

MIGRATION AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

**ENDEMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF
ETHNOCULTURAL INTEGRATION OF
THE NORTH CAUCASIANS
IN MODERN FRANCE**

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ABSTRACT

In the 1990s-2010s, a considerable number of people from the Northern Caucasus emigrated from Russia to Europe, mainly Chechens, mostly for political (Chechen wars) and economic reasons. The article is devoted to the specifics of their ethnocultural integration in modern France. The work is done on the basis of materials obtained by the author's own ethnographic field research conducted in 2015-2016, and is the first trial in the development of the

given scientific direction. Examined are: getting work in the new country, learning the language, attitudes regarding French laws, culture and society, formation of the Turkish and North Caucasian people's milieu in France.

Examined are the changes in the cultural life-supporting functions and socionormative (weddings and burials) traditions. With regard to the North Caucasian migrants of the first post-Soviet wave it is possible to

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speak of the process of adaptation, whereas their children can already be partly viewed | *as undergoing assimilation, in any case, some typical characteristics are obvious.*

KEYWORDS: *the Northern Caucasus, Islam, folk traditions, France, laws, family, emigration, the French language, the Russian language, Turkish Circassians.*

Introduction

In the 1990s-2010s, the emigration from Russia to Europe involved a significant number of North Caucasians, mainly Chechens, generally for political (Chechen wars) and economic reasons. In the given article, prepared on the basis of materials, collected by personally conducted ethnographic field studies, we will look at the special features of integration of the people of the North Caucasian diaspora into the modern French society. The proposed work is the first trial in the development of this particular scientific direction.¹

The age of migrants. The contemporary North Caucasian diaspora includes three groups of migrants:

- first, young men aged 25 to 35 years,
- second, young families, which frequently come with small children, less frequently with adolescents,
- third, women with children—widows of those who lost their lives in the course of the Chechen wars.

The North Caucasian elderly, who could pass on people's traditions, are virtually absent: it is a rare family which lives with older relatives. As a rule, parents of emigrants remain in their home country or have already died (or were killed). Young emigrants, arriving in France, actively bear children (even if they have already come with children), therefore, to date, many North Caucasians were already born in France. The social situation of immigrants is diverse.

Marriages. Generally, young men and women consummate marriages with representatives of their own nationality (if one comes to France unmarried). The search for brides and grooms is quite a complex task and an important part of life for the North Caucasian immigrants. The Internet is often used for this purpose, or brides are brought from the Homeland.² Sometimes the people of the Northern Caucasus find spouses among the Turkish Circassians, South Ossetians and Abkhazians—the descendants of those who voluntarily resettled in or were exiled to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th-the beginning of the 20th centuries and are currently residing in France.³ There are French-North Caucasian marriages as well: Chechen women marrying Frenchmen and Adighe men marrying French women.⁴

¹ See: I.L. Babich, "Sotsiokulturnye i politiko-pravovye aspekty adaptatsii kavkazskikh musulman v sovremennoi Evrope," *Sotsiodinamika*, No. 1, 2015.

² The author's field materials, 2015 (further—FM, 2015).

³ See: V.O. Bobrovnikov, I.L. Babich, "Mukhadzhirstvo i russkaia kolonizatsiia," in: *Severnii Kavkaz v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii*, Moscow, 2007, pp. 155-182.

⁴ The author's field materials, 2016 (further—FM, 2016).

Mastering the French Language. The Preservation of the Russian and National Languages

One of the main components of the adaptation to life in another country for an immigrant is learning that country's language. Most of the North Caucasian migrants coming to France do not speak French. We are aware of only isolated cases of the proficiency in the French language by representatives of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus. For the majority of the North Caucasian immigrants the study of the French language is one of the priorities. For all immigrants in France there are French language courses available that are enthusiastically attended by the North Caucasian immigrants. As was told by one Kabardian woman, who had received a higher education in Russia, she immediately realized that language can be mastered faster if one gets a job. She did everything possible to obtain it. And learned the language perfectly. She began to understand spoken language just after two months. She says: "For me, knowledge of the language provides the feeling of comfort,"⁵ that is, the North Caucasians are well aware of the role and value of knowing the French language. However, there are immigrants with poor knowledge of the French language, who, as a rule, do not work or study.

The age of immigrants is one of the factors that are essential to the successful learning of a new language. The easiest adoption of a new language is accomplished by children of 4 to 5 years old, while the most difficult seems to be by adolescents. The adaptation of children, indeed, starts at 5 years—the age, when all children born in France must start attending school. By Russian standards, this age belongs in the last stages of a kindergarten, but in France it has the designation of a school and, although the attendance in a French kindergarten is not mandatory, the school attendance is compulsory. In this primary school, children are taught the French language, mathematics, etc. As soon as the children start to attend the French school, they quickly get immersed in the language: after a few years, siblings start communicating in French. Sometimes parents have to seek help from their children to resolve issues with the French authorities in the French language.⁶ Children of immigrants successfully graduate from French schools, choose universities to obtain higher education. As a rule, by the time they are 16-17 years old, they know several languages and for them language barriers do not exist. Much of this depends on the willingness of the parents to provide their children with a good education.⁷ For example, an adolescent girl from an Adighe family from Kabarda knows six languages: Kabardian, Russian, French, English, German, and Spanish. She arrived in France when she was four years old. In the city of Baksan (Kabardino-Balkaria), she went to the nursery when she was not even two months old. The family all spoke Kabardian, and she learned the language. In a nursery and kindergarten Russian was spoken, and she mastered it as well. In a French kindergarten and school, she mastered the French language. Other languages are also taught in schools. Currently, this girl is studying at the University of Strasbourg.

