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**DOMINANT IDEAS IN FORMATION OF SELF-IDENTITY IN**  
**TRADITIONAL CHECHEN CULTURE**

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**Abstract**

The paper attempts at analysis of self-identity formation in traditional Chechen culture. On the basis of critical analysis of philosophical, psychological and ethnographic literature by the method of content analysis, dominant ideas were identified in the traditional Chechen culture that directly influence formation of personal self-identity. During that, the following dominant ideas were identified: personal example of a mentor who is a carrier of behavioral patterns and a role model in various models of communicative behavior; internal commitment to meeting the requirements of the national code *Nokhchalla* and ethic code *K'onakhalla*; prevailing formation of moral and will-based component in family upbringing; extreme politeness in communication and lack of obscene vocabulary. From an early age, a child is provided with the idea that honor and personal dignity are above all and nobody shall be able to impinge on them. Spiritual potential of the traditional Chechen culture is a foundation for formation of self-identity and reflects national ideology of the ethnic group, originality of its mentality. The bar line in the communicative culture of Chechens is directly related to etiquette, *g'illakh-o'zdangalla*, which prescribes respecting elders. *Bakkhiy nakh* (adults) were embodiment of wisdom and high morality. Traditional culture, customs and traditions, along with religion allowed Chechen ethnic group to avoid socio-cultural crises in conditions of rough upheavals, and preserve their national code, *Nokhchalla*, which is based on the concepts of *g'illakh* (respect), *o'zdangalla* (culture), *sinmarsho* (free thought), *do'nalla* (endurance), *yakh'* and *siy* (honor).

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## 1. Introduction

Determining a ratio between biological and social in human nature is a relevant problem for interdisciplinary studies. Internal conflicts are a source of passionate development of a personality, a driver of its development. We are of the opinion that these conflicts are determined by a collision between traditional and modern approaches to character education. Thus, self-education is important for personal development, as it facilitates formation of individuality as a unique set of separate personal qualities and spiritual world that constitutes personal self-identity. A high level of self-identity development is determined by capabilities to self-knowledge, adequate self-esteem with respect to personal aspirations, life goals and potential personal skills. Besides that, the nature of self-identity is determined by proactive attitude that a person has to oneself, their behavior and activities, as well as to personal development. Personal capabilities to self-knowledge and planning of personal life trajectory characterize their individuality, the nature of their self-identity. Formation of self-identity depends on many factors. We hold that among them, the context of social and cultural environment and influence from traditional culture of upbringing are important factors. Formation of self-identity is directly influenced by religion as well, thus, we may say that a person within the Islamic world view perceives all phenomena of the world in accordance with the main principles of this religion.

## 2. Problem Statement

A task for formation and development of personality is defined among the key tasks in the *Strategy for development of education in the Russian Federation for the period of up to 2025*. (Government Executive Order, 2015). In the modern world of globalization and digital processes, there is an evident trend for devaluation of universal human values as well as ethnic values. Today, one may state that despite broad access to information and capabilities for intellectual development, many representatives of modern youth are characterized with mosaic thinking, low motivation to self-development, lack of value-based understanding of traditional culture. On this basis, it is quite important from the scientific point of view to identify the main dominant ideas that define formation of self-identity in traditional Chechen culture.

## 3. Research Questions

Traditional culture of each ethnic group is a determining factor in personal development and formation. Direction of the development vector and trajectory of individual personal formation are primarily determined by a system of ethnic cultural value orientations that are acquired during an early period of development. Despite conflicting approaches that point to failure of ideas justifying a return to traditional upbringing holding them for a return to patriarchal order of things, it should be remembered that the present and the future are largely determined by the past. Exposure to values of world culture is possible only through understanding of one's own belonging to a native culture and through awareness of one's ethnic culture being a part of the global civilization. In this regard, it is necessary to remember a rightful note made by Likhachyov (1985) that "delay in development is created not by commitment to

origins, but by refusal to move forward" (p. 76). Ethnic cultural values of every people have global nature and are eternal and universal. Formation of personal self-identity that we define as an integrative characteristic of a person manifesting in high culture, a need for self-knowledge and a sense of purpose in one's position in the world are influenced by social and cultural context, traditional culture and personal perception of the world.

