

Comparative Exploration of Freedom, Knowledge and Dignity in the Eastern and Western Philosophy of Enlighteners

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Abstract. This article conducts a comparative analysis of the concepts of freedom, knowledge, and dignity as portrayed in the works of Frederick Douglass, one of the central figures in the biographical novel *TransAtlantic* by Colum McCann, and Abdurauf Fitrat, a prominent figure in Uzbek Jadid thought and Enlightenment, as depicted in the biography *Jadids: Abdurauf Fitrat* by Hamidulla Boltaboyev. McCann’s *TransAtlantic* describes the intricacies of human existence and the enduring pursuit of dignity transcending temporal and spatial boundaries, as reflected in the ideologies of Frederick Douglass. Conversely, Boltaboyev’s biography accentuates Fitrat’s role in the Enlightenment movement, unveiling the intricate intersections between knowledge, dignity, and the yearning for freedom within the historical context of Central Asia.

The article systematically dissects the thematic fabric that binds these narratives, presenting readers with a comprehensive perspective on shared human aspirations and the nuanced interplay of ideals across diverse cultures and historical epochs.

Keywords: Jadid, Enlightenment, freedom, knowledge, dignity

Феруза Хажиева. Шахноза Рахимова. СРАВНИТЕЛНО ИЗСЛЕДВАНЕ НА СВОБОДАТА, ПОЗНАНИЕТО И ДОСТОЙНСТВОТО В ИЗТОЧНАТА И ЗАПАДНАТА ФИЛОСОФИЯ НА ПРОСВЕЩЕНИЕТО

Резюме. Статията прави сравнителен анализ на понятията за свобода, познание и достойнство, представени в творбите на Фредрик Дъглас, една от централните фигури в биографичния роман *TransAtlantic* от Колъм Маккан, и Абдурауф Фитрат, отличаваща се фигура в узбекския джадидизъм и Просвещението, чийто живот е разгледан в биографията *Jadids: Abdurauf Fitrat* от Хамидулла Болтабоев. Романът на Маккан *TransAtlantic* описва заплетеността на човешкото съществуване и непрестанния стремеж към достойнство, който надхвърля времевите и пространствени граници, отразени в идеологията на Фредрик Дъглас. От другата страна, биографията на Болтабоев поставя акцент върху ролята на Фитрат за Просвещението, разбулвайки сложните пресечни точки между познанието, достойнството и стремежа за свобода в историческия контекст на Централна Азия.

Статията критически изследва тематичната тъкан, която свързва тези наративи, представяйки на читателите една изчерпателна перспектива за споделените човешки домогвания и разнообразните взаимодействия на идеали сред различните култури и исторически епохи.

Ключови думи: джадидизъм, Просвещение, свобода, познание, достойнство

Research/Научно изследване

INTRODUCTION

This research undertakes a comparative analysis of the concepts of *freedom*, *knowledge*, and *dignity* as presented in the literary and philosophical works of Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat. Douglass, a prominent figure in American abolitionism featured in Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic*, and Fitrat, a significant figure in Uzbek Jadid thought and Enlightenment portrayed in Hamidulla Boltaboyev's biography, *Jadids: Abdurauf Fitrat*, offer intriguing perspectives from distinct cultural and historical backgrounds.

McCann's novel studies the complexities of human existence, reflecting Douglass's persistent pursuit of dignity across time and space. Conversely, Boltaboyev's biography uncovers Fitrat's role in the Central Asian Enlightenment, exploring the intricate connections between knowledge, dignity, and the desire for freedom in a different cultural context.

This article comparatively analyzes the shared themes in these narratives, providing a comprehensive view of human aspirations and the nuanced interplay of ideals across diverse cultures and historical periods. By examining the similarities and variations in the expression and realization of freedom,

knowledge, and dignity, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of universal aspects of human experience. The comparative approach enables a nuanced exploration of how these concepts manifest in different cultural and historical contexts, highlighting both the diversity and interconnectedness of human ideals. The article examines the human condition through the lenses of Douglass and Fitrat, and the complex interrelationships between culture, history, and the pursuit of fundamental values.

MAIN PART

TransAtlantic, a novel penned by Colum McCann and published in 2013, stands as a biofiction that intricately intertwines diverse narratives spanning different epochs. The novel blends historical events with the lives of both factual and fictional characters. The exploration of various periods in history provides readers with a panoramic view of human experiences across time and space.

