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#### IDENTITIES TRANSFORMATION IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF ASTRAKHAN REGION

Elena Khlyshcheva (a)\*, Mikhail Topchiev (b), Anna Romanova (c),  
Maria Bicharova (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Astrakhan State University, 20A, Tatishcheva st., Astrakhan, Russia, culture\_mar@mail.ru, +7 (906) 177 5661

(b) Astrakhan State University, 20A, Tatishcheva st., Astrakhan, Russia, ceo.gfn@gmail.com, 89618123331

(c) Astrakhan State University, 20A, Tatishcheva st., Astrakhan, Russia, aromanova\_mail@mail.ru, 89171742766

(d) Caspian Institute of Sea and River Transport, 6 Nikolskaya St., Astrakhan, Russia,  
valkirija@inbox.ru, 89608533996

#### *Abstract*

At present days, the problem of cultural identity is one of the major in space of globalization changes. The most vulnerable points of stability are cross-intersection areas of cultures. There are lifestyles alternative to the standard norms, the aspiration to adjoin to Other. However, the difference in valuable ideas closes the representatives of specific groups into the narrow frameworks of traditional thinking. Nevertheless, cultural distance is not static and is changed under the influence of social transformations and interactions. The emergence of new transcultural formations actualizes for science the search for patterns and scenarios of coexistence in the common cultural field of various traditions and mentalities developed and tested during historical development. Changes taking place in society construct an innovative understanding of identity. Therefore, the purpose of the article is to identify changes occurring during the transformation of traditional cultures. A special attention is paid to the gradual change in the ratio of regional, national and civil values and corresponding self-identification at all levels. The proposed theoretical constructs for the development of adequate mechanisms for the coexistence of cultures require careful analysis. A complex system of methods is used for this. We used both diachronous and synchronous research methods. A cross-cultural analysis of problem identification is required, and this cannot be done without identifying the indicators of ethnic, confessional and regional levels of self-awareness. The above mentioned determines the need to develop new principles of building identity. Astrakhan region demonstrates the formation process of such a transcultural identity.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern globalization processes are characterized by centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. A process of interweaving global trends and local characteristics of the cultural dynamics of various peoples is happening. Existing identity models are destabilized under the influence of immigration processes, weakening traditional ties and disrupting existing structures. Identity is blurred, loses clear boundaries and becomes heterotopic. Moreover, with intensifying of globalization processes in the cultural sphere, “not only the erasing of differences, but their strengthening” occurs (Malakhov, 2014). Isolated territories have emerged, whose inhabitants, enclosed on themselves by means of their language and cultural symbols, gradually begin to lose the ability to reach the general telecommunications level, which creates suitable ground for interethnic and interconfessional conflicts. The experience of managing multi-ethnicity within the framework of one state, one republic and even an area is becoming popular.

Historically, different ethnocultural groups living on the same territory in time create a peculiar cultural type, distinguished by their tolerance for foreign ethnic components. This becomes possible because of the long-term living together in close proximity, in the same natural conditions, which leads, as a rule, to a community of activities, family life, material and spiritual culture. As a result of this interaction, boundary cultural landscapes are formed and function, a new form of cultural identity, “multiple” (transcultural) that means going beyond the limits of “its own” culture and the diffusion of initial identities, becomes relevant.

Researchers even talk about the possibility of forming a “large-scale collective identity” (Wæver, 1996), which can function regardless of the specific state. Such identification is compensatory in nature, overcoming “social marginality” (Demintseva, 2011). However, the modern “request for distinction” (Malakhov, 2014) has led to an open positioning of another, turning to methods of opposing the practice of assimilation.

## 2. Problem Statement

Because of the adaptation process complexity, most immigrants experience a transgression of identity forms, leading to the appearance of a “blurred identity” with a fragmented view of their ethnicity. As a result, the need for recognition increases, the most important feature of which is “claim to originality, struggle for identity” (Malakhov, 2014).

