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CHAPTER 6

ACCULTURATION AND TURKIC NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTMODERN END OF GRAND NARRATIVES DISCOURSE

Sarkhan KHAVARI

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Sarkhan KHAVARI

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences

Abstract

This article examines how Turkic national identity is being transformed within postmodern discourse, particularly following the collapse of grand narratives as explanatory frameworks. Classical Turkism ideology, which emerged in the early 20th century around unified ethno-cultural and political principles, faces significant challenges in contemporary conditions characterized by fragmentation, localization, and pluralism. Drawing on John Berry's acculturation theory and Jürgen Habermas's communicative action theory, this study proposes a shift from rigid ideological frameworks toward flexible, dialogue-based models of identity construction. The analysis reveals that Turkic unity in the 21st century cannot rest on ideological hegemony but must instead emerge through voluntary cultural cooperation, network-based relationships, and shared symbolic platforms. The article examines acculturation patterns across diverse geopolitical contexts – from diaspora communities in Europe and North America to Turkic populations under authoritarian regimes in Iran, China, and Russia – identifying integration as the most sustainable model. Azerbaijan and Türkiye play important roles in facilitating pan-Turkic dialogue, supported by their active participation in the Organization of Turkic States and shared linguistic and cultural ties. The study concludes with actionable recommendations for a new integration strategy encompassing coordinated state policies, intellectual and cultural initiatives, symbolic unification efforts, and economic collaboration mechanisms that acknowledge contemporary realities while building on historical connections.

Keywords

Postmodernism, Turkic Identity, Acculturation, Integration, Cultural Cooperation

Problem Statement

To what extent are the theoretical postulates of classical Turkism functional for strengthening integration among Turks in contemporary conditions? Can they solidify cultural-spiritual, economic, and political ties, and structure independent Turkic states and other Turkic geographies without independent statehood into a unified cultural-spiritual and political force?

Against this complex backdrop, the question of Turkic world unity and its future becomes urgent from scientific, cultural, political, and national interest perspectives. As President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan has stated: “The Turkic world is our home, our family.” This assertion is not merely a political statement but reflects a worldview grounded in centuries-old cultural and historical ties while targeting a strategic future.

At the scientific level, this topic can be examined within the frameworks of postcolonial theory, identity sociology, discourse analysis, and communicative action theory. From a cultural perspective, Turkishness must be analyzed not only as folklore and ethnographic heritage but also as a contemporary symbolic system and aesthetic code. On the political plane, the common interests of Turkic states – energy, transport, security, technology, and diplomatic influence – constitute the strategic foundations of this unity. From the perspective of national interests, Turkishness functions not merely as an element of historical memory but as a sustainable framework for future identity construction.

In today’s world, as ideologies lose their appeal, ethnocentric movements either become marginalized or transform into reactive forms of resistance. Under such conditions, this article argues that Turkism is undergoing a shift toward a new semantic and functional form in the postmodern era.. Turkishness should be presented not only as an ideological system or common ethnic identity but as shared values, communication codes, and a platform for cultural dialogue.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the main transformation trends of Turkic national identity under postmodern conditions, demonstrate how classical Turkism can be renewed for the contemporary period, and propose a new integration model that is flexible, symbolic, yet strategically grounded.

This undertaking requires addressing several critical tasks:

- Developing new identity models grounded in postmodern theoretical frameworks;
- Analyzing how cultural diversity within the Turkic world can be reconciled with common symbolic codes;
- Formulating new communication strategies, shared symbols, and terminology;
- Establishing common scientific and educational platforms in history, politics, language, and culture;
- Preparing policy recommendations for transforming Turkishness from a model of ideological hegemony to one of cultural cooperation in state-society relations.

The present article aims not merely to offer theoretical reflections but to contribute concrete conceptual and institutional proposals toward a strategic vision for the Turkic world’s future. When discussing unity and integration among Turkic peoples, the effectiveness of classical methodologies must be critically examined in light of contemporary realities.

1. Theoretical Background

The first quarter of the 21st century has witnessed transformations unprecedented in both scope and speed. We observe an information explosion, the fragmentation and reconstruction of social, cultural, political, and religious identities, deepening intercultural contradictions, and the chain-like proliferation of regional and global conflicts. Yesterday’s certainties no longer hold today, and today’s truths will likely dissolve tomorrow.