One of the distinctive features of *TransAtlantic* is how it intertwines the stories of real-life historical figures, such as aviators John Alcock and Arthur Brown, diplomat Frederick Douglass, and politician George Mitchell, with those of its fictional characters, such as Lily Duggan, a young Irish maid who seeks a new life in America, and her descendants, including Emily Ehrlich, a journalist, her daughter Lottie, and Lottie's daughter Hannah, whose stories enrich the exploration of the novel's broader themes through their personal journeys and connections across generations.

In this research, our primary focus will center on the ideas of Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist, orator, newspaper publisher, "an American icon who fought for social justice and equity, became known as the "Lion of Anacostia" for "his dedication to challenging the country to recognize the rights of all people and be consistent with its ideals" (Trent, *Encyclopedia Britannica*). This deliberate emphasis on Douglass's contributions allows us to analyze the profound impact of his ideas on the broader themes explored in *TransAtlantic*.

The second object of the research is a collection featuring biographies of notable Jadidists (reformists) spanning eighty years. This compilation is a treasure trove of insights into the lives and creativity of eight influential Jadidists, offering a nuanced perspective on their philosophical contributions. The featured philosophers include Gulom Zafariy, Abdulhamid Chulpon, Ishokhon Tora Ibrat, Abdulrauf Fitrat, Abdulla Qodiri, Abdulla Avloniy, Munavvarqori Abdurashidkhonov, and Mahmudkhoja Behbudiy. However, for this research, we are mainly focusing on the biography of Abdurauf Fitrat by Hamidulla Boltaboyev, who "was the most classical, the most enlightened among the scholars who grew up in Central Asia in the twentieth century" and his works on "literature, linguistics, history, philosophy, theology, oriental studies, ethics, aesthetics, music, chess, land reclamation, geodesy" testify him as "encyclopedic thinker and intellectual" (Rakhmonova, 94–95).

The Enlightenment Ideas in West and East

It is crucial to recognize that both thinkers, Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat, lived and created their works during the Enlightenment period in their countries. Their ideas and literary works not only bear the imprint of their individual perspectives but also reflect the broader intellectual currents of their times. In much the same way as Enlightenment thinkers in America embraced revolutionary ideas, Douglass and Fitrat contributed to the intellectual landscape of their eras, shaping their works in alignment with the ideas that characterized the Enlightenment period in their countries.

According to Shane J. Ralston, the Age of Enlightenment in America involved a profound shift away from “absolute authority, whether religious or political”, with thinkers such as Thomas Paine, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin adopting “revolutionary ideas about scientific rationality, religious toleration, and experimental political organization” (Ralston, *IEP*). The American Enlightenment thinkers not only embraced the European ideas of deism, liberalism, republicanism, conservatism, toleration, and scientific progress but also molded them into uniquely American forms that had far-reaching effects on the nation’s development (Ralston, *IEP*). This highlights the transformative impact of Enlightenment ideals on shaping the intellectual and political landscape of America during that period.

In the Uzbek context, a similar historical backdrop is characterized by both Jadidism and a movement sharing analogous goals and ideas, as articulated by Rakhmonova. The primary aim is described as the intention “to liberate the country from backwardness, superstitions, to lead the people to the path of modern development, to build a constitutional, parliamentary and presidential state, to construct a prosperous society, and to accord Uzbek the status of the state language” (Rakhmonova, 93). This visionary pursuit reflects a concerted effort to not only address immediate challenges but also to lay the foundation for a more enlightened and inclusive future for the Uzbek people.

It becomes evident that Knowledge, Freedom and Dignity are considered the key concepts of the Enlightenment literature of the XIX–XX centuries in West and East. They described the human struggle for liberating from chains of ignorance, slavery, and subordination. This dialectic approach to interpret the concepts reveal the linchpin of both of Western societal life and Eastern progressive mind.

Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat on Knowledge

Douglass. Frederick Douglass’s primary notion centers on the transformative influence of knowledge. “The essence of intelligence was to know when, or if, to expose even the heart’s deep need for instruction” (McCann, 20). The given phrase contains a profound reflection on the nuanced nature of intelligence and

the discretion involved in seeking knowledge. This sentence suggests that true intelligence lies not only in the acquisition of knowledge but also in the discernment of when and if to reveal one's innermost desire for guidance.