As a rule, the state policy of identity is aimed at shaping the image of “we-communities”, supporting “respect and confidence in the cultural identity of individuals” (Romanova, Khlyshcheva, Yakushenkov, & Topchiev, 2013, p. 35). Therefore, the attitude to the “foreign” and main characteristics of its image becomes “important indicators of the social organization level of any society” (Topchiev, Romanova, & Yakushenkov, 2016, p. 18). At the same time, the state of alienation deprives a person of social support and leads to adaptation problems, which negatively affects his integrative abilities. It is this situation when they begin to talk about cultural distance, which manifests itself in the form of confrontation between cultural worlds of traditional and innovative form.

The state of interethnic relations largely depends on the dynamics of identity transformation of various social, territorial and ethnic groups. A new level of analysis of the cultural interaction of peoples is

associated with the primary understanding of ethnocultural differences. In this regard, the analysis of national relations in multicultural bordering regions is of particular relevance. This is Astrakhan region, which is a kind of geo-cultural space with a specific type of cultural genesis, determined the formation of interpenetrating geo-fields: ethno-cultural, natural-economic, confessional, political, etc. The transformation of ethnic and religious identities in the cultural landscape of represented region is of interest.

### **3. Research Questions**

The population of heterotopic region is forced to adapt to new conditions and “perform an act of transgression”, no matter how conservative it is (Topchiev, Dryagalov, & Yakushenkova, 2016), that is, to go beyond the traditional behavior. And this, in turn, triggers the process of changing the traditional picture of the world and often leads to a breakdown of stereotypes, the emergence of new forms of identity and a new level of intercultural dialogue.

Transgression acts represent a certain form of reaction to a meeting with an “alien”, allowing a person to adapt to new sociocultural conditions in a space of cultural diversity.

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

All this determines the need to identify new principles of identity building, based “equally on history, religion, mentality” (Kostina, 2009), and on general citizenship. The formation of such a transcultural identity is well demonstrated by Astrakhan region.

### **5. Research Methods**

The research methodology is associated with an analytical approach that allows us to consider society as an object of control at various levels. The problems of ethno-confessional dialogue, cultural policy, analysis of the dynamics of socio-cultural relations of the peoples inhabiting a particular region come to the fore, emphasizing new trends in relations between cultural actors both within the region and between the individual region and the Center. This requires a structural-functional approach to the study. Such an approach makes it possible to study the level and forms of interaction between different peoples and to identify changes occurring in the process of transforming the traditional worldview of individual cultures, leading to the formation of new levels of identity.

The proposed theoretical constructs for the development of adequate mechanisms for the coexistence of cultures require careful analysis. A complex system of methods is used, which is based on comparative analytics. We used both diachronous and synchronous research methods.

And if the issues of social and economic development of the regions had been analyzed before, the study of the formation of regional culture and regional socio-cultural identity became a relatively new direction of research of post-Soviet Russia, having practical significance.

## 6. Findings

**Regional identity as a result of multicultural processes.** Identity transformation is well seen in multicultural bordering regions. That is why Astrakhan region is chosen for analysis, where almost every wave of immigrants newly forms the composition of population. However, cultural memory has preserved the history of nomadic migrations, forming a special identity among the peoples settled here.

Russian tsars pursued a policy of assimilation, including as many nomadic peoples and suburb population as possible into the Russian state. Geographical location and natural features of Astrakhan region determined the originality of the settlement process. The trade people came here from the Nogai Horde, Derbent, Shemakha, Khiva. Many foreigners came running to Astrakhan lands: the Germans, Swedes, Poles, who, being captured by the Nogais or Cossacks, were looking for an opportunity to escape from slavery under the protection of Russian authorities. Working people went in the mouths of Volga for fishing and salt extraction. Many people were attracted in Astrakhan by trade life and freedom from the usual tyranny of orders in indigenous Russia.

The large influx of merchants was explained by the fact that Astrakhan was the only Russian city where eastern merchants paid minimal dues. Bukharian, Khivan, Persian, Indian merchants stayed in Astrakhan in caravans, representing “separate worlds with their cultural traditions” (Nebolsin, 1852). The most significant were the Indian, Bukhara, Gilyan and Agryzhansky Yards, population of which represented a separate privileged estate enjoying the right of free trade. Some Indians married Tatar women and settled in their own homes. Children born from such marriages were called agryzhans (or agryzhanian Tatars).

