

Individualist Trends in Collectivist Societies

Modern reality... The epoch of a strange duality - when the world is more united but at the same time more fragmented than ever, when one attempts to gain as much freedom as possible but at the same time desperately escapes from it, when individualism is given the highest value but at the same time one searches for collective loyalty...

Contemporary social scientists, searching for the reasons to explicate what's wrong with our reality, think that social life changes much more quickly today than it happened in times when Durkheim, Freud or Piaget lived. They explain this change with decrease of religious influence, transformation of traditional values, and movement from collective to individual morality (Camilleri, Malevska-Peyre, 1997, p. 43).

It is doubtless that socio-economic transformations following modernization trends provoke the change of traditional values and life standards all over the world. Owing to this fact, the emphasis of socialization transfers from defense of traditional values to adaptation to the permanently changing social standards and the demands of modern life. But it is also true that at the same time each culture retains the basic values as the necessary condition for cultural continuity. Adaptation to the changing life standards means that old stereotypes need to be modified in order to fit in with contemporary reality – the “synthesis of traditionality and modernity” (Goodwin, 1999, p.1), which characterizes so many of today's cultures, especially the collectivist ones undergoing rapid changes in the direction of individualism.

Before discussing these changes, I would like to briefly deal with the culture-level dimensions of values and their importance in shaping fundamental social institutions, as well as overall orientation of society.

I would underline three cross-cultural researches most influential in this sense: The Hofstede project, the Schwartz culture-level approach, and the Trompenaars value survey.

A cross-cultural research conducted in 1980 in 40 countries of the world by G. Hofstede set off a new epoch in the empirical study of cultures. On the basis of this research he developed four culture-level dimensions of values, which, according to him, are reflected in all the spheres of social life: Family, educational system, political structure, etc. These four dimensions are as follows: Individualism versus Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity versus Femininity.

The first dimension describes relationship between an individual and a group. Hofstede calls individualist cultures those, where individuals are loosely integrated in a social group and they pursue personal interests rather than the social ones. While in collectivist cultures individuals are tightly linked to their in-groups, which continue to protect them all over their life span in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. In such cultures personal interests are often sacrificed for the group ones.

Another dimension reflects the attitude to the fact that power is unequally distributed in different social institutions in a society. In the cultures with a long power distance power is considered to be the basis of society; while in the cultures with a short power distance power is used only when it is legitimate and based on the rule of law. Hofstede sees the connection between individualism/collectivism and power distance stating that the cultures with a long power distance are mainly collectivist, while those with a short power distance are mostly individualist.

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the attitude to the situations that are hardly predictable. There are certain cultures, where everything unknown and unpredictable is considered dangerous, but there are also the cultures, where the very same is considered fascinating. Therefore, this dimension reflects whether the representatives of different cultures feel uncomfortable or comfortable with uncertainty, accordingly, value or devalue social institutions providing certainty and conformity.

The last dimension reflects the degree of social differentiation between the sexes. In masculine cultures achievement, competition, and material success are highly valued, and there is a strong sex-role differentiation in such societies; while in feminine cultures preference is given to harmonious relationships, modesty, and caring for weak (Hofstede, 1980).

Another research on culture-level dimensions of values was conducted by S. Schwartz and it is very close to the previous one. The author identified three main culture-level dimensions of values: Conservatism versus Autonomy, Hierarchy versus Egalitarianism, and Mastery versus Harmony.

The first dimension reflects valuing collectivity and social relationships through identifying with the group, respecting tradition and family security versus valuing intellectual autonomy that is independent ideas and creativity, as well as affective autonomy that is positive emotional experience such as pleasure, exciting and varied life, etc. It is evident that the Conservatism versus Autonomy dimension by Schwartz is quite close to the Collectivism versus Individualism dimension by Hofstede.

Another dimension of Hierarchy versus Egalitarianism also reminds us of Hofstede's Power Distance as it also reflects the attitude to an unequal distribution of power and roles versus equality, social justice, and honesty.

The last dimension suggested by Schwartz is Mastery versus Harmony, where the former implies an attempt to master and change the natural and social world through activity and achievement, while the latter accepts the world as it is trying to preserve rather than to change it (Smith, Schwartz, 1997, pp.99-101).

Finally, F. Trompenaars's value survey is one more endorsement to the previous researches, expanding their scale and searching for the backup in the classical sociological theory. Trompenaars's culture-level dimensions of values are based on T. Parsons's five dichotomous categories for description of value orientations. Parsons differentiates among personal, social and cultural aspects of these dichotomies, ascribing the greatest importance to the last one, as for him cultural system, made up of values, norms, and symbols, determines the structure of personal and social systems as they are just value-normative standards internalized at the level of personal needs (personal system) and social roles (social system) (1998).

