Migrant’s Identity in the Modernized Society: An Example of Southern Russia

Victor Yur’evitch Apryshchenko
Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia

Abstract: This article analyzes the migration situation in Southern Russia and is focused on the risks emerging because of the influx of migrants in the region. The author believes that the greatest threat is when the increasing number of immigrants is accompanied by an instability associated with the modernization process. Modernization breaks down the entrenched social structures and also causes economic instability, resulting in an increased level of internal conflictogenity. The mass influx of migrants can make this threat more intense, which has negative effects both for the host community and the migrants. The southern parts of Russia that have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of migrants at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries are an example of such a region where the modernization instability is aggravated by the influx of immigrants.

Key words: Migration • Northern Caucasus • Southern Russia • Crisis • Social instability • Modernization • Conflict • Integration • Diasporas

INTRODUCTION

Today, the progress of interethnic relations in Russia is characterized by an increased degree of conflictogenity both at the regional and local levels. One of the reasons behind this trend is associated with the development of migration processes characterized by the mass nature of the migration flows in the 20 and 21 centuries, stressful nature thereof, ethnic pattern of the migration processes and conflict relations between the immigrants and the host environment of different ethnicity. The migration process is accompanied by ethnic erosion of the local communities, causing tension between the local population and the immigrants who may differ significantly from the “aboriginal population” in terms of their ethnic, racial, confessional, social and cultural parameters. The hostility can be initiated by the lower strata of society [1]. This tension (observed globally) is of particular threat for multinational Russia whose history has a lot of negative examples of inter-ethnic relations.

The relations between the host communities and the migrant minorities are to a large extent associated with the identity crisis that both the migrants and the host community undergo. In turn, the crisis results in aggravation of the safety problem and the demand for searching for a way out of the situation. It is clear that not only the social and economic aspects of the migration processes need to be studied but their perception by both migrants and the host community as well. It appears that the “identity” category is associated with substantial heuristic potentialities in this context, which may add some new analytical approaches to studying many historical and social phenomena, including the migration processes.

The identity crisis is of particular significance during the period when the modernization is occurring at a high rate, the traditional social institutions are being collapsed and new ties are being formed. In accordance with these processes, the consciousness is changed and the historical memory is transformed, which in turn destroys the identity with some social groups and forms new ties. In a historical retrospective, modernization during the new epoch has caused origination of nations and nationalism, thus underlying the European identity crisis [2].

Modernization also has another facet, which directly affects the development of “anthro flows”. The experts have recently proved that an accelerated economic development at a certain stage increases the outflow of immigrants from the country (but not in the opposite way as it used to be believed for a long time) [3].

The fact is that the establishment of market relations destroys the economic ties that used to be typical of traditional communities. The traditional communities usually relied on the principles of shared ownership of
land and social collectivism with the predominance of family solidarity. The government-encouraged transition to the farming economy meant a collapse of these principles. Private ownership of the land and the change in the land inheritance system has deprived many rural residents of land and the traditional means of subsistence. The accelerated migration of rural people to the urban areas in the developing countries in the 1960–1970s resulted from these changes in the traditional agriculture. However, the urban labor markets in these countries are unstable; they cannot absorb the inflows of rural migrants. Hence, these migrants have to seek for other opportunities for living. Some of them venture to migrate to other countries.

These processes can be observed particularly clearly under the conditions of modern globalization, when the structural transformation and penetration of new capital-intensive production methods into the traditional communities occur at a very high rate, on one hand and the global mass media ensure rapid and wide spreading of information about the opportunities and the standard of living in the other countries, on the other hand.

The situation in Russia is complicated by the fact that the host society also faces the identity crisis associated with the modernization processes that cause an abrupt change in conditions, level and pace of life and collapse of the entrenched stereotypes in the population.

The processes that used to occur in former republics of the Northern Caucasus during the post-Soviet era (starting in 1991) were associated with the rapid and drastic changes in the social and political structure of the society, which were aimed at forming the stratum of owners. This process was one of the components of modernization. The researchers mention that the question regarding who has the right for power and property within this territory has emerged naturally, while the ethncal resource of economic and political competition has become the key one and was the main reason behind the inter-ethnic conflicts and forced migration [4]. Furthermore, the researchers (e.g. James Scott) have made an attempt at combining the political anthropology and social theories to analyze the reasons behind the ethnic conflicts and collisions. They believe that two conditions are needed: the hierarchy and domination of one social group within the social system and the experience of daily submission, which results in a strong desire of a group to change its status [5].

Another feature of the conflicts related to the migrations during the modernization period is that the relations between the local population and the migrants overlap with the identity crisis of the local population (residents) that had also been caused by modernization. A complex tangle of problems (economic, social and religious) is eventually formed, while both the federal and local authorities fail to resolve these problems. The symbolic side of the conflicts is a significant component of confrontation [6].

In order to interpret the reasons for the conflicts in the migration sphere during the period of modernization processes, the researchers use the deprivation concept [7]. Deprivation is the condition emerging when there is an explicit divergence between people’s expectations and opportunities to satisfy these expectations. It is clear that deprivation can either increase, or decrease, or remain unchanged over time. The change in deprivation depends on the ratio between the expectations and the opportunity for satisfying them. In other words, there is a clear association between the social context and the identity that is transformed in certain social environment [8].

