

The Demise of the Adygean Code

Author: [Zarina Kanukova](#)

New social phenomena such as drug abuse and alcoholism have caught the older generation of Adygeans unawares

The Adygean code of etiquette - the Adyge Khabse - has proved itself unequal to the challenges of modern society.

Sociologists say the rules which once dominated family life across the North Caucasus are being unanimously rejected by the younger generation.

And the Adyge Khabse is being replaced by a new set of values dictated by Western movies, cheap thrillers and Russian gangster culture.

Prior to the October Revolution of 1917, the Adygean code of conduct laid down the cornerstones of social behaviour for the Cherkess, Kabardinian and Adygean tribes.

First and foremost, it advocated unquestioning respect for the older generation who enjoyed an almost exalted position in local society. The Adyge Khabse also held that the shame of any individual reflected on his immediate family who collectively shared his guilt.

Consequently, the Adyge Khabse dominated not just the family circle but all aspects of social interaction. At the highest level, it formed the basis of an informal "people's court".

Children learned the Adygean code of conduct from birth, taking their lead from immediate members of the family, then from their peers. When guests visited the family house, the younger generation were forbidden from sitting down at table and instead had to look after the guests.

In the course of the daily routine, young people were not permitted to talk directly to their elders or join in their discussions. They were only allowed to answer direct questions.

The Adyge Khabse also gave members of the older generation the right to punish anyone who broke the code and brought shame on their families. Thus complete strangers could accost youngsters who were improperly dressed, badly behaved or abusive and mete out whatever punishment they felt appropriate.

The Soviet authorities did their best to eradicate the Adygean code of conduct which they saw as a threat to collective existence. And, on a wider social level, the tenets of the Adyge Khabse were swiftly crushed by a bureaucratic machine which demanded complete subservience to the state programme.

However, many Adygean families - particularly those living in rural areas - kept the old traditions alive. For some, this marked an attempt to resist the Russification of the Soviet republics; for others, it was a desire to preserve the last remnants of the old life.

A few enlightened Communist leaders realised that the Adyge Khabse was the glue that kept society

together rather than a divisive anachronism - especially as moral values were eroded by the Soviet ideology.

Thus, in Soviet times, it was not uncommon to see a village elder reprimand a young man for failing to give up his seat in a bus or looking unkempt or swearing in public. And, behind closed doors, the Adyge Khabse continued to provide a source of welfare for those who had fallen on hard times or suffered a bereavement.

Today, however, champions of Adygean etiquette are few and far between. In the past, Adygeans professed complete contempt for material attributes, believing that moral rectitude and personal honour were the most valuable possessions a person could have.

But new laws governing ownership and property have driven rifts between families, with brothers fighting brothers over the division of their father's land.

The Adyge Khabse has also proved itself unequal to the task of combating drug-abuse and alcoholism which are both new phenomena in Adygean society.

The younger generation has effectively rejected the rules of a patriarchal society, preferring to take their cue from the influx of Western culture which has flooded the post-Soviet cultural vacuum.

There is little hope that the Adygean code of honour will find itself a new role in the North Caucasus of today. Recent events such as the wars in Chechnya, the Dagestan incursions and the unrest in Karachaevo-Cherkessia have served to promote the spirit of adventurism, proving that there is little to gained by meek subservience and abstract values.

Zarina Kanukova is a regular IWPR contributor

Location: [Caucasus](#)
[Stavropol](#)
[South Ossetia](#)
[North Ossetia](#)

Focus: [Caucasus](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/demise-adygean-code>