Throughout history, scholars have proposed various frameworks for understanding human civilization's trajectory from prehistory to the present. Marx and Engels (1848/1998) theorized socio-economic formations, while Toffler (1980) conceptualized progress through agrarian, industrial, and information societies. Among these periodizations, one philosophical rupture stands out: Friedrich Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead," first articulated in *The Gay Science* (1882/2001) and elaborated in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885/2006). Though Nietzsche wrote in the late 19th century, his pronouncement anticipated by nearly a century the collapse of metaphysical certainty that would define the postmodern condition. The two world wars that followed seemed to validate his diagnosis, marking what many scholars consider the starting point of postmodernism.

A century after Nietzsche, postmodern thinkers began theorizing this transformation more systematically. Lyotard (1984), Baudrillard (1994), and Foucault (1977) identified the late 20th century as a period of fundamental civilizational shift, marking the twilight of modernism and the emergence of postmodernism. They challenged modernism's foundational concepts – progress, rationalism, objective truth, scientific authority, and faith in justice – proposing instead an epoch characterized by doubt, diversity, polyphony, relative truths, deconstruction, and play. These were not merely academic exercises but diagnoses of emerging social realities.

In the post-World War II order, international institutions attempted to impose logic, rationality, and universal legal and ethical norms on global affairs. Yet today, a quarter-century into the new millennium, we increasingly inhabit a world defined by irony, parody, and what might be called "ludic politics" – the aesthetics of play pervading all spheres of public life. Contemporary warfare illustrates this paradox starkly: drone operations resemble video games, conducted remotely through digital interfaces, while political leaders perform for cameras with theatrical gestures more suited to entertainment than statecraft. The language of international diplomacy increasingly borrows from gambling metaphors and card game jargon. Thus, our contemporary socio-political reality is characterized by the coexistence of genuine tragedy – destroyed cities, civilian casualties, massive displacement – with these game-like elements.

Huizinga (1955) observed that through play, humans create representations of reality based on rule-governed behavior. By adopting the player role, individuals step outside ordinary constraints into a model governed by alternative rules. Within this ludic space, they become representations of themselves, and reality is not merely imitated but actively recreated.

Baudrillard (1994) extended this insight, identifying the phenomenon as "hyperreality" – a condition in which simulations can become more convincing than the reality they supposedly represent. He argued that in postmodern conditions, the boundary between event and representation collapses: a war may occur without being perceived as real, or be perceived as real without occurring. Media simulation, advertising technology, and visual simulacrum spectacle do not merely represent war but effectively replace direct experience of it. His provocative analysis "The Gulf War Did Not Take Place" (1995) exemplified this thesis, suggesting that for most observers, the 1991 conflict existed primarily as televisual hyperreality rather than material reality, thereby demonstrating postmodernism's core paradox: the simulation becomes more -persuasive than the original it purports to reproduce (Baudrillard, 1995).

This blurring of boundaries extends beyond cultural production to the most consequential realm: the distinction between war and peace, information and manipulation, reality and simulation grows increasingly unstable. As conflicts reshape the global order, organized violence once again dominates international relations. Is war really the final result brought by the postmodern worldview? Foucault (2003) inverted Clausewitz's famous dictum that "war is the continuation of politics by other means," arguing instead that politics is merely the continuation of war during periods of temporary peace. From this perspective, conflict remains society's fundamental condition, merely disguised as civil governance when open hostilities pause. The postmodern condition, then, does not transcend violence but rather masks it more effectively.

This raises a more fundamental question about war's persistence in human affairs. In 1932, Albert Einstein wrote to Sigmund Freud asking, "Why do people wage war?" Freud's response identified war as a social manifestation of humanity's innate aggression and death instinct (thanatos), suggesting that organized violence stems from deep psychological drives rather than merely political calculation (Freud, 1933/1964). This psychoanalytic perspective offers a counterpoint to purely structural or discursive analyses, grounding the problem of war in human nature itself.

