the ethnodocumentalist is to identify and analyze the features of the screen image of ethnic culture, as noted by I.A. Golovnev [15].

There are two main methods that allow the director to solve the tasks of ethnopanoramic presentation of people's culture. One of them is the method of observing the life of one or several families as representatives of the entire ethnic community, which allows him to reveal the specifics of the entire ethno culture, its uniqueness and identity through the peculiarities of everyday life. Family and its members form a kind of close-up view of the

ethnic community and convey specific features of folk culture.

The second method is the method of ethnic journey covering as many territories as possible - the territories of residence for ethno cultures that have become a natural factor of ethnos formation and reproduction of ethnicity as a basis of worldview.

Turkish director Nezhir Unen's film "The Last Song of Anatolia" (2010) is based on the method of journey that Nezhir Unen and a group of cameramen and assistants undertook in Anatolia. One of the tasks of the creative team was to collect folk songs of Turkey. However, almost seven years of work enabled Nezhir Unen not only to create a complete anthology of songs, but also to show rituals, songs and dances of different peoples living in Anatolia, whose cohabitation did not impede the development of the ethnic groups; on the contrary, it contributed to the enrichment of cultures giving priority to the preservation of traditions and linguistic roots. The director also used the techniques of ethno-fiction when all scenes are shot in real-life conditions, and the participants of shooting as, in a way, co-authors of the picture, are real people living in the covered territory.

Observation is the main method for the creators of the ethnic documentary "The Goose Shepherd" (2016). Its director Nurhan Uzsoy Taştimer observes the life of a family living in Cildir district of Ardahan province in northeastern Turkey. The film is an account of how a Turkish family living in the village of Gulbelen raises geese, which preserves the roots of rural life and identifies the value characteristics of a typical Turkish family. The story is conveyed through close attention paid to valuable ethnographic and ethno-cultural material with the help of a film camera, and the image of a goose herder becomes one of the central images in the picture.

The method of observation is also used by Ayhan Kınaly, the author of the film "Wedding Society in Anatolia" (2018). It presents a traditional wedding ceremony of the Turkmen ethnic group living in the Orhaneli district of Bursa region of Turkey. The peculiarity of the ritual, its roots, its meaning - all of that became the subject of the film. The Chronotope is formed by successive actions of the participants of the rite. Living through the time of the ritual, the authors of the film in an unhurried narration apparently emphasize its immutability and deep cultural roots giving support and strength to the living descendants. The tasks of culture representation are solved through the creation of a film image of a wedding as one of the fundamental rites of the ethnic group.

The Turkic-speaking cinematography of Russia's regions (Republic of Tatarstan and Republic of Bashkortostan) is represented to a greater extent by films observing the development of national cultures. The main goals of documentary filmmaking are to reflect the peculiarities of national culture of the region and to create a film image of the ethnic group.

Riyaz Iskhakov's Bashkir film "Kahym Türe" is a musical story about the Bashkir ethnos representing a musical aura of the people. Through the flow of alternating musical melodies, he highlights a vivid national and cultural image: it lies in the colour scheme - white and the colour of ripe mint, in crimson and red patterns, the jewellery of women and girls. The work of director Aysyuak Yumagulov and author of the idea Riyaz Iskhakov in the musical ethnic film "Etagan" (2014) based on Bashkir legends is also a striking image of the Bashkir ethnos. The staged shooting does not detract from the documentary nature of ethnic events, the director continues to observe the life of the people.

Ethno-cultural cinema in the Republic of Tatarstan plays one of the leading roles in addressing the issues of preserving the national image and identity of the Tatar people, its culture as well as the development of tolerance, strengthening inter-ethnic friendship, education of respect for the culture, traditions and customs of different peoples. N.G. Yuziev compares the content of ethno films with the peculiarities of the content of Tatar folk songs: he finds frequently occurring images of nature, symbols, metaphors, spiritual oppositions of lyrical characters in them [16].