Another example. Two children of the Chechen woman, M., are receiving higher education in France. Chechen N., having learnt the French language thanks to his mother, who was a teacher of the French language in Russia, received an excellent education in Paris, having graduated from the Paris Institute of Political Studies (also called "Sciences Po"). As told by French teachers, the North Caucasians are currently attending universities in Brittany, Toulouse, Normandy. Among them there

⁵ FM, 2015.

⁶ See: A. Chleimikov, *Les particularités de la société traditionnelle tchéchène. Identité tchéchène. Master d'Ethnologie*, Nanter, 2008 (manuscript).

⁷ FM, 2015; FM, 2016.

are many Chechens, including girls. But many North Caucasians, after finishing school, do not continue their studies.⁸

Here is another example: A Chechen family with four children. The oldest boy, Yu., immediately began to work: to repair roads together with Portuguese crew. Subsequently, he received his higher education in France and became an architect. Interesting is the fate of one other Chechen boy, A. When he lived with his parents in a hostel for refugees, it was visited by an elderly Frenchman. He spoke with adolescents, taught them the French language. The boy began to communicate with him. The man had a beneficial influence on him: A. graduated from the French school with distinction and is currently a graduate student in a Medical Institute.

Note that the Russian language performs multiple functions and remains a valuable and important attribute in the life of the French emigration.

- First, all the North Caucasian immigrants in France watch Russian television in Russian.
- Second, for communicating, representatives of the middle-aged generation of the North Caucasians use the Russian language.
- Third, at home, within a family and with relatives, the North Caucasians often speak their native language, but sometimes Russian also.

For example, the Chechens speak the Chechen language, but frequently may be unable to read or write it.⁹ Therefore, many far-sighted North Caucasian families in France try to teach their children not only their native and French languages, but also Russian, considering that, since the Northern Caucasus is a part of the Russian Federation, and the Russian language is the state language in Russia, it is necessary to be proficient in it as well. A respondent said to us: “If you go to Russia, it is not possible to accomplish anything with only the Kabardian language.”¹⁰ Sometimes, the North Caucasian parents in France enroll their children in “Russian” schools, i.e. in schools where Russian is taught as a foreign language. For example, a Frenchwoman—teacher of the Russian language in the prestigious Orsay (suburb of Paris) lyceum said that Orsay is home to a scientific community and a Lyceum, in which 170 pupils are taught the Russian language: among them there are a number of Chechens.¹¹

Public Organizations of the North Caucasians

In France, most North Caucasians live their lives in the customary way, not getting involved in politics. But there are also those, for whom political activity has become an integral part of their life. In 1999, the Committee of Chechnia (Comité Tchetchenie), a human rights organization (of an anti-Russian orientation), was established in France. On the site of the Organization (in French), the purpose of its activities is described as follows: “The Committee, created in Paris in October 1999, has set for itself the objective of mobilizing public opinion to push the French Government and international organizations to take measures to end the war in Chechnia and to participate in the reconstruction of the Republic.” The Committee holds monthly meetings in Paris, in the International Center of Culture of the Amnesty International organization. The Committee is engaged in organizing

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ FM, 2016.

¹⁰ FM, 2015.

¹¹ FM, 2016.

various events dedicated to the Chechen culture. Currently, the main goal of the Committee is to render assistance to Chechen refugees arriving in France.¹²

Since its inception in 2014, the cultural and educational center Bart of the French Association of Vainakh People (Ayndi Akhmadovich Magomadov, President), has been pursuing its main goal of promoting cohesion and solidarity among Vainakhs living in France.¹³ The priority areas in the activities of the Center are the establishment of the national schools, courses in the French language, national crafts, providing legal assistance to new refugees, assistance in finding work, organization of funerals back home. In France, there also exists a Franco-Chechen organization, named Serlo (in Chechen it means “light”), whose aim is to “show the European public that not all Chechens are ‘sinister Islamists’.” It is composed of 11 persons (six Chechens and five French). The Association organizes poetry, dance, art, and music workshops for the North Caucasian emigrants. There are other national associations in France, for example, the Ossetian Association (established in 1982, Paris), headed by Lora Janaeva, Franco-Ingush Association of the Lorraine Region (France), headed by Isa Bokov, Ingush Cultural Center (Provence-Alps-Azure Coast) headed by Savarbek Khamat-khanov, etc. The Associations seeks to unite their people in France, maintain their culture, language, and identity.

Getting Work as a Way to Adapt to Life in France

It seems that the mechanisms of adaptation of the North Caucasians in France are different, that there is no single criterion by which it can be argued that one immigrant was able to “adapt,” while the other did not. Ways to adapt are very diverse. But, of course, the important, if not determining factor of adaptation, after learning the French language, is to get a steady employment in the new country. It is worth mentioning that there are exceptional situations, when the North Caucasians acquire interesting professions in France. Chechen N., who graduated from the Institute of Political Studies, works in a French Bank.¹⁴ Ingush woman N. defended her doctoral thesis in the field of Philology, and works in the Mitterrand National Library. Many Ingush, who received higher education in Russia or in France, have prestigious jobs: oculist, educational officer, head instructor in a judo dojo, a deputy member of the local Parliament in Lorraine (Miriam Sagrafena), chef in Cannes, housing manager in Lorraine. These are cases where the North Caucasian intelligentsia reveals its potential in France.

