

# ETHNOCULTURAL BEHAVIOUR OF MIGRANTS IN POLYETHNIC CITY (EXAMPLE OF THE TAJIKS OF KAZAN)

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**Abstract:** Basing on the analysis of various sources (statistical, written, and author's field materials), the features of ethnocultural processes among the Tajik migrants in a large Russian city (Kazan) are considered.

The Tajik diaspora in the Republic of Tatarstan is a young and rapidly growing one. They are attracted to the Republic mainly due to its economic stability and availability of jobs, as well as by the large percentage of Muslims in the population (50%). The main adaptation problems are related to the insufficient language competencies (poor knowledge of the Tatarstan official languages – Tatar and Russian), and the tendency to live in rather closed community. At the same time, a certain part of the Tajik migrants is socially active; they participate in various events, both municipal and organised within the Tajik community. An important ethnocultural characteristic of the Tajiks is a high level of religiousness, which determines the main aspects of their lives. This factor is reflected in many aspects of their food culture, which we interpret as a combination of nourishment system with various manifestations of social interaction. In general, the obtained data make it possible to assert that, under the dominance of closed/lock-in cultural environment, the Tajik migrants tend to preserve the traditions brought from the previous place of residence.

**Keywords:** culture of food, migrants, Muslims, polyethnic city, Republic of Tatarstan, the Tajiks

## Introduction

Diasporas play an important role in the modern society. Diasporas – old and young, large and small – change the ethnic and social structure, bring new elements of culture, and come into various contacts and interactions. The Republic of Tatarstan (further – RT) – one of the subjects of the Russian Federation founded on the ethnic principle – and its capital Kazan for several centuries have been the territories with a diverse ethnic structure of the population. Together with the major ethnic groups (the Tatars and the Russians), it contains many diasporas differing in languages, cultures, and confessions.

The Tajik diaspora in the RT is relatively young. According to censuses, the first Tajik migrants, permanently living in the RT, were registered in 1970 (88 people). Since then, their number increased manifold; according to the 2010 census, the Tajiks in Tatarstan hold the 12<sup>th</sup> position by number (5659 people) out of 122 distinguished ethnic groups (Itogi 2013: 5–6). The overwhelming majority of the Tajik migrants (about 75%) live in cities; men twice outnumber women. Out of 4351 urban Tajiks registered by the 2010 census, 1589 people (1172 men and 417 women) live in the RT capital – Kazan (Itogi 2013: 7). The main reason for migration is the search for employment and financial assistance to the relatives in Tajikistan. The main occupations are small business (trade), services, construction, public catering, transport; this explains the gender-age imbalance of the migrants, the majority of whom are men of working age.

The objective of this paper is to show, by the example of the Tajik migrants in Kazan, the means and features of their adaptation, the forms of ethnocultural behaviour, including interaction with the poly-ethnic environment. This issue is topical due to the overall situation associated with global migrations and population transfer; complications occasionally arising between the new-comer and the receiving community; the need to propagate the positive practices of migrants' adaptation. When writing the paper, we used documentary sources (statistical data, official documents) and author's materials obtained when developing a project on studying the food culture of the Tajiks in Tatarstan. Within the project implemented in 2017, we polled 300 respondents using a specially designed questionnaire; 30 more respondents underwent in-depth interviews.

Historiography of the issues referring to diasporas includes many areas (see, for example, Thomas & Znaniecki 1920; Tishkov 2003; Djatlov 2010; Avdashkin 2015). We are, first of all, interested in the research focused on ethnocultural components, which makes a large bibliography (for example, Asribekova 2012; Astvacaturova 2003; Korovushkin 2006; Mahmutov 2009; Savchenko 2002; Starovojtova 19874; Jagafova 2015). As for Tatarstan, the researchers' interest towards migrants and different ethnic groups significantly grew after the disintegration of the USSR, due to the increase of the migrants flow and the growing importance of the issues of interethnic interaction in the new ethnopolitical environment. The Tajiks in Tatarstan also got into the focus of research and were studied by sociologists (Sagdieva 2010; Gabdrahmanova & Sagdieva 2016), political scientists (Omorova 2014), and ethnologists (Diaspory i soobshchestva 2013; Diaspory i soobshchestva 2014; Diaspory i soobshchestva 2016). Major attention was paid to such issues as political-legal status of the migrants, socio-economic aspects of adaptation, identity within diaspora, etc. All these works are united by a similar feature: they are structured according to the principle of transiting from general phenomena and processes to specific examples, the latter being the Tajiks in Tatarstan as a group or as individuals. Our research is structured according to the opposite principle: its starting point is a specific element of culture of the Tajiks, namely, their food culture; around it, various collisions and manifestations of the general ethnocultural processes are formed. This approach is possible due to the multiplicity of roles which food plays in culture of any people and its links with the environment.

