

(Neo)traditionalism as a form of cultural identity of the inhabitants of Yakutsk

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Abstract: The article is aimed at describing the sociocultural situation in the transboundary space of the city of Yakutsk from the perspective of cultural anthropology. The focus is on a marginal person, social forces and movements that exist in the context of cross-cultural communications (within the process of urbanization) and increasing globalization, which only actualizes the issues of identity and self-identification. The article also contains descriptions of the sociocultural landscape, where the process of human socialization begins, and a further process of inculturation is given impetus. Such issues as “Vacuum” and “Oasis” appear in the problem under consideration. “Vacuum” as a phenomenon can be associated with the regional remoteness. In this regard, the territory of Yakutia, like the entire Arctic part of the North-East of Russia, is perceived as a kind of hard-to-reach territory, which develops separately from the Central part of the Russian Federation, the Urals and Western Siberia.

Keywords: identity, self-identification, population, ethnicity, (neo) pagan practices

1. Introduction

The relevance of this issue is due to the fact that this concept can be used in questions of the local population's identity, and it also assesses how the socio-cultural environment in the city of Yakutsk changes. In the first place, speaking of identity, we mean the ethnic, cultural, and group identity of the local population, mainly Yakuts. Thus, the following questions arise from the problem at hand: What role does the (neo)pagan Yakut practices play in urban space in this study? What needs and motivations encourage people to participate in (neo) pagan practices?

Ethnic identity seems to be one of the most basic and accessible (as well as family) socializations, since it implements a common understanding and trust. Acting rather instinctively than deliberately, people in different situations seek salvation in ethnicity (in some cases, religious identity). And in it they draw resources of self-realization and self-identification. Depending on the state of the elite and external contacts, ethnicity can be pumped, unified, dissipated, split up. However, even being changeable, it remains a stable feature of social life, and the ethno-instinct is revealed in people of all ages and cultures [2].

The process of urbanization in Yakutia begins with the industrial development of the republic, the emergence of new cities on its territory: Mirny, Neryungri, Ust-Nera, Aldan. The study of urbanization processes and the development of urban agglomerations in general require a strong evidence base, which would include large statistical data recording of population movements from cities to villages,

from villages to cities. Doctor of Economics, Professor I. E. Tomsy in his work “The Population of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)” [4] reveals in detail the general picture of the socio-economic development of Yakutia in various historical periods.

2. Research Questions

The urbanization of Yakutia was closely connected with all the processes taking place in the country, namely collectivization, industrialization, the Great Patriotic War, restoration of the national economy, BAM construction, which left a large imprint on the socio-cultural environment and the cultural landscape of the cities of Yakutia. At the present stage, the issue of developing Yakutsk as the capital city of the region, and its interaction with the nearest districts and towns is particularly acute. To understand these processes and the development of urban agglomerations in Yakutia, historical features, influence of natural factors, and landscapes on the economic life must be considered.

The territory of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), due to the remoteness of its location, is a kind of “Vacuum.” At its core, the concept of “distance” or “remoteness” is largely important for those who do not live in a separate place, it is applied by outsiders to some isolated place. However, people living in a remote place do not have the same feelings towards their place of residence, they just live where they live [6]. For a clearer understanding of the connection between remoteness and the socio-cultural environment, we should cite the following words of C. Humphrey, “In this regard, it can be assumed that remoteness, which is always determined by comparison with a larger social unit, implies its own separate way of being” [6]. That is, it can be said that remoteness is the main condition in which the socio-cultural environment of Yakutia is formed. In the case under consideration, the city is a place where this comparison is strengthened and encourages a person to reflect on his identity. This clause provides an explanation for the concept of a “marginal person.” Specifically, in this article, this concept is interpreted as a person who finds himself in a transboundary situation, living between a city and a village, or in a suburban area where the issue of self-identification is acute.