Thus, a high-priority task of modern education system is formation of a personality brought up in the depth of an ethnic culture, a personality that is aware of complexity and ambiguity of surrounding reality, capable of development in accordance with the present challenges and being actively integrated into the global space.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Analysis of Russian and global experience with traditional cultures in personal education allows stating certain issues in application of a rich potential of ethnic wisdom in personal education and development. At the same time, the modern world being characterized with mobility and variability poses complex questions to educational establishment and society as a whole in orienting people to their origins, to a search of cultural and ethnic identity. The main goal of this work is to identify and analyze dominant ideas that influence formation of personal self-identity in the context of traditional Chechen culture.

#### **5. Research Methods**

In order to attain the set goal, a complex of the following methods was applied: methods of theoretical analysis, systematization and generalization of literature in psychology, education, ethnography and history touching upon the research question; educational works on history, material and spiritual culture of the Chechen people; monographic works and dissertations covering ethnic education in different peoples; folklore and spiritual literature containing information on goals, objectives and nature of anti-educational traditions in upbringing of Chechens.

#### **6. Findings**

According to a classification proposed by M. Mead (as cited in Solonin, 2007) traditional culture of Chechen people shall be included with post-figurative, characterized by communal leaving of three or more generations, where elderly people served not only as leaders and mentors, but as carriers of behavioral patterns and role models as well. Traditional Chechen culture is based upon humanitarian principles, its main purpose is to be turned towards people, creation of conditions for appearance and development of personal individuality. Educational system of the Chechen people assumes formation of humanistic world view, development of humanitarian style of thinking and feeling, that is, subject-subject interactions between educator and child, at that, the role of educator is taken not solely by parents, but by the whole family, tribe and society as a whole. In Chechen society, it is perceived as normal if a representative of elder generation, independent of whether acquainted or not, makes reprove young people behaving inappropriately. At that, it is very important to note that this reprove in no case shall be

rough, diminishing or insulting. An elder person, usually referring to the youth's distinguished ancestors and to the fact that he is a Chechen (*nokhcho*), shall respectfully state that behaving in such a way is inappropriate. However, if the elder person lashes out and makes a rude comment, the youth in question does not reply in kind, and those present will not let him do it.

In our opinion, the dominant ideas for formation of self-identity in traditional Chechen culture are personal example of mentors (parents, grandparents) and other elders in various models of communicative behavior; self-education in accordance with the requirements of ethical codes of *Nokhchalla* and *K'onakhalla*; prevailing formation of moral, ethical and will-based component in family upbringing; extreme politeness in communication and lack of obscene vocabulary.

A distinctive feature of Chechen education system is personal example of adults (parents, elder brother, etc.) shown to them in various models of communicative behavior. Parents and other adults do not read dictum, but they may have talks and share the lessons from their personal experience. Influence of adult relatives onto socialization of children and youth, transmission of experience and knowledge in Chechen families was especially clearly seen in participation of grandparents in formation of personality. The elder members of the family served as translators of ethnic culture and fulfilled the spiritual needs of a child to the maximum degree. Intergenerational transmission of spiritual component and values of the Chechen culture happened through fairy tales, parables, legends, admiration of *turpalkhoi* (heroes) in *illi* (songs).

As a distinctive feature of traditional family upbringing, one shall note a respectful attitude to child personality. From an early age, a child is provided with the idea that honor and personal dignity are above all and nobody shall be able to impinge on them. It manifested especially vividly in upbringing of boys. Even if in a family a daughter is elder than her brothers, she shall always show them respect, admiration and obedience. At that, a brother is a real protector of his sister in any situation, ready to give his life for his sister's honor and dignity. In Chechen folklore, a girl without a brother is compared to a vulnerable "pigeon without a wing". The girl, in her own turn, knows that by her weakness and inappropriate deeds she will dishonor her brothers, parents and her tribe as a whole. It is an powerful deterring factor in moral and ethical behavior of youth. At that, a child in traditional Chechen family was required to obey and demonstrate responsibility to both juniors and elders. Deontological ethics in the traditional Chechen culture set up a specific degree of responsibility to each member of a family. Irrespective of age, *dekhar* (duty) supposed a life according to moral values. Duty was understood as not just a necessity to be responsible and polite, but as a meaning of existence. First of all, it is a duty to one's father, mother, family, villagers, people. A person who understood and followed this highest degree of responsibility and moral and ethical ascension had a right to bear a high and noble title of *k'onakh*.