The use of the term "essence of intelligence" implies that there is a core, fundamental quality to being intellectually astute, and the subsequent clause clarifies that this essence involves a strategic awareness. The phrase "to know when, or if" emphasizes the importance of timing and discretion in the pursuit of knowledge. It suggests that intelligence is not just about accumulating information indiscriminately but involves a thoughtful consideration of when it is appropriate or necessary to seek instruction. The addition of "even the heart's deep need for instruction" adds an emotional dimension to the concept of intelligence. It implies that the pursuit of knowledge is not solely a rational endeavor but may also be driven by a profound emotional longing for understanding.

In the context of the research on Frederick Douglass, this sentence may resonate with his own journey towards literacy and education in the face of slavery's constraints. It invites an analysis of the emotional and intellectual dimensions of Douglass's pursuit of knowledge and how his experiences align with or depart from the sentiments expressed in this insightful sentence from *TransAtlantic*.

Abdurauf Fitrat. Fitrat's notion on knowledge is based on the differentiation of human being from animal. "The distinction of human dignity from other creatures lies in the fact that humans are receptive to progress and refinement, whereas other animals do not possess this capability. Wise individuals have divided the world into three realms for human progress and refinement: the realm of animals, the realm of plants, and the realm of humanity" (Boltaboyev, 132).

Abdurauf Fitrat's quote reflects a philosophical perspective on human dignity and the unique qualities that distinguish humans from other creatures. Fitrat posits that human dignity is distinct from other creatures because humans are receptive to progress and refinement. This implies an intellectual and moral capacity for growth and improvement that extends beyond basic survival instincts.

While humans possess the capability for progress and refinement, other animals do not share this characteristic. This sets humans apart in terms of their potential for intellectual, moral, and societal development. Fitrat introduces the concept of three realms for human progress and refinement: the realm of animals, the realm of plants, and the realm of humanity. This classification implies a hierarchical structure, with humans positioned at the apex due to their unique capacity for progress.

The hierarchical classification indicates that Fitrat sees a gradation in the order of existence, with animals and plants occupying lower realms, and humanity standing out as a distinct and superior realm. This could be interpreted as a reflection of a worldview that assigns different roles or values to each level of existence. The emphasis on progress and refinement suggests that, in Fitrat's view, human

dignity is tied to intellectual and moral achievements. The ability to transcend basic instincts and actively engage in progress distinguishes humans as the highest realm.

Douglass and Fitrat on Freedom

Douglass's ideas about the power of oratory to eliminate violence. “Wiping his handkerchief on his brow. His wig shifting slightly on his head. A slight sadness there. But to have that command, thought Douglass. That charm. That energy. To be able to possess the stage in such an extraordinary way. To stir justice without violence. The way the words seem to enter the very marrow of the people who still hung around the dockside, bits of refuse floating on the water” (McCann, 26).

This excerpt from *TransAtlantic* vividly captures Frederick Douglass's contemplation as he observes Daniel O'Connell, Irish politician, engaging with an audience. The passage humanizes O'Connell on stage by detailing physical exertion and a shifting wig, suggesting even commanding presences experience strains and challenges. The “slight sadness” noted by Douglass adds emotional complexity to the individual's outward confidence.

Douglass expresses admiration for the performer's “command, charm, and energy”, implying a resonance with his own experiences as an orator and abolitionist. The passage underscores the profound impact of words on the audience, with imagery depicting words entering “the very marrow of the people”. This suggests a deep, visceral connection and the transformative potential of rhetoric to inspire justice without resorting to violence.

In analyzing Douglass's ideas, this passage illuminates his appreciation for oratory's power, the significance of commanding a stage, and the potential for words to inspire social change. It offers insight into the intersection of Douglass's observations and broader themes of justice, influence, and the eloquence of spoken words.

Douglass about Slavery and Freedom. “It is said that history is on the side of reason, but this outcome is by no means guaranteed. Obviously, the suffering of the past will never fully be redeemed by a future of universal happiness, if indeed such a thing is obtainable. The evil of slavery is a constant ineradicable reality, but slavery itself shall be banished! The truth cannot be deferred. The moment of truth is now!” (McCann, 27). This passage from *TransAtlantic* reflects a contemplation on history, reason, and the enduring impact of slavery. The statement challenges the notion that history inherently aligns with reason, suggesting that while history should logically favor rational progress, such an outcome is not assured. The acknowledgment of suffering in the past implies a recognition of the weight of historical injustices, particularly focusing on the evil of slavery.

