

Mechanisms for Preserving the Institution of the Family: National Characteristics



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Abstract: *The formation of family values in the younger generation begins at the earliest stages of personality formation within the family and continues in the socialization process in society. The value system associated with the institution of marriage and the family is transmitted through various channels, ranging from parenting to the virtual environment. The border areas, such as the Astrakhan Region, which are characterized by interfaith marriage unions, are a special environment, in which there are own mechanisms for preserving the institution of the family and special channels for transmitting family values. One of these mechanisms is the reconstruction of the traditional wedding ceremony. Within the framework of the present research, the authors studied archival documents containing information about the traditional wedding ceremonies of the peoples living in the Astrakhan Region. There was also a content analysis of ritual traditions related to the creation of a new family (matchmaking, wedding, etc.), in the reconstruction of which the modern cultural organizations of the region were involved. The research results show that the reconstructed wedding ceremony between partners, when one of them is a representative of another nationality and religion, is a kind of portal, through which the future spouse enters a new cultural environment for him or her and begins his or her adaptation already at the initial stage of creating a family union.*

Keywords: *family, family values, religion, transgression, frontier, reconstruction of wedding ceremony.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The family is the first and, perhaps, the most important stage in the hominization and socialization of a person. The family forms in the person a civil position, promotes awareness of participation with these or those value orientations, principles, and ideas. Getting to know initially the internal culture of the family, expressed in the value awareness of individuals, the younger generation passes to the acquaintance of traditions and foundations at the mesolevel – confessional and ethnic affiliation of family members, eventually mastering the macrolevel – regional and national culture [1]. The formation of proper family traditions, in addition to the usual way of life of the family,

formed by succession from generation to generation, is also associated with the composition and type of the family. These can be traditions formed during the existence of a single nuclear family, or the ones existing for a long time and being the result of socio-cultural intergenerational experience, which is characteristic of a society with a traditional culture [1].

At the same time, being one of the most ancient and seemingly stable social institutions, today's young Russian family is a rather fragile formation that can collapse as soon as it is formed. Modern political and socio-economic transformations, modification of social relations have led to a shift of value orientations in the direction of moving away from traditional sex-role positions in the family, the emergence of alternative forms of the family (guest marriage, voluntary childlessness, etc.).

Taking into account the need to preserve young family unions, based on traditional family values, it is necessary to look for mechanisms that are formed by a multinational society of frontier territories, such as, for example, the Astrakhan Region, located in the Russian territory of the Northern Caspian Sea region. This is a region, in which not only different nationalities peacefully coexist next to each other, but also quite often families are formed, where spouses are representatives of different cultures and religious confessions. Despite the negative trends in Russia, the mixed interethnic marriage unions characteristic of the region persist in spite of sometimes diametrically opposite points of view on issues related to religious and cultural self-determination. This positive experience can be useful for the formation of the concept of protective mechanisms for the frontier family in a multicultural region.

II. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

A. Problem statement

This research is part of a project aimed at studying the main aspects of the influence of religious and cultural transgression on the modern institution of the family, the analysis of the mechanisms for creating family values through the example of the Astrakhan multicultural family institution in a changing frontier situation.

The modern young generation found itself in such a socio-cultural environment, which carries an incomprehensible mixture of scraps of the value system, which was actively promoted in the Soviet Union, but after its collapse lost its relevance, as well as a mixture of new fashionable patterns and behavior models carried by the information culture.

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Realizing that it is unlikely that models, not tested by time, will be effective, young people are increasingly striving for historical sources, getting acquainted with the traditions and customs of their people, finding answers to their questions related to the value system.

B. Research methods

The complexity of the object of research, due to the understanding of the importance of integrating a number of scientific approaches to the problem under study to obtain the most objective results, suggests using an integrated approach in the research [2]. In the framework of the analysis of global social changes, the identification and description of social phenomena that change the value paradigm of young people within the family institution, lead to the need to rely on such fundamental methodological principles as dialectics, system analysis, comparative analysis, and historicism. The cognitive capabilities of the method of comparativistics, hermeneutics, and psychoanalysis are auxiliary, but no less significant for this research. An important tool at the stage of studying the role of reconstruction of traditional wedding ceremonies and rituals was the analysis of scientific publications and archival materials containing information about specific stages and elements of wedding ceremonies in different peoples and faiths.