Thus, based on Parsons's ideas, Trompenaars identified five main culture-level dimensions of values: Individualism versus Collectivism, which absolutely coincides with Hofstede's definition of Individualism/Collectivism; Universalism versus Particularism, which implies pursuing universal rules versus pursuing those guiding specific-situational obligations; Specific versus Diffuse Orientation - emphasizing strict

division between private life and business versus emphasizing interconnection between these two areas; Neutral versus Emotional Orientation - valuing objective and distant relations versus valuing affective and close relations; and finally, Achievement versus Ascription – judging individuals based on their personal achievements versus judging individuals based on their origin, group membership and the similar criteria (1993).

It is obvious that the dimension of Individualism/collectivism as the main descriptor of cultural values is present in all three researches and at the same time closely linked to other dimensions. Indeed, it is considered the most popular among all of the dimensions and most frequently applied in the recent cross-cultural researches. Some of the social researchers even argue that the notion of Individualism/Collectivism has a long history and it began with Durkheim's concepts of Mechanical and Organic Solidarity, from which the former is synonymous to collectivism and the latter to individualism; Toennies's concepts of Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (association); Kluckhohn's and Strodtbeck's concepts of Collateralism and Individualism; Weber's notion of Communal and Associative social relations; Parson's Collectivity and Self-Emphasis; and finally, the concepts of Traditionalism and Modernism widely applied in Weber's, Inkeles's, Smith's and others works (Triandis, 1995. p.7).

Many social scientists agree that Individualism is primarily associated with Modernism, while Collectivism is often used as a synonym to Traditionalism (or Conservatism). A Turkish cultural researcher C. Kagitcibasi lists the whole range of processes related to modernization such as orientation to achievement rather than ascription, gaining independence from parents' authority, participation in the secondary groups, openness to innovations, belief in science rather than religion, aspiration to getting higher education and position, preference given to the urban life style, development of mass media, orientation to the future, individualist orientation, activism, egalitarianism, etc. She cites Iang's research on the main characteristics of modernization, which demonstrated that out of 20 such characteristics at least 2/3 reflect individualism. This fact can be considered the main reason for why they are often perceived synonymous (Kagitcibasi, 1994, p.57).

Now let's come back to the question of what major cultural transformations are the contemporary societies undergoing, accordingly, what are the aims of socialization in

them? In traditional societies with rigid value systems, and quite minor and seldom social changes individuals occupied a fixed position in the social system without any competition or contradiction. The sense of belonging to the in-group provided them with the feeling of safety and developed “the culture of interrelatedness” (C. Kagitcibasi), which supported establishment of the socialization style where a child had to constantly refer to the elders for assessment, control, and approval of his/her behavior. Therefore, in such societies the opportunities for individualization were kept to minimum.

Although we cannot state that in traditional societies the individuals possess only social identity without possessing the individual one, it is true that socio-cultural conditions supporting development of the latter are rather limited. Nevertheless, the authors prove that individualization tendencies emerge even in such traditional societies. For instance, even in complex traditional societies individuals are able to freely participate in the subgroups based on friendship and companionship, founded for leisure purposes, etc. Besides that, there certainly exist different personal features that distinguish individuals in all the social contexts. Based on this fact, some of the social scientists state that conformity and individualism are not mutually exclusive concepts but rather two poles of the same dimension. An individual can move from one pole to another within a particular societal context (Camilleri, Malevska-Peyre, 1997, p.52).

C. Camilleri and H. Malevska-Peyre continue that in the modern societies social categorization is weakened, which brings two major transformations: Firstly, social roles are more open to individual variations; Secondly, individuals are given vast opportunity to personally choose the groups they would like to belong to rather than being involuntarily involved in them. Today, through weakening of socio-cultural basis or everything that is socially ascribed, the significance of individual coefficient in socialization considerably increases. This state is further promoted by one more renovation caused by cultural changes, namely, weakening of general values as a result of coexistence of a variety of conflicting subcultures. An individual is forced to make a choice among them. Thus, he/she is not only given an opportunity to choose but also pushed to do so. In such conditions, the extent of individualization considerably increases and it already becomes a social value (Camilleri, Malevska-Peyre, 1997, pp.43-54).

No doubt that the situation described above is typical to the developed western societies. But I would try to demonstrate that this trend is already quite visible in non-western traditional societies as well.

I will begin with the Chinese culture as China is considered as a classical example of traditional collectivist society. Family is a basic element of the Chinese society. The Chinese families are characterized with a strict hierarchy: The youngsters are subordinate to the elders, a wife – to a husband, the children – to their parents' authority. The aim of socialization is to teach the individuals to value collective wellbeing rather than the individual one. That is why Chinese family is often considered as a prototype of collectivist family. The research conducted by King and Bond in China in 1985 showed that Chinese children were raised based on traditional values and were taught subordination to their parents from a very young age. In 1988 Young stated that Chinese parents continued to take care of and control their children even after they were grown-up. However, it does not mean that Chinese adolescents could not develop independence. They simply became autonomous at a later age than their peers from the western individualist countries. But this state began to considerably change from the last decade of 20th century. The researches conducted in China in 1990s by Tsui, Chu, Lee and others revealed that individualist orientations were rapidly increasing among the young people, along with the increase of the number of nuclear families (Goodwin, 1999, p.115).

