



## CULTURAL CODE AS A SYMBOLIC MECHANISM FOR REPRESENTING NATIONAL CULTURE

### O CÓDIGO CULTURAL COMO MECANISMO SIMBÓLICO DE REPRESENTAÇÃO DA CULTURA NACIONAL

**GULNAZ GIZATOVA**

Kazan Federal University – Russia. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7997-2034> E-mail:  
[Gulnaz.Gizatova@kpfu.ru](mailto:Gulnaz.Gizatova@kpfu.ru)

**OLGA IVANOVA**

Kazan Federal University – Russia. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5378-1109> E-mail:  
[Olga.ivanova.ksu@mail.ru](mailto:Olga.ivanova.ksu@mail.ru)

#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study aims to analyze the impact of cultural dimensions, specifically "power distance," on the rate of increase in COVID-19 cases per million.

**Methodology:** The research utilizes a comparative historical and typological analysis, discourse analysis, and system analysis. These methods allow for a comprehensive understanding of national culture and its cultural code, examining how narratives function as forms of discourse.

**Results:** The study concludes that destructive processes in modern realities are leading to the deformation of the cultural code of national cultures. This deformation is closely linked to the transformation of subjectivity within a multicultural world. The results indicate that "power distance" has a significant and negative impact on the rate of increase in COVID-19 cases per million.

**Conclusions:** The study underscores the tension between stability and variability in society, suggesting that national memory and cultural codes are essential for navigating the complexities of human existence and ensuring societal adaptation in the face of contemporary global challenges.

**Keywords:** Cultural code. Symbolic construct. Symbolic representations collective memory.





## RESUMO

**Objetivo.** O estudo tem como objetivo analisar o impacto das dimensões culturais, especificamente a "distância ao poder", na taxa de aumento de casos de COVID-19 por milhão.

**Metodologia.** A investigação utiliza uma análise histórica e tipológica comparativa, uma análise do discurso e uma análise do sistema. Estes métodos permitem uma compreensão abrangente da cultura nacional e do seu código cultural, examinando o modo como as narrativas funcionam como formas de discurso.

**Resultados.** O estudo conclui que os processos destrutivos das realidades modernas estão a levar à deformação do código cultural das culturas nacionais. Esta deformação está intimamente ligada à transformação da subjetividade num mundo multicultural. Os resultados indicam que a "distância ao poder" tem um impacto significativo e negativo na taxa de aumento dos casos de COVID-19 por milhão.

**Conclusões.** O estudo sublinha a tensão entre estabilidade e variabilidade na sociedade, sugerindo que a memória nacional e os códigos culturais são essenciais para navegar nas complexidades da existência humana e assegurar a adaptação da sociedade face aos desafios globais contemporâneos.

**Palavras-chave:** Código cultural. Construção simbólica. Representações simbólicas. Memória colectiva.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Modern culture, like modern society, which is characterized by leading social theorists as a risk society, considered as a continuous process, is also a sphere of instability and risk (Wu & Chelyapina, 2023). Under these circumstances, the cultural code also becomes a space of tension (Ukolova, 2022). This tension is generated by the similarities and differences of cultures, the interaction of which is extremely contradictory and multifaceted (Sharonova & Avdeeva, 2024). Tension is generated by the fact that, on the one hand, there is a transformation of cultures, and, on the other hand, any national culture is influenced by the past of its ethnic group (Abdullaev et al., 2021), the past, which is a forceful and multifunctional determinant of the trajectory of cultural development. Under these conditions, the cultural code of ethnic cultures is often destroyed. These processes require critical reflection, since they are not always on the surface but often have a latent nature.

Authors, define cultural code as a system of symbols, language and customs is used to transmit and preserve the values and traditions of an ethnic group. The cultural code functions as a key element in creating the image of a nation in the eyes of both its own citizens and the world community (Kokorina et al., 2023). It allows people to





express their identity, maintain and reproduce cultural heritage from generation to generation (Sarin et al., 2024). An important element of the cultural code is the historical memory of an ethnos. The sense of the past can be interpreted as a symbolic social construct because it is formed and maintained through symbolic representations, rituals, traditions and social norms (Togaibayeva et al., 2021). Every society has certain symbols and myths that are associated with the past and serve as the basis for the formation of collective memory. These symbols and myths, when passed down from generation to generation, influence the perception and evaluation of past events, as well as the formation of a society's identity and values (Zein et al., 2022). Thus, the sense of the past is the result of symbolic interpretation and construction of history by an ethnos (Malika et al., 2022).

