

Peoples of the North Caucasus: Identity Crisis and Ways Out of It

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ABSTRACT

Actualization of ethnicity is the way to overcome the identity crisis in the modern life of our peoples; it is possible through the achievement of a certain balance between external impulses and revival of own internal potentials for self-development, mastering of civilizational universals and preservation of cultural identity.

Keywords: Culture genesis, value, identity, mentality.

Introduction

The main issue of modern ethno-cultural problems is the nature of the relationship between the traditional ethnic culture with its special picture of the world and values, and the new way of life provided by the processes of modernization and globalization. The culture genesis is interpreted as a constant unfinished process associated with the periodic change of cultural paradigms and technologies for their implementation. This process of adaptation to the constantly changing conditions of human existence is immanently inherent in the culture including the ethnic one; due to it, either new cultural phenomena arise, or the already existing ones are modified. D. S. Likhachov defined the dynamic nature of the culture as follows: “The culture is an organic whole changing all the time, and its movement is not stopped with tradition or accumulation of values, but is regulated by them. The culture of the people as a whole can be compared with a glacier moving slowly and powerfully between mountains”. Thus, on the one hand, the ethnic culture inherits ancient traditions of its people; on the other hand, it is constantly updated being enriched by features of the modern thinking type. This process of constant updating has a certain limit. The limit of the ethno-cultural updating is the boundary, beyond which quantitatively expressed innovations, changes in the behavior strategy, plasticity of the life-style and thinking result in qualitative transformation for the value core of the culture.

In our opinion, the value and semantic “culture core” is the sacred space of stable ethnic archetypes having an essential, primordial nature. Dominant values and concepts of the “culture core” form and sustainably reproduce the ethnic mentality as a special type of spirituality expressing the most significant essential properties of the ethnos as a cultural entity. It is appropriate here to recall the “archetypal phenomenology” by K.G.

Jung, as well as such concepts of the modern cultural studies as the “cultural archetype” and “ethnocultural archetype”. The ethnocultural archetypes are constants of the national spirituality expressing and consolidating the fundamental properties of the ethnos as the cultural entity. According to Jung, actualization of the archetype is a “step backward”, a return to the archaic features of spirituality; however, the archetypal strengthening can also be a projection into the future since the ethnocultural archetypes express not only the experience of the past, but also the aspiration to the future, the people’s dream: “Entire mythology and all revelations have come from this matrix of experience, and hence, the future idea of the world and person will also originate from it”.

Thus, the active presence of archetypes is an important condition for preserving the identity and integrity of the national culture. The process of mastering the ethnocultural archetypes as certain matrices of individual’s mentality is also related to a certain sacral space in his life. This is the space where the human being is totally predetermined by the “divine providence” and in no way depends on his or her individual will and choice. This space includes the very fact of the person’s birth, his or her parents, ethnicity, mother tongue, natural and cultural environment, as well as other “first order” values on his life path. According to sociologists, the period of person’s active socialization primarily occurs during the first quarter or third of the life and undergoes no radical restructuring in the future. Thus, basic mental attitudes and cultural preferences are formed in this sacral space making up the dominant values of the “culture core” for the individual and ethnos as a whole. This number of basic values forms an ethnic “picture of the world” and, based on it, traditions of life and forms of culture, being also a mental code for understanding the mentality of the ethnos and its culture.

Each ethnos has distinct and recognizable natural and spiritual cultural niches. We can determine its current state, we can reconstruct its past through various forms of culture; in some cases it can be done for 3 centuries back, in other ones – for 3 millennia. However, the degree of reliability for this description and reconstruction will always be relative, because the ethnos has been changing throughout its existence adapting itself to the constantly changing world around and improving its adaptation mechanism. The ethnos survival resource, its innovative potential are also predetermined by the basic system of values. Both a single ethnos and humanity as a whole have a chance for survival and development only if they are able to generate and protect the nature- and life-saving imperatives. The loss of this ability is the exhaustion of the survival resource and renewal potential resulting in the assimilation and destruction of the culture.

Innovations in the ethnic culture can be organically perceived instead of leading to destructive crisis phenomena, both in terms of personal deidentification and crisis in the society only if they correspond to the value “culture core” and its fundamental mental concepts. In some ethnic cultures, the boundaries of this sacred space are clearly determined. For example, the Chechens believed that at the age of 15 the young man’s blood was renewed, i.e. the blood was previously parental, and only then it became his own. Since then, he was responsible for all his words and deeds himself. On the 15th birthday, the young Chechens sang prayer songs, gave alms, organized races and other

competitions. Ethnographers usually label this tradition as transformation to a man; however, its main sense is the “new” blood blessing.

The present moment peculiarity of updating the North Caucasus ethnic cultures includes the onslaught of the mass culture with its radically different values; it is so aggressive that it threatens to blur and destroy the sacred archetypal space determining the identity of our traditional cultures. Today, the dangerous tendencies are observed in all cultural spheres. First of all, this is spiritual loss. A large part of our population is already professing principles of situational ethics fundamentally alien to our spiritual traditions. We often witness shamefully theatrical, external religiosity aimed at obtaining certain material benefits far from the sincere faith. The same pattern includes eclecticism and direct borrowing of Western models in our visual arts and architecture, as well as explicit kitsch on our stage. Attempts of purely symbolic use of traditional culture’s external forms without warming them with a sincere sense of belonging are especially disappointing. Pop singers wear national dress, which principally disallows provocative texts of their songs, as well as gestures and facial expressions incompatible with it. The national ornament decorating cafes and restaurants of our cities also rarely looks organic, same as political fringes who, at best, are able to begin speaking in the native language, but then immediately switch to Russian.

