

EDN: WVQSPK
УДК 37.032(=512.157)

Ethno-Identification Symbols in the Formation of National Consciousness

Sargylana V. Nikiforova*

*North- Eastern Federal University
Yakutsk, Russian Federation*

Received 23.03.2021, received in revised form 28.04.2023, accepted 02.05.2023

Abstract. The problem of the complexity of ethnic self-identification of a modern person is considered. The analysis of basic symbols, functioning both in the ritual and in everyday life, is proposed. We determine the specificity of structuring and hierarchization of the semantic field of culture, where symbols appear as signs of identification of an ethnic group and genetic memory of culture. It is noted that in traditional everyday life, ordinary consciousness uses these symbols as something “taken for granted”, not subject to reflection, automatically building a household context: the “self-concept” of the ethnos, the self-name, everyday knowledge, the jointly known idea of the native land – *alaas*. Based on the analogies between ordinary and mythological consciousness, the author, using the example of self-designation and spatial representations in the Sakha (Yakut) culture, examines the structure and mechanism of functioning of key symbols. The author concludes, that symbols serve as the basis for ethnic identification, actualize and strengthen the spiritual experience of predecessors in the consciousness of the cultural bearer, thereby rooting a person and providing the foundations of his existence.

Keywords: corpus of basic symbols, everyday life, ethnomethodology, everyday consciousness, ethnicity, stereotypes, self-name, historical memory, values, social competence.

Research area: cultural (social) anthropology; cultural studies; ethnology; ethnomethodology.

Citation: Nikiforova S. V. Ethno-identification symbols in the formation of national consciousness. In: *J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci.*, 2023, 16(7), 1036–1042.
EDN: WVQSPK



Этноидентификационные символы в формировании национального самосознания

С.В. Никифорова

Северо-Восточный федеральный университет
Российская Федерация, Якутск

Аннотация. Рассмотрена проблема сложности этнической самоидентификации современного человека. Предложен анализ корпуса базовых символов, функционирующих как в обряде, так и в повседневности. Определена специфика структурирования и иерархизации смыслового поля культуры, где символы фигурируют в качестве знаков идентификации этноса и генетической памяти культуры. Отмечено, что в традиционной повседневности обыденное сознание использует эти символы как нечто «само собой разумеющееся», не подлежащее рефлексии, автоматически выстраивающее бытовой контекст: «я-концепция» этноса, самоназвание, повседневное знание, совместно известное представление о родной земле – алаас. Исходя из аналогий между обыденным и мифологическим сознанием, автор на примере самоназвания и пространственных представлений в культуре саха (якутов) рассматривает структуру и механизм функционирования ключевых символов. Автор утверждает, что символы служат основанием этнической идентификации, актуализируют и укрепляют в сознании носителя культуры духовный опыт предшественников, тем самым укореняют человека и обеспечивают основания его бытия.

Ключевые слова: корпус базовых символов, повседневность, этнометодология, обыденное сознание, этничность, стереотипы, самоназвание, историческая память, ценности, социальная компетентность.

Научная специальность: 5.10.1 – теория и история культуры, искусства.

Цитирование: Никифорова С.В. Этноидентификационные символы в формировании национального самосознания. *Журн. Сиб. федер. ун-та. Гуманитарные науки*, 2023, 16(7), 1036–1042. EDN: WVQSPK

Introduction. Every time creates its own type of everyday life with the specific structures of consciousness and behavior, moral norms, material and tangible world. “The spirit of the era,” imposed on “a distinctive way of life” (Geertz, 2004: 275), i.e. the basic characteristics of the traditional culture, formed in the course of history: beliefs, knowledge, material world of objects, values and behavior patterns. For the modern world outlook is typical to aspire to justify such a model of the world that would satisfy a request for adaptation to rising changes in life. “Unstable routine of everyday activities” (Garfinkel, 2007: 185) generates an intensification of meaning of life by means of analogy, which,

in turn, provokes the mind, which not being able to recognize and having no time to react, goes in a simple way: refers to the cultural precedent. You can barely recognize the modern problem.

