

Russia's Northern Caucasus provinces or why the metropoly proved to be unprepared for the "Reconquista" of the provinces

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Abstract. The article is dedicated to the complicated socio-cultural and ethnic processes connected with the displacement of the inhabitants of the former provinces of the Russian state to the imperial center which proved to be unprepared for the broad flood of the ethnic groups. It discusses the historical stages, character and causes of this phenomenon, their consequences. The authors note that the so-called "reconquista" of the provinces is gaining momentum, turning into a spontaneous torrent threatening to engulf not only the imperial identity now in crisis but also to destroy the very foundation of the traditional structure of the Russian state system.

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Introduction

Today's Russia, first of all its historical Russian areas, proved to be unprepared to the influx of those whom it had earlier brought into its world, i.e. the natives of the provinces colonized in XIX century. The Caucasus in this case is taken as one of the manifestations of the universal process that affected both Russia of the late XX-early XXI centuries and the Western world.

The archaic world of the provinces shocked the world of Russia which had never foreseen the situation when the ethnic groups of the provinces started colonizing the center of the Metropoly. The shock affected both the level of everyday life and the mental level.

The united power of the archaic structures proved to be more effective than that of the Russian world which was undergoing a severe crisis. Russia – the Metropoly – failed to find the answers adequate to the situation and did not have at its disposal the necessary tools of influence on the former colonial provinces.

Why did it happen? Firstly, the Metropoly lost not only the energy but also the idea of colonialism, its main initiator – a strong sovereign state – the empire, and its substance – the nobility and peasantry was lost, too.

Secondly, the global communist idea of proletarian internationalism, equality and class solidarity was also lost. With the collapse of the USSR the Metropoly lost the creative inspiration.

Thirdly, there began the reverse colonization as a world-historical process that had hardly been thought of and had been ignored for a long time.

The first manifestation of the advance of the specific provincial "Reconquista" from the Caucasian

provinces to the Metropoly dates to XIX-early XX centuries.

Russia needed the ethnic layer as its reliable ally in the cause of the transformation of the Caucasian world. The imperial authorities selected from the Caucasian elite the people suited for the solution of this problem, and sent them to the imperial educational institutions and elite military subunits for "acculturation" and education.

Here one can already speak about the national question that took shape as a constituent element of the policy of the Russian Empire, regarding the non-Russian ethnic groups, with the characteristic features of tolerance and specific pragmatism. The extension of the territory of the empire resulted in the incorporation into the ruling Russian elite of the representatives of the elite of the local ethnic groups.

To lend good organization to this process and exercise control over it, M.M. Speransky completed in 1822 "The rules of governing the non-Russians" [1].

The socio-economic changes caused by the reforms of the 60-s-70-s of XIX c. began to push out from the provinces to the imperial centre the representatives of the ethnic enterprising people who initially appeared as queer exotica and therefore aroused curiosity rather than fear.

However their growing number and economic activity soon made many natives from the Caucasus rivals for the ethnic Russian entrepreneurship and in this capacity they robbed Russian workers of their jobs.

From the second half of XIX century in 1856, 41556 people from Dagestan region alone, left for seasonal work to the southern Russian towns and

other regions, and in 1911 this number amounted to 77762, and in 1913 – to 93317 [2].

According to A.T. Vasiliev every year thousands of mountaineer-dwellers would come to the district administration to apply for a permit to look for seasonal work in other parts of the empire. In the market place they would usually rent small shops and set up their own shops there, enduring tremendous hardships in order to save up as much money as possible [3].

Especially numerous were the groups of skilled tanners, who left for the southern and eastern areas of the empire – to Astrakhan, Kharkov, Rostov, Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan, Sarapul [2]. A great number of the inhabitants from Temir-Khan-Shura district left for the inner provinces and stayed in the industrial centers for quite a long time holding the posts of guards, sentries, watchmen and others [4].

Northern Caucasus Provinces and the Center of the Metropolis

Many mountaineer-dwellers proved to be clever enough to amass a fortune. As an example one can quote Ismail Shapiev who would go to seasonal labour to Novorossiisk. His business went right and by 1919 he had owned the post road Novorossiisk – Tuapse [2].

The invasion of the Russian imperial environment by the non-Russians from the provinces was strongly promoted by the revolutionary events of 1905-1907, World War I and two 1917 revolutions.

The general situation in the empire and the isolation of the natives of the Caucasus from their communities changed their moral character. The researchers of that period drew attention to their “demoralization” and loss of “traditional upbringing” [5].

Having found themselves in towns, in most cases young and unmarried men led a wild life, took to drinking and strongly promoted local prostitution, participated in quarrels and fights [2].