## **Motives of Migration and Ethnocultural Description of the Tajik Migrants**

Prior to analysing the food culture *per se*, we consider it necessary to make a number of preliminary comments.

The rates of the Tajik migration to Tatarstan testify to the presence of motives attracting the migrants to the Republic. Apparently, the first waves of migration, as early as in the Soviet times, were the form of social mobility: people moved within the country in search of jobs, mainly seasonal, and, having worked for some time, returned to the place of their permanent residence. After the disintegration of the USSR and due to the complicated situation in the former Soviet Republics, including Tajikistan, the migrants started to pursue another

goal – the search for a long-term employment for financial assistance to their family members and a probable change of place of residence and citizenship. For the Tajiks, as well as for other migrants from the Central Asia, Tatarstan was a rather attractive option. According to the migrants, their choice of the region was due to several motives. First, RT is one of the donor regions in Russia, with a steadily high level of economic development, capacious labour market and favourable prospects of employment. Second, the social background in RT (standard of living, income rate, cost of living) is good enough for various social groups. Third, Tatarstan has a steady image of a problem-free region in terms of interethnic and inter-confession relations, and tries to maintain it by state regulation measures. This factor played an important role in distribution of migrant flows in post-Soviet states, when the interethnic and inter-confession conflicts aggravated in many regions. Finally, and this is obligatorily emphasised by the Tajik migrants, it is essential for them that a half of the RT population are Muslims, and the Tajiks feel comfortable in such conditions.

As has been stated in a number of studies (Sagdieva 2010; Stolyarova & Maddahi 2012), the Tajik migration to Tatarstan is greatly facilitated by the social networks, which are formed by the principles of kinship and country-fellowship. These networks provide information about the employment prospects and the residence conditions. The new-comers first of all turn to their fellow-countrymen, try to find accommodation close to them, obtain necessary information and assistance from them.

Adaptation of migrants takes place in several stages. The first stage – legalisation – is establishing direct personal links with the fellow-countrymen, obtaining a permit for living and working. The second stage is “accommodation” to the new conditions of a large city, adaptation in the working place, broadening the social environment. The third stage is participating in the public life of the city, an attempt to become “a native”. The first stage is necessary and obligatory for all migrants. The second and third stages are, as a rule, undergone by those who are satisfied with their new position and are planning to live there long-term.

The majority of the Tajiks arriving in Tatarstan are men of working age. In case of their successful legalisation, other family members come to some of them – wives, children, sometimes senior family members. The summarised ethnocultural description of the migrants, based on a number of researches (Omorova 2014; Diaspory i soobshchestva 2016), is as follows: they adhere to traditional way of living (preferring the traditional elements of culture in

clothes, food, dwelling interior, family relations); they prefer speaking their native language; they prefer having their fellow-countrymen as milieu; they are Muslims, and their confessional identity prevails over ethnic identity. The formulation “*first of all I am a Muslim, and only then I am Tajik*” is characteristic of our respondents.

## Culture of Food of the Tajik Migrants as a Part of Ethnocultural Behaviour

Food is one of the primary needs of a human. During the long period of evolutionary development, the ethnic cultures formed the so called **nourishment system**. Nourishment system is usually interpreted as a set of consumed products; techniques of their acquisition, processing and storing; kinds and content of the dishes prepared from them (national cuisine); utensils used for storing, cooking and serving food; nutrition regime. A broader conception – **culture of food** – comprises the nourishment system elements with various manifestations of social interaction (Stolyarova *et al.* 2016).

The nutrition of the Tajiks – ancient tillers and cattle-breeders – is based on vegetable and meat products. The main rules, regulating all processes related to food and nutrition, are contained in the Quran and other Islamic sources. As our research showed, for the Tajiks, the instructions of Islam are an essential factor influencing the food culture. This is especially apparent when comparing the Tajiks with another Muslim group of Kazan – the Tatars.

