

SIMILARITIES IN THE CULTURE OF KYRGYZ AND TRIBAL PEOPLE OF THE USA (NATIVE AMERICANS)

In this article I will try to show some results of my research, which includes the similarity of culture and traditions in the family of two quite diverse people's living in different parts of the world but keeping very similar customs and traditions in their families, clans and tribes.

Key words: tribal people, cultural presuppositions, similarity of culture and traditions.

В этой статье я попытаюсь показать некоторые результаты моих исследований, которые включают схожесть культур и традиций в семейной жизни совершенно разных людей, живущих в разных частях мира, но сохраняющих очень похожие обычаи и традиции своих семей, кланов и племен.

Ключевые слова: племена, культурные предпосылки, сходство культуры и традиций.

“Before learning to understand the culture of the other, I must become aware of my own culture, of my cultural presuppositions, of the implicit premises that inform my interpretation, of my verities. Only after taking this step, which is in fact the most difficult one, can I begin to understand the cultural presuppositions of the other, the implicit premises which inform a formerly opaque text”.

R.Carroll, 1988

“Communication is unique within each culture, and the same time, there are systematic similarities and differences across cultures”.

W.Gudukunst

As far as we learn about different cultures living nowadays on the Earth, so more we see that there are close to each other. Different cultures being kept for many centuries try to keep only the most valuable, and sometimes may be not so valuable but peculiar and interesting only for one cultured group of people.

So what does it mean similarity at all: (From Webster Dictionary)

Sim-i-lar-i-ty n., pl. -ties.

1. the state of being similar; likeness; resemblance.

2. an aspect or feature like or resembling another: similarities in their behavior.

n. pl. sim·i·lar·i·ties

1. The quality or condition of being similar; resemblance. See Synonyms at likeness.

2. A corresponding aspect or feature; equivalence: a similarity of writing styles.

In this article I will try to show some results of my research, which includes the similarity of culture and traditions in the family of two quite diverse people's living in different parts of the world but keeping very similar customs and

traditions in their families, clans and tribes. They are the Kyrgyz people and the indigenous Native American tribal peoples.

At a time when civilization is taking away the traditions and cultures of many nations and nationalities, and at a time when people are lost in the web net, internet and other bio-technological achievements, achievements which surely improve the search for information but damage the real value of communication, people are obtaining information not from simple ordinary books but the different media; and being involved in all this, people have forgotten about the other more valuable and real things such as the family, family relationships, family customs and traditions, family culture and cultural values. And this loss has resulted in a huge gap between us and our parents, grandparents and ancestors.

Our ancestors cared about the future of their generation, they cared about keeping the concept of their understanding of the family, tribal, kinship, and family values, and they tried to bring us the things which have now developed into huge techno values. The tribal peoples living in Eurasia and Central Asia are not called indigenous people, but ethno-national groups and nationalities. The tribal systems of these peoples were studied, but these peoples were mostly grouped into one or more groups, maintaining one type of relationship. For example, Kyrgyz tribal life was not studied separately, but as part of a group of Kazakhs, Turkmen, Uzbeks and Uyghur, and they were considered to have one and the same type of relationship in families, tribes and nations. The reason for this, I think, lies in the lack of information about the ethnic identity of each group; there does not seem to be any in-depth study of each group separately.

When I started my research on similarities between above mentioned group of people, I was concerned with the transformation of family values in my own culture and among the Kyrgyz people. This required me to explore our Kyrgyz traditional cultural values and compare them with the other Eurasian and Central Asian nomadic peoples, particularly the Kazakhs, Mongols and other peoples from the Siberian part of Russia.

At the very beginning of my research I have found out that the Kyrgyz tribal concept of family clan is connected with its gender roles; child rearing; the sharing of wealth, government and nature which are all quite different from the other peoples' lives, living side by side with the

Kyrgyz, such as Kazakhs, Uyghur and Uzbeks. And I put forward the following question: are there any other cultures and peoples who have the same values as my people, the same family concepts, similar customs and traditions?

As I can use English, I found the following quote in one of the sources about tribal life of the American Indians: *"For all the diversity of the first Americans, they inherited certain common traits from their Old World ancestors. Reflecting their Asiatic heritage, they were generally of short to medium stature, with straight black hair, light brown skin, and prominent cheekbones - features that in 1492 reinforced Columbus's mistaken conviction that he had reached the East Indies and prompted him to assign to the inhabitants the inaccurate yet enduring title of Indians"*¹⁴.

It was like a push for me, why not compare two quite different and, quite far apart cultures? The other thing which was really interesting for me was language. Could the hunters who had crossed over the Bering Straits keep even a tiny part of their ancestral language? Some American scholars try to deny this (e.g., Vine Deloria: *"Scientists, (and I use this word loosely) are committed to the view that Indians migrated to this country over an imaginary Bering Straits bridge, which comes and goes at the convenience of the scholar requiring it to complete his or her theory. Initially, at least, Indians are [said to be] homogenous. But there are also eight major language families within the western Hemisphere, indicating to some scholars that if Indians followed the trend the migration went from the east to west; tourists along the Bering straits were going to Asia, not migrating from it"*¹⁵. May Vine Deloria may be right in his own way.

The second point is the emergence of a people who are quite similar in appearance to our people, also the relation of the Kyrgyz and Native Americans to nature, to women, to domestic animals and their customs and traditions.