The notion that war is integral to human psychology found powerful literary expression in Ali Karim's poem "The Stone" at the beginning of the last century. The poem traces the evolution of violence as a stone thrown by ancient humans progressively transforms into sword, bullet, shell, atomic bomb, and finally subatomic particles – becoming a symbol of apocalyptic destruction. The poet concludes with an anguished appeal to his contemporaries: "O my contemporary, blood brother of truth, can't we stop, tell me, the half-naked, half-wild, ancient man from throwing the stone?!" (Karim, 2004, pp. 214–215). This poetic rendering anticipates theoretical concerns about technology's role in amplifying humanity's destructive capacities while questioning whether moral progress can keep pace with material advancement.

Ali Karim could not have been aware of Michel Foucault's theoretical argument that politics is a continuation of war, or Jean Baudrillard's analysis of how modernism was characterized by grand narratives that twentieth-century societies accepted as absolute truth. Yet his poetic lines transcend mere verse—they constitute philosophical discourse that captures the logic of the modernist world, the essence of destructive technologies, and the symbolic power of force.

The global political, economic, and cultural transformations occurring in the 21st century confront national states and peoples with new challenges. For the Turkic world in particular, spread across wide geographies and living under different political systems, these challenges present both opportunities and threats.

After Fuzuli and Mevlana, Dostoevsky proclaimed that beauty would save the world. The Azerbaijani poet Javid embraced this vision, while Ali Bey Huseynzade declared that "Salvation is in love..." (Füyuzat, 1906, No. 6). Ali Bey spoke these words during a time when "red darkness" and "flames of terror" surrounded everything, when daily "bombs danced savagely," when "people killed each other in front of churches and shot each other inside schools."

2. Characteristics of the Contemporary Period: Main Features of the Postmodern Age

Postmodernism – in Jean-François Lyotard's formulation – represents "the end of grand narratives" (Lyotard, 1984). According to this concept, universal representations about history, religion, science, nation, gender, and human nature itself are undergoing deconstruction. The metanarratives – the great ideological and spiritual systems upon which humanity has relied for centuries to construct collective identity – are losing their authority. Lyotard argues that under postmodern conditions, societies no longer embrace these grand explanations but instead favor local, individual, and often contradictory meanings.

This shift represents not merely a philosophical change but a fundamental transformation of social and political relations. Ideologies no longer function as instruments of mass motivation but instead become objects of skepticism. As each individual's reality becomes recognized as different and subjective, concepts of universal truth and shared purpose fragment.

These postmodern tendencies produce concrete effects in the Turkic world. Identity previously constructed around pan-Turkic solidarity now yields to more localized identifications. National movements such as Azerbaijanism, Turkishness (Türkiyelilik), Kazakhness, and Uzbekness naturally prioritize each people's distinct statehood and cultural sovereignty, relegating pan-Turkic identity to secondary status. Within postmodern consciousness, the centralized pan-Turkic vision appears not only outdated but potentially "totalitarian" in its demand for uniformity.

This fragmentation does not, however, produce exclusively negative consequences. The postmodern era simultaneously creates new possibilities. Through global networking, digital culture, and the validation of diverse experiences, Turkishness can be reconceptualized – not as an imposed ideology but as a shared cultural code. This shift enables new forms of unity: network-based, symbolic, and cooperation-oriented alliances rather than hierarchical structures.

The central question becomes: how is Turkic unity possible under postmodern conditions? At this juncture, such unity must be understood not as an imperative to be enforced but as an opportunity to be cultivated. The contemporary challenge demands a model based on voluntary cooperation rather than coercion, one that establishes communication within a shared value system while respecting difference. A new form of unity – more flexible, more symbolic, and more dialogue-based – is therefore essential.

Turkic identity, accordingly, should no longer function as a fixed ethnos or rigid ideological framework but rather as a dynamic communication platform: variable, relationship-based, and continuously formed through cultural dialogue.

3. Turkic National Identity and Limitations of Classical Turkism

Classical Turkism emerged as an ideological framework in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily aimed at forging cultural and political unity. Its main theoretical foundations were developed by intellectuals such as Ali Bey Huseynzade, Ziya Gökalp, Yusuf Akçura, and Ismail Gaspirali (Landau, 1995). Ali Bey Huseynzade's tripartite ideology – Turkism, Islamism, and modernity – represented a particularly distinctive approach within the Azerbaijani context. The tricolor flag adopted by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 embodies a symbolic synthesis of these principles: blue signifies Turkishness, green represents Islam, and red denotes modernity and progress (Swietochowski, 1995). This flag entered history not merely as a political emblem but as a harmonious and visionary synthesis of grand narratives – nation, religion, and modernism.