The collection and analysis of empirical material, containing specific symbols and value markers that are transmitted through individual elements of wedding ceremonies, as well as their content analysis, allowed establishing differences and similarities in ritual traditions, which basically carry the traditional family values, generally recognized in different religions and cultures [3].

III. RESULTS ANALYSIS

The territory of the Astrakhan Region, inhabited by different peoples with their own traditions and customs, is a fertile ground for the emergence of strong interethnic and interfaith ties arising from the entry of representatives of different peoples and cultures into marriage unions. In recent years, it has become fashionable among young people to return to the historical traditions of their people; this is expressed in the desire of young future spouses to conduct a wedding ceremony in accordance with the foundations of a particular people. Sometimes a couple decides to hold a wedding according to the traditions of the people of one of the spouses; sometimes in one wedding ceremony, traditional rituals of two cultures are mixed [4]. Despite significant differences in cultures and religions, wedding ceremonies of different peoples have some similar elements.

Thus, for any people, the process of creating a new young family most often begins with matchmaking; in one form or another there is a bride's ransom, and the ceremony of the bride's entry into the groom's house and the groom's acquaintance with the bride's family are mandatory [5].

A. Matchmaking

In the old days, Kazakh parents wed their children without their knowledge. Before a girl, who was accidentally seen or heard about from friends, was wooed, a Dzhigit's parents sent a man who had to find out everything about the girl, her parents and the state of the household. For official collusion,

the groom's father sent matchmakers, led by his next of kin, to the bride's father's house. Upon reaching agreement on both sides, the agreement was sealed with an oath, and the "Aksakals", respected "elders", blessed the collusion. Then the groom's entourage gave the bride and her family gifts. A treat and a meat dish were served, and this meant that from that time the matchmakers of both sides were bound by God himself. During the matchmaking, and before the end of the ceremony, the bride should not meet matchmakers' eyes from the Dzhigit's side. Then there was the acquaintance of the bride and groom. Having introduced the young, the parties began to prepare for the upcoming wedding [6].

Currently, young Kazakhs marry by mutual consent. The groom's parents gather relatives for a family council and discuss how the matchmaking will take place. The bride's parents at that time are preparing to meet with matchmakers. For this purpose, they cut a ram, prepare different dishes and call guests. On the day of the matchmakers' arrival, future relatives meet at the laid table and discuss the details of the upcoming wedding [7].

Matchmaking among the Tatars could take place in one or two stages: eitteru and syrau. The decision to marry was sealed by a prayer and demonstration of the gifts brought. In the period between the collusion and wedding, each of the parties performed the rite of election of the "invitress to the wedding" – endeu, endeualdy. The intermediate rites are fully expressed at wedding celebrations on the side of the bride, consisting of two parts: women's wedding – khatynnartuye or tugyztuy and groom's evening treats – kiyausy. Guests on the groom's side bring with them gifts, the number of which by tradition should reach nine – tugyz.

The whole rituals for matchmaking were invented and religiously observed everywhere among the Russian peoples. The first thing a young man had to do was getting relatives' consent to the marriage. Only then did the matchmaking itself take place. Customs ordered him to come to the head of the lineage and tell him about his chosen one. Usually, it was reported who she was, where she lived and what her relatives were. Most often, a young man was interested in the appearance and attractiveness of a young woman. His relatives conducted a whole "investigation", finding out whether a girl was worthy of such honor. When consensus was found, matchmakers were chosen. It was a very responsible role. Now, nothing has changed. A young man rarely went to offer himself as a groom (although this happened). More often it was done by his relatives. In some cases – by a godfather or mother, in other ones – by an elder brother, etc. A young man also attended the ceremony but tried not to join in conversations, in order not to spoil the matchmaking. Trusted people on the man's side were obliged to show by appearance and confirm with words his reliability and worthiness. To do this, the people had to dress beautifully, even richly. Customs on the part of the groom suggest bringing gifts to the bride's relatives. The focus, however, should be left to the girl. Customs dictate that the bridegroom should not enter into conversation when he goes to her house. This is considered a bad omen. The girl's parents, if they liked the groom, were obliged to close the door with a hook. This was done so that a casual visitor could not jinx the whole thing. That is, translated into modern language, one can say that some mystery surrounded the matchmaking on the part of the bride.