For the last two decades, the similar changes have been traced in another traditional collectivist society India. An Indian cultural researcher D. Sinha thinks that quick socio-economic changes in the country have provoked the adaptive changes in a family, which on their side have caused the changes in socialization values and upbringing practices. According to the author, in the contemporary conditions, expansion of women's rights and simplification of the divorce laws have had a crucial impact on the traditional extended family. He lists a number of changes undergoing in the Indian family along with the increase of autonomy: An extended family has been substituted by the nuclear one; new values have emerged in the upbringing system emphasizing a child's psychological separation from his/her family; the changes in a woman's status and role have provided her with more egalitarianism and more opportunity to contribute to her family income (Sinha, Tripathy, 1994, pp.123-136).

The increase of individualist trends is also apparent in another traditional collectivist society Turkey. While studying socialization values in Turkish society in 1982, C. Kagitcibasi argued that Turkish parents demanded subordination and obedience from their children and only 18% emphasized the importance of developing independence and self-confidence in them. A decade later, in 1993 the research conducted by Phalet and Clays demonstrated that although the Turkish youth still expressed loyalty to their family, their aspiration to individual self-realization was becoming even stronger and their parents also began to support their independence and initiative (Kagitcibasi, 1994, pp.53-64).

Finally, I would like to discuss the changes of cultural values undergoing in the modern Georgian society, which, like other non-western societies, was typically considered as a traditional collectivist culture. It was natural as usually traditional Georgian family consisted of several generations, and not only parents and grandparents, but also great-grandparents actively participated in the upbringing of younger generations, thinking that it was their duty to control and direct their children's and grandchildren's life, even if it harmed their autonomy and initiative, as such an outlook is considered as a norm in collectivist societies. Moreover, a Georgian parent always perceived his/her offspring as a child (even a grown-up one) and inseparable from him/herself as through separating a child from him/herself, the parent lost his/her traditional status. Therefore, a Georgian family was characterized with a firm hierarchy, where youngsters were subordinate to the elders and an adolescent's attempt to gain independence was considered as a threat to the family.

Recently, the number of young families, where a young couple lives without parents and independently raises a new generation, has significantly increased. Often do the young people support not only their small family but also their parents' family as they are the ones who acquire the knowledge appropriate to the demands of modern life that is less accessible to the older generations. More and more Georgian youth learn foreign languages and continue their study abroad that further promotes the increase of their independence. Employers search for young and perspective specialists as well. Apparently, financial independence encourages young people's independent activity in other spheres of life. Undoubtedly, in such conditions a child's autonomy is no longer

perceived as a threat to the family and parents themselves encourage the increase of independence and initiative in the adolescents so that they could better adapt to the changing social conditions.

In order to study the process of changes of cultural values, and the aims and characteristics of socialization in the contemporary Georgian society, a social research based on structured and semi-structured interviews was conducted by the author of this paper in Tbilisi in 1999-2000. The representatives of four age groups were inquired: High school students, University students, their parents, and their grandparents. In order to make a comparative analysis among the different age groups, the same number of respondents was inquired in each (100 in each age category; total - 400). To analyze the data and estimate the trend of changes, Entropy dimension was applied.

As it is impossible to present all the details in this short paper, I will just summarize the main findings. According to the received data, in the contemporary Georgian society, socialization goals have changed from the defense of traditional values to the development of autonomy in the adolescents and their adaptation to the rapid changes in the society. While 76% of young people and 86% of their parents and grandparents think that in the near past the main goal of socialization was defense and transmission of traditional values and norms, 93% of young people and 89% of their parents and grandparents think that today the main goal of socialization is development of independence and initiative in the adolescents, as well as their successful adaptation to the demands of modern life.

Along with the change of socialization values, a trend of change of socialization style and methods is visible. If in the past socialization style was mainly authoritative, parents often and strictly punished their children (even using physical punishment), and they seldom revealed their feelings and seldom praised their children, recently this traditional distance between parents and their children has been questioned. It is believed that parents are no longer considered as unshakeable authorities who should control and direct their offsprings' life but rather their children's friends and counselors as a new idea of upbringing implies raising a child as the parents' equal (Kon, 1988).