The cultural code can be considered as a representation of national culture, a symbolic system of expression of values, national memory, unique to each nation. The cultural code is a mechanism for preserving national heritage. It also promotes establishing connections and mutual understanding between generations. Thus, the cultural code plays a key role in shaping ideas about national culture and its perception as unique and valuable.

## 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methodology is based on comparative historical, typological analysis; method of discourse analysis, since the narrative is viewed as a form of discourse, system analysis contributed to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of national culture and the cultural code as its basis. It is concluded that destructive processes are taking place in modern realities, leading to the deformation of the cultural code of the national culture, which is inextricably linked with the transformation of subjectivity in the multicultural world.

The sources used are the works of E. Shils, who laid the tradition of studying the cultural core; E. D. Smith, who is one of the authoritative researchers of the problems of nations and nationalism; the works of the theorists of narratology E. Smith and P. Ricoeur, as well as the works of modern Western social theorists F. Jameson, W. Beck, D. Tomlison and W. Hannerz, some English language sources are introduced in the article.





### 3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

When analyzing socio-cultural processes in the modern world, researchers increasingly use the concept of cultural code as a semantic structure-forming core of culture. The concept of the cultural core was conceptualized by the American sociologist E. Shiels, who believed that in each specific segment of the historical period, a fairly extensive volume of traditions can be attributed to the semantic core; ideas about the world and about a person, as well as beliefs that are generally significant for a given culture, which permeate ideological, religious, political, ethical, aesthetic and other concepts in the specified period of time (Shils, 2004). As is known the problem of the axiological (cultural) code was analyzed by A. Gramsci in the context of his doctrine of cultural hegemony. Gramsci believed that the axiological code as an integral system of values, ideals, ideas about good and evil, etc., shared by members of society expressed in cultural unity, is the most important factor in maintaining the power of the ruling class, and its (value core) transformation is one of the foundations of social changes (Gramsci, 1959, pp. 138-145).

Today, the problem of the cultural code takes an increasing importance due to various factors: the unprecedented development of mass communication caused by the globalization process, the spread of transnational forms of mass culture that undermines the essential basics of national cultures, the destruction of the traditional foundations of identification processes which gives rise to its "hybridization". In our opinion, there is another important aspect of the problem, which is emphasized by A.V. Goryunov who writes: "Yu. M. Lotman began his work "Culture and Explosion" with the question: "How can the system, remaining true to itself, still keep developing?" But now it would be more urgent to ask the opposite: how are systems, still developing, keep being able to remain true to themselves?" (Goryunov, 2011, p. 66). The concept of cultural code seems, to a certain extent, to allow to give an answer to this question.

As for the Russian society, it is necessary to emphasize the process of marginalization of huge social groups deeply permeating society, which leads to social, as well as cultural, stratification of society. The process of the crisis of identity in Russia, and in the world in whole, is a special threat, since, as noted by the Spanish post-Marxist sociologist M. Castells, identity is the source of the meaning and activity of people (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 269). In its turn, this leads not only to transformation,





but - often - to the destruction of the very core of the life world of huge masses of people, to the destruction of their value systems.

Undoubtedly, the modern world is a world of cultural diversity, and “simultaneity has become a new feature of the dialectic of cultural identity, an important structuring principle of identity in today's globalized environment” (Köchler, 2019). In this world, national cultures cannot remain unchanged and fenced off from other cultures. Ulf Hannerz, a Swedish anthropologist, uses the following terms to characterize the cultures of the modern world: “hybridity, collage, melange, hotchpot, montage, synergy, bricolage, creolization, mestizo, mongrelization, syncretism, transculturation, etc. (Hannerz, 2019). All these phenomena, expressing deep transformations taking place in the development of cultures, cannot but influence the central core of each individual culture. As a result of the destruction of all structures of society, the entire socio-cultural space is fragmented. Under the circumstances, the adaptive function of culture, including mechanisms aimed at preserving the integrity of national cultures, is intensified.

In our opinion, one of such mechanisms, and the most important one, is the historical memory of an ethnos, which makes it possible to preserve continuity in the development of culture under conditions of contradictory socio-cultural dynamics.

M. Halbwachs, one of the founders of the study of historical memory, a student of A. Bergson and E. Durkheim, singled out cultural memory along with mimic, objective and collective ones. According to the researcher, cultural memory has a sacred nature and does not spread by itself as a collective memory does, but always has its own special carriers - priests, teachers, professional historians (Vysokova, 2008).