Theoretical framework. Justification of the conclusion, if it is required, will cause the following archetypes: presentation, prejudices, norms, myths, which, according to K. Jung, are imprinted in the consciousness of everyone.

The archetypes constitute the system of coordinates, from which the ordinary consciousness is not able to get out. With the acceleration of pace of life ability to perceive reality is deformed, it is replaced by a simplified scheme, a set of mythological stories provided

by culture. It seemed that forgotten phenomena of the collective unconscious acquires relevance, because human nature does not allow to remain only in the rigid system of rational truths and the strict framework of formal logic. In this regard, the daily is related to the myth: the same complexity of mythological thinking, not separated subject and object, the prevalence of emotional and evaluative characteristics. "The proof of compliance of real life with the mythological primary example was a ritual, which was the main semiotic formula, archaic text of everyday life" (Leleko, 2002: 64).

Through national consciousness the traditional cultural fund, the historical memory that best preserved in the ritual, is associated with modernity. New realities and new interpretations of the fate of the people and the sense of national and cultural realities are in this fund. Self-consciousness, that is, understanding of themselves as a subject of consciousness, communication and action, understanding their feelings, thoughts, behavior motives, their status in society, or "dialogue of the person with his/her experience" (Spirkin, 1972: 142) gets to the everyday life, which for centuries was polished by the rite, determining its experience. In this context it is interesting the fact that "self-consciousness is constitutive principle of personality. It is peculiar not only to the individual, but also to the society, class, a social group, when they are raised to understand their common interests and ideals" (Spirkin, 1972: 149).

Statement of the problem. Ethnic (national) identity means not only the national self-determination, but also the idea of the people, the origin, historical past, traditions, norms of behavior (Kuznetsov, 1994: 26). Ethnic identity is considered as an awareness of belonging to a particular "we" as opposed to "others", who are "not we" (Gumilyov, 1990: 56). As long as members of the ethnic group of people save specific ethnic features of national identity, ethnic group continues to exist" (Bromley, 1981: 175). In accordance with the concept of the psychological tool of social grouping in the modern mobile world, self-identification of the person is perhaps the only sign of ethnic identity. Thus, "the crisis of national identity can be described as a global trend of our time"

(Malygina, 2017). The person, who considers himself, with whom relates himself, who is his "own" for himself, for this reason he positions himself as a member of an ethnic group "We", for example, *bihigi sakhalar ... (we, Yakuts ... usually do so)*.

Methodology. The study was carried out within the framework of the ethnomethodological approach of G. Garfinkel, who considers practical circumstances and actions (self-name, locus of space, coat of arms of modern times, etc.) as independent phenomena and basic symbols of the identity of an ethnic group. We consider some aspects of everyday life and propose a cultural-semiotic interpretation of the ethno-identifying symbols of Sakha culture, which is by its nature extra-temporal and general ethnic, using the methodology of A. Shchutz's phenomenological sociology, research on ethnic identity by I. V. Malygina; N. P. Koptseva's research on the formation of the identity of the indigenous peoples of the North and Siberia; semiotic theory of everyday life Yu. M. Lotman, S. T. Makhlina and V. D. Leleko; some ideas of S. Yu. Neklyudova on the structuring of the intertext in the mythological consciousness while building the basic structures of everyday life.

Discussion. In the traditional culture external contacts were usually kept to a minimum, the ethnic community lived in a space mastered by ancestors, following their traditions in a small circle, so identification was automatic according to the principle of imprinting. For centuries in the culture functioned social archetype, deep installations of the collective unconscious, which are stable, not recognizable by people and are difficult to change. They are lifestyle, everyday behavior patterns, features of housing, clothing and food, public morality and personal ethics.