In the early 20th century, European and Russian ideologies were essentially monolithic – peoples typically constructed their identities within the exclusive framework of nationalism, liberalism, or socialism (Anderson, 2006, pp. 36–46). Azerbaijan, by synthesizing three parallel grand ideologies under a single flag, sought to articulate the experience of a people undergoing postcolonial transition in a multifaceted and inclusive manner. This approach represented a radical innovation for its time, demonstrating the flexible and sophisticated theoretical foundations of classical Turkism.

Ziya Gökalp played a pivotal role in systematizing classical Turkism theoretically. He conceived the Turkic nation as a culture-based entity, strengthened through unity of religion, language, and historical memory (Gökalp, 1968). By foregrounding concepts of “populism” and “national spirit,” Gökalp demonstrated that nationhood is not merely hereditary but also a conscious social and cultural construction. Yusuf Akçura, in his influential essay “Three Types of Policy,” articulated the necessity of choosing among Turkism, Islamism, and Ottomanism, advancing Turkism as the most viable political strategy (Akçura, 1976).

Today, however – within the postmodern context – these classical postulates require fundamental reconsideration. In an era characterized by the decline of grand narratives, the stable, unified, and universal explanatory power of ideologies has eroded. The contemporary Turkic world – spanning from Central Asia to the Balkans, from Siberia to Southern Azerbaijan – exhibits considerable cultural, political, and social diversity.

Classical Turkism's ideological framework struggles to accommodate this diversity. While each Turkic people seeks to preserve its distinct culture, they simultaneously desire cooperation and mutual recognition with other Turkic communities. Consequently, classical Turkism's core tenets – particularly its vision of a centralized national model and unified value system – have lost much of their functionality under contemporary conditions.

Turkism must therefore be reconceptualized: not as an ideology but rather as a communicative code, a framework for mutual understanding, and a vehicle for cultural dialogue. This renewed Turkism should rest not on imposed centralization but on voluntary cultural cooperation and value-sharing among diverse Turkic communities. The objective should be not ideological hegemony but rather the creation of spaces for inter-identity dialogue and mutual enrichment.

4. Acculturation Models and Turkic Reality

Sociologist John Berry's four acculturation models provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding identity dynamics in multicultural contexts (Berry, 1997):

- **Assimilation** – the individual or group renounces its national identity and merges with the dominant culture;
- **Separation** – maintaining attachment to one's own culture while rejecting contact with external influences;
- **Marginalization** – distancing from both cultures, resulting in identity crisis;
- **Integration** – preserving one's own culture while establishing constructive relations with other cultures.

These models manifest with varying intensities across different geographical contexts within the Turkic world:

Europe and North America: Turks living in the West – particularly Turkish and Azerbaijani diaspora communities – frequently navigate between assimilation and integration. While children tend to adopt dominant cultural norms more readily, families often strive to preserve ethnic and religious values in the domestic sphere (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Effective diaspora policies, native language instruction, and cultural festivals serve as key mechanisms promoting integration.

Authoritarian systems (Iran, China, Russia): Turks in Southern Azerbaijan, the Uyghur region, and Tatarstan face risks not of voluntary separation but of forced marginalization. Cultural pressures, state-sponsored assimilation policies, and educational restrictions systematically undermine national identity in these contexts (Millward, 2007; Peyrouse, 2007). Here, both grassroots cultural resistance and international visibility and support become critical.

Central Asian states: In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, although Turkic identities predominate, localized national identities have emerged as paramount. Legacy effects of Soviet-era Russification policies have produced marginalization tendencies in certain regions (Akiner, 1995). Regional cooperation frameworks and educational exchange programs can play crucial roles in addressing these challenges.

Azerbaijan and Türkiye: These two states have maintained strong national identities within post-Soviet and post-imperial contexts while assuming leadership roles in pan-Turkic integration efforts. Azerbaijan's national ideology accommodates both integration with the broader Turkic world and preservation of distinct national values within its multiethnic society (Cornell, 2011). Türkiye similarly constructs cultural bridges spanning Europe and Asia, translating integration ideals into practical cultural policies (Hale, 2013).

Given these diverse realities, effective acculturation management requires region-specific strategies. Through cultural institutions, shared information networks, educational platforms, and political support mechanisms, the integration model can be rendered more functional and adaptive to local conditions.