The process of assimilation of peoples was quite peculiar in Astrakhan region. On the one hand, the task of the local authorities was not in military opposition to the nomads but in diplomatic activity, that is the peaceful resolution of conflict situations, the attraction of nomads “under the hand of the White Tsar”; on the other hand, close cultural contacts of nations were not encouraged. So, if inter-ethnic marriages were allowed, then it concerned only minorities (Armenians, Georgians, Tatars, Kalmyks), but “marriages with Orthodox were rare and were allowed only with the observance of many formalities” (Savvinskii, 1900, p. 52).

Every nation lived quite closed, in its own suburb, intersecting with others mainly on economic issues. Contradictions of nomadic tribes provoked a persistent struggle for land; ethnic balance was often broken. The authorities’ measures about the transfer of sedentary lifestyle did not arouse any sympathy among nomads, especially Kalmyks. Russian government constantly had to intervene in the conflicts of the Kalmyk Dukes and reconcile them (Nefedev, 1834).

Under Catherine II, foreigners were invited to settle in the outskirts of Russia (including Astrakhan lands), for which special conditions for living in strictly designated places were stipulated. Special favor was expressed to the Germans, who were given freedom of religion, free choice of settlement place, self-government, exemption from dues, taxes and all kinds of duties.

Trukhmen (the so-called Turkmen tribes) came from Mangyshlak, who were ordered “to leave forever in Astrakhan province with allotment of lands to them” (Rybushkin, 1841, p. 45). At the same time, Kalmyks assimilated individual Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Turkmen families who were captured during armed conflicts. Together with the Kazakhs, the Crimean-Kuban Nogais, who entered the Bukeev Horde, roamed, making up a new «py» (family) of “Nugai-Cossacks”. (Kidirniiazov, 1999). In the Bukeev steppe, soldiers-

deserters among the Tatars, natives of the settlements at the junction of the present Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Orenburg, were hiding. According to the specific high black hats for men, they were called “kalpak” (Urastaeva, 2000) (“капа-каппак”). Today, their descendants feel that they are Kazakhs of the “kalpak” family.

Lower Volga region formed the “real Babylon” - the whole world of people of all classes and nationalities - the usual characteristic of Astrakhan, given by travelers. Traditional belief-tolerance of the Astrakhans is of particular note, manifested not only in the construction of churches of various confessions and respect for their rituals, but also in the practice of interethnic marriages (especially during the Soviet period), which contributes to the strengthening of mutual understanding between the peoples of the region. Therefore, no matter how conservatively a population was in its traditional habits, but living conditions led to relatively quick adaptation to a changing life. “The foundation of harmonious and regulated life practically took shape by the end of the 18th century, and it was possible to speak of the emergence of a regional culture based on regional identity, when “the earth prevailed over their natural and racial qualities and they all became of one family, because married each other and remained to live in this land”.

In the reports of the Astrakhan governors it was noted that, in general, “the Astrakhan people are generally kind, humble, subjugated” and were highly tolerant of all residents and guests of the region. In the end, there was a tradition of good neighborhood between nations in Astrakhan, resulting in the existence of a peculiar way of life, interethnic relations and original culture. Many-sided Astrakhan still represents a variety of clothes and languages, different cultures and their peaceful coexistence, which gives a special, unique flavor to a large Russian city.

#### **Transformation of regional identity under the influence of ethno-confessional renaissance.**

Centrifugal processes that radically changed the position of many ethnic groups, causing a sharp increase in ethnic migrations, disturbed relative stability of the social and ethno-cultural situation, characteristic of the region, in the 90s of the 20th century. Historically established multiculturalism of Astrakhan Territory led to the fact that cultural confrontation manifested itself not according to religious or ethnic principles, but according to the “own” principle, traditionally residing in the given territory, regardless of its ethnic and religious affiliation, and “foreign”, newly arrived. This is an interesting feature of the region, when under the influence of ethno-confessional renaissance, the “old” ethnic groups that had long been living on the territory, differing in language, belief, and everyday culture, formed common values and perceived migrants who were far from traditions, established in the region as aliens that do not want to integrate into the system of social relations.