The accelerated migration of rural people to the urban areas in the developing countries in the 1960–1970s resulted from these changes in the traditional agriculture. However, the urban labor markets in these countries are unstable; they cannot absorb the inflows of rural migrants. Hence, these migrants have to seek for other opportunities for living. Some of them venture to migrate to other countries.

These processes can be observed particularly clearly under the conditions of modern globalization, when the structural transformation and penetration of new capital-intensive production methods into the traditional communities occur at a very high rate, on one hand and the global mass media ensure rapid and wide spreading of information about the opportunities and the standard of living in the other countries, on the other hand.

The situation in Russia is complicated by the fact that the host society also faces the identity crisis associated with the modernization processes that cause an abrupt change in conditions, level and pace of life and collapse of the entrenched stereotypes in the population.

The processes that used to occur in former republics of the Northern Caucasus during the post-Soviet era (starting in 1991) were associated with the rapid and drastic changes in the social and political structure of the society, which were aimed at forming the stratum of owners. This process was one of the components of modernization. The researchers mention that the question regarding who has the right for power and property within this territory has emerged naturally, while the ethncal resource of economic and political competition has become the key one and was the main reason behind the inter-ethnic conflicts and forced migration [4]. Furthermore, the researchers (e.g. James Scott) have made an attempt at combining the political anthropology and social theories to analyze the reasons behind the ethnic conflicts and collisions. They believe that two conditions are needed: the hierarchy and domination of one social group within the social system and the experience of daily submission, which results in a strong desire of a group to change its status [5].

Another feature of the conflicts related to the migrations during the modernization period is that the relations between the local population and the migrants overlap with the identity crisis of the local population (residents) that had also been caused by modernization. A complex tangle of problems (economic, social and religious) is eventually formed, while both the federal and local authorities fail to resolve these problems. The symbolic side of the conflicts is a significant component of confrontation [6].

In order to interpret the reasons for the conflicts in the migration sphere during the period of modernization processes, the researchers use the deprivation concept [7]. Deprivation is the condition emerging when there is an explicit divergence between people’s expectations and opportunities to satisfy these expectations. It is clear that deprivation can either increase, or decrease, or remain unchanged over time. The change in deprivation depends on the ratio between the expectations and the opportunity for satisfying them. In other words, there is a clear association between the social context and the identity that is transformed in certain social environment [8]. First, deprivation increases and the probability of conflict increases when the opportunities for satisfying the already existing demands are reduced (which is observed then the established economic relations are collapsed). In this case, the expectations of many people are determined by the humble formula for maintaining the status quo: “if only things did not get worse”. Second, it increases in a situation when expectations and demands increase much faster than the opportunity to satisfy them do.

According to this approach, the maintenance of the stable deprivation level or its reduction causes the formation of psychological environment facilitating stabilization of the moral and psychological atmosphere in the society and tension reduction [9]. Contrariwise, an increase in deprivation induces aggressive reactions that are typically implemented as protests against the source of disappointment, people who are responsible for the situation (it can be either actual or farfetched guilt). The aggression can be manifested as seeking for new “scapegoats” who can be either migrants, or the people who are paid “too much” for their work, or the authorities and the officials. In other words, increased deprivation increases tension in society and the probability for the emergence of open social, political and ethnic conflicts with participation of immigrants [10].

Modernization of the economic sphere increases the number of job positions, resulting in an influx of immigrants (sometimes illegal) from the adjacent areas, which actually is the basis of the phenomenon known as “labor migration”. I.V. Ivakhnyuk mentions that the answer to the question about the reasons and mechanism
of migration is not as simple as it may initially seem [11]. Among the factors promoting the mass “anthro flows”, he distinguishes such factors as dissatisfaction with one’s position, job, financial well-being, education, career, etc. All these problems (which can cause mass migrations) are especially typical of societies being modernized. In this case, the desire to find a place where the migrants hope to acquire better life conditions is the migration incentive.

People with migration background prefer to settle down in megalopolises and large cities. The multicultural environment is formed here; it is easier for the migrant communities to live in such an environment when trying to economically integrate into the existing social system of production. During the era of post-industrialized economy when the service sector provides up to 60–70% of the GDP in developed countries, the migrants become a “privileged group” in many respects due to the fact that they are more ready to change their place of residence because of work as compared to the indigenous population that is often kept in the region there live by the habitual lifestyle and the entrenched traditions. For this very reason, the ethnophobia virus is more likely to affect the residents of megalopolises than other settlements. It is evident that young people are more susceptible to ethnophobia: thus, the negative attitude to all ethnic groups among young people in Moscow is higher than that among the Muscovites in general. Young people nowadays exhibit a higher level of intolerance as compared to elderly people, as opposed to the 1990s, when youth was more tolerant to ethnic minorities compared to the elderly people [12].

