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### **Abstract**

The article represents an empirical study of the ethnic mentality and family-household stereotypes of the Abkhazian Muhajirs, living in the territory of Adjara. In the historical context, there can be traced the main reasons that affected the mass withdrawal of Abkhazians from their places of residence. Involuntary resettlement, first, to the Ottoman Empire, and afterwards, to Adjara, as well as the settling new places and the process of interaction with the local population are significant both in historical and sociocultural aspects. Having settled in Adjara, the Abkhazian Muhajirs brought with them elements of their cultural specifics, simultaneously absorbing the traditions and customs, carried by the autochthonous population. In spite of the fact that the Abkhazian Muhajirs experienced difficult historical changes, they could have preserved the national customs and traditions, tested throughout centuries, as well as the common Abkhazian ethnocultural identity.

**Key words:** Muhajir, identification, globalization, pramontheism, mentality, demographic disaster, social construction.

### **The historical transformation of identity of the Abkhazian Muhajirs, living in Adjara**

**Introduction.** The problem of personal identity in society is a relevant and actively explored pattern of modern social construction. On the one hand, there is an increasing desire to preserve own ethnic, religious, etc. identity, a strategic retreat to the traditional origins. On the other hand, this phenomenon becomes a reciprocal action against the opposite tendency, which reveals the processes of the spreading unification of spiritual culture in the global world. There is a process of a slow but offensive erasure of spatial and systemic boundaries between different cultural societies.

The problem of national identity is extremely relevant for many nations today, and we believe, it should be considered not only in the historical and cultural, but also in the socio-cultural context. Comprehending the complex and largely contradictory situation, that confronts the ethnos with the need for self-preservation in a rapidly changing world, we reasonably evaluate the experiencing processes as a possible crisis of self-awareness, an extinction of genetic memory. In other words, we are losing the qualities and properties that once determined our mentality, our way of life in general. And in the search for ways of preserving our originality, we are trying to get to the true causes of the

depreciation of the unique spiritual experience. It is very difficult to predict the peculiarities of the development of such processes, but it is impossible to deny that symptomatic changes in the mentality of certain ethnic groups are real. It is about preserving the real historical and cultural identity in the context of increasing globalization, the fierce geopolitical confrontation of the superpowers, the incompatibility of interests and the characteristic features of autochthonous folk culture and technocratic civilization. Therefore, it is quite natural that the traditional society is somehow trying to respond to these challenges.

The Abkhazian ethnos, that constantly attracted the interest of neighboring (and not only) states due to the geostrategic location, is not an exception. Important trade routes from Asia to Europe, from the Middle East to the Far East passed through the Caucasus, therefore dominance over the Caucasus meant not only establishing control over the transport trade, but also provided an opportunity to gain a foothold in the Black and Caspian Seas (1). This circumstance significantly increased the strategic importance of the North Caucasus and was the reason for permanent ongoing wars in this region.

Abkhazians, living in the territory of Adjara, are descendants of the Muhajirs, who were forced to leave their places of residence in Abkhazia and move to the countries of the Middle East in the second half of the XIX century. The word "muhajir" (also spelled as **mahajir** and **mohajir**) in Arabic means "forced migrant" and is primarily associated with the resettlement of the Prophet Mohammed and his fellow campaigners from Mecca to Medina. The XIX century events in the Caucasus gave this word a new load - for example, in the Abkhazian language this term ("amhajir") acquired the meaning "refugee expelled from his homeland". In connection with this process, the term "hijra" is often used, which means moving from one place to another. As a religious term, the word "hijra" is used in cases of resettlement of believers who are oppressed in their homeland and deprived of their freedom of religion.

In the history of Abkhazia, there are several periods of forced relocation: after the punitive expeditions of General Muravyov in 1840-1841; after the Crimean War of 1853-1856; after the abolition of the Abkhazian principality in 1864; the resettlement became more widespread during the Lykhny revolt of 1866 and the Russian-Turkish war of 1877-1878.

One of the hardest historical periods of this region was the Caucasian War, which lasted about 100 years and ended in 1864 with the eviction of a significant part of the Caucasian highlanders to the Ottoman Empire. This war was the most important event in the history of the North Caucasus in general, and the Western Caucasus in particular. Muhajirism affected mainly the Western Caucasus. According to some historians, about 90% of the population of individual ethnic

groups were forced to leave their homeland. The process of Muhajir resettlement continued throughout the second half of the XIX century. Some separate waves of migration took place at the beginning of the XX century as well.

### **Main part.**

For the Caucasus, Muhajirism became the largest demographic disaster, which, together with the intensified colonization of the region, redrew the traditional ethnicity of the Caucasus for several decades. This is one of the most difficult and tragic pages in the new history of the Caucasus.

At the beginning of the second half of the XX century, the first settlers from Abkhazia appeared on the territory of Adjara. These were the first, so-called family-individual migrations of Abkhazians, which apparently were caused by religious and social motives (4). The first relatively large group of immigrants (about three hundred families) settled in Batumi in the area "Nuriye Geli" (today the territory of the May 26 Park) in the early 60s. Before the Russian-Turkish war of 1877, 78, 9500 Abkhazians and Circassians settled in the Batumi district (2).