The second stage of this process was the national policy of the Bolsheviks.

The Soviet state structures aimed to achieve mass inclusion of the ethnic groups in the Soviet construction. This stage progressed and in its form began to resemble a broad and full-flowing river in the period of the so-called socialist reconstruction in the 20-s-30-s of XX century.

The industrialization and collectivization, antireligious struggle pushed out tens of thousands of people from the provinces to the center of Russia and Siberia. The repressions of the Soviet authorities against the Caucasian moslems reached their climax in the summer of 1937 when the organs of the People's Commissariat of Home Affairs (PCHA)

conducted in the auls “The general operation on the withdrawal of the anti-Soviet elements”, in the course of which they arrested over 14 thousand people [6].

Mass ethnic deportations conducted by the Soviet authorities continued to saturate the Russian world with the non-Russian element in the 40-s. In 1943-1944 they deported 317 thousand Chechens, 165 thousand Crimean Tartars, 84 thousand Ingush, and 64 thousand Karachai-Balkar [6].

The repressive measures caused a huge damage to the moral side of the society, and those who were exposed to forced displacement developed the syndrome of inferiority and humiliation.

Exceptionally efficient in the encouragement of the provincial “reconquista” was the policy of the socio-cultural integration realized through the implementation of the idea of the organization of big agrarian settlements and gigantic building projects.

The Soviet reality and the Soviet way of life suppressed and transformed the ethnopsychology. The representatives of the former colonial provinces were not able to completely display their ethnic traditionalism; instead they were offered internationalist and class values.

The ethnic minorities in big numbers began to appear in the Russian world through the officially organized labour recruitment, by their sending them to study at technical higher and secondary educational institutions, by the call-up for active military service in the country's armed forces.

However the saturation of the metropolis with the national minorities at that time did not develop into the spontaneous “reconquista” as the state stood firmly on its own two feet and with a firm hand exercised control over the processes in the country.

Migrations of population are one of the most important problems of population and are seen as a complex social process affecting many sides of the socio-economic life.

In the USSR in conditions of the socialist construction, migrations of the population not only persist, but the state planning of the national economy creates prerequisites for the organized flow of immigrants inside the country.

Huge masses of the people were made, often against their will, to leave their place of residence and were sent to the construction of the big industrial projects and development of the new areas not only in the Far East, but also in the European and Asian North. Apatity, Norilsk, Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur and many other towns are the chief results of the forced migrations of those years.

The third stage of the “reconquista” which began in the second half of the 80-s of XX century quickly assumed the uncontrollable, spontaneous

nature caused by the growth of the instability in the provincial areas of the state that was already in the process of its collapse and reformatting.

The phenomenon absolutely new and extreme in its nature resulted in the flows of the refugees, displaced persons and forced settlers not only among the Russian-speaking population (the so-called Creole and Metis) of the republics of the former USSR but also among a great many of other ethnic groups of the disintegrated state.

Today in Russia the number of the people belonging to this category estimates at over 1 million people [1]. The regions of their withdrawal are Central Asia; Transcaucasia; the regions of the Russian Northern Caucasus: Chechnya, Ingushetia, Northern and Southern Ossetia.

At first the whirlwind of change grabbed the isolated groups of the Slavs and other ethnic groups, the bearers of the Christian cultural archetype. The next in turn were the Russian-speaking residents – the Creole and Metis – who in the general flow of the migrants in the 90-s amounted to 68 percent. In absolute figures their flow in the period of 1991/1995 amounted to 1898.0 thousand people, and in 1996/2000 – to 1034.0 thousand people [1].

They were followed by the flows of the ethnic Caucasian world that became suddenly aware of the former metropolis's weakness. For example, in Volgograd region the total size of the Slavonic population has a steady tendency to reduction. From 1970 to 2002 its number reduced from 90,58% to 88,89%, and the demographic onslaught on the part of the population of the republics of the Northern Caucasus is going on – without the official language and the national culture [7].

The new settlers in the private and social life neglect the laws and cultural and moral norms of the residents of the recipient territories. The excessive expressiveness of the natives of the Caucasus with the negative and even destructive tinge is at this stage interpreted by them as a necessary compensation for the past. This gave rise to the manifestation of the conflict of interest which for quite a lot of time the authorities of the former metropolis had closed their eyes to.

Part of the ethnic migrants from the North Caucasus were pushed out into the flow of the seekers of the new life not so much by the possibilities of modernization as by the fear of the challenges of the general advancement of the archaization which manifested itself in the growth of interethnic confrontation, clan structure and religious fundamentalism. It has to be noted that it is just this part of the ethnic North Caucasus migrants that causes the former metropolis the least trouble as it

was shaped in the imperial socio-cultural space and inherited its mental code.