Semantic fields, marked with ethnic symbols are formed in the course of daily communication. Historical experience of the community is objectified, preserved and accumulated within the semantic fields. Accumulation is selective, since the structure of the semantic field of everyday life sets the criteria for what should be preserved and what should be forgotten. Selection mechanism is a tradition, passed through it and being integrated in the

culture system it becomes its element. Daily life, as peripheral – in relation to the valuable core – a part of traditional culture, is an open self-regulating system, the closer to the center, the more rigid are the system connections of its elements. Therefore, changes are less visible, but there is no doubt that they occur. Ethnicity, according to E. Smith, is “mythical” and “symbolic” (Smith, 1986: 16). “There can be no identity without memory (at least selective), a collective purpose without myth and identity and purpose (or fate) – the essential elements of the concept of the nation” (Smith, 1991: 12). In ethno-psychology there is a special group of ethnic symbols associated with national identity or “I-concept” of the ethnos, through symbols (clothes, jewelery, rituals, etc.) identity of each ethnic group has an opportunity to ethno-identification and ethno-differentiation. Besides, the ethno-identifying symbols include homeland, language, music, dance, national heroes, characteristic gestures, behavioral acts, mental reactions, etc. Because there are specific symbols that contribute to the identification of the ethnic group, therefore, has to be a mechanism of support and preservation of the body of these symbols marking the “I-concept” of ethnic group (Nalchajyan, 2004: 328). Considering the identification of the mechanism, most researchers have suggested that the meaningful symbols arise in those areas, which are influenced from outside, that is the choice is determined by historical circumstances experienced by the culture carrier. Symbols are bound into complexes that make up the code system and function in culture, standing the pressure of influences from other cultures, if they have a sense for the ethnic group. They encode the features of the national character, ethnic values, the most important aspects of the culture, thus they contribute to self-determination and the creation of the image in the course of history. The reservoir for the formation of the body of ethnic symbols is all the available fund of culture, not only traditional forms. The study of ethnic identity can be effective in handling inter-ethnic interactions, since culture is “conscious of itself ... in the eyes of another culture” (Bakhtin, 1986: 334–335). In the process of recognition and comparison, we analyze the

symbols of “our” and “foreign” cultures, which are the means of designation and expression of interests of ethnos, that is, we focus on the instrumental character of the symbols. They identify objects, actions, concepts, events, (Makhlina, 2000: 406) that awaken the senses and emotions (Sapir, 1993: 204), to encourage response.

“Analysis of the current content of the national consciousness allows to determine ... what behaviors, traits are cultivated by adherents of this system as a national” (Kuznetsov, 1994: 34). The stereotypical image of the culture of Sakha is associated with choron; in this role can act khomus, serge, tabyk etc. Before the revolution on the emblem of the region were depicted an eagle and a sable, today – diamond. Signs of dominant symbols are reproduced and change over time, these changes are not arbitrary, and are the result of social dynamics, for example, in the period of statehood they become the anthem, flag, coat of arms, etc. But, in general, the body of leading symbols and “structure of symbols of a culture forms a system, isomorphic and iso-functional of genetic memory of the individual” (Lotman, 2000: 249), a kind of a representative image of the “soul” of the culture.

During ethno-identification the most important seems to be the name and endonym of the ethnos. “Endonym of Yakuts “Sakha” is not found in the documents of the XVII century, because the bearers of this endoethnonim did not perceive it as a major ethnic determinants. Firstly, generic (ulus) self-designations – the memory of ancestors were important.

The term “Sakha” is of ancient origin, and at present is transformed into a symbol of the Yakut state” (Borisov, 1997: 126). The vocabulary of the Yakut language does not contain the word “Yakut”, that is “Yakuts” – exoethnonim. Reports of pioneers never encountered the word “Sakha”, Yakutia is called with homonymous toponym “Yakolsky land” (Materials on the history of Yakutia XVII century ..., 1970: 52). In their native language the Yakuts call themselves only “Sakha”, “ethnonym is important ... as an evidence of the existence of community consciousness: awareness of the ethnic group members of their group uni-