The resettlement process in Adjara has its own specifics and can be explained by the different circumstances. The reason for the relocation of some of the first Abkhazians to Ajaria was not associated with a mass migration. For example, representatives of the Akvadzba family (who live in Charnali - Khelvachauri district today) relocated in Adjara due to the fact that their great-grandfather was hiding from persecution. He kidnapped his beloved, who was a sister of nine brothers, so he was forced to leave his homeland. This is not the only particular case of the resettlement of Abkhazians to Adjara.

A relatively large group of Abkhazian settlers in Adjara appeared in 1867, after the Russian imperial government suppressed Abkhazian anti-Russian demonstration in 1866 and demanded the population of Abkhazia to leave the central and north-western part of its territory and migrate to Turkey. At that time Adjara was a part of the Ottoman Empire. The part of the Abkhazian population settled in the Georgian province, which was identical to Abkhazia by geographical and climatic conditions.

Migrants relocated in Adjara not only directly from Abkhazia, but a part of the population returned after moving to the Ottoman Empire, hoping to get to their native land. However, first, Turkey and, later, Russia did not allow the Abkhazians to reach Abkhazia. For this reason, a large number of immigrants settled in Adjara.

The formation of the local ethnic group of the Adjarian Abkhazians in Adjara was preceded by their resettlement to Turkey. The Turkish ruling elite sought, firstly, to populate sparsely

populated lands with Abkhazians, and secondly, to obtain cheap labor and militant soldiers in the war against Russia. In turn, the Abkhazians were hoping for a happy life in a coreligionist state. However, instead of the promised moon, the Abkhazians found hunger, poverty and diseases in Turkey. In the end of the XIX century, they began to return to their homeland, despite the prohibitions of both Turkey and Russia. First, the Abkhazians arrived to Batumi in order to move to Abkhazia. At the end of the XIX century, Batumi became the so-called transit point between the Caucasus and Turkey.

Having settled in Adjara, the Abkhazian Muhajirs transferred elements of their cultural and everyday life to a new ground. Gradually, the household began to improve, and in addition to hunting they began to cultivate land, to plant different varieties of fruit crops. Another business sector was livestock. At first, migrants bartered or bought meat and cattle from the local population, but later they established their own cattle breeding, using the obtained products themselves, or for sale and exchange.

The years of research have shown that food is the most preserved, conservative element of everyday culture, which actively resists the modernization changes observed in other elements of the material environment. Living in Adjara Abkhazians tried to preserve ethnic traditions in nutrition, the main element of which was considered to be a vegetable component. So, the main dish was hominy (“abista”), seasoned with greens, bitter adjika and beans. The meat component was presented in quite diverse ways. So, the favorite dish was boiled meat. At the same time, meat was often smoked (this tradition is still preserved in some families of Muhajir descendants, for example, in the family of Levan Aykutsba). Dairy products were also very popular. Cheese was used both with hominy and in separate dishes. The Abkhazian housewives often cooked dumplings with cheese (“achagaluf”) and savory - dried greens (“atsibra”).

The Abkhazian Muhajirs, who settled in Adjara, were followers of Islam, what was one of the main factors of their rapid adaptation with the local population. In general, the role of religion in the history of the Abkhazian people is extremely large: Abkhazia experienced a period of Orthodox Byzantine influence, a period of Ottoman protectorate and gradual Islamization, and after 1810, when Abkhazia became part of the Russian Empire, there began the reanimation of Orthodoxy.

However, it should be noted that the Abkhazians have a traditional religion, pramonotheism, according to which the world is the realization of divine providence, and the absolutely infinite God Antsea stands above the world and a man. God has “apaimbara” - angels, higher beings, servants, and representatives of God on earth, who report to God about everything that happens. This religion is a system of religious beliefs, canons and rituals, which was formed by the Abkhazians during a

long historical development. A traditional religion develops among the peoples in the process of their historical development, without the formative influence of world religions. It is an independent religion that was not influenced by either Christianity or Islam (5).

The Abkhazian traditional religion is not a pagan one (as among the ancient Slavs, Greeks, Scandinavian peoples who had a pantheon of equilibrium gods). It represents a form of the ancient religion with a single God-creator. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Satan does not oppose God in it. The idea of Satan is not presented in the religion. A man is punished for his sins by God.

These pre-Islamic beliefs among the Adjarian Abkhazians are not as widely spread as among compatriots in Abkhazia. However, until the middle of the XX century, Abkhazians in Adjara kept the elements of pramontheism. Annually, usually on the Old New Year (January 13-14) and with the onset of spring, the family performed a family prayer. Usually, several generations descended from one ancestor, participated in such a prayer. Young women did not participate in these rituals, only older women were eligible to attend the event.