Those who emigrate and apply for French citizenship, begin to live in France, receive government assistance, and attend the French language courses. That is why at first not all of the immigrants look for work. Sometimes this “idleness” gets prolonged. In principle, the allowance obtained from the French authorities provides sufficient means to live on, especially if a family has many children—the government doles out assistance for each child. And that is how some Chechen families live. In the meantime, we communicated with Chechen, Ossetian, Ingush and Adighe immigrants who were eager to work, were distressed if there was no work and tried their utmost to get it. As aptly said by one respondent: “If you want to adapt to living in France, it is essential to work. *Work is a way of adaptation.*” At first, all refugees get help finding work from social workers of the Refugees and

¹² See: A. Chleynikov, op. cit.; L. Vinatier, *Tchéchènes : une diaspora en guerre*, Pétra, Paris, 2013.

¹³ [<http://bart-tchetchene.fr/>].

¹⁴ FM, 2016.

Migration Service. Many North Caucasians got jobs thanks to this service.¹⁵ Later, immigrants get assistance from various other social services, such as the Employment Service, for example.

Certainly, the North Caucasian immigrants themselves are aware that it is better to work for a French company, but it doesn't always work out. For example, for the Adighe it is easier to find work with the Turkish Circassians, of whom there are many in France. In general, the Turkish Circassians willingly employ the Adighe from the Northern Caucasus, although the North Caucasians do see differences between a Turkish and French companies: the latter is better, because the French comply with the laws, including labor regulations.

Modern North Caucasians often work in "garages" (in Russia, they are called car services),¹⁶ sometimes buying such garages to hold in private ownership. North Caucasians willingly work in construction and repair businesses. Typical of the North Caucasian peoples is the entrepreneurial streak, which they exercise even as immigrants. Even in France they try to establish a business. One Chechen woman, Zh., owns a company for the manufacture of tourist souvenirs. Russian and Turkish North Caucasians often run restaurants; an Abkhaz woman, D.D., has been running a Turkish restaurant for 17 years already.¹⁷

Adaptation of the North Caucasians and the French Laws

Adaptation to living in a different country is, first and foremost, contingent on the recognition of that country's laws. This is true with respect to France, where the law is many centuries old and is the cornerstone of the government. Emigrants almost immediately are faced with French laws when they prepare their documents for obtaining a residence permits or attempt to obtain work. This is a fairly complex process for a newcomer wishing to start a life in France.¹⁸ So, the main factor for the North Caucasian emigrants wishing to assimilate is the desire to respect the laws of the country. However, at present, France itself is experiencing the changing of citizens' attitudes toward the laws, with the credibility of the state and authorities largely weakened. An important factor is that the North Caucasians, living in the Northern Caucasus, have not been brought up to respect the law as such, since the people in the region, despite the Soviet power, mostly continued to live under the adat (common) law, legal customs, regulating many aspects of their lives. Among the members of the North Caucasian community there are a few who obtain subsistence in violation of the laws, for example, by illegally renting the social housing, which is provided by the French State, and live on that money without working anywhere officially. For them no legal adaptation is even feasible. Others, however, abide by the laws, realize that, unlike the Northern Caucasus (and the whole of Russia, in general), in France one can live relying on the laws alone, without seeking influential connections and resorting to corruption.¹⁹ Nevertheless, life in Europe lends itself to opportunities for committing certain crimes, which in Russia are harder to perpetrate. For example, in Europe homes are easier to access and therefore easier to rob, etc. Also, laws are being gradually undermined by the efforts of Muslims in France, who are trying to legitimize certain rules of the Shari'a.

¹⁵ FM, 2015; FM, 2016.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ FM, 2015.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

French Environment, French Culture, French Lifestyle

Often, migrants like France, but don't like the French and their way of life. "France is beautiful, the French are terrible"—this is, unfortunately, the sentiment expressed by expatriates from all over the world. The problem of the renunciation of the French way of life partly exists for all immigrants, including the North Caucasians.

What does it mean to live a French life? It means to go to restaurants, visit the French, have them pay a visit, have a "taste for the French lifestyle" (i.e. enjoy French food, communicate and speak the French language). The French have a penchant for elevating aesthetics and are, therefore, given to the inclination of deprecating and criticizing objects, thoughts, architecture, etc. which, in their opinion, lack in aesthetics. The famous *savoir vivre* and *art de vivre*, considered to be typical of the French character, are certainly not without cause: leisure, its planning and discussion of this topic is an integral and important part of every French man or woman.²⁰

One of the important criteria of adaptation for the North Caucasians to life in France is having French friends or, at least, acquaintances, i.e. the presence of French "milieu." It is not so easy to accomplish. With all its affability, the French society is "stratified" and in many ways "closed." In the process of adaptation, of course, a great role belongs to obtaining employment in a French company, as well as the psychological make up of a person applying for work (extraverts are, of course, more amenable to establishing contacts than the introverts). Note that the process of assimilation for the North Caucasians into the French society is in many ways similar to that established for all migrants, including Russians.²¹

