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Sanctification of Religious Elements in the Process of Identity Convergence

(Regional Analysis according to Adjarian Example)

Abstract:

Historically, religion was a determinant of ethnicity. Consequently, religion played an important role in shaping the identity. At the modern stage, the clear strengthening of secularization contributed to freedom of religion. However, following the historical processes religious things in social life have contributed to the elements of sanctification, which has established exceptional approaches in social culture, consciousness and identity processes.

Taking into consideration these tendencies, Adjarian region is characterized by special significance based on historical processes and modern trends. Due to the historical past, Adjara is distinguished with religious diversity that has influenced the population's traditional culture, as well as the consciousness and identity formation. Cultural and social grounds for establishment of Christian religion in Adjara were prepared by pagan religion, the elements of which in modern stage are well maintained in the population and culture. This was due to the spread of Islam as pagan culture was more acceptable than Christian elements. Consequently, the conservation of pagan elements in the society occurred. The spread of Muslim religion was used as a factor of ethno-cultural de-integration. More importantly, that historically religion was the main criterion of ethnicity. In the modern

stage, secularization processes have replaced existing approaches and generally religion is no longer a factor of ethnic identity. However, we can say that we have received syncretism of three religions (paganism, Islam, Christianity), which has had a significant impact on the development of cultural identity.

Main Part:

Religion is an important factor in the criteria that determine a person's concept of life. Religious beliefs define the forms of personal and public life, integrating aspects of freedom, both internal (own religious beliefs and attitudes) and external (personal religious attitudes and beliefs).

The intrinsic aspect of freedom of religion and belief primarily involves the "freedom of choice" of religious beliefs, which in turn is intertwined with the ability to freely accept or change a particular belief. [3. p.20].

Freedom of religion, on the one hand, allows for the interpretation of individual thinking, and on the other hand it is often a key determinant of identity as well, since religion also creates a certain socio-cultural environment that differs from other similarities. Thus, the religious factor in defining identity is as important in the modern era as it was particularly important historically, when religion and politics were considered in almost the same aspect. The fundamental ideas and beliefs that give rise to a person's values cannot themselves relate to another person, society or state.

Christian-Orthodox faith has played a major role in Georgia's history. It was based on Georgian culture, for which the norms of the Eastern Christian world were of great importance. For a number of reasons, including the political, cultural and civilization aspects, Orthodoxy was identified with nationality and its protection was linked to the country's

"resurrection" problem. The search for a faithful ally, and then a patron, has been one of the main directions of Georgia's foreign policy for centuries. The issue of political orientation has transformed into a problem of cultural orientation, and in the face of centuries-long confrontation with the Islamic world this choice has also become a form of religious-cultural choice.

It should not be a coincidence that our Muslim neighbors in Georgian historical sources are referred in the main religious content as: "Muslim" ("History and Azman Sharavandedtani"), "Muslim" (Basil Ezosmodzgvari), and "Mohammedan", Islam ("History and Azman ..."), "Sarkinozni" [7.p.23]. But there is one political and at least religious orientation - belonging to a particular civilization that, unlike political and economic interests, has long been established and represents a result of many different circumstances (sometimes random). E. Smith points out that religious identity may enhance other including civilization identities and may weaken them. [7.p.120].

Today, issues of cultural and civilization identity have become particularly actual. Besides scientists, they are increasingly becoming a matter of interest to politicians. Identity research, along with the theoretical one, also has practical significance as it allows the identification of present and future cultural and political orientations. The notion of civilization identity is rarely seen as a means of escaping the crisis experienced by states in the process of formation.

Issues of cultural and civilization identity are particularly actual for small nations and people whose mentality, if we admit to Milan Kundera, is determined by a constant search for their own meaning. For the peoples of the Caucasus, including Georgians, the issue of the existence of cultures and civilizations is further complicated. The Caucasus, historically and to this day, is the bridge connecting the West and the East, the North and the South, the

crossroads of civilizations and, therefore, the intersection of different forces of interest. The Caucasus is a region characterized by centuries of organic fusion and dynamic equilibrium of integration and disintegration trends.