Customs suggested that her relatives "shut themselves off" from the rest of the world for this short time. The collusion should be carried out in an intimate setting, only among trusted persons. If someone accidentally dropped in, he was boldly and ruthlessly escorted out. Even for protection from the evil eye, it was recommended to touch the leg of the table. This was done so that "happiness would not run away" [8]. Often Russian matchmaking is accompanied by allegorical sayings: "Matchmaker-marriage broker-relatives, not parents are going. The matchmaker covers on her shoulders such a beautiful, rich shawl, and when she rises in the bride's house, she sits down over a beam. The beam is on the ceiling, as in the form of a bar. It is mandatory that the beam lay turned, washed, clean and beautiful. They come in and say, "You know, we've lost a chick. Here we are looking for it, and looking for it and can't find it anywhere. We've passed all herds, all houses; the people have told that it has to be here".

Despite the national characteristics of each of the described matchmaking rituals, it is obvious that its main purpose is not only the acquaintance and rapprochement of relatives on the part of the bride and groom, but also the demonstration of such values as respect for the older generation, the need to take into account the views of parents and older relatives, the continuity of traditions from father to son, from mother to daughter. In each of the rituals, there are gifts for the bride and her parents: this is a way of demonstrating how valuable the bride is as a woman, a future spouse and a keeper of the hearth in the family.

B. Wedding

The Kazakh wedding ceremony consists of two stages. During the first one, *neke kyu*, two daughters-in-law led the bride, taken by the arms, into the wedding yurt and seated next to the groom. The bride's mother poured milk into bowls and dropped two rings into them. Then she asked the groom about the consent to the marriage; having received it, took out a ring, put it on his finger and treated him to milk. After the bride's consent, her mother put the second ring on her finger, and she also drank milk from the wedding bowl. At the end of the wedding on the bride's side, held with abundant treats, singing songs, various games and competitions, the bride, accompanied by her sisters and daughters-in-law, went around all the houses in the neighborhood and said goodbye to everyone. The bride's relatives, as far as possible, gave her gifts: carpets, bracelets, earrings, and rings. She had received her mother's admonition before she left:

"My dove, be a darling in the house of the groom, be respected, you have to get up early. That's when you will justify taking care of you. Dove, such is fate since you were born a girl, you must go to a foreign land".

Next, there is a *bet ashar*. At this time, the groom's relatives are waiting for dear guests and meet them singing wedding songs, scattering sweets and money in front of the guests. Guests entered the groom's wedding yurt in the same sequence as they left the bride's wedding yurt. The bride's face was covered with a shawl and led her away behind a screen. A dowry was also brought in. After numerous acquaintances with new relatives, jokes, singing folk songs, verbal competitions and inspection of the bride's dowry, the bride's mother presented gifts to all the groom's relatives. The groom's mother would then ask permission of the bride's mother to reveal the bride's face. Two daughters-in-law brought the bride to the guests, put her on a pre-prepared white ram skin, with the wish that the young one would be of

an accommodating nature. To the fringe of the shawl, behind which the bride's face was hidden, a *kamcha* was tied. In the middle of the yurt, a *dombra* player sat, who was allocated the role to acquaint the young with the numerous groom's relatives and to give her instructions and wishes from them. At each acquaintance with the groom's relatives, the *dombra* player waved his whip, and the bride bowed, kneeling to the relative with whom the *dombrist* introduced her. The *dombrist* introduced her not with dry enumerations but composed a song about each.

Among the Yurt Tatars, the central place in the wedding ceremony is given to the religious rite of marriage – *nikah*. The wedding ceremonies on the groom's side, as well as on the bride's side, included two stages: women's wedding – *khatynnartue* with the rite of "opening the face" – *bit kurem*, and the evening one, paired – *parly*. The rites of the second day, reinforcing the new status of the bride, include the rite of "daughter-in-law's tea" – *kilen/Kelen* tea. Special attention was paid to taking the dowry away. At the groom's house, the horses were dressed up: the bright ribbons were tied on the mane, the bells were hung, the horses' shins were wrapped with white ribbons. The carts, on which the matchmakers sat, were prepared and decorated. The procession went to the bride's house, accompanied by merry games. The matchmakers on the part of the bride and groom threw a pillow each: who first sat on the pillow that side ruled in the family. Nowadays, carts have given way to cars. However, taking away the dowry is one of the funniest moments of the wedding action. In the doorway of the bride's house, there are jokes: "the narrow door – the furniture does not enter"! An attire ritual was called *oh kienderu* – "dressing the house".