Do the North Caucasians accept the French lifestyle? Some more so, some less. There are Chechens, who visit restaurants or cafes to meet with acquaintances or friends.²² As was told to us, at first it was hard to accept the French custom of eating at set times: lunch from 12 to 14, dinner from 19 to 21.²³

Note that there is a difference between being familiar with the French culture and the adaptation to it. To adapt, an emigrant is certainly not obligated to have an implicit knowledge of the French culture, just some rudimentary understanding in order to maintain a conversation. A typical conversation with the French revolves around children, cars, jobs, and politics. The French possesses a good quality—curiosity. They are sincerely interested in the lives of others, always inquiring the North Caucasians about their life, culture, traditions, food, etc., request to show photos. For immigrants, this creates a favorable psychological climate. The French are characterized by civility, which is also a part of the North Caucasian etiquette.

The emigrants from the Northern Caucasus get acquainted with the French Alps, downhill skiing, bicycling, using swimming pools, etc.,—not a popular time spending back home. Group sports (or simply an active lifestyle) is not considered an important factor in the lives of the North Caucasians at all. This, of course, is the influence of the French society. The French, according to the North Caucasians, are dynamic people and the mountaineers try not to be outdone.²⁴

Travel is not a significant component of the North Caucasian people, and therefore, when the emigrants from the Northern Caucasus are beginning to live in France, partly due to financial con-

²⁰ FM, 2016.

²¹ FM, 2015.

²² See: A. Chleynikov, op. cit.; FM, 2015.

²³ FM, 2015.

²⁴ Ibidem.

straints (life on the dole does not afford travel) and to peculiar character of their mentality they do not travel. And this is one of the important differences between the French and the North Caucasians. The French love to travel: the proximity of interesting places of Europe allows them to arrange travel lasting two days. Gradually, the North Caucasians start to imitate this feature of lifestyle. Here is how one respondent described her change in attitude toward travel: “When I went to work on Monday, my French colleagues asked what I have been doing during the weekend. I answered, ‘washed clothes, cleaned the apartment, washed windows.’ My French colleagues were surprised: they spent weekends traveling and on Monday talked about it at work. And I had nothing to tell! This has influenced my attitude. I also started to go out with my family on weekends. One of the motives for my trips was the desire to tell about them Monday at work and show photos.”²⁵

In the French and North Caucasian cultures there is a marked difference, regarding the freedom and status of women, including the divorced ones. Thanks to the French freedoms, a divorced woman in France does not feel flawed, as is the case in the Northern Caucasus, where the divorce, as a rule, is unheard of. In France, women are free, can divorce and live independently and this is perceived as normal.²⁶ This feature of the French life allows many North Caucasian women to improve their status within a family and society.

All Russians, including the North Caucasians, loved and continue to love the French Cinema, but now, in France, there is a predominance of American movies.²⁷ In the past twenty years, there has been a growing trend of Americanization of the French culture: the emergence of a network of American restaurants, format of television programming (for example, the French news programs first run news from the U.S., and only then from European countries and France).

In view of the emigrants, the majority of French holidays are religious (Christian) or political-historical holidays (for example, the well-known holiday on 14 July—the Bastille Day).²⁸ In general, European Muslims respect the French culture, values and religion. Partly, it does affect them, for example, in Muslim families parents also give their children gifts on Catholic Christmas. For them it is not, of course, a holiday, but a tribute to the French traditions. In turn, the French also strive to be responsive to the needs of Muslims. The French State in many ways shows consideration for the complexities of the adaptation of migrants to the Christian country, for example, one of the main holidays—the Christian Christmas and the New Year. Before, everywhere was written “Noel”—“Christmas”, and now “Fin d’anne” is frequently written—“The end of the year”, so that the Muslims do not feel disadvantaged.²⁹

Cultural Differences of France and the Northern Caucasus

The North Caucasian immigrants perceive France as a country of the sun, clean streets, cordial people in the streets, “unrealistically” comfortable life (transportation, services); enjoy the floating smell of croissants and coffee, loquacious murmur of French conversation. In the opinion of the North Caucasian migrants “generally, in the Caucasus, as well as in Russia, it is not customary to smile at strangers. In France, smiling is the minimum, a necessary accompaniment to the oral communication.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem.

In visitors it elicits a feeling of joy. After having lived for a time in this country, there appears a feeling of appreciation for of pervasive beauty and aestheticism.” The immigrants also like the French “thoroughness,” which, however, in some situations, subsequently appears as a flaw and source of annoyance with the French.³⁰ After a difficult, in many respects, life in Russia, life in France seems very easy and comfortable, engendering a feeling of security and the importance of human life. The North Caucasians readily accept the inherent French aestheticism, which manifests itself in all things, and especially in architecture. For many of the North Caucasian emigrants the cultural component of a lifestyle is important. In France, culture commands a great deal of attention.³¹

Nevertheless, the life in France is different from the life of the Northern Caucasus in almost every aspect: the infrastructure, place that a family occupies in one’s life, perception of one’s role and place in the life of a community and the country. The French are socially active and often participate in strikes or rallies. The population of the Northern Caucasus is very inert socially.³²

North Caucasian immigrants see a substantial difference between theirs and French culture, way of life, and the foundations of morality. For example, the French freedom³³ is manifested in all areas of their everyday lives, including home. The North Caucasians have traits, such as an etiquette of restraint, the cult of self-control in both men and women, respect for elders, hospitality, sense of “shoulder.”³⁴ In France, faced with the emancipated behavior of the French, the North Caucasians feel uncomfortable.