ty is usually called ethnic identity, the external manifestation of which is the existence of a common self-designation” (Bromley, 1981: 56). Until the XVIII century the endoethnonym “Sakha”: “Firstly, it didn’t cover all groups of Yakuts, secondly, the use of the term by the ethnophors was specific. Ethnonym Sakha has ancient origins, going back to the distant days when generic terms were used as an endoethnonym. Yakuts, descended from different ancestors, remembered it, preserving the ancient tribal names: Khangalas, Nam, Borogon, Bootulu, Khoro and others” (Borisov, 1997: 124). In the Yakut language there is an expression ‘bylyr Sakha sagana’ (in ancient times, when we were Sakha). In a case, when it was necessary to invite a shaman, people said: “sakhatyiaary gynnybyt” – (we will be Yakut) (Ksenofontov, 1992: 120). G. V. Ksenofontov notes that these examples of linguistic usage allude to the sacred meaning of endoethnonym “Sakha”.

For ordinary consciousness are typical stylistic reduction, attraction to the reductions, ironic change of meanings on the opposite, so people use deliberately exaggerated forms in everyday communication. For example, in the Russian language the opposite expressions “God knows” and “Devil knows” refer to one, nobody knows. Something similar in semantics and transformation of usage of the following speech constructs in the language of Sakha.

“Yutyugen Yureidin, Sakh saraidyn” – Do not let it come true, deities do not allow it. Yutyugen – Mother Earth and Sakh – Father Sky are lexical units of high style, but in common language they have opposite meanings: yutyugen – gulf, female sexual organ, sakh – manure, shit. And one more important referring to the direct analogy with the Russian turns of speech: saying “Sakh sietin” in meaning “so be it, the hell with it” (Nelunov, 2002. V. 2: 109).

Often Yakuts say “Sakh biler” – the devil knows (Nelunov, 2002. V. 2: 108). It is said, when a person does not know, it is difficult to answer: (nobody knows, only Sakh knows). Here the name is used in the sense of God, and the whole proverb is identical to the Russian “God knows”. “Sakh almost in all dialects of the Mongolian and Turkish languages – connection with the heavenly fire. Was Sakh a

mythological name of the sun, the god of the summer heat and the abundance of milk? ... In connection with the name Saka, Sakha can be understood as the people of Sakha, sun worshippers” (Ksenofontov, 1992: 246). The state of unselected individual from the collective is achieved through the mythological structure of social consciousness, embodied in the traditional culture (Kagan, 1997: 180). The regulator of human activity in daily life is the everyday consciousness.

There is a perception that ordinary consciousness and mentality are two sides of social consciousness, resulting from the separation of general mythological picture of the world on the knowledge and feelings. Whatever side we take, the possibility of its existence and functioning would be provided by the mental structures, psychological mechanisms, value-oriented attitudes that make up the everyday consciousness. The practical nature of everyday life determines the nature of everyday knowledge that is “recipes of solutions of everyday problems», the knowledge of what to do in certain cases ... Everyday knowledge allows to be practically competent in daily life (Berger, Lukman, 1995: 75). Competence is due to the importance of relevant knowledge and its depth. Everyday knowledge is not only knowledge of their own “relevant bodies”, but also the relevant structures of other people, that is, knowledge of the nature and limits of their competence. This allows, if necessary, to get desired information or practical help (Leleko, 2002, 21). Mutual understanding, the creation of a common social reality is possible only under the condition that the vision of reality and concrete situation is common and shared by the participants of social interaction in the basic moments. In this situation, it is important that in everyday life communication process is largely based not on non-called, but on so-called “background understanding”. How, after A. Schutz (2003) H. Garfinkel says, “the individual assumes that the other is also assumes and implies that as well as he assumes the other person assumes the same about him” (Garfinkel, 2007: 66) looks bulky, but the meaning conveys accurately enough. It also transmits the mechanism of everyday communication.

The process of everyday life produces “hidden” and “tolerant” forms of distortion within a clear context for a given culture.

The differences and discrepancies in the understanding of the communicants are required (otherwise communication is meaningless), but those signs are clearly held in the general discourse and they define the character of community, that is “common sense of events”.