Tatar ethno-documentary cinema is represented by the works of Salavat Yuzeev, a talented director and dramatist. His filmography includes more than a dozen of ethno-documentary works including "The Call of Melody", "The Kukmor Boys", "Kryashen's mother", etc. These are observation films that allow the author, without appearing in actions, to determine his position as an ethno-researcher through the image of the protagonist.

The documentary film "The Kukmor boys" (2016) is a story about an ancient sacral Tatar rite Soren (Sørən) preserved in one of the villages of Kukmor district of Tatarstan - the village of Kukshel. The origin of the rite refers to the rituals of male initiation. This rite preserved in the Tatar village is exactly what S. Yuzeev tells us about. Observation and immersion are the main methods of the director. The camera observes dressing up of the direct participants of the rite - young men of conscription age - in national Tatar clothes. All inhabitants of the village take part in the rite - from the beginning of the rite at sunset to its end the next day. The spectator gets an opportunity to take part, together with the village boys, in the collection of presents for the event: embroidered scarves and towels, shirts, pieces of chintz, food are put into a specially adapted basket (karnasha, chirma). The details of the ceremony are clothes with national embroidery and ornaments which distinguish and create a colour code of Tatar culture, songs and folk instruments that form the musical code of the ethnos. The camera not only records the event from the outside, but it is inside the ritual actions, it is a living witness of the people's world perception.

Yuzeev actively uses the "naked structure" technique, which is called the method of demonstrating the technique. This is typical both for feature films with the manifestation of folk forms of culture with an ethnographic component (plot, exterior), and for ethnodocumentary. The director uses this technique, for example, in the film "121" about Gabdulla Tukay, built as a film shooting. As emphasized by I.V. Monisova and D.Yu. Syryseva, "the actions of the film crew, the very atmosphere of creating a film text are important elements of the film narrative" [17, p. 40]. The same technique allows the author to reflect on his own nature in ethno-documentary films. The author is like a guide and a narrator at the same time. And this role of the author-narrator allows the national cinema to take the very direct path that allows the people "to declare themselves, their identity, to say that they exist" [18].

Such is the ethnographic film "Kryashen Anasy" - about the original life of the Kryashens (an ethno-confessional group within the Tatars). This is a journey through the villages where the Kryashens live, sing forgotten songs and perform ancient rituals. The film

preserves that folk spirit, which “can hardly be found anywhere” [19].

## Summary

The analysis of ethno films allowed us to highlight such features of Turkic ethno-documentaries as:

- anthropological nature of representation of a man of culture on the basis of a detailed accentuated consideration of everyday life;
- search for similarities and differences between cultural texts represented by traditional formats of everyday life, rituals, and mentality;
- Interpretation by the artist–author of the documentary film given while participating in the process of shooting;
- peculiarities of the direction of collective perception in the process of projecting perception in the film programme with creative use of cinema as a channel of cultural representation, creation of a specific navigation of screen information and social regulation of the content of ethno film on the basis of involvement in the process of making an ethno film and constant existence in conditions of ethno-communication of film-makers as well as representatives of an ethnos - participants and film authors at the same time;
- conveying an aura of culture based on the consonance of film aesthetics with the aesthetics of culture.

At the heart of an ethno-documentary film talking about a rite or tradition is the visualization of a folklore text (the rite or tradition and/or everyday practices) reflecting and revealing the cultural codes of ethnic groups and interpreting them. They include the chromatic code, musical and acoustic codes, kinetic, culinary and numerical codes of culture.

The method of ethnic journey as one of the common methods of ethnic cinematography shows the diversity of the cultural world not only of one territory but the country as a whole; it also shows the natural conditions of ethnic formation reproducing ethnicity as the basis of world perception.

## Concluding

Thus, the study has identified an important specific feature of ethnic films of Turkic cinema - immersion in an unhurried narrative of life based on the traditional ways of life of an ethnic group. The director becomes a participant of the narrative, and the characters become the main audience and narrators. In conclusion, it should be noted that ethno-documentary films are a kind of commentary of the author on national culture, with an expressed idea of representing the mentality of the people. Each film is a revelation and at the same time an immersion into the ethnos, which allows us to consider these films as an act of cultural self-awareness.

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