The French society lacks the tradition, characteristic of the North Caucasian culture—that of respect for the elderly and veneration of one’s parents. The French have no dichotomy of “senior-junior.” The North Caucasian immigrants at the outset of their residence in France offer their seats to the elderly in transport, but then begin to see that they do not need to do so: people get offended, perceive it as humiliation.³⁵

In the French culture there is no concept of *shame* as it exists in the culture of the North Caucasian people (*емыкы* in Kabardian).³⁶ The families of the North Caucasian migrants, where parents are strict with their children, see the difference. Brought up in the spirit of the North Caucasian culture, the children of migrants are surprised by the characteristics of the relationships between their French friends/girlfriends with their parents. French teens often talk with their parents quite sharply. In the North Caucasus this is still impossible.³⁷

The North Caucasian migrants noted that only some French people support family values. Many in France have no need for relatives: brothers and sisters may not see each other for years. French families do not have a lot of children. Many live without children and don’t want to have them.³⁸ For the North Caucasian mentality that seems strange, because for the peoples of the Northern Caucasus kinship and family values are very important, and the significance of this is preserved in emigration. Children, growing up in the West and arriving later in the Northern Caucasus, see the difference between the treatment of relatives in the land of their ancestors and in France.

In the opinion of the North Caucasian emigrants, one can have French acquaintances, but making friends with them is difficult: they often don’t understand the problems of the North Caucasian migrants. For example, a respondent said that when her father passed away, she requested a 10-day

³⁰ FM, 2016.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem.

³³ FM, 2015.

³⁴ FM, 2016.

³⁵ FM, 2015.

³⁶ FM, 2016.

³⁷ FM, 2015; FM, 2016.

³⁸ FM, 2015.

leave, whereas in France one gets 3 days in similar situation. Her request was granted, however, nobody understood why she needs so much time. Or another instance: if a person is hospitalized, in the North Caucasus he does get visits from lots of people, even if these visits are not warranted. In France, however, it is not customary: if the situation is not serious enough, the person does not get visitors.³⁹

Many respondents, whom we have been able to interview, expressed a desire to communicate with the French. Certainly, it is not easy to make friends with them. The North Caucasian children of the first wave of emigrants, attending French schools, are beginning to talk and even make friends with the French children.⁴⁰ For example, the girls of one Adighe family have French friends, who come to visit them at their home. There are children's holidays, to which the French reciprocally invite the Adighe girls.⁴¹ One respondent, a Chechen, said that he has French friends, with whom he had studied at a university in France, as well as friends from former and current jobs. The French and the North Caucasians have different approaches toward treating guests: the French are frugal, while the North Caucasians are more cordial and love to feed and entertain their guests.

In France, neighbors virtually do not communicate between themselves, do not even greet each other. It is difficult for the North Caucasians to fathom, since at home, in a village or aul, each resident knows everybody and greets everyone.⁴² It is difficult for the North Caucasians to accept the glibness of the French people, the French are not sincere and open enough. Unconditional positive regard for friends and family, a sincere attempt at understanding, which is the norm in the Northern Caucasus (and, maybe, in Russia in general) is not common in France. All relationships have "a compulsory rational component, even in relationships between spouses, parents and children, etc." Strange for the North Caucasians are the monetary relations in the French families. The North Caucasians are shocked by stories that parents lend money at interest to their children. They are bewildered when they see that a husband and wife pay separately at a restaurant. In the Northern Caucasus it is unthinkable.⁴³

In the Northern Caucasus there exists a *home cult*. People constantly modify, decorate their homes: this is at the level of a "mass competition." In France, with its numerous private cozy houses, the North Caucasians feel at home. And if they are able to afford it, they try to live in their own house, "on earth."⁴⁴

There are also instances when the North Caucasian traditions get introduced to the French. For example, there is no tradition of toasting during a French feast, it is a custom imported by the North Caucasians and the French like it. Emigrants also practice the tradition of presenting colleagues with gifts, for example, in celebrating a birth, which is not customary for the French either.⁴⁵

The Turkish "North Caucasians," the Role of the Turkish Environment for the North Caucasians in France

In France there is a rather large "Circassian" diaspora, which appeared in the 1960s-1970s: it is made up of the Turkish Adighe (they are often called Circassians), Abkhazians, the Ossetians, whose

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ FM, 2015; FM, 2016.

⁴¹ FM, 2015.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ FM, 2016.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ FM, 2015.

ancestors emigrated from the regions of the Northern Caucasus during the Caucasian War. The Turkish diaspora in France is well organized, it has its own Associations (e.g., *Association Culturelle des Franco-Caucasiens du Nord*, Villerbanne, formerly known as the Association of the French Circassians, 2004-2013). The Association conducts an extensive cultural program, in particular, the concerts of the Caucasian dances performed by a dance group from Istanbul (*Itıfak—groupe de danse Nord-Caucasien de l'Univ. d'Istanbul*). There are also political events, such as the Circassian Genocide Memorial Day 21 May, 1864 (*Les Caucasiens commémorent à Lyon le 21 mai 1864*). The Turkish Circassians also created a pan-European organization, the *Federation of European Circassians* with an office in Berlin. It conducts meetings for the European Circassians.

