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TRADITIONS OF TOLERANCE IN THE CULTURE OF THE
PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS

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Abstract

The Caucasus is a complex region both in its language, ethnic groups and religion. Here, in a relatively small territory, peoples have long lived side by side, differing from each other in the peculiarities of economy and life. The paper studies traditions, customs, and the customary law of the peoples of the North Caucasus revealing the potential for tolerance (toleration) characteristic of the traditional and everyday culture of these peoples. In the conditions of multi-ethnicity, multilingualism, multiculturalism, the formation of tolerance was a multifaceted process. In modern understanding the category of “tolerance” is differently treated and interpreted, and includes respect and recognition of equality of others, refusal of domination or violence; this is the moral quality characterizing the relation to interests, views, beliefs, faith, habits and behavior of other people, representatives of various ethnic and social groups. Tolerance is expressed in the desire to achieve mutual understanding, to agree on different points of view and different interests, without resorting to violence, acting by means of persuasion and clarification. The paper addresses the following issues: ideas about “friend” and “foe” in traditional culture, attitudes towards non-believers and representatives of other peoples; traditions and customs aimed at establishing contacts between villages, communities and ethnic groups; social institutions. The mechanisms of interethnic interaction recorded in literary and archival sources, preserved in the memory of the people, serve a reflection of stable value orientations towards a certain degree of tolerance characteristic of all ethnic groups of the Caucasus.

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1. Introduction

Tolerance (toleration) and intolerance are qualities that are equally characteristic of each individual, each social and ethnic community. Tolerance allows establishing relations and contacts with people and societies thus renouncing violence and dominance (Tishkov, 2002); at the same time, intolerance of another, stranger, alien, contributing to some separation, helps to avoid excessive external influence and preserve personal identity. Currently, when tolerance has become a global problem, it is important to study the experience of the coexistence of tolerance and intolerance in specific societies and regions. Any society characterized by cultural, ethnic, religious heterogeneity can only be stable provided there is a certain degree of tolerance.

2. Problem Statement

The modern period is characterized by the attention of the world scientific community to the development of various communication problems of certain communities in the conditions of inter-ethnic, interreligious, intercultural differences. In this regard, the traditional culture of the peoples of the Caucasus, who have accumulated valuable communication experience in conditions of long-term interaction and coexistence in this multi-ethnic region, is particularly relevant. The paper will consider some socionormative institutions and mechanisms that existed among the peoples of the Caucasus, which made it possible to develop norms of interaction on the basis of mutual tolerance, reasonable accommodation, worthy compromises that provide the possibility of versatile cooperation.

3. Research Questions

The traditional norms of tolerance developed over the centuries by the peoples of the Caucasus were expressed in the features of etiquette, the rules of behavior in certain situations, as well as in various social institutions that created certain mechanisms to strengthen contacts between individual families, villages, peoples, regions. This paper will consider the norms of relations with neighbors characteristic of Caucasian peoples, traditions of learning the languages of neighboring ethnic groups, mechanisms for resolving conflict situations, as well as those customs that helped overcome the existing isolation and alienation of ethnic and social communities, establish connections and contacts, ways of mutual communication and trust between different peoples and different groups of the same people: hospitality, twinning, etc.

The paper also considers the following:

- Attitude of the peoples of the North Caucasus to non-believers and representatives of foreign peoples;
- Study of languages of other peoples.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the customs and social institutions characteristic of the traditional culture of the peoples of the Caucasus, the action of which was aimed at the formation of a

culture of tolerance and provided the opportunity for intensive and fruitful inter-ethnic and intercultural communications.

5. Research Methods

The study utilized the comparative historical method, which defines the approach to the studied phenomena as certain realities of historical present, changing with the course of time and influenced by certain specific historical conditions. A synchronous diachronic method was also used, which allows considering the subject of research in development, in the unity of history and modernity.

6. Findings

For the Caucasian region where the people with different features of language, religion, culture, economy lived throughout centuries and the millennia it was inevitable to form representations about “friends” and “foes” in turn correlated to representations about “personal good” and “not so good alien”. As “everything good” was associated with the people, the existence of such concepts as “*адыгагъэ*” (literary “*adygstvo*”), “*нохчалла*” (derivative of “*nokhcha*”) serving to define the code of moral behavior of the people is characteristic of the Caucasus (Bgazhnokov, 1978, p. 23).

“Own” could exist at different levels – “own family”, “own relatives”, “own neighbors”, “own village”, “own people”. The priority of “own” is brightly reflected in the folklore of the Caucasian people.