In our opinion, symbols of ethnicity are also built this way. “The meaning of together known is filled with personally not expressed, which is selectively hidden. Thus, the everyday events are filled with an essential background of “unspoken meanings”, the background of what is known about themselves and others...” (Garfinkel, 2007: 301). The uniting power of symbols of national identity is in this sense, unspoken, but implicated by all members of the community.

When Sakha imagines alaa, it is not just the locus of space, but also the smells of grass and a smudge, mooing cows and horses neighing, squeaking and buzzing insects, ringing and air play in the summer heat, a nap and quiet measured life in a summer house. The smell, taste and color of cold whipped cream with strawberries.

In this picture we were able to convey a hundredth part of an image, standing up for the signs, we defined very approximately the semantic field of perception and experience, and we barely hinted at the transcendental states that accompany these types of symbols. “Modern man is interested in the restoration and preservation of their identity and the fundamental role in this process is played by symbolic mediators as carriers of cultural memory” (Avdeeva, Yu.N., Degtyarenko, K.A., Koptseva, N.P., 2020: 710): the memory of the family, the people and the culture.

Conclusion. Through the sense of phenomena you can penetrate into the everyday psychology of people, reach the mechanisms

of everyday consciousness. “In the aggregate nationwide spiritual activity there is no effort, no achievements, which would in vain: every improvement, every enlightenment in human soul imperceptibly lives, breeds and is transmitted in all directions, never disappearing completely. Each personal state is precious: because everything goes into a national treasury of spiritual experience” (Ilyin, 1994. V.3: 59). The novelty of the feeling of actualized archetype roots the human being, provides the foundation. “In everyday situations that, what he knows, is an integral part of his social competence ... he claims his competence as a member of the group as one of the conditions of confidence in the fact that his understanding of the meanings of everyday events is realistic” (Garfinkel, 2007: 298). In determining the structure and function of myth S. Neklyudov explains the mechanism of this process: “The spontaneous mythology, coming from below, with all the complexes of national self-awareness... and “artificial” mythology, constructed with the ideological and political goals within the individual or power groups suggest the possibility of “abrupt transition” from a single mythological event to repeatability profane, thus correlation myth with daily is established (Neklyudov, 2000: 36). It is necessary to put this symbolic image in the common context of culture: its time-space, to sound, to determine the title, that is, to restore the traditional model of the world, and there will be held the approach to the understanding of principles. “The national past transmits its charm, genuine or imaginary, to the future. It seems desirable that future in which our nation would continue to live” (Ortega y Gasset, 2003: 165). The peculiarity of human behavior in a changing world is associated with shifts in the outlook. Reality forces to turn to the archaic methods of identification of routine, in fact development without reflexes, which have proved their worth.

References

Avdeeva, Y.N., Degtyarenko, K.A. & Koptseva, N.P. Compensatory role of symbolic mediators in constructing ethnocultural identity. In: *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2020, 13(5), 702–715. DOI: 10.17516/1997–1370–0600.

