Self-Identification in Mixed Ethnic Family

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Abstract

The article analyzes self-identification processes in mixed ethnic families. Despite the existing opinion that ethnic meaning of many social phenomena gradually disappears from the social context, ethnic identity and self-identification still play a significant role in the organization of everyday life, in the interaction of various social groups. The problem of ethnic identity is manifested in various spheres of human life, including the sphere of family and family relations. On the one hand, in mixed ethnic families, parents can translate the originality of different cultures, traditions, and values to children. On the other hand, some may form ethnic hostility, self-isolation, fears and concerns in them. Moreover, a mixed ethnic family is able to form ethnic marginality among its members. The results of the authors' sociological research led to the conclusion about the specific identity of children in mixed ethnic families living in Russia, where one of the parents is Russian.

Keywords: Descendants; Ethnic identity; Ethnic marginality; Inter-ethnic marriage; Self-identity.

1. Introduction

For a long time, it was widely believed that the significance of ethnic identity in people's lives would slowly decline. This was due to several reasons: globalization, blurring the boundaries between cultures, unification of lifestyles, development of personal intelligence, etc. However, the ethnic factor in the modern world still retains its role, there is an ethnic revival. According to D.K. Tanatova, “Ethnic phenomena, one way or another, relate to almost all aspects of human life and society, including culture, economics, politics, interpersonal, intergroup and international relations” [1, p. 13]. This is because ethnicity creates the space for expressing one's own uniqueness. The phenomenon manifested itself already in the last decade of the 20th century, primarily in the growth of both ethnic and religious identities. People still strive to preserve their ethnocultural heritage. These processes affect Russia as well.

In particular, the results of a number of studies indicate the increase in the number of inter-ethnic marriages and families. Such families are an important resource of inter-ethnic harmony, cross-cultural contact. Family is a keeper and translator of ethnocultural values, it has great influence on the formation of ethnic identity, the behavior of younger generations. There are global trends that contribute to the growth in the number of inter-ethnic marriages in the world:

1. Active development of migration processes that affect the ethnic structure of the population and inter-ethnic marriages;
2. Development of international labor market;
3. Development of international marriage agencies [2].

The ethnicity of spouses, which refers to the historically established stable set of people who share common features and characteristics of their culture, expresses the social essence of interethnic unions.

The appearance of children in such marriages turns this union into an ethnically mixed family. The inter-ethnic family “is a special type of family since the spouses in it are members of different ethnic groups” [3]. Its important characteristics are:

1. Ethnic composition of the family. In ethnically mixed families, it is important which parent belongs to the ethnic majority. This is due to the fact that the husband and the wife have a different degree of influence on the definition of the language of intra-family communication, choice of education language of children, choice of names for children, etc. Most often the husband has more influence.
2. The language of interfamily communication. Saving the native language in a foreign language environment is possible when the family uses different languages in their communication and in the social environment. Most often, ethnic and linguistic identities are interrelated.
3. Size of the family. In a multi-generation family, the native language and culture are more often preserved.
4. Religion and degree of religiosity of the family members. If the family differs from the ethnic majority not only in language but also in religion, the probability of preserving the conscious ethnic identity will be greater.
5. The level of education of parents and children. The higher the social status of the individual, the more homogeneous language environment surrounds him/her.
6. Occupation, profession of the family members. Knowledge of language of the ethnic majority is necessary when possession gives advantages in obtaining an education, career development, etc. Ethnic entrepreneurship helps to preserve ethnic identity because the workforce consists of members of an ethnic minority, and communication often occurs in the native language.
7. Housing conditions. Living conditions have an impact on the preservation of certain ethnocultural practices. Features of formation of culture leave their mark on the nature of communication in inter-ethnic families. There are two types of communication: democratic and authoritarian. The first type is characterized by family lifestyle, which is based on selective as-
that depend on ethnic groups, connecting in marriage, local ethnic norms of intra-family communication. However, it is possible to identify common features for mixed ethnic families:

1. All inter-ethnic families are based on the intersection of cultures.

2. In such families, life is bicultural, and sometimes multicultural in nature while preserving ethnic specificity.

3. The level of detail is at the intermediate level of ethnicity, to which the parents belong themselves [6].

4. Usually, such families are characterized by bilingualism, which is caused by objective and subjective factors. The first group includes the place of residence and a certain ethnic microenvironment, the second group includes preferences for use of a particular language by adult family members and targeted influence of their relatives. It should be noted that changes in the language sphere also affect the transformation of ethnic identity.