The people of the Caucasus often equated the neighbor’s relations in terms of the meaning of related: the opinion of neighbors should be considered, in every way they sought to avoid the conflicts with the neighbor. The neighbor was considered so “own” that at some people of the Caucasus the marriages with neighbors were actually forbidden. The fidelity to the village, community (*dzhamaat*) was recognized by the people of the Caucasus as the greatest value: “Who is not together with the aul – that is a dead man without a grave” (the Nogai proverb), “The one that betrayed aul will be burned in the aul” (the Avarian proverb). The preference of “own” formed the corresponding attitude towards “alien”. According to national representations, only in the homeland, in the native village of people a person could find true happiness, here he had to shape his life: “The one who left the aul of the father won’t see good day”, “It is better to be in the aul a sole, than a sultan in a foreign land”, “Do not live where your ancestors are not based” (Nazarevich, 1958, p. 23). The reason for such views is the need for unification in the face of various threats and dangers: attacks of enemies, natural disasters, diseases and epidemics.

Nevertheless in general the principle of the benevolent, peaceful attitude towards people around was recognized as necessary at all levels – from family to community.

Multilingualism of the Caucasus induced the most socially active part of the population – men – to learning languages of the neighboring people, and, as a rule, mountaineers sought to learn language of the lowland population. So, according to the Dagestan historian Magomedov, in summer young people from the Urakhinsky and the Akushinsky auls went to Dzhemikent, Velikent to dig madder, to remove grain, though they earned a little. Their purpose was to learn the Kumyk language (Magomedov, 1963). The Georgian Rachins sent children for some time to families of the Balkars and Karachays, the Svans and Ossetians did the same (Volkova, 1989).

In the Caucasus with its cosmopolitan structure the majority of the population did not create negative stereotypes towards the neighboring people. On the contrary, positive traits of any given ethnic group were quite often emphasized. So, in the North Caucasus the Adyghe were considered as legislators in the field of etiquette. The Ingush, wishing to praise a person, said: “Noble as Circassian”.

According to the norms of “nokhchall” – the code of honor of the Chechens – it was required to show respect for any person, and the respect was bigger, if in terms relation, belief or origin this person was farther. They say: the offense of a Muslim may be forgiven because the meeting on the Doomsday is possible. The offense caused to a person of a different belief is not forgiven because such meeting will never happen. In Chechen heroic songs-illi it is impossible to find even a word belittling advantage” of people with which they had a fight; “the tarkovsky young k’ant”, “the Georgian good fellow”, “the Russian good fellow”, “the Russian brave Cossack” participate in heroic affairs of the Chechen athletes (The Chechens, 2012, p. 45).

Etiquette features. The etiquette norms of the Caucasian peoples were largely aimed at creating a favorable atmosphere for communication between people, not only acquaintances, but also accidentally encountered on the way, on a trip, etc. Highlanders are characterized by special attention to verbal formulas that accompanied various situations of communication.

Overcoming conflict situations. The studies of the legal traditions of Caucasian peoples show that the numerous evidence of travelers who visited the Caucasus in the 18th–19th centuries referring to blood revenge, which allegedly lasted many years and became the cause of the death of not only individual families, but also entire villages, are strongly exaggerated. In practice, in most cases, blood revenge was restrained by a system of natural or monetary fines, according to the customary law, as testified by some proverbs: “If people did not forgive each other, then there would be no end to the killings”, “Blood is not washed away with blood”. The custom of blood revenge “preserved public order, social justice and equality, preventing the spread of arbitrariness and anarchy in the society” (The Ingush, 2013, p. 26). The legal culture of the peoples of the Caucasus has developed various methods and forms of overcoming conflict situations and reconciling warring families.

The need for coexistence in conditions of cultural, social and ethnic diversity contributed to the emergence of institutions among the peoples of the Caucasus, which purpose was to overcome the existing isolation and alienation of ethnic and social worlds, through which it was possible to establish links and contacts, to establish ways of mutual communication and trust between different peoples and different groups of the same people. This purpose was served by such traditional institutions as hospitality, quality, atalychestvo, twinning and other forms of artificial kinship.

The Georgians of Mountainous Rachi, who lived closed to the Karachay and Balkars, were interested in establishing close economic contacts with the region of the North Caucasus, and entered into kunachestvo relations with the highlanders of neighboring Balkarian and Karachay villages. Often kunachestvo relations became hereditary, passed down through generations for decades. Thus, at the end of the 19th century Mikhail Lobzhanidze from Gebi village of Onsky district of Georgia became a kunak of the Balkarian Shavaev family, since he often visited their village for trade – he bought young small cattle in the Upper Chegem village, then raised and sold it. His three sons – Georgy, Luke and Sergo – also often visited the Balkarian Kunaks, and Luke even lived with them for a year to learn the language.

When the Balkars were evicted in 1944, the Shavaevs left Kunaks some property, including a barrel of honey, for storage. Returning home after 13 years, the Shavaevs got everything back safe and sound (Maysuradze, 2002).

In Dagestan, as in other parts of the North Caucasus, hereditary quality was widespread, when close friendly relations were maintained by families for several generations. This form of personal ties helped not only to solve the problems of everyday life, but also to resolve communal strife and conflicts (Bobrovnikov, 2002).

