

SCTCMG 2022
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

KUNACHESTVO AND HOSPITALITY – THE BEST TRADITIONS
OF PEOPLES OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS

Zara Alaudinovna Gelaeva (a)*, Yakha Abdullaevna Kindarova (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Chechen State University, 32, Sheripov Str., Grozny, 364021, Russia, gelaevaz@bk.ru

(b) Chechen State Pedagogical University, 33, S. Kishiev Str., Grozny, 364021, Russia, kindarova_yakha@mail.ru

Abstract

The North Caucasus is a special region where dozens of peoples have lived together for centuries. Despite the fact that each nation has its own individuality, there are nevertheless customs that are considered common to all North Caucasian peoples. For example, this is the custom of hospitality and the associated kunachestvo. The Institute of Kunachestvo, which is directly related to hospitality, in fact implies the friendship of persons who are not related by blood. Moreover, they can belong to different ethnic groups and even religions. The custom of kunachestvo was that people who visited each other many times and showed very trusting friendly attitudes and sympathies, regardless of their ethnic origin and religion, entered into mutual brotherhood. Kunachestvo, like other traditions and customs of the peoples of the North Caucasus, was studied by ethnographers and specialists in Caucasian studies of the 19th century. Thus, describing the vital need for kunachestvo and hospitality, the ethnographer wrote that “with the patriarchal simplicity of life, with family asociality, as well as the absence of public institutions like hotels or inns, a traveler or generally a resident of a different aul would never be able to not find shelter and even spend a night in a safe place, if there was no time-honored custom of kunachestvo. ... The duty to stay with his kunak passes from generation to generation. Not to stay in the house where the ancestors stayed would mean inflicting the greatest blood insult on this house...”.

2357-1330 © 2022 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Custom, Chechens, Cossacks, hospitality, kunachestvo, North Caucasus

1. Introduction

Among the peoples of the Caucasus in the 19th-early 20th centuries, as well as in the earlier period, the Institute of Kunachestvo performed not only social, but also public functions. As it is known the basis was the obligation of any member of the society to meet any visitor, welcome, give overnight accommodation, food, help, if necessary, in resolving his personal problems, for the purpose of which the traveller arrived, protect his safety in this territory, protect the honour, life and property of the guest, kunak.

The custom of kunachestvo existed not only among the peoples of the North Caucasus, but also among the Transcaucasian peoples, in particular among Georgians (Rekhvashvili, 1974).

The custom of kunachestvo contributed to the destruction of barriers between the peoples of the Caucasus, as well as to the establishment of friendship and good-neighborliness of the peoples in the Caucasus. Trade and cultural relations between the peoples of the region developed as a result of this custom.

The relations of kunachestvo contributed to the development of economic cooperation. In accordance with this custom, in the old days the border areas of Chechnya and Dagestan gave each other their cattle for grazing. The kunaks were proud of their friendship and passed on the traditions of kunachestvo from generation to generation. Kunachestvo gathered all the best in the relations of ordinary mountaineers (Akhmadov, 2006).

2. Problem Statement

For centuries the peoples of the Caucasus retained the traditions and customs of hospitality and kunachestvo, which were transformed with the changes in socio-economic and socio-living conditions. It should be noted that kunachestvo, like hospitality, was considered and is considered one of the main virtues, which raised friendship to a sufficient height. The culture and etiquette of kunachestvo passed down through generations.

Kunachestvo was and is an excellent folk custom that ensured the safety of inter-ethnic contacts, and contributed to continuous friendship between the representatives of Caucasian peoples. Kunachestvo improved the security of interethnic contacts between individual regions and peoples, the formation of favorable trade and cultural relations, which in no case allow any strife, enmity and misunderstanding. In the event of some conflict situations, the kunaks were responsible for their resolution and attracted to the truce of the parties. All the peoples of the Caucasus developed the customs of kunachestvo, hospitality and friendship with certain features.

Like many peoples of the Caucasus, the Chechens had traditions and customs as regulators of relations between people even under extraordinary circumstances, which served as a kind of a test of morality, spirituality, perseverance. Even such a harsh law as the custom of blood revenge did not exempt from the obligation of respectful treatment of a person, especially a guest or a victim, or a humiliated person in order to spare vanity, not to hurt his human dignity.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study is the Institute of kunachestvo and hospitality, which contributed to the development of cultural, economic and economic cooperation.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to show the role of kunachestvo being one of the humanistic traditions of the peoples of the North Caucasus.