The sociocultural environment in which a person needs to identify himself with society or be included in a social group is the environment with a predominance of marginalization that encourages socialization and the search for his place in society. That testifies that “Vacuum” induces a person to action, being a state of social and cultural environment. This phenomenon is fully manifested in the urban environment, but it also has roots in rural areas. Over time, cultural and ethnic differences can be leveled, but the distinctions that are gradually becoming more and more subjective, and from the outside, even “imaginary”, remain for a long time. As is known, the origins of this are formed in big cities, and its main consumers live there. In a small settlement, in regions with a sparse, scattered and ethnically homogeneous population, people usually know each other perfectly, their own and neighboring ancestry, so the possibility to draw imaginary and not related to reality or not approved by the local community border is small [5]. However, it is worth noting that directly from the Yakut rural environment, many trends regarding culture, religion, and traditions are moving into the urban environment of Yakutsk. It can be said that directly in the urban environment they acquire the very function of self-identification and ethnic identity. Moreover, directly in this dialogue of the rural and urban components of neo-paganism, ethnic culture acquires its life and potential for transformation and development.

The city of Yakutsk stands out. It is not just a political, economic center of Yakutia, but also a cultural, scientific and educational center, with a number of city-forming organizations. Yakutsk is a large forge of personnel of the republic, its cultural and leisure potential is high. It is exactly recreational opportunities, the availability of cultural and leisure institutions, which are becoming more and more frequent from year to year in Yakutsk, a rapid development of the service sector make the city attractive for internal migration.

The city of Yakutsk is an “Oasis” inside the “Vacuum.” It is more attractive for rural migrants. It is in the urban environment that stimulates the variability of various value systems, the changed reality for them. In the system of spatial sensation of the inhabitants of Central Yakutia and the Vilyui group of uluses, the concept of “city” is directly connected with the city of Yakutsk. In everyday life, we can

often hear the words “urban,” which refers to the Yakuts born in Yakutsk, or who have migrated from the ulus and have been living in the city for a long time. Many experts come to the conclusion that urbanization can carry changes in identity and priorities regarding the family and a possible reduction of interest in the national culture.

Thus, we can assume that in Yakutsk, difficulty in self-identification in terms of urbanization for Yakut migrants from rural areas is possible. The so-called “culture shock,” formed by the American anthropologist K. Oberg, manifests itself [3]. To overcome this condition, a person resorts to several types of conflict resolution. The overwhelming majority of this population is the young people, having migrated from the village, faced with a variety of cultures, experiencing the above-mentioned “cultural shock.” For any person, in new conditions, socialization and a sense of belonging to something more are simply required. In many ways, socialization among young people flows through students and fraternities, where they can fulfill themselves and their needs, make friends, and also seek help.

The problem of socialization is due to the fact that the initial formation of an individual takes place among a narrow circle of communication, in which verbal exchange of information, observation of other individuals actions and events occur among a small society with a limited number of people, whose goals and views on life are pretty similar.

3. Results

Addressing the socialization problem of male ethnophors’, we can assume that being inside a traditional society, in the zone of their comfort, they become accustomed in their environment to the significance of forming and keeping “masculinity”. In rural areas, there is often no improvement, it takes a lot of physical effort to support themselves. In the urban environment, where improvement (progress) is a norm, the importance of physical strength is not so important, where female residents can live and earn themselves quite easily. In this context, a migrant from a rural area, most often a male, has a problem of self-identification, and the problem of finding a place in urban society appears.

Often, when migrating from rural areas, a person is faced with the diversity of individual societies, with an abundance of various kinds of cultures and subcultures, he experiences the aforementioned deep “cultural shock”. This cultural shock forces ethnophors to gather around the idea of preserving their habitual way of life, which often results in hidden and sometimes even open confrontation with other cultures. In other words, the glocalization process is intensifying within the Republic, and the city of Yakutsk in particular.