- Bakhtin, M.M. *Ėstetika slovesnogo tvorcestva [Aesthetics of verbal creativity]*, 1986, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 444 p.
- Berger, P. & Lukman, T. *Sotsial'noe konstruirovaniye real'nosti [The Social Construction of Reality]*. Moscow: Medium, 1995, 323 p.
- Borisov, A.A. *Yakutskie ulusy v epokhu Tygyna [Yakut ulus in the era Tygyn]*. Yakutsk: Bichik, 1997, 160 p.
- Bromley, Y.V. *Sovremennyye problemy etnografii [Modern problems of ethnography]*. Moscow: Nauka, 1981, 389 p.
- Garfinkel, G. *Issledovaniya po etnometodologii [Studies on ethnomethodology]*. St. Petersburg: Peter, 2007, 335 p.
- Geertz, K. *Interpretatsiya kul'tur [Interpretation of Cultures]*. Moscow: ROSSPĖN, 2004, 560 p.
- Gumilyov, L. N. (1990). *Ėtnogenez i biosfera Zemli [Ethnogenesis and biosphere of the Earth]*. Leningrad: Gidrometeoizdat, 1990, 528 p.
- Kagan, M. S. (1997). *Filosofskaya teoriya tsennosti [Philosophical theory of value]*. St. Petersburg: Petropolis, 1997, 205 p.
- Ksenofontov, G.V. *Shamanizm: Izbrannyye trudy: (Publ. 1928–1929) [Shamanism: Selected writings: (Publ. 1928–1929)]*. Yakutsk: Sever-Vostok, 1992, 318 p.
- Kuznetsov, I.M. *Issledovaniye simvolov v sisteme natsional'nogo samosoznaniya: (k postanovke problemy) [The study of characters in the national identity system]*, In *Tsennosti i simvolyy natsional'nogo samosoznaniya v usloviyakh izmenyayushchegosya obshchestva [The values and symbols of national identity in a changing society]*. Moscow, 1994, Pp. 25–36.
- Leleko, V.D. *Prostranstvo povsednevnosti v evropeiskoi kul'ture [The space of everyday life in the European culture]*. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta kul'tury i iskusstv, 2002, 320 p.
- Lotman, Y.M. *Semiosfera: Kul'tura i vzryv. Vnutri myslyashchikh mirov. O dinamike kul'tury [Semiosphere. Culture and explosion. Inside minded worlds. On the dynamics of culture]*. St. Petersburg: Arts – ACT, 2000, 704 p.
- Malygina, I.V. *Dinamika etnokul'turnoi identichnosti: mirovyye trendy i rossiiskaya spetsifika [Ethno-cultural identity dynamics: global trends and Russian specificities]*, In *Kul'tura kul'tury [Cultural culture]*. 2017, 1 (13), Available at: <http://cult-cult.ru/archive-2017-1>
- Materialy po istorii Yakutii XVII veka (dokumenty yasachnogo sbora) [Materials on the history of Yakutia 17 century (collection of documents tributaries)]*. Moscow: Nauka, 1970, Part 1–3. 1269 p.
- Makhlina, S.T. *Semiotika kul'tury i iskusstva: Opyt entsiklopedicheskogo slovarya [Semiotics of Culture and Art. Experience wikis.: words]* In 2 hours. St. Petersburg. Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta kul'tury i iskusstv, 2000, 552 p.
- Nalchadzhn, A. A. *Etnopsikhologiya [Ethnopsychology]*. St. Petersburg: Piter, 2004, 381 p.
- Neklyudov, S.Y. *Struktura i funktsii mifa [Structure and function of myth]*, In *Mify i mifologiya v sovremennoi Rossii [Myths and mythology in modern Russia]*. Moscow, 2000, 17–38.
- Nelunov, A.G. *Yakutsko-russkii frazeologicheskii slovar' [Yakut – Russian phrasebook]*. Novosibirsk: Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2002, 287 p.
- Il'in, I.A. *Sobranie sochinenii: [Collected Works]*. In 10 vols. Vol. 3. Moscow: Russkaya kniga, 1994, 592 p.
- Ortega y Gasset, José. *Vosstaniye mass [Mass uprising]*. Moscow: OOO “ Publishing House AST “, 2003, 269 p.
- Sapir, Edward. *Izbrannyye trudy po yazyku, kul'ture [Selected writings of in language, culture and personality]*. Moscow: Progress, 1993, 656 p.
- Spirkin, A. G. *Soznanie i samosoznanie [Consciousness and self-consciousness]*. Moscow: Politizdat, 1972, 303 p.
- Smith, A.D. *National Identity*. New-York: Priority press, 1991, 175 p.
- Smith, A.D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford, 1986, 221 p.
- Schutz, A. *Smyslovaya struktura povsednevnogo mira: ocherki po fenomenologicheskoi sotsiologii [The meaningful structure of the everyday world: essays in phenomenological sociology]*. Moscow: Institut Fonda “Obshchestvennoe mnenie”, 2003, 336 p.