In Islam, the main rule, forming the whole way of life, is the principle of permissibility. Distinction between the permitted, the allowed (*halal*) and the unpermitted, forbidden (*haram*) exists in all spheres of life, including culture of food, – from products to rules of behaviour. The notions of *halal* and *haram* were familiar to each Tajik respondent of our research, regardless of their gender and age, and the absolute majority of them (100% of respondents) try to eat only permitted food. Under certain circumstances, for example, during grave illnesses the respondents, by their words, also would not use the forbidden (*haram*) products and medicines. Even in an extremity, under the threat of death, only one of the five respondents (19.8%) would use the forbidden products, though under such circumstances Islam does not insist on strict observance of the rules. For comparison, the Tatars show different results. The terms *halal* and *haram* are less familiar to the Tatars, than to the Tajiks:

68% and 72% of the latter confirmed knowing these terms, respectively. Thus, the notion of *halal* is slightly more familiar to the Tatars than the term *haram*. This is especially vivid among the youth: the term *halal* is familiar to 60% the respondents and 15% know nothing of it; while for the term *haram* this ratio is 50% to 25%. There are also differences in gender-age groups. In general, the Tatar women know the notions of *halal* and *haram* better than the Tatar men (81.6% and 77%; 71.2% and 63.8%, accordingly); the younger the respondents, the lower these values. As for using the forbidden products during illnesses or under the threat of death, over 60% of the Tatar respondents were ready to use them.

The obtained data prove that the Tajik migrants not only very well know the Islamic rules concerning food, but also try to observe them in their everyday practices. Such norms as pronouncing a thanks-giving prayer before and after a meal, moderation in eating, reverence to the sources of food and to the process of eating, interrelation between eating the permitted food and doing virtuous deeds, and many others, the majority of our respondents (90% and more) recognised to be customary for themselves. From the interview: “...*I got used to it since childhood; in my homeland, every family read namaz [prayers] and everyone behaves as it is prescribed in the Quran*” (Field materials 2017).

Various mandatory actions related to food and having ritual character are of special significance. For Kazan Tajiks, the most important are such ritual actions as offering (including the tradition of *aqiqah*) and *zakyat*, remembrance rituals, observing the fast (*uraza*), solemn oath (vow).

In the Islamic tradition, offering is done during *Kurban Bairam* (celebration of sacrificial offering); during the ceremonies before wedding; after the return of a kin from a long journey; for healing of the ill; when buying a house or a car to remove misfortune. Another type of an offering, popular among the Muslims, is *aqiqah*. This ritual is performed on the seventh day after a child-birth for protecting purposes, and is aimed at removing illnesses and other misfortunes from the baby.

The religious vow (solemn oath) is a religious tradition, during which a person sacrifices an animal, food or valuables to the supreme forces or spirits who may help in achieving the desired goal. The most popular solemn oath is done with food, mainly by sacrificing an animal and cooking food. This tradition is more widely spread among women than among men, and in the Islamic communities it is considered to be a religious activity of women.

Another tradition associated with food is *zakyat* (donations). The main functions of *zakyat* are the following: creating a balance between the standard of living of the rich and the poor; financial support of social programs; prolongation of life; increasing well-being; protection from misfortunes. The canonical *zakyat* includes nine elements, seven of which are eatable (wheat, barley, dates, raisins, camel, cow, ram) and only two are uneatable (gold and silver). Thus, it is obvious that food plays a special role in this Islamic tradition.

The above-listed rituals are universal and are observed by many Muslim communities, including the Kazan Tajiks. The celebration of sacrificial offering – *Kurban Bairam* – is one of the main and most popular events; the Tajiks consider the ritual of sacrifice and the donation to be its most essential elements. Equally important are remembrance meals, aimed, according to the believers, both at revering the memory of the dead and peace of their souls, and at protection of their own health and well-being.

As was shown by our research, in all the above-listed segments of religious conceptions and nutrition practices connected with them, the Tajik are more competent and active than, for example, the Tatars. In particular, the remembrance rituals, *aqiqah* and *zakyat* are customary for the majority of the questioned Tajiks (about 100%), while for the Tatars *aqiqah* and *zakyat* are much less frequent even among the most religious persons of elder age groups. Besides, 40% of the Kazan Tajiks practice donating food to the needy in the case of a solemn oath violation, which is very rare among the Tatars.

Of all Islamic rules related to food, one can distinguish the norms which the Kazan Tajiks consider to be not strictly mandatory. As a rule, these are the norms of permissible and recommended character. For example, Islam allows the Muslims to accept invitation for a meal from representatives of Abrahamic religions, provided they do not eat meat dishes. Actually, not all accept such invitation (44% of the responding Tajiks). Islam also recommends composing a larger part of one's ration from vegetable food; this rule is observed by about 60% of our respondents. Not every respondent (a little more than 50%) follows the recommendation to start a meal with a small amount of salt or vinegar, which is considered to be health prophylaxis in Islam. However, these deviations are not crucial, as they do not violate the fundamental norms of Islam and are of individual or situational character. In general, it should be admitted that the religious factor plays a determining and regulating role in the culture of food of the Tajik migrants.