The inclusion of the North Caucasian emigrants from Russia in the Turkish-Circassian environment could significantly ease their adaptation in France. But in reality this is not happening. Of course, there are contacts among them, but they are negligible. More active contacts are precluded for a number of reasons.

- First, although the Turkish emigrants “adapted” quite nicely to life in France, in reality they are practically not assimilated: live separately, are not “open” to the French life, people and culture.
- Second, the Turkish North Caucasians have, to a large extent, become Turkishized and are more similar to the Turkish Circassians than to the representatives of the Russian Northern Caucasus. The Turkish Circassians in Turkey itself often marry Turkish women and become Turkishized permanently. Most of the “Turkish” Circassian culture in France represents the culture of the Turkish Circassians, which is not similar to Kabardian. Holidays and weddings of the Turkish Circassians are markedly different from those in the Northern Caucasus. As a result, the North Caucasians perceive them as “foreign.”⁴⁶ If the Russian North Caucasians want to adapt to the French life, the contacts with the Turkish diaspora only slow down this process.
- Third, in France, the “Turkish Circassians” imply not only the Adighe, but also Ossetians and Abkhazians. Their common language is Turkish, with only a few of them speaking French. Some of the older Turkish Circassians know the Adighe language.⁴⁷ In Lyon, there lived one older Turkish Circassian, who knew the Kabardian language well. Previously in Istanbul he was the chief of police. In Lyon the man searched out some Russian Kabardians and tried to help them. In Lyon, there is a Turkish diaspora in which there are many Circassians (approximately 200 persons).⁴⁸ In the old part of the city, there is a hotel which is owned by a Turkish Circassian from the clan of Kardanovs. He was a child when he arrived in France and has been living in the city for more than 40 years. For a time, he had a construction company, which employed several Kabardians from Russia.⁴⁹ He speaks fluent Turkish and French, but not Kabardian. It is interesting that the emigrants from Kabarda suggested that one of the Turkish centers organize the teaching of the Adighe language, but the management of the Center did not support this initiative.
- Fourth, the Turkish “North Caucasian” diaspora in France has no sense of solidarity: the Circassians and Abkhazians from Turkey communicate between themselves, but not with the Turkish Chechens. The Chechens even in Turkey segregate themselves.⁵⁰ It is the same in France.

⁴⁶ FM, 2015.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ FM, 2016.

⁴⁹ FM, 2015.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

The Turkish Circassians gather in their cultural centers every Saturday, have dances dressed in national costumes to indigenous national music, hold concerts in Turkish and French, prepare native foods. The Turkish centers invite to their activities by disseminating information through acquaintances and publishing it on the web. Although the North Caucasian Adighes rarely attend these events, yet a peculiar social interweaving between the lives of the Turkish Circassians and Russian Circassians does occur in France.⁵¹ However, the North Caucasian immigrants attend major events, for example, they all came to the wedding of the above-mentioned Turkish Kabardian, Kardanov, in Lyon. The opening of a Russian Kabardian restaurant was attended by the Turkish North Caucasians.⁵² Although the Russian Chechens do not attend such centers, when one of the Chechens had problems, they appealed for help there and all the North Caucasian and Turkish diasporas raised funds for him.

The North Caucasian Environment in France

Modern gadgets and social networks in many ways “lighten” the difficulties of emigrants living in another country: there is the phone, web, etc., by which one can always communicate with fellow countrymen in their homeland. Therefore, the present migrants can be assessed as emigrants of a new type—“emigrants of the Internet era.”⁵³ They are interested in political and cultural news from their homeland in the Northern Caucasus. There are many North Caucasian sites, for example, Adighe (Circassian), which the migrants frequently visit. It is true that the second generation of these migrants—children, already find it difficult to use these sites, as they tend to be in the Adighe language. Of course, social networks do not replace live communication. So, on the one hand, the North Caucasian emigrants are eager to visit native lands to which they bring children born in France, and, on the other, try to find a North Caucasian environment in a new country. Modern immigrants bring their relatives to France. But by and large, the North Caucasians are not easily enticed to travel and seldom visit France. Often, even brothers and sisters have not visited their relatives in France.⁵⁴ Of course, sophisticated real and virtual conditions create a completely different psychological climate and atmosphere in which the current migrants live: the pain of the loss of their homeland is somewhat dulled.

On the whole, there is no North Caucasian milieu in France:

- first, it is divided into several segments; and
- second it is delineated along Muslim and, conditionally, “traditional” (ethnic) lines.⁵⁵

Nowadays, there is a division in the diaspora between practicing Muslims (regardless of ethnicity) and ethnic Muslims (the rest of the North Caucasians). For example, one young man from a large Adighe family (30-40 people) became a practicing Muslim and almost ceased to communicate with his relatives and ethnic countrymen and joined a Muslim chapter, which counts many Chechens among its members. It should also be mentioned that even abroad, the emigrants from the Northern Caucasus place a great deal of value on their family ties. If several related families emigrate to France, they try to live in the same city to be able to maintain close communications.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ FM, 2016.

⁵⁴ FM, 2015.

⁵⁵ See: I.L. Babich, “Sovremenoe islamskoe dvizhenie v Kabardino-Balkarii,” in: *Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v sovremennoi Kabardino-Balkarii*, Moscow, 2003.