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis included the principles of objectivity, scientificity and historicism, which involve the study of facts and phenomena in all their diversity in the specific historical conditions of their emergence and development.

The study used a comparative historical method. This method considers phenomena and events within the framework of historical reality changing under the influence of time and specific historical conditions.

6. Findings

According to ethnographers, in Chechnya, similar to Dagestan, in the event of a murder for some reason, a person who committed the murder was sent to the kunaks to a remote village away from his blood relatives for some time, until they could agree on reconciliation. It was thought and was actually safe for the murderer. Among the Chechens, like other peoples of the Caucasus, there were often cases when the murderer had to remain in a foreign society forever if reconciliation could not be achieved. Thus, the famous Caucasian scholar, Aglarov (1998) wrote: "...In Andia, you can find the names of immigrants from the Tsudakhar and Akushin societies, and in Gidatl, Akusha and Tsudakhar – Andian surnames" (p. 54). There have been cases when the Chechens were hiding from blood revenge from their kunaks in neighboring Avar jamats or, on the contrary, Avars – in Chechen villages.

The etiquette of hospitality and kunachestvo among all the peoples of the Caucasus was higher than blood revenge. This was also noted by the famous researcher of public life of the mountaineers of the North Caucasus Pozhidaev. He wrote:

He is seeking salvation. If the house is not far away, he hurries to himself, if not – he runs to the nearest courtyard (it is not a problem, if he does not know the owner) and, having come to the owner, hastily talks about his business and asks for protection and patronage. This is a heavy duty of kunachestvo, but it cannot but be fulfilled. Eternal indelible shame would fall on the head of the owner, who did not want to protect the unfortunate person and gave him to the pursuers; and he himself, and his clan would be considered as pestiferous, no one would make friends with him, become related, would avoid business agreements... (Pozhidaev, 1926, p. 47).

Almost all peoples of the Caucasus strictly protected and considered inviolable the dwelling both according to Adat and Shariat.

If anyone is killed in his own hut or in his own yard, the custom charges 12 cows from the guilty for dishonoring the yard (Leontovich, 1882).

It is noteworthy that Chechen folklore reflected the relatively well-developed kunak relations between Chechens and ordinary Cossacks. So, for example, the poem *Akhmad Avturinsky* describes that the Chechen helped his friend – the Terek Cossack from Kizlyar to take out his beloved girl following friendship and kunak relations.

The song *About Terek Young Man* tells of the union of Chechen, Kumyk and Cossack young people who united on the basis of kunak relations, they were able to fight together against the detachment of the tsarist general.

Kunak relations were spread between the peoples of the Caucasus and the Russian population in the Caucasus – the Cossacks.

Caucasian customs of hospitality and kunachestvo contributed to the economic, cultural and political ties of the peoples of the Caucasus.

According to the customs of kunachestvo and hospitality, people engaged in any common business, living in a neighborhood or even unfamiliar to each other, but meeting along the way should and were obliged to provide the necessary assistance to each other, to be faithful like full brother.

Today the traditions of hospitality and kunachestvo are preserved to varying degrees, and their positive aspects are bearing fruit these days.

Time-honored and passing on through generations the customs of hospitality and kunachestvo of the Chechens, like other peoples of the Caucasus, to some extent have become a form of communication, the moral and ethical norm of society and the moral characteristic of the Chechens.

Hospitality and kunachestvo is one of the oldest and most strictly observed customs in the Caucasus. It was widely popular in the historical past among the mountaineers of the Caucasus. The etiquette of hospitality of the peoples of the Caucasus included a fairly large number of rules of conduct.

In the public life of the Chechens hospitality and kunachestvo occupied a significant place, and it was considered the gravest shameful act to violate the sacred duty of hospitality. Hospitality is an expression of the soul of the people, their historical etiquette and humanity, which give both hosts and guests a pleasant feeling of spiritual communication.

Mountain customs of hospitality and kunachestvo organically fit into the system of ethics of interpersonal relations. The Chechens, like all the peoples of the Caucasus, highly appreciated and still appreciate this custom. “Хъауа ца вогълычу беркам ца догълы” – “Where the guest does not come, grace does not come either”, the Chechens said. “Hospitality is considered one of the virtues and is strictly used by everyone”, wrote Ivanov (1851, p. 19).