This controversy between traditional and contemporary views about socialization style and methods has also been reflected in our research. Although according to the

traditional views perfectly reflected in the Georgian proverbs and didactic literature, negative sanctions are considered much more effective than the positive ones in the upbringing practice (one can hardly find a single Georgian proverb or a piece of didactic literature with contrary views), the idioms widespread in the contemporary Georgians' everyday speech as well as our respondents' views prove opposite – nowadays Georgian parents give preference to positive sanctions that is well evidenced by the received data: 85% of young people and 90% of their parents and grandparents think that in order to stimulate a child's desirable behavior parents should apply award and approval rather than punishment and disapproval.

Alongside socialization aims and style, the socialization agents' role is changing. Today, instead of family and school, peers and mass media more often perform in the socialization agents' role. The vast majority of our respondents report that currently the influence of family and especially school on the adolescents has considerably decreased, while the influence of peers and mass media is constantly increasing.

In addition, it should be emphasized that the contemporary Georgian youth express a growing aspiration towards autonomy while making an important decision or choice (choice of a future profession, job activity, choice of a referent group, and marriage). According to the research data, 73% of young people and 70% of their parents and grandparents think that an adolescent should independently choose his/her future profession. None of the respondents thinks that an adolescent should obey his/her parents and follow their decision in this case. Such a state was unimaginable two decades ago, when young people considered their duty to choose their future profession based on their parents' advice. Moreover, quite often the Georgian parents were the ones who made this decision instead of their children.

The question of marriage was even more complicating as the issue of the Georgian mothers-in-law with their active involvement in their grown-up children's private life still remains one of the favorite topics of the Georgian anecdotes. However, some significant changes are evident in this respect too. Although it is not surprising that 80% of young people think that a young person should make an independent decision while getting married, it is quite unexpected that 71% of their parents and grandparents tend to hold the same opinion. However, these views are absolutely concurrent to our respondents'

description of the modern Georgian reality, as their obvious majority agrees that nowadays the former knowledge and experience are outdated. Therefore, the elders more often take into account the youth's opinion. Moreover, 37% of the young people and 42% of their parents and grandparents think that today the young people are able to be completely independent from the elders (Tsuladze, 2003).

The presented data provide evidence of the increase of individualist trends in the contemporary Georgian society and support the fact that the modern Georgian culture, like those discussed above, can be considered as an example of coexistence of traditional-collectivist and modern-individualist orientations.

How can we explain this transformation? What do cross-cultural researchers consider the main reasons for increasing individualist orientations in collectivist societies? Essentially, they see its origin in three basic processes: 1. Modernization trends have strongly shook traditional authoritarian structure that means that traditional patterns of social relationships, based on respect for the elders, are no longer leading. This fact causes development of pragmatism, as well as rejection of conservatism and the authoritarian style of upbringing; 2. Spread of the western model of family that pushes young people to spend their income on themselves and their immediate families; and 3. Expansion of market orientation causing the substitution of traditional extended family links with new relations of economic benefit. While the importance of such relations increases, the size of family itself decreases (Goodwin, 1999, p.115).

Finally, in support to my views I would like to present the modern typology of family developed by C. Kagitcibasi. In her words, there are basic differences in personal-interpersonal characteristics that are independent from socio-economic variations as economic change and urbanization are not able to directly influence the psychological level characteristics. These psychological characteristics are based on the cultures of "interrelatedness" and "separateness" that can be understood on the basis of socialization and upbringing patterns. The culture of "interrelatedness" is characterized with interdependent family relations, while for the culture of "separateness" independent personal relations with strictly defined personal boundaries are crucial. As an example of these cultures, Kagitcibasi presents a research on Korean and Canadian mothers' socialization patterns conducted by Choi in 1992. The research demonstrated that Korean

mothers perceived themselves as unseparated from their children, while Canadian mothers separated themselves from their children's reality so that it remained autonomous (Kagitcibasi, 1994, p.62).

On the basis of the cultures of "interrelatedness" and "separateness" C. Kagitcibasi developed the typology of family consisting of three main types of families: 1. Interdependent family, representing a collectivist model of family – it is a traditional extended family whose members are financially and emotionally dependent on one another; 2. Independent family, representing an individualist model of family – here autonomy is emphasized and there is a very little financial or emotional dependency among the family members; and 3. Emotionally dependent family that is a dialectic synthesis of the first two types. Here financial dependency decreases with socio-economic development but emotional dependency remains quite strong.

In the collectivist model of family, characteristic to non-western traditional societies, the interaction between a parent and a child is oriented to subordination. In the individualist model of family, characteristic to western developed societies, autonomy and self-confidence are emphasized. While in the emotionally dependent model of family socialization integrates both control and autonomy. Although socialization values still stress the family and group loyalties, individual loyalties emerge too and a child's autonomy is no longer perceived as a threat to the family. Thus, "old," "traditional" values successfully fit in with "new" values. C. Kagitcibasi argues that this type of family with the combination of collectivist and individualist orientations is characteristic to non-western industrial-urban societies (Kagitcibasi, 1994, pp.53-64).

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