The first step in creating the North Caucasian environment is in the form of accommodations in a hostel for refugees, where they are lodged by the French authorities. It is here that they develop first long term affiliations “with their own.” Many remain friends for years. Kabardian woman B. said: “When we arrived, we lived a long time in the dorm with all the North Caucasian refugees and initially were dealing with everyone: Kumyks, Chechens, Armenians, Georgians and now, when we began to live separately, we lost the connection with many, for example, with the Chechens and Georgians, but preserved it with Kumyks and Armenians.”⁵⁶

Mainly, the North Caucasian environment consists of two segments of communication: the first is made up of people from the Northwestern and Central Caucasus, the second—the people from the Eastern Caucasus. The first segment includes the Kalmyks as well, who gravitate to the North Caucasians.⁵⁷ Both segments loosely overlap each other. In exile, the Adighe are friendly with Balkars, Abkhazians, Armenians, but have little contact with the Chechens. Typically, the ethnic groups of the North Caucasian migrants in France merge on the basis of nationality, for example, the Adighes conduct pan-Adighe events that attract Adighes from all over France. Normally, these activities serve as venues for finding spouses for the Adighe young people.⁵⁸ These events help acquainting all the Adighe residing in France, for example, the Kabardian emigrants will certainly know all of the Kabardians from other cities. The North Caucasians will gladly interact with Armenians, of whom there are very many in France, including those who came from Armenia. Armenians work as cobblers and tailors, trade in jewelry, and own laundries. The North Caucasians attend their weddings, christenings, etc.⁵⁹

The Islamization of the Chechen emigrants, in many ways, isolates them from the rest of the North Caucasians, who are not so close to Islam, as well as the French. The Chechens, accepting Islam, stop drinking alcohol altogether, while the rest of the North Caucasians do imbibe a little. The Chechens are characterized by a sense of community. The Chechens from all the French cities try to attend large Chechen activities. Once a Chechen wedding was held in Paris: the groom was from London and the bride—from Paris. It brought the Chechens together from all corners of Europe. Although the Chechens predominantly socialize within their ethnic diaspora, they do have acquaintances among the North Caucasians, Russians, French, Africans, the South Americans, etc.⁶⁰ Many Chechens live in France with the sense of being there temporarily. They believe that “they do not need to adapt, since they will be going back to Chechnia” (and indeed, many leave).⁶¹ An Abkhazian lady, D., says: “We consider the Lyon Chechens to be strangers. For example, it is known that some of them here have several wives. For us, this is alien, barbaric.”⁶² In the meantime, if someone dies, the funeral and the wake are conducted with all of the North Caucasians in attendance.⁶³

The Culture of Life-Support

In France, the North Caucasians do not wear either national, traditional or Islamic clothing, and rather enjoy European.⁶⁴ North Caucasian girls and women, being practicing Muslims, do not always

⁵⁶ FM, 2015.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ FM, 2015.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ See: A. Chleinikov, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ FM, 2015.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

carry headscarves. Wearing a headscarf in France is not an unequivocal sign of the level of a woman's Islamization.

Traditional food is an important attribute in preserving the indigenous cultural roots in immigration: the North Caucasian migrants often remain committed to the national traditional cuisine. At home, women prepare meals familiar from childhood, usually on weekends and holidays.⁶⁵ During the Kurban Bayram (Eid up-Adha) celebration, the Adighe emigrants prepare a national traditional dish—Ashryk—made up of five cereals (white corn, pearl barley, ground wheat, rice, millet), three kinds of beans, meat jerky, preserved from a previous holiday. They distribute the meat among all of the North Caucasian Muslims (formerly raw, currently—most often cooked). The great diversity of national dishes is observed at Chechen weddings (at the weddings of other North Caucasian migrants the majority of dishes are European).

Socionormative Culture

North Caucasian migrants live in conventional dwellings, the interiors of which are nothing special. The main factor regulating the ethnocultural security function in emigration is behavioral culture: even in emigration the North Caucasians retain mountain traditions. Their home lives are filled with both ethnic and Islamic components. At home they listen to the North Caucasian music (for example, the Circassians enjoy listening to Cherim Nakhushev, a well-known performer), watch Russian variety shows and Russian television.⁶⁶ Dances are an important attribute of ethnic identity in the emigration. Holidays are always celebrated by dancing. For example, the Chechens have always celebrated the so-called “positive” (a positive decision on the status of political refugee). During such holiday meetings everyone dances: young girls and boys, men and women. The girls' shoulders may be bare, mature women tie their hair.⁶⁷ Small children are often taught the national dances. It is an important part of the education of the younger generation—the children of the North Caucasian migrants.⁶⁸

Inherent traditions of hospitality and mutual assistance are kept alive among the North Caucasian emigration. As in the Northern Caucasus, for any hard work, such as construction, or moving a family to another place of residence, etc., relatives and acquaintances are convened to render assistance. More often it applies to immediate family members, but there are cases when complete strangers help in difficult circumstances. For example, one Chechen lady, A., lodged two unfamiliar Chechen women in her small room, who had nowhere to live.⁶⁹

Retained are many of the traditions, associated with children, for example, the Adighe families still practice the tradition of determining a profession for a child based on what object he chooses. To do this in front of a child of 4-5 years old various items are placed. The Adighe believe that the first object the child will choose will be linked to his profession. A North Caucasus emigrant observes the tradition of respect for elders on the street or when communicating with the elderly, including at work, in society and within a family. For example, if a Hall, where there is dancing, is visited by older people, everyone rises.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ FM, 2016.