The question arises, “Are ethnic cultures principally able to overcome this identity crisis?” We have already noted that the culture genesis is a constantly flowing, incomplete process by its nature. On the other hand, from synergetic point of view, the ethnic culture is a complex self-organizing system, the modern state of which can be characterized as a bifurcation point having several poles of exit. An attempt to predict the further development of the North Caucasus peoples’ ethnic cultures allows us to identify several scenarios, each of which has already taken place in the real life as an emerging trend. The most predictable and supported project is the globalization characterized by standardization and unification of culture. It coincides with the ideas of cosmofuturism aimed at novelty, ethnicity overcoming, forgetting traditions and moving to the universal culture of the global world, which is inherently supranational and cosmopolitan. Prospects for this project are clearly illustrated by the following analogy. An individual functions as a single “whole” consisting of a complex of interrelated, interdependent organs, which are at the same time completely different in structure, shape and functions. Yet at the cell level, each of these organs has a special DNA set inherent only in it.

This genetically determined difference ensures and preserves the person’s life according to the Bohr Law “On additionality...”, interacting and mutually complementing one another. However, there is a certain cell in the human body, which is activated only with a certain negative impact on it. It can be some stress, or depressive state of the nervous system, or severe pain shock, or poor ecology, etc. In this case, this hidden cell begins to multiply rapidly, and this is not a mutation process, but cloning, when the cell having one DNA set suppresses and destroys the whole variety of cells in the organs and the organism as a whole, killing the life in it as a result. In medicine, this process is regarded as an almost incurable disease called “cancer.” We believe that this is

the fate of all total strategies imposed on the world including the ones related to the process of universal culture globalization. The unification of culture is not only unable to overcome the today's crisis, but it is the way to the complete extinction of ethnic cultures and, as a result, total collapse of the world culture as a whole.

The apologist of this idea, well-known Kazakh scholar Auezkhan Kodar, expressed it in the slogan "Ethnic self-awareness is something necessary to overcome" In our opinion, another unpromising phenomenon is ethnopreterism positively perceiving only the past and being intolerant and alien to everything new. This results in the fact that idealization of the tradition, absolutization of its immutability and stability, its purely external transfer to the modern environment alien to it as a sacred sample also inevitably leads to stagnation and extinction of the ethnic culture. Still, there is a way, the viability of which was proved by the centuries of ethnic cultures' existence and development. In this way, the national culture appears to be dynamic and changing in time. In the context of confrontation between the tradition and modern innovations, the ethnic culture mobilizes its inherent internal survival potential allowing us to reconsider the historical cultural heritage in relation to the modern conditions, update and add the still preserved but dying forms of our culture to the modern one. It is a synthesis of ancient and modern, ethnic and universal aspects coming together with the civilization and globalization.

In this case, the tradition becomes not only a limiting and stabilizing element of the culture, but also a basis for "catalyzing" the society renewal processes. In our opinion, the viability of the ethnic tradition is related to its ability to accept and assimilate the innovations, and this ability is one of the ethnos viability indicators. The actualization of ethnicity is the way to overcome the identity crisis in the contemporary life of our peoples, the way to overcome the marginal state of the ethnic groups and national elites; it is possible on the basis of transferring the culture integrity image to the past, restoration of the ethnic myth and its return in new forms. In this case, the ethnic culture is perceived and experienced by the nation and separate individuals as modern and self-valuable reality. There are many examples of this trend's prospects in the modern world. Many societies are now in the stage of gradual transition from the traditional state to the modernized one.

The most organic example of the cultural identity coexistence with modernized economic and political order is provided to the world by the countries of South-East Asia. Their modern development particularly demonstrates that the society modernization does not necessarily need to be accompanied by standardization and unification of culture and social norms of life. It can and must be carried out on the basis of people's cultural traditions taking into account its ethnic and national mentality; thus, the society modernization will correspond to the ethnic and national culture. In the late 19th century, the Japanese made an attempt to copy the methods of advanced European countries and the United States, but they did not achieve any meaningful results. However, after the Second World War, they preferred to modernize the country on the basis of own cultural traditions. The Japanese economic miracle coincided with a sharp growth of the interest in the native culture's traditions. An optimal ratio of the cultural traditions and innovations was found in China.

In this case as well, keeping to the traditions and reliance on them are the basis of the country's success. Refuting the view of the global "all-human" values' universality, the culture of modern China develops relying on the values, which are opposite to the Western ones in many respects. The identity and culture are preserved in the Muslim states being on the economic rise. Positive experience of these countries is a result of achieving a certain balance between external impulses and revival of their internal potentials for self-development, between the development of the civilizational universals and preservation of the cultural identity. We hope that the peoples of the North Caucasus will also follow the path of preserving and developing their ancient traditions being able to give a worthy culture-keeping answer to the challenges of the modern world.

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