5. Foundations of the New Strategy: Communicative Turkishness in the Postmodern Age

The epistemological and sociological characteristics of the postmodern era demonstrate that stable ideological systems are yielding to more flexible, adaptive, and pluralistic structural models. Accordingly, the manner in which Turkishness is articulated must also evolve. Turkishness should now be understood not as an ideology but as a shared communicative code. This reconceptualization creates organic opportunities for dialogue and cultural-political cooperation among diverse Turkic peoples without imposing forced unity.

Jürgen Habermas's theory of "communicative action" provides the theoretical foundation for this model (Habermas, 1984). According to Habermas, social rationality emerges not through coercion but through communicative action grounded in mutual understanding. Within this framework, legitimacy derives not from force but from dialogue and consensus. Consequently, Turkism should function not as an ideological project through which one people establishes hegemony over others, but rather as a communication platform built upon shared historical memory, common linguistic and symbolic resources, and recognition of difference. This approach underscores that Turkishness constitutes not a monocentric, monolithic ideology but a polycentric, cooperative value system.

Michel Foucault's discourse theory further reinforces this conceptualization. Foucault demonstrates that discourse serves not only to establish power but also to resist it, generate alternative identities, and deconstruct dominant paradigms (Foucault, 1972). In this light, Turkism can function as a postcolonial discourse: for Turkic communities subjected to prolonged cultural hegemony under Soviet, Chinese, or Russian imperial rule, Turkishness represents a form of resistance. Critically, however, this resistance is oriented not against other peoples but toward cultural self-expression, self-promotion, and the construction of shared platforms for dialogue.

Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" emphasizes that contemporary identities lack stability and are continuously reconstituted in response to shifting conditions (Bauman, 2000). According to this framework, fixed categories such as nationality, religion, and class are giving way to flexible, transient, and contextual identifications. Accordingly, Turkishness no longer functions as a "stable ethnos" or "unified ideology" but rather as a constellation of identities that manifest differently across geographies while remaining interconnected through shared cultural codes.

The practical import of this model lies in its capacity to enable Turkic peoples to forge strategic, cultural, and technological partnerships through shared values without relinquishing their distinct cultural and political sovereignties. A Kazakh, for instance, can simultaneously identify as Kazakh and as a participant in broader Turkic cultural traditions; a young Azerbaijani can position herself within both Azerbaijanism and pan-Turkic frameworks. This represents neither assimilation nor separation but exemplifies the integration model in practice.

As a result, the communicative Turkishness model offers a networked, pluralist identity structure for the postmodern age without imposing uniformity. This model acknowledges the polyphonic character of the Turkic world, frames differences as opportunities rather than threats, and seeks to construct sustainable cooperation upon this foundation of diversity.

6. Proposals for a New Integration Strategy

Constructing Turkic unity in the postmodern world requires not merely emotional appeals but functional, strategically grounded mechanisms that are socially, economically, and culturally sustainable. This strategy should promote voluntary integration based on shared codes rather than forcibly uniting disparate cultures. Azerbaijan and Türkiye, in particular, should assume central roles by effectively mobilizing both historical experience and contemporary political capacities.

The new integration strategy can be structured along four principal dimensions:

A. State-Level Commitments

Strategic Coordination Centers: Establishment of unified coordination centers (for culture, science, economy) within the Organization of Turkic States framework. These centers should function in a results-oriented manner, managing concrete collaborative projects.

Normative Harmonization: Adoption of unified standards and regulatory frameworks in customs, education, technology, and law. This will establish the legal foundation for practical interstate cooperation.

Regional Economic Zones: Creation of economic zones anchored in the Caspian basin, Central Asia, and the Zangezur corridor, with harmonized tax incentives and investment promotion mechanisms.

B. Intellectual and Scientific-Cultural Initiatives

Turkic Integration Institute: Establishment of multidisciplinary research institutes with branches across Turkic states. These should conduct collaborative research in political science, cultural studies, technology, and international relations.

Digital Culture Platform: Development of a unified digital repository for history, folklore, literature, and shared memory. This platform should present Turkishness to youth not merely as inherited tradition but as a dynamic and contemporary identity framework.