Russian philosopher Zh.T. Toshchenko considers historical memory as “a certain way of focused consciousness, which reflects a special significance and relevance of information about the past in its close connection with the present and the future”. He emphasizes such a feature of historical memory as an ability to “keep in the minds of people the main historical events of the past until the historical knowledge transforms into various forms of world view perception of past experience and its reflection in legends, fairy tales” (Toshchenko, 2000).

As E. Smith notes, culture, representing the meanings and images of symbols, myths, memories and values, is not a specific set of features or a limited "content"; culture is both an intergenerational treasury, and a heritage (or a set of traditions), and





an actively formed set of meanings and images embodied in values, myths and symbols that serve to unite a group of people with common experiences and memories and separate them from outsiders (Smith, 2004, p. 341). Thus, it can be argued that historical memory is the most important constitutive subcomponent of national culture; and at the same time, historical memory “remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” (Nora, 1989).

Having often a symbolic representation, historical memory creates a semiotic space around the cultural code, in which other components coexist. It is no coincidence that many modern social theorists emphasize that the new emerging global culture has no memory. Thus, Jameson states the disappearance of a sense of history: our entire contemporary social system has begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past. It has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve (Jameson, 2004).

Sense of the past is a social construct; it is not formed spontaneously. Historical memory has a symbolic and semantic nature, it has an ability to give meaning both to elements of culture and people's vital activity, creating in a person a sense of selfhood, rootedness and existential comfort.

The modern world is a world of constant changes, increasingly getting out of control of people; these changes are gaining an ever-wider scope, an increasing speed and they are becoming in a greater degree spontaneous. Under the circumstances, the stability of the cultural code of a society becomes extremely problematic. No culture is isolated in the world of global communications, therefore, no culture can remain unchanged, static. The problem is that, experiencing the influence of other cultures, changing under this influence, which can be considered as an objective and inevitable process, a national culture seeks to preserve its identity, which becomes impossible in the event of the destruction of its cultural core. A UNESCO document on intercultural dialogue notes that a central focus of the debate should be not the preservation of cultures created as permanent monoliths or on change mixed with irreparable destruction of their past and memory. It should focus on the problem of how cultures can save space for sustainability, that is, their endogenous ability to organize a balance between tradition and change. Since externally imposed change is a cultural hegemony, sustainability should be seen as a culturally authentic path to modernity (UNESCO moving forward the 2030).







It should be noted that traditions, being an essential element of the cultural code, can have a contradictory effect on social life. On the one hand, they contribute to the stability of this code. On the other hand, traditions can give rise to patterns of behavior that may not only produce an unexpected result, but may resist progressive innovations. In such cases, in the socio-cultural life, people's activity is often determined by adherence to traditions, often unconscious, rather than by their rational choice.

At the same time, many theorists emphasize the characteristic feature of the modern discourse of choice: the subordination of all elements of social choice to rational choice.

However, the adherence to traditions and "dependence on the path", in other words, to one's own historical memory is not the result of an alternative that is opposed to rationality. Moreover, the structural deformation that the very core of culture is undergoing today inevitably makes a person feel the "split of the world", the fragmentation of the living space.

Indeed, it should be noted that the narrative of historical memory, the history of the ethnos is created by the subject as a process of construction. In it, along with the rational level, a layer of the irrational also coexists, since the narrative is rooted in the very nature of a person, in his "inner reality" and, thus, cannot be reduced only to the rational.

As to P. Ricoeur: "Within narrative, the semantic innovation lies in the inventing of another work of synthesis- a plot. By means of a plot, goals causes and chance are brought together within the temporal unity of a whole and complete action. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous that brings narrative close to metaphor" (Ricoeur, 1984).

It should be emphasized that M. Bakhtin, referring to the study of the nature of metaphor, comes to the conclusion that the latter reflects the ways of constructing the world. Thus, narrative, being a social construction, has a wide semantic meaning, reproducing polysemantic meanings. As C. Brainbridge notes: "A social construct is something that exists not in objective reality, but as a result of human interaction. It exists because humans agree that it exists... Social construct theory says that humans create constructs in order to make sense of the objective world» (Why Social Constructs Are Created, 2020).





Another important feature of narrative is that its representation depends to a large extent on the goals that its author seeks to achieve. As a prominent scholar of the narrative H. White notes, "within professional historical studies, however, the narrative has been viewed for the most part neither as a product of a theory nor as the basis for a method, but rather as *a form of discourse* which may or may not be used for the representation of historical events, depending upon whether the primary aim is to *describe* a situation, *analyze* an historical process, or *tell a story*" (White, 1984, p. 2).