All these factors serve as a good basis for the formation of ethnic marginality among descendants from ethnically mixed families. Ethnic marginality is observed among people from inter-ethnic families and members of ethnic minorities who live in the different ethnic environment.

The ethnic marginality refers to people who are on the verge of two ethnic cultures and participate in the interaction of these cultures: it is most characteristic of the initial stages of acculturation and assimilation [12]. For the first time, this term was used by the American sociologist Robert Ezra Park in his essay “Human Migration and the Marginal Man” in 1928. By a marginal person, he means an individual who is on the border of two different, sometimes conflicting cultures. Marginal personality arises from the natural cultural process that expands the interaction of cultures. Marginality is a side effect of acculturation product, the process of the impact of 2 cultures on each other. Marginal personality exists in two worlds at the same time, therefore, it accepts the values and norms of both worlds [13] . Everett Stonequist continued to develop the ideas of Park and published the monograph “The Marginal Man” in 1937. In this paper, a marginal person is represented as a social subject who participates in a cultural conflict. Such an individual is located on the edge of each of the cultures but does not belong to any of them. The marginal environment is an area of intertwining of two cultures, as well as a space for combining the characteristics of two cultures [14].

The ethnically marginalized people are those who in the process of socialization have not learned the values of any of the ethnic groups and are the most active agents structuring the ethnic group. However, T.G. Stefanenko believes that a person with specific ethnic origin can also be attributed to ethnic marginals if he/she does not want to learn certain cultural norms or behaves in accordance with other sociocultural standards [15, p. 96]. A.S. Kim studied ethnic marginalization, by which he understood the process of losing objective belonging to an ethnic community, the result of which is superficial possession of external forms of culture without penetrating into the ethnic mentality. The author distinguishes ethnic marginality as a state and ethnic marginalization as a process [16, p. 159].

Such individuals may feel inequality of social status of cultures; they are aware of their incomplete joining to the higher status in culture and incomplete break from the initial lower one. Therefore, many ethnic marginal groups are part of nationalist movements and participate in ethnic conflicts. However, it is worth noting that high creative potential is characteristic of marginal mental personality type; therefore, such people often become leaders of ethnic groups, national movements, prominent cultural figures, etc.

2. Methods

The research part is aimed at studying respondents’ ethnic identity, which in extreme cases can manifest itself in the form of ethnic marginality. The time of the study: April 2018. The geographic of the survey: Moscow, Russia. The economic development of the Russian capital attracts the largest number of labor migrants, which contributes to the maximum ethnic diversity, hence a significant number of inter-ethnic marriages and families compared to other regions.
Sampling was of multistage character. The main ethnic groups of Moscow were investigated at the first stage. According to All-Russian population census in 2010, the main ethnic groups living in Moscow were singled out: Ukrainians (154,104 persons), Tatars (149,043 persons), Armenians (106,466 persons), Azerbaijanis (57,123 persons), Jews (53,145 persons), Belarusians (39,225 persons), Georgians (38,934 persons) (Results of All-Russian population census of 2010, 2018). There is a reason to assume that with the representatives of these ethnic groups Russians more often enter inter-ethnic marriages. The second stage was the selection of respondents born in these inter-ethnic families. Online survey method and in-depth interview method were used. The online survey included 313 respondents, descendants from inter-ethnic families over 18 years old, living in Moscow. By gender, the distribution of respondents was almost uniform (47% men, 53% women). Seven people participated in the interview with a certain selection criterion: one of the parents belongs to the Russian ethnic group, and the second parent could belong to the following ethnic groups: Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Belarusians, Georgians, Jews, Tatars or Ukrainians. Duration of the interview: 25-30 minutes.

3. Results

The common history, common sources of development for many centuries left a special imprint on the cultural traditions of Russia. Islam together with Christianity made a significant contribution to the formation of Russian civilization [17, p. 71]. Today, the formation of the ethnic identity of children is influenced by the religious affiliation of parents. Most respondents indicated that their parents (71.9%) profess Orthodoxy. Respondents whose parents do not profess any religion are much fewer in number (22%). The formation of ethnic identity is influenced by all family members who live with their descendants in the same apartment. The majority of respondents live in nuclear families (with parents 95.2%) (Figure 2). Most of the relatives belong to Russian (71%) and Ukrainian ethnic groups (32.3%). In most ethnic families, Russian culture prevails (69.6%) (Figure 1).