Collaborative Academic Infrastructure: Creation of a common registry and international indexing system for scientific journals published in Turkic languages, accompanied by intraregional grant programs for scholars.

C. Cultural and Symbolic Integration

Shared Commemorative Dates: Joint celebration of symbolic occasions such as Dede Korkut Day, Orkhon-Yenisei Inscriptions Day, and Turkic Languages Day. These should be promoted across all Turkic societies through coordinated media strategies.

International Turkic Film and Music Festival: Annual cultural festivals rotating among Turkic states to strengthen shared aesthetic and emotional vocabularies.

Language Policy: Establishment of research centers focused on common Turkic lexicon and terminology, with strengthened translation institutes to facilitate mutual intelligibility across Turkic languages.

D. Entrepreneurial and Business Sector Engagement

Turkic Chamber of Commerce: Formation of an entrepreneurial organization that pools investment capital and supports regional economic initiatives.

Innovation and Technology Hubs: Creation of collaborative innovation centers across Turkic states to advance cooperation in digital technologies.

Corporate Social Responsibility: Engagement of business leaders not only in economic ventures but also in educational, environmental sustainability, and youth development initiatives.

This strategy can succeed only through broad-based participation encompassing not merely states but civil society, academic and cultural professionals, youth, and the business community. When connections across the Turkic world rest upon substantive cooperation rather than ideological rhetoric alone, this unity can achieve sustainability and functionality in the postmodern context.

Conclusion

The principal conclusions emerging from this analysis and the philosophical, sociological, and cultural discussions it entails can be systematized as follows:

1. The postmodern age demands not rigid national ideologies but flexible models grounded in cultural and communicative codes. Imposed ideological unions are yielding to voluntary cooperation and polycentric network structures.
2. Turkic identity constitutes not a fixed ethnos or monolithic ideology but a system of shared cultural codes. While this identity manifests distinctively across different geographies, unifying symbolic and historical values persist.
3. Although Ali Bey Huseynzade's tripartite synthesis (Turkism, Islamism, modernity) represented a visionary framework for its era, it requires fundamental reconsideration and adaptation to postmodern conditions.
4. Among acculturation models, integration emerges as the most sustainable approach for the Turkic world. Confronting risks posed by assimilation and separation, integration preserves both cultural sovereignty and collaborative possibilities.
5. The renewed Turkism model—communicative Turkishness should draw upon Habermas's, Foucault's, and Bauman's theoretical frameworks, evolving into a cultural platform that embraces difference and prioritizes dialogue.
6. The new integration strategy must be operationally functional, resting not on aspirational rhetoric but on concrete institutional and economic projects. Within this strategy, states, intellectuals, scholars, business leaders, and all societal sectors bear distinct responsibilities.
7. Azerbaijan and Türkiye have emerged as significant centers of Turkic integration due to their geopolitical and cultural positions. This study shows that Azerbaijan and Türkiye can serve as leading actors in the creation of a single cultural-political space.
8. A shared Turkic future becomes possible not through ideological imposition but through cultural coalitions and voluntary cooperation. The inherent vitality of culture and the integrative force generated by shared historical memory assume pivotal roles.
9. Contemporary youth must advance this model by drawing upon historical foundations while simultaneously revitalizing and extending it through digital technologies. In the postmodern era, identity transcends biological or ethnic givens – it constitutes an active process of information exchange, communication, and collaborative meaning-making.

In conclusion, reconstructing Turkishness for the postmodern era necessitates carefully deliberated approaches operating simultaneously at theoretical-philosophical and strategic-practical registers. This reconstruction proceeds not merely by recovering the past but by actively rewriting the symbolic and functional codes that will shape the future.

“From common Turkic past to common Turkic future” – this formulation represents not mere rhetoric but an adaptive, reflective strategic cultural framework demanded by postmodern conditions.

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About the Author

Sarkhan Khavari

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences | sarxan.xaver[at]@mail.ru | ORCID: 0000-0002-3501-8898

Dr. Sarkhan Khavari is a Doctor of Philological Sciences specializing in postmodern discourse analysis, identity studies, and Turkic cultural integration. His research focuses on the transformation of national identities in the context of contemporary geopolitical and cultural changes, with particular emphasis on the Turkic world. Dr. Khavari has published extensively on postcolonial theory, acculturation models, and the intersection of cultural policy and identity formation in post-Soviet spaces.