The declaration “Slavery itself shall be banished!” reflects an optimistic yet resolute stance, aligning with historical movements towards abolition. The concluding assertion, “The truth cannot be deferred. The moment of truth is now!”

carries a sense of immediacy and urgency. It emphasizes the importance of facing historical truths without delay and suggests a call to action in addressing the ongoing impact of slavery. This sentiment aligns with the broader themes of social justice and the moral imperative to confront and rectify historical wrongs.

In the context of analyzing Frederick Douglass's ideas, this passage resonates with themes central to his advocacy against slavery and his commitment to truth and justice. It reflects the ongoing relevance of historical reflection and the imperative to address the legacies of injustice in the pursuit of a more equitable future.

Fitrat about courage. “The life of a people without courage is nonexistent” (Boltaboyev, 130). Fitrat underscores the paramount importance of courage in the life of a people. Courage, in this context, is likely seen as a fundamental quality that shapes the collective identity and vitality of a community. The use of the term “nonexistent” carries existential weight. Fitrat suggests that courage is not merely a desirable trait but an indispensable element for the very existence of a people. This implies that a lack of courage could lead to a diminished or compromised collective life. The quote also pertains not just to individual courage but extends to the courage of an entire community or people. Fitrat's emphasis on collective courage suggests that he sees bravery as a shared attribute that defines the resilience and character of a society.

In the context of Jadidism, a socio-cultural and educational reform movement in Central Asia, this quote aligns with the movement's emphasis on modernization, enlightenment, and empowerment. Courage, in this framework, might be seen as crucial for navigating social transformations and embracing new ideas.

Douglass and Fitrat about Human Dignity

Douglass and his ideas about feminism. “Such a truth is a woman's right to equal liberty with man. She was born with it. It was hers before she comprehended it. The rational basis for proper government lies in the female soul” (McCann, 79). This passage from *TransAtlantic* boldly asserts the inherent right of women to equal liberty with men, emphasizing that this entitlement is fundamental, existing from birth even before full comprehension. The declaration challenges conventional ideas, suggesting that women's rights are not granted by society but are intrinsic and pre-existing.

The phrase “The rational basis for proper government lies in the female soul” makes a provocative claim about the essential role of women in the underpinnings of governance. By stating that the rational foundation for proper government is found in the female soul, the passage challenges traditional perspectives that may have marginalized women's intellectual and moral contributions to governance. It implies that recognizing and respecting women's rights is not only a matter of justice but also critical for the rational and proper functioning of government.

In the context of analyzing Frederick Douglass's ideas, this passage resonates with his advocacy for universal rights and dignity, extending beyond race to include gender equality. Douglass, as a prominent abolitionist, often extended his advocacy to encompass broader notions of justice and equality. This passage aligns with the ongoing historical and philosophical discourse on women's rights and their integral role in shaping a just and rational society.

Abdurauf Fitrat's concept on humanism. "He who elevates his level of humanity from its core, enters the realm of true humanity. The wise recognize him as a true HUMAN among humans" (Boltaboyev, 132). This quote from Abdurauf Fitrat reflects a profound insight into the nature of true humanity and the elevated state that one achieves by reaching the core of their humanity. Fitrat suggests that one can elevate their level of humanity. This implies a transformative process where an individual actively seeks to enhance and refine their understanding, empathy, and moral compass.

Fitrat introduces the notion that the wise recognize an individual who has elevated their humanity as a "true HUMAN among humans". This recognition by the wise suggests that achieving this higher state is not necessarily a common occurrence but is discerned by those who possess wisdom and insight. The emphasis on the core of humanity suggests that the transformation isn't superficial. Instead, it involves a deep introspection and understanding of one's fundamental nature, values, and connections with others.

In essence, Fitrat's quote encourages a profound exploration of one's humanity, suggesting that by achieving the core of one's being and elevating one's understanding and actions, an individual can attain a higher state of true humanity – a state recognized and appreciated by the wise. The quote prompts contemplation on the transformative journey towards a more enlightened and virtuous existence.

Abdurauf Fitrat about a Balanced Life Philosophy. "If a person is engaged in trade, they will live comfortably in this world; if occupied with worship, their hereafter will be prosperous; if involved in knowledge, they will attain happiness in both worlds" (Boltaboyev, 130). Abdurauf Fitrat's quote encapsulates a tripartite perspective on life's pursuits, suggesting that an individual's engagement in trade, worship, or knowledge will yield distinct outcomes. While trade and economic pursuits address material comfort, worship attends to spiritual well-being, and knowledge caters to intellectual and holistic happiness. This balance reflects a comprehensive understanding of a fulfilling life that encompasses both worldly success and spiritual growth.