The situation is also aggravated by the conflict between the metropolis and Slavonic Christians born and grown up in the colonial provinces. According to their status they belonged to and identified themselves as the representatives of the metropolis, but by the origin and upbringing they were part of the colonial provinces. They were joined by a numerous tribe of the metis.

The Repatriation did not save them from the identity crisis, as the repatriates in the RF have become cultural marginalia, the state they are not ready and are not willing to accept.

The “reconquista” of the former colonies is not an entirely new phenomenon to the modern world.

Since 1950 Europe had seen a progressive growth in the number of moslems who at first gathered in the port towns, in 1970 – 2,7 million people settled in all the regions of their former metropolis, in 2008 their number amounted to 16,2 million people.

There were attempts to restrain the “reconquista”: in the West by the policy of multiculturalism; and in the USSR – by the policy of internationalism. Both policies failed. The attempts of the new Russia to curb the flood of the exodus by finding the new general identity in the “Russianness” are a failure, too.

The obstacle on the way of the construction of the “Russianness” is the triumphant ethnocentrism breeding the wars of memory, the wars of history.

The new ethnic histories act as an answer to the challenges in the both the metropolis and the provinces. The metropolis is forced to seek in its own past the ideological, political and cultural constructs fit to be used in the new conditions or to create the new ones.

At the same time the provinces, in their turn, reinvent themselves, reformat their ethnic structures in such a way so as to get away from the former depression and cultivate the rising feeling of strength in order to replace the historical defeat not only by the new opinions or new images but also by the feeling of triumph and happiness derived from the historical revenge.

In what way is the metropolis capable, if at all, to address the challenge of the provinces?

The metropolis – Russia, in its turn, having undergone a cardinal transformation is so far unintelligible. The new Russia being created after 1991 is often “the new Russian” society of individualists who are practically not connected with the history of their country and its historical tradition.

The former imperial super ethnos that represented in the past a certain substance with the specific mentality and set of basic values passed on from century to century ceased to be a historical reality and if it does exist it is no more than an ideological or propaganda cliché.

Modern researcher Leonty Byzov in connection with this circumstance notes, that in “a great number of its characteristics the Russian society is more and more distancing itself from the traditional culture and traditional values” [8].

If one should agree with this observation one can say that the former empire is getting more and more languid and incapable of generating its own culture, of getting fresh impetus to preserve and develop its own modern mentality of the world vision of the ever-victorious leitmotiv.

“The “new Russian” society having broken away in its mass from its own ethnic tradition and soil, taking no interest in either its ancestors or the history of their country” [8] is unable to counterpose to the traditionalist challenge of the provinces.

The postmodern state that “the new Russian” society had rushed itself into after the collapse of the empire, devaluated the ethnic solidarity and ethnic traditional clamps to such a degree that the metropoly proved impotent in the face of the growing pressure from the provincial “reconquista”.

The excessive social atomization resulted in the fact that in the “new Russian” society there is no agreement on any issue or problem. And as the same L. Byzov argues: “We are faced with the modern urban society of mass consumption which is unwilling to carry the burden of responsibility for the fate of the Russian civilization, for the heritage of the Russian super ethnos” [8].

The events connected with the collapse and reformatting of the Russian statehood and Russian society were turned simultaneously into the mechanisms of the reformatting of the Russian super ethnos with the aid of the socio-cultural reforming that had taken place for the last 20 years and devaluated the ethno-cultural archetypes established long before.

Conclusion

All the aforesaid problems and processes are perturbing the society of the metropoly – Russia and fail to give an unequivocal answer concerning its ability to address the challenges thrown by the course of history.

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The atomizing former imperial super ethnos in pursuit of personal success suddenly discovered in all the spheres of the metropoly’s space the natives from the provinces who began to win for themselves a place in the sun with renewed vigor, bringing hard terms of competition and claiming leadership which as in the former metropoly they were used to thinking belonged by right to the imperial super ethnos alone.

The North Caucasus provinces began to present their numerous leaders in all the spheres, for example in the sphere of business – Suleiman Kerimov, Umar Dzhabrailov, Sait-Salam Gutseriev, Ziyavutdin Magomedov and others who are turning the provincial “reconquista” into an exceptionally serious argument.

The super motivated migrants did not only cease to consider the former hierarchy but contrary to the customs established for the last 200 years began to claim fearlessly their ethnocultural difference and domination in the metropoly’s social space.

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