In the Russian tradition, the central rite at the wedding is a "binge": "On the next day or a week after the matchmaking, the groom's relatives go to the bride. There is already a laid table. They sit at the table; the bride and the groom do not sit at the table. They are in the bedroom or sit somewhere. Still here, parents will agree, then bring them, put them at the table and ask the groom: "Well, do you like her? You take her?" – "I take". – "Are you marrying him? Well, of course, it was a shame, the heads were lowered: "I'm marrying him". The parents ask at once: "Will you call parents "mom-dad"? Right there a couple started calling: "Mom, dad, godmother, godfather". The bride and the groom then sit down at the table. The bridegroom's relatives announce: "Let's go to us now, to the bridegroom". They go out and sing a song: "Dark autumn night". They go in such a way at least from one edge of the village to another one, end this one song and start singing it again" [9].

Each described wedding ceremony has its own features, symbolism characteristic of the given religion and culture, but they all boil down to emphasizing the significance, importance, even a certain sacredness of the marriage process, which has a deep religious meaning. Each element of the wedding ritual is aimed at showing the future spouses that this is a serious, landmark stage in a person's life, the transition to adulthood, requiring everyone to take special responsibility for the life and happiness of the other. This places a sacred responsibility on the man (the worthy of his ancestors functions of the bearer of the family name, head, master, protector of his family and a worthy member of the whole community) and the woman (cleanliness, beauty, health,

functions of the bearer of the family name, hard-working, modest, caring hostess, capable of humility and patience, to honor not only her father and mother, but now most of all – husband and her new relatives).

The whole wedding ceremony is permeated by the idea of joy of life, combined with the idea of self-sacrifice (fun, jokes, observance of prohibitions, special rules and regulations, multiple mutual gifts on behalf of the groom, bride, their parents, relatives, friends and girlfriends). The apparent utilitarianism of many elements of the wedding ceremony (dowry, ransoms, gifts, begging for money, etc.), in addition to the goal of ensuring a well-fed and rich life of the young, also has a symbolic meaning of sacrifice in the name of life, its prosperous and happy continuation. Everybody "gives each other" – tries to ensure the future life of the new couple as best as possible, but also requires them to respond – a sign of gratitude [10].

IV. CONCLUSION

In any culture, the wedding has always been considered the most important stage of a person's life, which everyone had to go through. The modern Russian wedding is often reduced to registration in the Wedding Palace and a festive feast with invited guests. Although more and more marriage ceremonies have recently been accompanied by religious rites, the wedding itself has lost much of its sacred ritualism. "The participants in the wedding ceremony have become a whole village, or even two if the groom and bride were from different villages. The wedding was not just celebrated, it was played, episode by episode... Each participant in the ceremony knew his/her "role", tried to perform it as accurately as possible..." [11]. A certain measure of theatricality and entertainment inherent to the wedding is only its outer side since there was a deep sacred meaning behind each action.

Today, if young people aspire to ensure this theatricality, they often do it not so much because of the desire to study and feel the traditions and customs of their culture or the culture of the future spouse, if he or she is a representative of another people, as they want to make this important event in their lives a bright, unusual and memorable holiday. As a result, when young people turn to the reconstruction of the national wedding ceremony, they, without delving into the meaning of the ceremony sacrament, seek to capture the process on video and photos, reducing the whole ceremony to the fact that it later just becomes an occasion for vivid memories, a set of original video series and interesting photos that are published in social networks. Moreover, currently the wedding ceremony is not reproduced and, often, purely technically cannot be reproduced in full. There is an obvious gap between the accumulated ethnographic material, its theoretical understanding and the low level of practical application and, moreover, awareness of its sacred significance. "...The wedding ceremony in its traditional and current state is directly related to the problems that we designate today as problems of family and marriage..." [12].

In order for the reconstructed wedding ceremony not to become a fashion trend among young people, it is very important not just to recreate the traditional elements of the wedding ceremony in the form, in which they are represented by historical and archival documents, but it is necessary to

convey the meaning of the symbols present in the ceremony. This is a task not only for the organizers of such events but also a duty of senior family members, who are originally carriers of those traditional family values that transmit wedding ceremonies.

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