Most respondents noted that there was no ethnic education in their family (59.1%). However, in families, ethnic culture translates from older family members to the younger ones (Figure 2).

**Fig. 1: Distribution of answers to the question “What culture prevails in your family?”, (%)**

**Fig. 2: Distribution of answers to the question “Was there ethnic education from the parents”?, (%)**

Among the ways of translating elements of ethnic culture, respondents noted the following: visiting the homeland of one of the parents (73.5%), preparing national dishes in the family (46.1%), celebrating national holidays (68.7%), using the parent’s language in the family (58.6%). Among the ways of inculcating ethnic culture, ethnocultural events are less common (40.6%), as well as the use of national clothing (10.2%) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Distribution of answers to the question “Please, mark whether the listed elements of ethnic culture were used in your education”? (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of transferring culture</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit to the motherland of the parent</td>
<td>73.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National cuisine</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National holidays</td>
<td>68.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent language</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Folk Art</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the native country of the parent</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions and customs</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethno-cultural events</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National clothes</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethnic identification is sometimes formed on the basis of a person’s native language. However, in the inter-ethnic family, this indicator for parents is reflected not only in interfamily communication but also in the knowledge of another language by descendants. The absolute majority of respondents (98.4%) know Russian. It is followed by Ukrainian (22%) and Tatar (11.2%) languages. The lowest knowledge is observed in Hebrew (2.6%) and Azerbaijani (1.9%) (Figure 3).

**Fig. 3: Distribution of answers to the question “What languages do you know? (There are several possible answers)”, (%)**

The high level of knowledge of the ethnic language is observed among the respondents (35% speak fluently; 42.7% know the language at the household level) (Figure 4).
The majority of respondents have a stable ethnic identity (75.4%). Ethnicity increased with the family (47.6%), with relatives (45.7%). It is in the family that ethnocultural values are laid down among younger generations in the course of ethnic socialization. However, the process of formation of ethnic identity among descendants from inter-ethnic families can be difficult because parents belong to different ethnic groups and transfer different cultural traditions. Ethnic education in the family greatly influences the ethnic identity of an individual. If in childhood, an individual did not assimilate the cultural characteristics of any of the cultures, the formation of ethnic marginality is possible. Ethnic marginality prevents the assimilation of values, denying each of the cultures.

5. Conclusions

Summarizing the findings, the author can conclude that most of the descendants from inter-ethnic families consider themselves Russians. This is facilitated by the predominance of the following elements: Orthodoxy; the Russian language; common traditions and values; Russian culture, as well as the lack of ethnic education in the family. In many families, joint decision making prevails, it contributes to the equal status of cultures. The predominance of the nuclear type of families indicates that communication with relatives is irregular, and assimilation of ethnic culture often occurs in the homeland of one of the parents. The ethnicity of parents and their native language do not always coincide, the predominance of the Russian language is observed, in which communication in the family most often takes place. There is a predominance of Russian culture, and ethnic is represented mainly by individual elements: cuisine, visiting the homeland of one of the parents, holidays and language. State and family holidays are celebrated, general traditions and values are accepted. Most identify themselves as Russians, and ethnic marginality is manifested in a small proportion of respondents, which indicates that there is no logical explanation for this phenomenon.

Among the identifying signs, the majority of respondents noted the following: knowledge of the language (74.4%), consanguinity (69%), observance of traditions and customs (59.1%). The main idea of many scholars and experts is confirmed that the assimilation of culture mainly takes place with the help of language.

The ethnic identity of descendants from inter-ethnic families can be changeable depending on the situation. Among the respondents, ethnicity increased with the family (47.6%), with relatives (45.7%) and when visiting the parent's ethnic homeland (48.9%). However, the majority of respondents have a stable ethnic identity (75.4%).
Russian ethnics, however, there were descendants from inter-ethnic families who had ideas about both cultures: “No, because I clearly understand that I belong to two ethnic groups not only by blood but also by world perception. In both cultures, there is something that I like, and something that I don’t”.

Only one respondent noted that it is quite difficult for her to correlate herself with certain ethnics. It was a girl from the Russian-Tatar family: “It is difficult to answer unequivocally. Probably more Russian, because the Russian language, cuisine and traditions prevail in the family, but Tatar blood also flows in me, but I don’t really know anything about Tatar culture. In Russia, it is considered to determine nationality by father; in my family, dad is Russian, probably I am Russian. I also have not chosen the religion. Mom took me to the mosque a couple of times, I was in the church a couple of times too. But I still cannot choose which religion to profess.”

References

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