According to traditional Chechen culture, during early stages of personality formation in the family, a child acquired as an unconditional imperative the qualities of cavalier, gentleman, diplomat, generous and reliable comrade, courageous and brave protector. Every generation of Chechens was brought up in accordance with the directions of a life code of *Nokhchalla* and an ethic code of *K'onakhalla*. What differs *Nokhchalla* from *K'onakhalla* according to Nunuev (2002), is that *Nokhchalla* is a national ideology of Chechens, a foundation of national self-identification, including ethical and moral character and features of Chechen mentality. A foundational nature of *Nokhchalla* lies in the fact

that it does not see class differences and any person may live up to its principles. The main requirement consists in living a dignified life without losing honor and nobility. *Nokhchalla* is not a warrior ideology, it is distinguished by peacefulness, aesthetic and ethics in interactions with representatives of any ethnicity.

*K'onakhalla*, according to our interpretation is a code whose purpose lies in personal self-development, personal growth, moral and ethic ascension. *K'onakhalla* is a foundation of personal self-identification that manifests in ability to self-analysis and self-improvement. *K'onakhalla* involves a particular title and elitism, as not everyone is capable of attaining such a high level of morality and spirituality. There may be a single *k'onakh* for a hundred of people. It worth noting, that *k'onakh* is a non-gendered term. Chechen language has a concept of *k'onakh stag yu iza*, which describes nobility, dignity and willpower of a woman. The main requirement to a *k'onakh* was presence of *sobar* (restraint) This restraint shall appear as a life principle in family, in communication and in behavior. It is no coincidence that among Chechens there is a saying *k'onakh vonekh', dikanekh' tskh'a bossa khu'lu* (къонах вонехъ, диканехъ цхъа босса хуълу), meaning "k'onakh behaves the same through foul and fail". In addition, a *k'onakh* is characterized by *k'inkhetam*, mercy. In traditional Chechen culture, manifestation of cruelty in any situation was considered an evidence of weakness. In war or in a duel between two enemies till death, there was a limit of mercy that it was prohibited to cross, e.g., it was prohibited to use daggers to stab, they should have been used only to slash. In Chechen society, mercy was manifested in respect to orphans, widows, sisters without brothers, parents not having a son, as well as elderly people. With adoption of Islam, traditions of mercy were solidified and enriched with new forms, such as *zakat* (mandatory charity), almsgiving during religious festivals of Eid-al-Adha (meat), Eid-al-Fitr (wheat, rye, money, etc.).

Traditional communicative culture of Chechens is characterized by extreme politeness and lack of obscene vocabulary. As the authors have noted in previous works (Dadashev & Muskhanova, 2012; Muskhanova, 2011a, 2011b), the main line in the communicative culture of Chechens is directly related to etiquette, *g'illakh-o'zdangalla*, that prescribes respect to elders and unconditional obedience to them. *Bakhiy nakh* (adults) were embodiment of wisdom and high morality. Their rich experience was taken into account by the younger generation. In Chechen society, only a distinguished person enriched by life experience and wisdom could have become a preacher or a mentor of youth. Today we may sorrowfully state as a fact that ethnic cultural values are reorganized, as are communication rules and communication models.

## 7. Conclusion

Concluding, the authors may state that traditional Chechen culture contained a system of moral and humanistic values, traditions of education in mercy and altruism, ethnically original forms of social and mutual assistance. Spiritual potential of the traditional Chechen culture is a foundation for formation of self-identity and reflects national ideology of the ethnic group, originality of its mentality. Dominant ideas for formation of self-identity in traditional Chechen culture are personal example of mentors (parents, grandparents) and other elders in various models of communicative behavior; self-education in accordance with the requirements of ethical codes of *Nokhchalla* and *K'onakhalla*; prevailing formation

of moral, ethical and will-based component in family upbringing; extreme politeness in communication and lack of obscene vocabulary. Traditional culture, customs and traditions along with religion allowed Chechen ethnic group to preserve national code of behavior with the concepts *g'illakh* (respect), *o'zdangalla* (culture), *sinmarsho* (free thought), *do'nalla* (endurance), *yakh'* and *siy* (honor) through the rough social and cultural crises.

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