⁶⁶ FM, 2015.

⁶⁷ See: A. Chleinikov, *op. cit.*

⁶⁸ FM, 2015.

⁶⁹ A. Chleinikov, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ A. Chleinikov, *op. cit.*; FM, 2016.

Wedding and Burial Traditions, and Islam

The North Caucasian Muslims, even in France, perform *nikah*: they go to a Mullah's home or he comes to a groom and bride. The North Caucasians rarely sign their marriage at City Hall. The North Caucasian weddings in France only partly reproduce the peculiar ethnic traditions of the North Caucasians. Usually weddings take place in a restaurant, there is practically no national component (except for cooking individual dishes).⁷¹ In the West, the Chechen weddings are the most interesting. A wedding for the North Caucasian migrants, particularly Chechens, is one of the major events of their lives in France. For such activities from 300 up to 500 persons get invited—people come from all over the country. A large room is leased for the event. Dishes for the wedding are prepared by themselves. The Chechen immigrants have mostly traditional feasts, including weddings, in the North Caucasian style. They call such festivities *Lovzar*. Other North Caucasians rarely attend Chechen weddings. Usually they watch them on European sites with “nostalgia.”⁷² For example, the Chechens saved tradition of the bride's entry into new house (for this, ram's skins are spread, the groom addresses the eldest of the family of the bride and asks them to forgive his taking away the bride, the groom and bride make a “mock” escape, etc.). During the wedding, the bride and her friend stand in a corner of the room.

The groom is not present at the wedding. Chechen weddings in France observe traditional segregation of tables for women and men. For other North Caucasians this is a thing of the past. Each table has its own tamada (master of ceremonies) (other North Caucasians have only one master of ceremonies for all tables),⁷³ retained is the role of the “dance toastmaster,” who, using a wand, chooses those who will dance the next dance.⁷⁴ Dishes for Chechen weddings in France are ethnic: *zhizhig galnash*, *rice pilaf*, *tortillas with cheese*, *meat*...⁷⁵ Also, *Salade Olivier*, *manti*, sweet treats—*Halva*, sweet rice are on the table. Prepared also are quite sophisticated dishes: *Kurze* (a kind of ravioli), *gnocchi* (pasta, prepared manually). Sometimes Chechen artists from Chechnia or from European cities (from Strasbourg, for example) come to large Chechen weddings.

Currently, if someone from the Northern Caucasus dies in France, relatives and all the North Caucasian emigrants raise funds in order to send the body home. More often the people are buried back at home, not in France⁷⁶ If, nevertheless, the funeral and the wake are held in France, all the North Caucasians, regardless of ethnicity, try to attend.⁷⁷ The North Caucasians conduct wakes (40 days, six months, year), for which the Kabardians, for example, prepare a ritual dish, *lakumy* (crumpets) They carry it into the homes of seven families—North Caucasian migrants. When Muslims eat these crumpets, they recite a prayer for the deceased (*thajtu* in Chechen). The French, even neighbors, do not get *lakumy*: they will not understand, and, of course, will not be able to recite the prayer.

Conclusion

What is adaptation? There are many definitions of the process on which we will not dwell in this article, except to note that, certainly, adaptation and assimilation are separate phenomena and

⁷¹ FM, 2015.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ FM, 2016.

⁷⁴ FM, 2015.

⁷⁵ FM, 2016.

⁷⁶ FM, 2015.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

should be distinguished. To adapt the following criteria are significant: respect for the French laws, French culture, people and the French way of life. Assimilation is characterized by *the sharing with the French their culture and religion* and *changing the religious and ethnic identity*. Twenty years ago, the French authorities, politicians (mainly, “left”) and the French in general were sure that immigrants would gradually assimilate, accepting the French values, culture and religion. Currently the “extreme right” is certain that emigrants must assimilate. In reality, however, this is not happening. The North Caucasian emigrants of the first wave of the post-Soviet Russia may still be regarded exclusively as adapting, however, with regard to their children, a partial process of assimilation is ongoing, anyway, some of its features are clearly evident.

Note that the presence or absence of individual components of the French life in the lifestyle of the North Caucasians in France is not indicative of the lack of successful adaptation. It seems to us that the ways to adapt for the North Caucasians may be diverse.

The formation of a number of cultural environments (societies) helps the North Caucasians to adapt in modern France. The primary one is the Turkish environment which is composed of the Turkish “North Caucasians,” whose ancestors left Russia and settled in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th-the beginning of the 20th centuries. Second is the Islamic environment, consisting of various groups of Muslims, who had emigrated to the country from the countries of the Islamic East, and which has existed in France for the past 30 to 40 years.⁷⁸

On the whole, the North Caucasian emigrants are ready to integrate into the French life, which requires about 10 years of residence in the country.⁷⁹ In the culture of life-support and in the socio-normative culture we observe a combination of invariant and innovative elements. The least prone to innovation has proved to be the traditional system of nutrition, the most vulnerable—ritual culture associated with family and social life.

⁷⁸ See: I.V. Ponkin, *Islam vo Frantsii*, Moscow, 2005.

⁷⁹ FM, 2015.