Chechens at all times respected the customs of hospitality, which included a whole set of rules: from the entrance to the very departure of a guest from home and even the village. According to ancient custom, the house or hearth of each Chechen should be open to anyone who needs shelter, regardless of race, religion, the guest was not only given shelter, food, but also, if necessary, took part in business and was even protected if necessary. “Failure to welcome the guest, to treat him in the most cordial way, and

thereby harm him is considered, and has always been considered the most humiliating and shameful thing. Therefore, the rite of welcoming guests developed from century-old practical experience and gained well-defined forms” (Lilov, 1892, p. 38).

It should be noted that hospitality is nowhere so vividly manifested as in rural life. There were certain rules and a culture of welcoming the guest enshrined in folk tradition, which assigned certain duties not only to adult owners, but also to children. For example, teenage boys had to meet a guest at the gate, address him with appropriate greetings and help him dismount, host in the house, take outerwear, fulfill various instructions and requests of the guest, if any. The fulfillment of such assignments was a kind of courtesy training and verification of respectful attitude towards the elders. According to the peoples of the Caucasus, failure to comply with certain rules for welcoming a guest in the eyes of the rest could turn out to be morally condemned and to some extent flawed in his society if he is not hospitable and welcoming.

Describing the customs of the Adyghe peoples, which are quite similar to the Chechen a specialist in Caucasian studies, a well-known researcher Gardanov (1964) wrote:

A traveler can drive through the whole country not having a bean and will not be detained anywhere, and in every yard where he comes, he will find shelter, bed, and food for himself, stall and feed for his horse... No wealthy traveler can be better served in a European hotel than a guest in a hut. (p. 27)

It is noteworthy that the Pole Tarchinsky, who deserted from the army of tsarist Russia during the First World War, fled to Chechnya and found shelter here. People built a house for him in Goyty village, he married a Chechen woman, who was given to him after he converted to Islam. Until 1966 this hundred-year-old Pole lived in Chechnya and even voluntarily moved with the Chechens to Kazakhstan (Khasbulatova, 2007). The famous Chechen writer Oshaev tells that during the First World War, an Austrian Bruno Plecheke, who later published his work *The Chechens* in German, was captured in tsarist Russia, left for Chechnya and stayed there for several years. In 1926, already a student at a geographical institute in Koenigsberg, he returned broke to the wide and, using local hospitality freely walked around Chechnya and Ingushetia collecting material for his book (Khasbulatova, 2007).

The guest was respected, he was a messenger of something new about the life of another people and about the events happening on a different territory.

The Chechens have a proverb: “You get what you give”. Like many other peoples of the Caucasus, the Chechens for centuries preserved kunak customs passing them on through oral folk art, fairy tales and legends to children, which praised courage in the name of friendship, good, goodness, loyalty, bravery, honesty. The honor and dignity of the kunaks, their loyalty was not determined by belonging to any nation or faith.

The works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy and many other writers who knew well the life and customs of the Chechens and other peoples of the Caucasus reflect the examples of fidelity, peacefulness, friendship, ethics and kunachestvo.

So, for example, Tolstoy, who knew the life of Chechens and Grebensky Cossacks (lived in Starogladovskaya village in 1853–1854), wrote: “Grebensky Cossacks arranged their dwellings in Tatar (meant in Chechen) manner ... Living among the Chechens the great Russian writer wrote: “The Cossacks became relatives with them and learned their customs, lifestyle, morals of the mountaineers” (Tolstoy, 1961, p. 99).

In turn, the Chechens respected the writer himself, who during his stay in the Caucasus often visited Chechen villages, Chechen families, personally knew many mountaineers, through whom he recorded Chechen folklore songs.

The great Russian writer was friends with Sado Miserbiev and other Chechens from Tolstoy Yurt village. About this friendship, he wrote that many times he proved his devotion to me, putting his life in danger because of me, but this does not mean anything to him, it is a custom and pleasure for him. Sado Miserbiev gave Tolstoy a sword, and the Chechens give weapons only to friends. There is a picture of this sword in the Literary Museum named after Tolstoy in Starogladovskaya stanitsa.