In the modern stage the political and religious life of states is determined by the obvious strengthening of secularization, which became almost irreversible. At first glance, the separation of religion and politics can be considered as full independence of the theological sphere and exemption from the influence on the surface level, which is quite appealing for the simple reason that faith is somewhat implicated from being in existence and is more likely to maintain neutrality. However, the issue is not as simple as the inward deeper development of the processes reveals elements of religious synergies at all stages of social development. All this led to the development of a different, peculiar public life and culture, which has had a great impact on the development of public consciousness and identity.

In a legal sense, secularization implies separation of the state and religion by means of functional and institutional features, which above all simultaneously serves to a free state policy from its undue religious influence and to free religion from unacceptable political interference. Accordingly, secularism is a mutual benefit that is equally enjoyed by the state and religion.

The promotion of secularization process by the state on the one hand leads to the freedom of religious institutions and they continue to remain untouched, but on the other hand, the state government loses the dominant role, as far as for many religious people religious institutions are more authoritative than state institutions. [3.p.10]

Taking into consideration this reality, studying and analysis of religious situations in Adjara is characterized by special importance, its influence on the formation of social-

political relations, cultural self-consciousness and identity formation as Adjara with its historical past is distinguished with religious diversity, which has influenced the population's traditional culture, as well as the rules of social and economic life.

In Adjara, the spread of Muslim religion was used as a factor of ethno-cultural de-integration. Moreover, that historically religion was the main criterion of ethnicity. Consequently, it defined the global political problem and, on the contrary, causes of confrontation between religions often derived from politics. [5.p.52]

It is not possible to study the religious traditions in Adjara without analyzing the peculiarities of individual religions. In the footsteps of secularization processes, it is necessary to identify the elements of religious syncretism and sanctification in the population and culture. In particular, the influence of individual religions on the formation of modern civil society; how important is the process of religious sanctification in different spheres of life and how the state policy affects secularization tendencies.

Until the 60s of the last century, there was a popular view in the scientific circles that education, urbanization, modern employment opportunities, technological shifts, new scientific achievements, etc. would surely lead us to the extent of secularization throughout the world. There were assumptions that the amendments would also bring new values and modern lifestyles and as a result of this the society would fiercely oppose religious traditions. Also following the dissemination of modernization, traditional religious institutions would be decimated and could completely disappear. Thus the society would be free from religious hindrances and the decaying religion would be a personal matter of individuals. Such approach was especially popular in the post-Soviet space.

During the atheism religious factors were almost entirely excluded from the sphere of public relations in Adjara as well. However, the collapse of the Soviet ideology led to an

increase in the population's religious beliefs. In new conditions the number of religious confessors increased, new religious movements from abroad easily started to enter, which caused not only a significant complication of the confessional structure but also in some cases resulted in a breakdown of religious and socio-psychological relations and internal contradictions.

In the footsteps of historical developments in Adjara the quality of the secularization and identity changed. There was a period when religion played a dominant role and represented the main determinant of ethnic origin. For example, orthodoxy became an identical concept of Georgians. Accordingly, Armenians were considered as Gregorians, Catholics as French and Muslims as Tatars. It is true that in the 19th century, after the return of the Adjarian ethnographic groups into the Georgian ethnic space, the leading role of faith in the definition of ethnicity gradually weakened, but before the final development of civil society, the confessional belongings were often exaggerated in this regard. This approach was further strengthened by the political and socio-economic cataclysms of the late XX century. In this time a popular geopolitical theory was added to the scientific circles according to which the future of the world was determined by religious polarization (collision of Islamic and Christian civilization). While these types of predictions remained at the theory level, in the face of difficulties and challenges after the independence of Georgia, religion offered spiritual guidance and psychological comfort to the population. Spiritual security is the state's provision of material, spiritual and psychological comfort [1.p. 11]. In the 90s of the twentieth century, when Georgia gained independence, the government often failed to fulfill the spiritual, political and economic duties. Namely promises of political justice and economic prosperity, which created a political and ideological vacuum and strengthened the

role of religious institutions in the civil society in the face of the weakening of political authority.