There is also another aspect of migration during the modernization period, which has been exemplified by the Caucasian republics of the former USSR. After the perestroika modernization started, the relative number of Russian population in the former Soviet republics has decreased. Such an “outcome” was observed for the South Caucasian states (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), North Caucasian republics and the bordering regions of the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions; Rostov, Volgograd and Astrakhan regions. The Northern Caucasus is nowadays a region with special geopolitics and ethnic culture, where two civilizations, the Slavic Christian (Orthodox) one and the Mountain Islamic one, co-exist [13].

For the peoples who live in the Caucasian region and have experienced the impact of modernization, the problem is aggravated by the fact that Islam, one of the main political forces, is not unified. A number of social and political entities are only nominally associated with the religion and politics, while the sphere of actual interests lies in the plane of rivalry between the regional sub-elite groups that have formed after the relations in the Soviet society had collapsed. These groups have different views on the fate of Caucasian identity. While the followers of traditional Islam consider the North Caucasian identity formed in Russia to be the main thing (with Islam being only a component of the local tradition), the new trends in Islam that are often formed and activated by the external influence insist that the North Caucasus Muslims must feel themselves a legitimate part of the Global Ummah and take part in establishment of the Caliphate. Hence, there is a struggle for the right to have influence on the post-Soviet identity in the North Caucasian region, resulting in the formation of the norms of relations with non-Muslims (which sometimes include high level of conflictogenity causing forced migration).

Another aspect of current modernization in the North Caucasian region is that the representatives of Caucasian ethnic groups leave this area and settle in the Russian territory. The relations between them and the local host population depend on a number of cultural and social factors. The identity of the local population and migrants is directly associated with social assimilation of the immigrants.

In Southern Russia, most ethnic immigrants are unskilled workers who have values of the traditional Eastern rural cultures; this fact determines the potentialities of social adaptation of immigrants in the host community to a significant extent.

The global and Russian experience demonstrates that as long as the number of immigrants having other cultural traditions and stereotypes is relatively small (and provided that they are voluntary immigrants), they assimilated in the host society rather easily. No serious inter-ethnic conflicts occur and the identity transformation is quicker and smoother. In other words, a particular social or political situation may significantly contribute to conflict escalation [14].

When the absolute number of forced immigrants becomes significant (and the rate of its growth are high), more or less compact sociocultural enclaves (ethnic diasporas) are formed.

The existence of diaspora groups slows down the adaptation and integration processes and typically causes inter-ethnic conflicts that are aggravated by the existing economic and social inequality between the “local” and “migrant” population. The in- and outgroup members compete in the labor and housing markets. Voluntary segregation of the communities of ethnic
migrants (or encapsulation, according to terminology proposed by M. Savva) is most typically the deliberate strategy of adaptation to the host community caused by the low level of readiness of a migrant community to be integrated with the local community [15]. The establishment of the “buffer environment” that reproduces the social ties, networks and the traditional cultural environment is most typical of ethnic communities whose traditions, culture and standards of behavior differ considerably from those of the local residents. Segregation is a strategy undertaken by the community on one hand and a result of the policy of the host society on the other hand. According to V.I. Mukomel’, the issue is not only about the everyday (usually unsuccessful) relations between the diaspora members and the local residents. The efficiency of social, economic and cultural institutions that are intended to ensure socialization of population becomes of significant importance. However, no mechanisms facilitating socialization of immigrants have been established in the societies being modernized thus far.

Most factors restraining socialization of immigrants are associated with the same modernization processes, the transition from the traditional society to the modern one, which are experienced by the migrant communities. Those who had to leave their homeland strive to preserve the patriarchal institutions of their traditional community. In other words, the Tajik migrants in Russia are “Tajiks” to an even greater extent than those who stayed in Tajikistan. The patriarchal structure with the well-developed familial and patronage institutions is also reproduced in the host community. The disadvantage of relying on traditional structures is that the immigrants acquire neither the experience of socialization in the host community nor adapt to the urban environment.

The actual and serious problems caused by the intense formation of new diasporas and compact settlements of migrant ethnic minorities should be solved by following the constructive ethno-national policy in these regions. And the authorities of the regions start following decisive policy for relieving the tension between the local population and the immigrants. The authorities of the entities of the Russian Federation try to solve the problems associated with migrantophobia within the framework of programs of regional and national policy, which are supported as programs for prevention of illegal migration and crime using the regional funds. Furthermore, a number of international standards in the sphere of migration policy need to be adopted.

However, another fact is also evident. New identities (both among the immigrants and the residents) can be successfully formed only through recognizing common values, mutual recognition and establishment of the mechanism for controlling the integration processes, which ensures “protection of identity of each individual at the micro level” [16]. It should be mentioned that the micro level assumes the interaction at the inter-personal and group levels.

The factors restraining integration are unfavorable social and economic, legal and socio-cultural conditions related both to the lack of completeness of the modernization process in sphere of economy and to marginalization of the social structure of the society, resulting in overlapping of several identity crises. The positive dynamics of the integration process and overcoming of the identity crisis under these conditions are possible only if there are positive grounds for convergence at the subjective level.

REFERENCES