The mandatory elements of the ritual were wine, a young goat, cornmeal for “abista” (hominy). The ritual “anikhara” (prayer) was conducted annually, at the beginning of spring, by the elder “Cholokva” (“Cholokava”). He prayed to God to ward off misfortunes, diseases and other adversity from all his relatives, so that the family genus would continue, multiply and prosper. After this, each of the family members repeated this prayer one by one. At the end of the prayer, they slaughtered a young goat and opened a wine jug, kept for this purpose. Abkhazians had a special attitude to trees. They divide all the tree species into two opposite classes: those bringing happiness, i.e. “lucky” and not bringing happiness, i.e. “unlucky” (poplar, willow, etc.). Such trees as oak, small and large walnut, hornbeam, yew, beech, etc., considered to be lucky, were endowed with the properties of sacred trees.

That is why the internal organs of the sacrificial animal were strung only on a nutty skewer. The elder took the meat from the skewer, tried it first, then, others followed him. After the procedure, the feast began. The ritual feast included several “pure” ritual dishes: boiled meat, abista, adjika and “pure” (without sugar) wine. After the sacrifice, the food was usually cooked by men right next to the place of prayer. The meat and skin of the sacrificial animal were not brought into the house, as it was considered a bad omen.

According to the preserved information, similar ritual traditions were held in the families of such surnames as Chamba, Agrba, Kaytamba, etc.

It should be noted that in Adjara most of the Abkhazians were adherents of the Islamic religion. The Adjarian Abkhazians tried to follow the Islamic traditions of the Sunnite type. After settling in

Adjara, they began to build wooden mosques (in the area of Adlia, Angisa, Feria, etc.). Mainly Abkhazian mullahs served in these mosques. Representatives of Abkhazian surnames often left for Turkey to study in Islamic institutions, from which they returned as Khojas (Kuteliya, Kishindba, etc.).

Abkhazian Muslims in Adjara observed fasting, went to the mosque for prayer: in the period of Ramazan (the month of the mandatory fasting for Muslims); on Thursdays they prayed for the rest of the souls of the dead, made halva and sorbet. At the end of the fast, they celebrated the holiday - the Bayram for two days. At this time it was customary to visit relatives and friends.

Today, according to the confessional affiliation, Adjarian Abkhazians represent a rare example of symbiosis, the synthesis of two world recognized religions - Christianity and Islam. In families that unite representatives of various denominations, religious holidays of Christians and Muslims are often celebrated together.

Thus, pramontheism, Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam intertwined in the minds of the Abkhazian people over the centuries. Religious ideas and cults, that served the vital interests of people and contributed to their economic and cultural development, were preserved and passed down from generation to generation.

It is impossible to talk about the ethnic identity of a people without its linguistic specificity. Abkhazians, living in Adjara, have not kept their language well. The representatives of the adult generation speak the language well, especially the children of those mothers who were born in Abkhazia and got married in Adjara 30-40 years ago.

The Abkhazian language of Adjarian Abkhazians differs in dialect from the language common in the territory of Abkhazia. In the scientific literature it is noted that the speech of the Adajarian Abkhazians, with its characteristic dialectal originality, is extremely interesting for linguistics, especially, for dialectology. The carriers of this dialect have long been living in Adjara and the specific features of their native speech, retained since the time of migration, although to a small extent, they still manifest themselves to this day.

Adjarian Abkhazians own a specific syncretic oral Abkhazian language variant (obtained as a result of mixing the Adjaran dialect of Georgian language with the peculiarities of the originally Abkhazian dialect of the Muhajiric period, completed with linguistic material, which was later restored as a result of contacts with Abkhazia), which is an integral part of the Georgian-Abkhazian bilingualism.

The speech of the Adjarian Abkhazians combines the Batumi version of the Adjarian dialect and the diglossia layering of Georgian literary language; the Adjarian Abkhazians even intonationally

accurately repeat the originality of the speech of the Adjarians living in and around Batumi, while their Abkhazian language is significantly different from the literary one and its two dialects (6). It is not possible to talk about ethnic identity without mentioning the component of linguistic affiliation. Therefore, the preservation of the mentality and identity of the Abkhazian local community in Adjara is impossible without popularizing the language among the younger generation.

Summarizing the above, we can conclude the following:

After overcoming a lot of problems associated with severe political conditions in the Caucasus since the middle of the XIX century, the Abkhaz-Muhajirs settled on the territory of Adjara without serious complications from the local population.

- 1) The majority of the Abkhazians, settled on the territory of Adjara, were adherents of the Muslim religion, which contributed to a quick and relatively painless rapprochement with the local co-religious community;
- 2) The second factor that played a significant role in the settlement of Abkhazians in the given territory, was the climatic and natural environment of Adjara region, which was identical to the one of Abkhazia;
- 3) In the course of the research there were observed the changes in the mentality of the younger generation. This is mainly due to the gradual loss of the linguistic component, which is one of the main factors of community consolidation and an indicator of an individual's ethnicity. The ongoing system changes, naturally, affected the younger generation, which integrated into the local society;
- 4) The conducted studies made it possible to trace a process of historical identity transformation of the Abkhazian ethnos on the territory of Adjara under the influence of external and, subsequently, internal factors.

Despite the fact that the Adjarian Abkhazians settled on the territory of Adjara almost two centuries ago, they managed to retain the common Abkhazian ethnocultural identity. The relations, created on a new social basis, absorbed national customs and traditions, preserving the common national identity.

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