The quote underscores the interconnectedness of material and spiritual pursuits, suggesting that a person need not choose one at the expense of the other. Engagement in knowledge, in particular, is presented as a pathway to happiness that spans both the worldly and spiritual dimensions. Fitrat's statement combines practical advice for a prosperous life with philosophical reflections on the multifaceted nature of

human existence. It aligns with broader discussions on the balance between material and spiritual pursuits that have been explored in various philosophical and religious traditions.

In essence, Fitrat's quote offers a holistic perspective on life, advocating for a harmonious integration of trade, worship, and knowledge, each contributing to different facets of human fulfillment in both worldly and spiritual realms.

Research Results

Similarities

The parallel themes of advocacy for dignity and justice, recognition of slavery as an evil, and feminist ideas in the works of Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat highlight shared values and concerns across different cultural and historical contexts.

Advocacy for Dignity and Justice. Both Douglass and Fitrat share a commitment to the principles of dignity and justice. Douglass's nonviolent advocacy echoes Fitrat's call for courage in the pursuit of justice in Central Asia. This suggests a universal recognition of the importance of these values in fostering a just and equitable society.

Recognition of Slavery as Evil. The acknowledgment of slavery as an enduring evil is a theme that resonates in both Douglass's and Fitrat's works. Douglass, as an abolitionist, expresses optimism for the banishment of slavery, aligning with Fitrat's historical context in Central Asia, where similar struggles against societal injustices were taking place. The shared emphasis on truth and immediate action underscores a commitment to addressing and rectifying such profound moral wrongs.

Feminist Ideas. Douglass's feminist ideas, particularly his advocacy for women's inherent rights and recognition of the rational basis for proper government in the female soul, align with Fitrat's emphasis on gender equality and the essential role of women in shaping society. Both thinkers acknowledge the intellectual and moral contributions of women and advocate for their rightful place in the pursuit of justice and progress.

Differences

The differences between Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat, as outlined in the research, are rooted in distinct cultural contexts, approaches to knowledge, life philosophies, and perspectives on transformation and enlightenment.

Cultural Context. Douglass's philosophical works are deeply embedded in the American experience, specifically addressing issues such as slavery and civil rights within the Western context. Fitrat, on the other hand, emerges from the Central Asian Enlightenment, reflecting the unique socio-political landscape of that region.

The differences in cultural context influence the nature of the challenges these thinkers grapple with and the societal changes they advocate.

Approach to Knowledge. While both figures value knowledge, their approaches differ. Douglass's intelligence, as portrayed in McCann's novel, is depicted in the context of exposing the harsh realities of slavery in the West. Fitrat, associated with the Jadid movement, likely emphasized knowledge as part of a more comprehensive life philosophy, encompassing material prosperity, spiritual well-being, and intellectual growth. The differing contexts influence the roles assigned to knowledge in their respective philosophies.

Life Philosophy. Fitrat's emphasis on a balanced life philosophy, integrating trade, worship, and knowledge for happiness in both worlds, reflects the Jadid movement's response to societal changes in Central Asia. In contrast, Douglass's life philosophy, as depicted in McCann's novel, centers around the enduring pursuit of dignity across time and space, particularly in the face of slavery and discrimination in the Western world. The distinct emphasis on life philosophies stems from the different challenges and contexts each thinker confronts.

Transformation and Enlightenment. Fitrat's quotes on self-development and humanity align with the Jadid movement's emphasis on education and moral elevation for societal progress in Central Asia. Douglass's ideas, while advocating for intelligence and recognition of deep human needs, are more rooted in the historical struggles of the African American experience in the West. The focus on transformation and enlightenment reflects the unique challenges and contexts within which each thinker operates.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the philosophies of Frederick Douglass and Abdurauf Fitrat, while converging on common themes of justice, dignity, and the acknowledgment of societal injustices, diverge in nuanced ways. These differences are fundamentally rooted in the unique cultural, historical, and regional contexts that shaped each thinker's worldview. While Douglass's works are deeply entwined with the American experience, specifically addressing the struggles against slavery and civil rights in the Western context, Fitrat's ideas emerge from the Central Asian Enlightenment, reflecting the distinctive socio-political landscape of that region.

While both thinkers share the common goal of societal betterment and recognize the evils that need addressing, the intricacies of their perspectives highlight the richness and diversity of human thought. By understanding the impact of cultural and historical contexts on their philosophies, we gain a more profound insight into the complex interplay of ideas across regions and periods.

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