Perhaps I am idealizing the culture of tribal peoples, but in comparison with the western cultures which conceptualize they are quite different from ours (for example, the concept of the nuclear family, male domination (among the English, Spanish and others, not only Islamic countries), breaking the will of the child,

¹⁴The First Americans. Time Life Books. Editor: Thomas H. Flaherty. Library of Congress cataloging in Publication Data, Washington DC., VA. 1992

¹⁵ Vine Deloria Jr., Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact. New York: Scribner, 1995.

authoritarian government, and the most dangerous thing for me was the belief that nature was created for the benefit of humans.

As Kyrgyz people lived in their own world before the Russian brought the “civilized world to them”, the same has lived the American Indians before the arrival of the Europeans onto the American continent.

Scholars studying clans and tribes have observed multiple faces of culture existing within a society. One face is ethno-nationality - the common cultural and linguistic traits and shared history or heritage. During Soviet times the nationalities policy specifically linked ethnics to politically recognized and territorially defined groups. Religious identity, a second face of culture, is an ideological or civilization identity based on doctrinal affiliation.

Family for tribal people such as Kyrgyz is sacred - they worship their family, family relationships, and their family history. The family is the reality; the society is changeable as is the policy and the state. For most tribal people the new type of family is quite tough to accept, the nuclear family is nothing. Ethno-national and religious identity have been highlighted as a causal variable in the protracted conflicts of the last decade in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. However, it has not led to conflict in post-Soviet Central Asia. To explain its absence, it is necessary to focus on the *clan* as the critical unit of analysis in Central Asia. Studies of conflict and transition have ignored the clan¹⁶.

Kyrgyz people got used to living in clans – a word which was usually not mentioned and omitted when identifying Central Asian peoples and which only appeared after WWII. Clan identity is a face of culture in many semi-modern societies in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The clan is a unit of analysis addressed by neither contrastive nor international relations hypotheses on identity and conflict. Clans have often been entirely ignored or dismissed as primordial. However, the clan can be approached conceptually and theoretically as a collective identity network.

Measuring identity, especially collective identity, is a challenge. Clans are informal social organizations in which kinship or "fictive" kinship is the core, a unifying bond among group

members. Clans are identity networks consisting of an extensive web of horizontal and vertical kin-based relations. Clans are rooted in a culture of kin-based norms and trust, but also serve rational purposes. A clan is an organized group of people distinguished by a single blood family and including all siblings.

The Kyrgyz family at present revolve around one type of relationship - *patrilineal*, meaning kinship was determined along male line. But during the shamanism period Kyrgyz people kept *matrilineal* relationship in the tribes and clans (Umai Ene, Bugu Ene). Tribes – *uruu* - are associations of clans - *tykym*. The Kyrgyz now have more than 40 well-known tribes, including Solto, Sayak, Kushchy (among Native Americans-Eagle), Bugu, Bory (Wolf), Mongy (Hill), Sarybagysh - names of tribes of different origin, but there are many animal and birds names.

The Native American tribes until now keep matrilineal type of relationship, as they are keeping shamanism, for example *Clan mother*, *Mother of the Earth* etc.

Of course, among the Kyrgyz tribes before the Russian came, Muslim missionaries tried to suppress the role of leading women, but anyway, in larger Kyrgyz tribes the role of women is still very high. And child rearing is quite different from westerner practices. For example, the Kyrgyz very seldom oppose the will of their children; and if this is connected with the adult, the tribal elders usually solve the problem of whether to allow the wish of the man or the woman to be take precedence.

If a child is being raised by a single parent, like a mother, usually the mother’s male-relatives from the clan help her to communicate with a grown-up young man.

So the Kyrgyz trust women more than men, especially in child rearing. In the case of the Native Americans, the Europeans were greatly surprised by the role of the father – “*the (clan) system that takes from the father his proper place at the head of his family and leaves him comparatively little control of his children. Christianity had to contend with that, and is gradually overcoming it*”¹⁷. As for the Kyrgyz family clan, it is a supportive system which worked and still works among modern Kyrgyz families too.

The same things we can observe among Native American tribes, especially the role of a woman is the most interesting even nowadays.

¹⁶Collins Kathleen, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, University of Notre Dame, Indiana ISBN: 9780521839501., April 2006

Because of family structure similarities we have so many similar traditions:

- ❖ the way to respect the elderly person, when greeting outside and inside of the house;
- ❖ do not greet entering the house people sitting or laying;
- ❖ remember the seventh parent of the clan;
- ❖ nicknaming relatives and famous people (Toko - Toktodul, Chiuke - Chingiz Aitmatov; among Native Americans - Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Standing Bear - Chiefs of the Indian tribes);
- ❖ putting the butter into the newly born child's mouth- that his/her life would be smooth and satiated (Kyrgyz do the same, mostly the grandmother from husband's side do it);
- ❖ putting the knife under the baby's pillow;

- ❖ smoking the house or the cradle of a baby with juniper (for the New year, or after settling to a new place)

- ❖ bring to the pregnant woman all food she would wish during her pregnancy;
- ❖ raise the only daughter as a boy, being adaptable to any situation;
- ❖ putting the ribbons onto the tree branches near water springs (Mazar baktar - among Kyrgyzs);

There are a lot of other similarities among the Kyrgyz and tribal people of the USA, in this article I have mentioned only a few traditional and in detailed try to speak about the family structure and tribal structure among Kyrgyz and American Indians. More similarities in the language I have already published.

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¹⁷Collins Kathleen, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, University of Notre Dame, Indiana