The "linguistic turn" that has taken place in philosophy in recent decades determines the fact that the most important, essential way of forming people's consciousness is linguistic representation, which largely determines the impossibility of "direct access to historical reality" (F. Ankersmit). Today, a person loses the ability to control social processes in society. This is enhanced by the fact that the subject is under the ever-increasing influence of the most diverse cultural and informational flows. The influence determines the loss of a person's sustainable landmarks and, as noted by most social theorists, the destruction of his value system.

In these conditions, it is of a particular importance to preserve cultural and historical memory as one of the most important components of the cultural code of a national culture. The destruction of historical memory is one of the factors deepening the anthropological crisis, which is an essential feature of the modern socio-cultural space. One of the manifestations of the anthropological crisis is individualization, which, according to social theorists, is generated, first of all, by the total uncertainty that permeates all spheres of society. According to the keen characteristic of U. Beck, individualization, which he defines, first of all, as a release from traditional life interrelations, is accompanied by the unification and standardization of forms of existence (Beck, 2000, p. 195). Fragmentation, as another essential feature of the modern socio-cultural context, seems to cut off modernity from the past, even more enhancing the "homelessness" of a person. Disruptive tendencies of fragmentation are manifested in the destruction of cultural and historical memory, traditions, values and, accordingly, the meanings of existence. The functions of retaining values and models are traditionally performed by culture, but the fragmentation of all social life leads to the formation of "cultural emptiness", a kind of cultural vacuum.

The main representative way of transferring modern culture is media. Researchers are unanimous in the opinion that the dominant function of their content is aimed at cultural homogenization, and the leading role in the process belongs to







American culture. As noted by the journalist and columnist for foreign topics in The New York Times, T. L. Friedman, “globalization has its own dominant culture, that is why it tends to be homogenizing. Culturally speaking, globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization – from Big Macs to Mickey Mouse – on a global scale.” (Mishra, 2008).

It is obvious that the media and, especially, television are social constructs. Modern television is inherently transnational, while at the end of the last century it was noted that the United States occupied the top three positions in the global turnover of both television and the world film industry (Barker, 1999). Media, including TV create a semiotic space that fills the axiological vacuum inherent to various national cultures, referring completely to the culture of modern Russia. As a result, we witness a “conflict between global cultural flows and inherited local identity, ... a complex balance between preserving unique local cultural identities and changing this uniqueness by combining transnational cultural influences, ranging from coca cola to the universalization of Western ideological and political concepts” (Charles, 1998).

Researchers emphasize that the production of modern media creates the phenomenon of "deterritorialization", a term that reflects the profound transformations taking place in the society and its culture. Deterritorialization is inextricably linked with fragmentation; these are processes that mutually condition each other and enhance the loss of cultural certainty. COVID - 19 has become a new challenge for the mankind. Culture faces an unprecedented crisis that undermines the very foundations of traditional cultural forms. The collapse of traditional human relations, of established way of life, the loss of essential support, of life guidelines - all this, conceptualized in the long-term horizon, destroys the existential comfort of a person. Lockdown, leading to even deeper distancing of people, has given rise to new destructive processes affecting all social institutions. So, for example, studies of the power distance in society have shown that under the influence of COVID-19 (Gokmen et al., 2020), the variation in the power distance index depends on the characteristics of the national culture and has negative dynamics.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that the “power distance” has a significant and negative impact on the rate of increase in the total number of COVID-19 cases per million”. The





consequences of COVID-19 today are not predictable, but emerging studies of its impact on a wide variety of areas of life, from economy to psychology of people, their spiritual life, demonstrate the need to reconsider the basic foundations of the life of society, culture, and man being.

Thus, the development of the modern world, contradictory processes, global challenges that humanity faces and will face, actualizes the need to study such a phenomenon as the code of culture, since the stability, viability of the latter is extremely problematic today. However, the tension existing in society between stability and variability, the transformation of subjectivity, forced to adapt to the complexities of human existence, demonstrates that national memory plays an important role in preserving the code of culture, which contributes to the accumulation of social experience, thereby creating anthropological, existential prerequisites for the process of adaptation to new conditions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper has been supported by the Kazan Federal University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullaev, U. I., Sagdullaev, A. S., & Togaev, J. E. (2021). Migrations and ethnocultural processes in Central Asia (Eneolithic and bronze age). *Journal of Siberian Federal University - Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14(8), 1182-1190. <https://doi.org/10.17516/1997-1370-0788>
- Barker, C. (1999). *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*. Buckingham – Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Beck, U. (2000). *Obschestvo riska: Na puti k drugomu modernu*. Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya.
- Charles, O. L., III. (1998). The Conflicts of Globalization. *The International Journal of Peace studies*. Retrieved from <https://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol31/learch.htm>
- Gokmen, Y., Baskisi, C., & Ercil, Y. (2020). The impact of national culture on the increase of COVID-19: A cross-country analysis of European countries. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 81, 1-8.