It should be noted that the peoples of the Caucasus are characterized by a special attitude towards friendship, especially male friendship. The prestige of fidelity to friendship, its value is reflected in numerous proverbs (“Left without friends will stumble a thousand times”, “One hundred friends are few, one enemy is a lot”, etc.).

Folklore works of the people of the Caucasus abound with colorful descriptions of how Kunaks, sworn brothers, including the representatives of different people should treat each other. Heroic folklore works by Vainakhs “Illi” contain many examples of noble behavior of Vainakhs towards, for example, the Kabardian sworn brothers. There are many facts of distribution of kunachestvo between the Ingushs, the Chechens and the Russian Cossacks (Gritsenko, 1974).

The custom of hospitality widespread in various forms among all people of the Caucasus contributed to the development of friendly relations with the representatives of the neighboring people (The Ingush, 2013).

Related to hospitality and kunachestvo the institute of protection connected various groups of one people (for example, Adyghe), or different people.

The Georgian dealers coming from the villages of Mountain Rachi (Gebi, Chior) to Karachay and Balkaria were forced to arrive under the protection of local Taubi and present them goods in exchange for protection. When Taubi families expanded and divided, they also “shared” the dealers among themselves who were under their protection.

Except monetary payments (according to the quantity of goods that the merchants had), the dealers who were under the Taubi protection were obliged to bring a certain number of iron ploughshares for plows and large coppers annually. When the Balkars brought horses and cattle to Transcaucasia, the persons, which are under their protection, had to accompany them as translators and servants. There was also such a tradition: after the marriage young Taubi went to the settlements of Gebi and Chiora with their fellows where they were prepared the solemn treatment and gifts (Barazbiyev, 2000).

Atalychestvo – the custom of raising children outside the parental family, which led to the artificial kinship – was known to almost all the peoples of the Caucasus, but in the “classical”, the most striking form of Atalychestvo was observed among the Adyghei, regarding whom Khan-Giray wrote in the first half of the 19th century: “There is no example in Circassia that the children would be purely raised in the parental house, under the supervision of parents; on the contrary, when the baby is born, the parents immediately give him for upbringing to other people” (Smirnova, 1983, p. 73). The connections of a child with the atalyk’s family throughout his life were very close. By custom, atalyk was considered the main adviser and leader of a child. Let us draw attention to one of the social functions of Atalychestvo – the establishment of close ties between surnames and even entire peoples. In the 19th century the children of

the Adygs were often given the names of the tribes in which they were brought up: Ubykh, Besleney, etc. Among the Adygs, the heirs of the Crimean khans were brought up, who, if necessary, always found refuge in Cherkessia.

The Kabardians had atalyk ties with other groups of Adygs, as well as with many neighboring peoples: Balkars, Ossetians-Digorans, Karachais, Abazins, Ubykhs. The institute of Atalychestvo was strongly developed among the Karachais and Balkars (including Swans and Ossetians).

The tsarist government, trying to weaken the influence of the Kabardian feudal lords on neighboring peoples, even tried to ban this custom. In 1822, Ermolov issued a proclamation aimed at destroying atalyk relations between Kabardian feudal lords and the neighboring peoples of the Caucasus. Nevertheless, the upbringing of children in another family continued in subsequent years, although on a smaller scale (Gardanov, 1973).

Twinning, adoption and other types of artificial kinship. Along with Atalychestvo, the peoples of the North Caucasus also had other, quite diverse, forms of artificial kinship. So, the establishment of artificial kinship was associated with some rites of the children's cycle (childbirth, first breastfeeding, naming, first haircut), the wedding cycle (placing a bride in an "intermediate house", a groom staying in a "different" house). Dairy kinship, twinning (sworn brotherhood or sisterhood), formalized in various ways, were widespread everywhere (Botashev, 2002; Smirnova, 1983).

7. Conclusion

A review of the traditions that contributed to the development of inter-ethnic cooperation among the peoples of the Caucasus and the formation of a culture of tolerance shows that the peoples of this region have accumulated a rich experience of mutual tolerance, reasonable accommodation, worthy compromises, norms that ensure the possibility of versatile cooperation. Clearly, one should not exaggerate the degree of tolerance of traditional culture, for which "one's own" in the vast majority of cases was always preferable and more valuable than "someone else's". Nevertheless, considering the mechanisms of inter-ethnic interaction that existed in the past, it cannot but be recognized that the traditions recorded in literary and archival sources, preserved in the memory of the people, etiquette norms, representations reflect stable value orientations for a certain degree of tolerance typical for all ethnic groups of the Caucasus.

Undoubtedly, the ancestral experience, proven by centuries of tradition of tolerant interaction in various spheres of life, continues to remain relevant for the peoples of the Caucasus to this day: they may become a solid basis for relations between the peoples of this region both now and in the future.

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