In such a situation, the question arose about the limits of the admissibility of positioning cultural traditions as support of the traditional picture of the world, where the demonstration of ethno-confessional differences is the basis for preserving their culture, but does not contribute to social integration, closing representatives of specific groups into the narrow framework of traditional thinking. In the process of transgression, “foreignness” is usually overcome, but the reality must either be “recognized” in view of modern corrections, or reinterpreted, creating new contours of the habitable space. Immigrants, “historical” national minorities, cultural minorities are waiting for the recognition of their cultures, their particular way of life, but sometimes the distance between people of different cultures is so great that it is extremely difficult to “agree” among themselves.

As the world around us becomes more complex, a person of traditional culture is increasingly seeking to regain the usual, traditional forms of sociocultural identification. The revival of religious, ethnocultural values is largely explained by this factor. But the growing conflict of the traditional picture of the world, which still serves as “ensuring the reproduction of the order of social and cultural relations”, is hidden behind such ethno-confessional “revival”. (Kostina, 2011). There is a paradoxical combination of the processes of globalization, modernization and fundamentalism, since the revival of nationalism has become a global phenomenon. Fears of invasion of “another” are to a certain extent forced to consider visitors as “aliens, uninvited guests” (Rybakovskii, 2009).

Modern Astrakhan is an industrial and cultural center with a rich cultural heritage, which makes it possible to call the city “an open-air museum”. Here “geographical frontier gives rise to cultural frontier” (Kazakova, 2009), where most diverse ethno-confessional groups have been interacting for a long time, forming and developing a new form of identity – transcultural.

Having become a bordering region at the end of the 20th century, Astrakhan region takes on a significant gravity of migration waves and, as a result, there is an increase in ethnic identity, which is accompanied, on the one hand, by increased interest in the traditions of different peoples, and on the other, by protective trends leading to ethno-confessional confrontations. That is why the problems of cultural security come to the fore in the relations of cultures and civilizations.

To strengthen regional unity in the region, an own Concept of State National Policy has been developed, which refers to the need to counteract “external attempts to influence the consciousness of citizens of different nationalities, aimed, as it were, at forming their ethnic identity, but in fact often endangering interethnic harmony and spiritual unity of Russian citizens” (Shantimirov, 2018, para. 11).

According to the results of the 2010 census, a decrease in the number of indigenous population was noted: ethno-confessional composition of the region’s population is changing towards an increase in the number of people from Central Asia and the peoples of the Caucasus. This, as well as the increased political interest in the Caspian Basin and the large influx of labor migrants into the region, make relevant the creation of a regional segment of the electronic monitoring federal system of interethnic relations and early conflict prevention. In the region, it is recognized that the implementation of the state Strategy is “not only holidays, community work days and festivals, but also, above all, a serious, sometimes hidden from prying eyes, work to prevent and counter ideologies of extremist and terrorist orientation, national and religious separatism” (Morozov , 2018, p. 63). The Strategy takes into account the challenges and threats in the sphere of interethnic relations, sets targets and expected results of its implementation.

## **7. Conclusion**

Changes in society create an innovative understanding of identity which is not “a static reality” (Malakhov, 2015) and is influenced by the processes of adaptation and integration, social transformations and interactions. Identity always responds “to the challenges of time” (Fedorov, 2013). In addition, today, when each person carries “a whole portfolio of identities” (Fedorov, 2013), researchers begin to discuss the emergence of new transcultural identity.

Nevertheless, surveys among Astrakhan residents show that most of the people consider their ethnic identity to be the primary one. However, the adherence to this form of identity creates adaptive difficulties

when moving to a new place of residence. It requires a new type of cultural connections that makes it possible to understand a different cultural model of thinking and behavior while preserving the valuable basis of its individual and national culture. Moreover, this entails wider forms of self-identification, making it possible to combine the individual experience of their ethnoculture and the collective experience of “new community for their own adaptation” (Ternovaia, 2004).

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