- Goryunov, A. V. (2011). Sushchestvuyut li v deystvitel'nosti lokal'nyye tsivilizatsii? *Filosofiya i obshchestvo*, (1), 66-84.
- Gramshi, A. (1959). *Tyuremnyye tetradi* (Vol. 3). Moscow: Izdatel'stvo inostrannoy literatury.
- Hannerz, U. (2019). Flows, Boundaries and Hybrids: Keywords in Transnational Anthropology. Retrieved from <http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk>
- Jameson, F. (2004). Postmodernism and Consumer Society. Retrieved from <https://art.ucsc.edu>
- Köchler, H. (2019). Nation and civilization in the global age. Retrieved from <https://www.i-p-o.org/Koechler-NATION-CIVILIZATION-Preprint-2019.pdf>
- Kokorina, Y. G., Abdullayev, U. I., Vagabov, M. M., & Kozukhov, V. (2023). "Archaeology in a Broad Sense Contains a Source of Knowledge of National Identity" (I.E. Zabelin on the Tasks of Archaeology (based on Archival Materials)). *Bylye Gody*, 18(2), 609-618. <https://doi.org/10.13187/bg.2023.2.609>
- Malika, B., Ybyraimzhanov, K., Gaukhar, S., Nurdaulet, S., & Ainur, A. (2022). The effect of information technologies on the development of moral values of future teachers based on innovations in education. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, 14(1), 164–174.
- Mishra, G. (2008). Globalization and Culture. State of Nature. Retrieved from [www.stateofnature.org/?p=6292](http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6292)
- Nora, P. (1989). Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. Retrieved from <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/ARCH230/PierreNora.pdf>
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and Narrative* (Vol. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sarin, K., Nursultanova, L., Baitureyeva, K., Polozhentseva, I., & Kapustina, D. (2024). Upbringing Traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy in the Creative Heritage of Saint Demetrius of Rostov (D.S. Tuptalo). *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 20(1), 59-68. [http://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/104/Contents%2020\\_1\\_2024.pdf](http://www.ejst.tuiasi.ro/Files/104/Contents%2020_1_2024.pdf)
- Sharonova, S., & Avdeeva, E. (2024). The Orthodox identification in a digital society. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 20(4), 75-86.
- Shils, E. (2004). O sootnoshenii tsentra i periferii: tsenostno-smyslovoy aspekt yadra i periferii. Retrieved from <http://www.sociomirror.ru/spros-972-1.html>
- Smith, A. D. (2004). *Natsionalizm i modernizm: Kriticheskiy obzor sovremennykh teorii natsiy i natsionalizma*. Moscow: Praksis.
- Togaibayeva, A., Ramazanova, D., Imzharova, Z., Alimpiyeva, T., Issibayeva, Y., & Imanchiyev, Z. (2021). Correlation between religious and legal norms at the stage of postsecularisation. *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 17(3), 161-170.





Tomlinson, J. (2003). Globalization and Cultural Identity. TGT2eC23, 269-277.

Toshchenko, Zh. T. (2000). Istoricheskoye soznaniye i istoricheskaya pamyat': Analiz sovremennogo sostoyaniya. Retrieved from <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/JOURNAL/NEWHIST/HIMEM.HTM>

Ukolova, L. I. (2022). Education of the spiritual culture of a growing person through the synthesis of arts in the space of a pedagogically organized musical environment. *Art criticism*, 3, 17-25.

UNESCO. Moving forward the 2030. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/interculturaldialogue/core-concepts>

Vysokova, V. (2008). Pamyat' kak istoricheskiy fenomen. Retrieved from <https://elar.urfu.ru/bitstream/10995/22784/1/iurg-2008-59-31.pdf>

White, H. (1984). The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory. *History and Theory*, 23(1), 1-33.

Why Social Constructs Are Created (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/definition-of-social-construct-1448922>

Wu, X., & Chelyapina, C. (2023). The Semiosphere as a Generator of Intra- and Intercultural Translations. *Southern Semiotic Review*, 17, 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.33234/ssr.17.11>

Zein, A., Mahmudiono, T., Alhussainy, A. A., Meshkova, G. V., & Suksatan, W. (2022). Investigating the effect of Islamic values on citizenship behaviours of Muslim citizens. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 78(4), a7334. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7334>