## Participation in Public Life as a Form of Ethnocultural Contacts

One of the forms of migrants' adaptation in a large poly-ethnic city is creating their own ethnic infrastructure: enterprises of public catering, trade, services, etc., organised by the migrants and serviced by them (Djatlov 2015). The Tajiks also adhere to this rule. In Kazan, a café chain "Ashkhana Khola" is functioning, which serves halal Tajik food; there is a Public Organization of the Tajiks assisting the employment of the fellow-countrymen; regional representatives of the Centre for Migrants' Employment and Adaptation, the main task of which is to offer juridical services; a business centre for providing mobile services with special reduced tariffs, etc.

In Tatarstan, the everyday life of migrants is facilitated by the fact that the state authorities try to actively regulate it. The Law "On national-cultural autonomies", adopted in RT in 2003 (Law 2003), is aimed, first of all, at protecting the ethnocultural and language rights of the ethnic minorities. Since 2002, the Tajik diaspora has its organisation (national-cultural autonomy) within the Assembly of the Peoples of Tatarstan, which works with the migrants – fellow-countrymen, arranges ethnocultural events and participates in the overall activity of the Assembly. Annually, the community arranges 15–20 cultural events (festivals, exhibitions, concerts; publishing, scientific, enlightening activity). According to the head of the community, at any festive event in Kazan, the Tajiks arrange their own sites, where they demonstrate national clothes, music, dances, sports competitions, folk crafts, etc. Special attention is given to the national cuisine, the leader of which is, undoubtedly, the Tajik pilaf. Paying homage to the skill of the Tajik culinary experts and cooks, including in organising feasts for large number of guests, they are often invited to mass events. In particular, it is the Tajik cooks that cook pilaf for the annual *iftar* (breaking the fast during the sacred month of Ramadan) in the Republic; the tradition of arranging the mass *iftar* appeared in RT in 2011, and now this event gathers over ten thousand people.

The functioning of the Public Organization, by the words of the Tajik migrants, is very important. First, it provides assistance to its members in various issues (juridical, financial, psychological, everyday life, etc.). Second, the community performs the mediation function between the migrants and the receiving community, and regulates relations between them. Third, through

various events the community, on the one hand, consolidates its members, and on the other hand, it transmits the information about the ethnocultural image of the migrants to the receiving community. All this taken together allows the Kazan Tajiks to estimate their stay as comfortable enough. From the interview:

*...my family feels well in Kazan. The fellow-countrymen help in everything, the relations with others are good, too. When I cook pilav, I always take some to the neighbors, people smile and thank me. I feel that I also can ask them for help...* (Field materials 2016).

The migrants emphasise that they observe the legislation and try to comply with the traditions of the receiving community.

Of course, there are certain problems. As our respondents stated in the interview, the most significant problems are: nostalgia; poor knowledge of the Russian and Tatar languages; low juridical competence, etc. Sometimes among the negative phenomena they mentioned the cases of unacceptable, in the respondent's opinion, behaviour of other people (not respectful enough attitude to the elderly, too free morals, rudeness, etc.). In general, the Tajik migrants positively estimate the contacts with different ethnic groups, mentioning Tatar, Russian, Uzbek friends. However, they generally do not approve of interethnic marriages, and prefer to spend free time with their fellow-countrymen.

## Conclusion

The research carried out among the Tajik migrants in Kazan showed that their adaptation in a large poly-ethnic city takes place successfully, in general. This is indirectly confirmed by the fact that the number of the Tajiks arriving in the Republic grows annually. The destination of migration is chosen by the Tajiks consciously and is based on the information spread by the social networks. The main factors for choosing the Republic of Tatarstan are the social-economic and political stability, ethnocultural proximity to the title ethnos (the Tatars) and the high share of Muslim communities in the population. Another important circumstance is the efforts of the Republic authorities to control the interethnic dialogue and to maintain the traditions of peaceful interaction and cooperation.

The analysis of ethnocultural processes in Tajik migrants, performed by the example of the culture of food, allows making a conclusion which confirms the suggested working hypothesis on the variability of the Muslim cultures. The

obtained data testify to the more traditional variant of Islam in Kazan Tajiks, compared, for instance, with the group of ethnic majority – the Tatars, and the larger compliance of their behaviour to canonical forms. In particular, such aspect of culture as food culture displays the high dependence on religious factors, which is apparent even in comparison with the Tatars who in the recent years position themselves as Muslims. At the same time, our results confirm that under different natural-geographic, socioeconomic, historical and cultural conditions the people of the same confession form different models of life activity and behaviour.

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