The traditions of *kunachestvo* were widespread in the relations between peoples. In the detachments of Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil the Russians and the representatives of other peoples fought next to their *kunaks*. The first condition that the Chechens placed on the Russian authorities that they would not extradite fugitive Russians. Peasant serfs and Cossacks ran to the Chechens during the Caucasian War. They always found shelter and hospitality among the Chechens (Gritsenko, 1961).

Kunachestvo strengthened the existing close economic and cultural ties between neighboring peoples. This custom contributed to the rapprochement of the peoples of the Caucasus. The Chechens had a certain impact on the development of the material culture of Russian immigrants. The Terek Cossacks adopted the form of clothing, types of equipment and weapons from the Chechens. In turn, Russian immigrants had a beneficial influence on the material and spiritual culture of the indigenous population. The influence and mutual burden was so strong that even the cruelest Caucasian war could not interrupt them. Thus, the special order of General Gudovich stated that all soldiers, Cossacks and other people running to the Chechens should not be accepted (Berge, 1869). Accepting all the conditions imposed on them, the Chechens agreed to everything except the extradition of fugitive soldiers and Cossacks, a significant part of which converted to Islam and remained among the Chechens. This process was bilateral. The Chechens escaped from blood revenge in the Cossack villages and created new Cossack surnames. On the contrary, those who did not want to fight against the Chechens crossed the Terek, converted to Islam, started families and became full members of Chechen societies. The relations with the Cossacks contributed to the fact that the Chechens bordering the line were adapted to the Russian system of citizenship and government. The Cossacks borrowed a national costume, some household items, games, dances, musical instruments and even melodies from the Chechens. So, the dance and “*Naurskaya Lezginka*” borrowed from the Chechens spread among the Cossacks, and not only throughout the Terek region. Horse races and competitions in off horse riding skills gained great popularity under the influence of neighbors among the Cossacks.

7. Conclusion

Without a doubt, the custom of hospitality and *kunachestvo* at one time played a positive role in the development of intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations, and in some respects contributed to cultural relations, mutual influence and mutual enrichment of cultures.

Thus, the traditions of hospitality and *kunachestvo*, fidelity to friendship continue even today. Traditional Caucasian hospitality is an expression of the soul of the people, their humanity, which gave both hosts and guests a pleasant feeling of spiritual rapprochement, custom, and in our opinion, contributed to the development of heterogeneous relations between the peoples of the Caucasus with other neighboring and distant peoples of the Caucasus and not only the Caucasus.

In summary, the ideas of Caucasian hospitality and *kunachestvo* served to establish and develop peaceful, friendly and kinship relations between different people, both between close neighbors and between residents of different villages, countries and peoples, regardless of their race, language and religions.

References

- Aglarov, M. A. (1998). *Rural community in Mount Dagestan in the 17th–19th centuries*. Nauka.
- Akhmadov, S. B. (2006). From the history of the development of relations between Chechens and the peoples of the Caucasus and Russia in the past. Nauka.
- Berge, A. P. (1869). *Acts collected by the Caucasian Archaeographic Commission*. Printing house of the Main Directorate of the Viceroy of the Caucasus.
- Gardanov, V. K. (1964). Hospitality, *kunachestvo* and patronage among the Adyghe Circassians in the 18th-first half of the 19th century. *Soviet ethnography*, 1.
- Gritsenko, N. P. (1961). From the history of economic and cultural ties. *Soviet economy*, 1, 41–53.
- Ivanov, I. (1851). *Chechnya*. Muscovite.
- Khasbulatova, Z. I. (2007). *Moral culture of the Chechens “gillakh-ozdangalla”*. Nazran.
- Leontovich, A. I. (1882). *Adats of Caucasian mountaineers*. Printing house of P. A. Zeleny.
- Lilov, A. (1892). *Essays on the life of Caucasian mountaineers*. SMOPK.
- Pozhidaev, V. P. (1926). *Mountaineers of the North Caucasus. Ingush, Chechens, Khevsurs, Ossetians and Kabardians. A short historical and ethnographic essay*. State Publishing House.
- Rekhvashvili, S. I. (1974). *Relations between the mountaineers of Georgia and the North Caucasus in the 19th–20th centuries*. Kerdzob Institute on Ethnographic: [PhD thesis]. Tbilisi.
- Tolstoy, L. N. (1961). *In the Caucasus. In Notes of contemporaries*. Chechen-Ingush Book Publishing House.