Due to the increased glocalization, the appearance of various kinds of religious buildings can be traced (House of Archa, House of Olonkho, etc.) not only in the city of Yakutsk, but throughout the territory of Yakutia. Reconstruction work on the restoration of places of worship (tyusyulgya) is conducted without fail. Also, the observance of traditional norms and orders is enhanced, for example, the feeding of fire and land during various national and borrowed holidays, during hunting, haymaking, etc. In addition, the intensification of glocalization processes is manifested in the creation of non-profit public organizations that aim to revive the traditional culture and faith of the Sakha people, educate young people on the basis of moral and patriotic foundations, which are inherent in the Yakut society and based on the traditions of the Sakha people, in their opinion [9].

According to the information portal of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, at least 5 local religious organizations are officially registered in the republic, 3 of which are registered in Yakutsk [7]. At the same time, we should note that in the Internet, thanks to messengers and social networks, there are many communities with a focus on preserving traditional culture, promoting a healthy lifestyle and sports, and popularizing the Yakut traditional faith.

It would be wrong to say that this phenomenon is relatively negative. There are also a lot of positive moments, where traditional culture is preserved thanks to the “cultural shock.”. However, the negative part of this term remains the most resonant in society. There is a twofold relation to these activities among the population, but it is worth noting that the above-mentioned phenomena are a bright indicator of interest in traditional culture and a way to preserve it. Also, we can very likely consider this compensation as a response to a dramatically changing reality and a way of socializing

the Yakuts by turning to traditional culture and faith. Participation in a larger structure, which is an integral part of the socio-cultural environment, is important for the identity of a person in society.

4. Discussion

Socialization can take place through a professional environment, sports, creativity. However, for a long time, in the urban environment of Yakutsk there was no way for socializing through religious associations. In addition, part of the younger generation of Yakuts feels the need for spiritual guidance and a society where they can share their desire to find spiritual unity with those who share their faith, has about the same social baggage. This entails the creation of horizontal connections in urban space.

Religious public organizations and organizations of religious subjects become a place of communication and a catalyst for the emergence of some questions to oneself and ideas. To a greater extent, these reflections can be considered as a way of compensation in the matter of self-identification and preservation of the usual socio-cultural environment.

A return to traditional origins, (neo)pagan practices such as urban Ysyakh, urban Osuokhay on Yakutsk squares, thematic holidays associated with the traditional Yakut calendar, can be viewed as an attempt to create a new social construct based on traditional beliefs and traditional patriarchal families. Public associations based on traditional culture and beliefs are trying to become a social construct in the conditions of the city, at least for those people whom these organizations help to socialize. That is, we can assume that in the life of these people, this social construct directly carries one of the most important roles, a place where they can identify themselves, and also share their views on life with like-minded people whose social background is identical with their background. In many ways, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a voluntaristic policy of influence on social relations. In addition, the attempt is visible by creating the image of the “ideal” Yakut, Yakut family. It raises issues of morality, gender roles, as well as appeal to the age-old Yakut ideals.

5. Conclusion

The examples given tell us that many representatives of the Sakha people, especially young people, have a motive for compensation regarding their identity. The city of Yakutsk as the center of the Republic, a place of communication of many cultures, seems to them the place where their self-identification can be under “threat.” In this case, the emphasis is on historical memory and the collective unconscious, i.e. those traditional sociocultural codes that are perceived better and close to the usual way of life. They also easily fit into the picture of the world of ethnophore, without disturbing his usual way of life. Also, individuals (or social group) do not have time to adapt to these or those changes caused by globalization. Thus, there is a threat to the marginalization of social and cultural life, values, and priorities. In this case, according to V. G. Babakov, ethnophors prefer to “turn back in time,” i.e. to traditional ethnic values [1]. And this process can be directly observed in the above example regarding self-identification. What can also find support in the works of C. Levi-Strauss. In his opinion, the myths of traditional culture are understood by the community without any explanation, and they are collective [8].

Thus, in a changing environment, in an environment of accelerating globalization processes, it is a return to traditional ethnic values and its strengthening is a way of adaptation, both to the urban environment in particular and to the multicultural environment in general.

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