The general tendencies of Soviet de-ideology and the return to religion has affected the development of Christianity and Islam in Adjara. The existing churches and mosques have been opened. New ones were built. However, the results of our survey showed that religion was not a political factor in the self-awareness of the population of Adjara and that attitude continues today. Today Muslim population lives in Adjara, there are mosques but they are used only for a holy purpose and don't have other socio-political function. Despite the fact that the population has elements of sanctification and specifically Islam (a few centuries of Islam in Adjara has led to the fact that Islamic elements are in traditional culture) socio-political and family life spheres are not affected by the Islamic law.

It is noteworthy that the Caucasus today is the area of concentration of Islamic radicalism - "Wahhabism". Although the press of the 90s of the last century often highlighted the danger of Islamic radicalism with regard to Georgia, the reason for which could be a close neighboring relationship with Muslim countries and more than half a million Muslim and non-Georgian population in Georgia, Wahhabism has not got a leg here. Although Wahhabism is a sect of Sunni Islam and in Adjara the Sunni Islam is spread, the main principle of Wahhabism - denial of cultural and civilization belongings was completely unacceptable for the Muslim population of Adjara. Studies show that the self-awareness of the population of Adjara is strongly separated from the relationship between politics and religion. Muslim religion is perceived as a historical acquisition only [2.p.138-140]

As for the Christian religion, in its time the Georgian society moved not only to the new stage of formation, but also the elements of Christian culture were spread, which has influenced the lifestyle, as well as the ethnic identity and consciousness. This was partly due

to historical political processes, because the definition of foreign political orientation was based on religious compatibility. These processes were naturally taking place in the same way in Adjara as well before the region would appear within the Ottoman Empire and as a result of religious policy Islam would become the main religion which has also influenced the population's lifestyle and culture.

It should be noted that while the spread of Christianity elements belonging to the pagan religious pantheon still existed in the culture of Adjarian population, because pre-Christian culture has prepared a basis for the establishment of new religious consciousness in Adjara. And while the spread of Islam it can be said that on the contrary, the conservation of religious elements characteristic to paganism occurred as far as the pagan elements were more acceptable than Christian. [4.p.40]

As a result we have received religious syncretism, which has led to a very complex cultural and social structure of society. However, this was largely reflected in cultural identity and had no influence on ethnic identity.

Conclusions

Thus, the study of identity is a topical issue in the modern world. Identity is not once and for all given and unchanged: it is continually shaped by social interactions. Social interactions are always carried out in a particular area and in a social setting. Thus, there is a significant link between identity, socio-political environment and place, which have a significant impact on identity and on the process of identity formation. In many cases, the place, with its constituent elements (buildings, churches, sacred places, squares, hills, etc.) has a decisive influence on the formation of human identity [8.g.360].

While researching the problems of identity in Georgia, it is important to separate ethnic and civic actors. Historically ethnic nationalism in Georgia has played a crucial role in

defining identity. Its main identifying mark along with ethno genesis was the religious factor. All of this was due to its historical heritage. In the course of historical events, religiosity has become a means of ethnic identity and has played a major role in the country's foreign policy orientation.

Thus, the confessional belongings in Adjara, traditions based on the influence of some religions and therefore research of consciousness and identity are one of the most important tasks taking into account the varied historical reality which Georgia and specifically this region has passed. Here are elements of the three religions (paganism, Christianity, Islam). As a result, we have received religious syncretism, which even today appears in Adjara in different forms and as studies have shown, it only affects cultural identity issues as religion and ethnicity were separated from the consciousness of the population living here and these processes are going pretty well at modern stage, when the quality of secularization of religion increased which led to a clear separation of religion and politics. Especially since ethnic identities were replaced by issues of civil identity. Religion as a determining factor of identification has been replaced by other values, and religion has been given only sacred meaning.

Christianity as Islam is no longer a primary determinant of identity in the consciousness of the population. None of the religious criteria has a decisive importance for the convergence of identity and at the same time, the attitude of the government towards religious communities is liberal today taking into account the nuance that attending Muslim holidays in mosques in modern times is part of religious policy.

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