

Language and territory as a «connective structure» in the collective memory of the Georgians of Turkey

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Résumé : L'objectif du présent article est de montrer comment la population géorgienne vivant à l'extérieur de la patrie à différentes époques réussissait à construire une *structure de connexion* et parvenait à maintenir son identité grâce à la mémoire communicationnelle et culturelle. À ces fins, nous analysons les informations historiques et ethnographiques qui montrent la différence entre les Géorgiens autochtones, qui habitent sur le territoire de Tao-Clarjethi historique, faisant partie actuellement de la Turquie, et les Géorgiens muhadjirs, qui ont émigré en Turquie pendant la guerre russo-turque et se sont installés dans la région de la mer de Marmara. L'étude des deux cas a montré que la préservation de la langue maternelle, la reproduction de l'espace symbolique de la patrie, le maintien des traditions avec le *paysage mythologique* aidaient la population à s'identifier à la Géorgie et aux Géorgiens. La recherche effectuée a montré également comment le territoire symbolique de la patrie s'est lié à la langue maternelle et est devenu avec le temps fragmentaire, pluralisé et territorialisé.

Mots-clés : mémoire communicationnelle; mémoire culturelle; espace symbolique; identité

Abstract: The paper aims to show how Georgian population living outside the homeland at various times managed to construct a *connective structure* with the native fraternity and how they maintained their identity by means of communicative and cultural memories in foreign cultural and language settings. Accordingly, historical and ethnographical accounts were drawn and the distinction was made between native Georgians living in historical Tao-Klarjeti (now in Turkey) and Muhajir Georgians who settled in an uncultivated and foreign setting in the Marmara Sea region in Turkey. The study of both cases revealed that the protection of the mother-tongue, the creation of the symbolic space reproducing the homeland and the observance of traditional customs together with the mythological landscape helped the population to identify themselves with Georgia and Georgian-ness. The study also shows how the reproduced symbolic territory of fraternity interlinked with the mother-tongue step by step gets more fragmented, pluralized and territorialized.

Key words: communicative memory; cultural memory; symbolic space; identity

Introduction

The paper aims to show how the Georgian population from the Black Sea littoral regions deviated from the homeland for different reasons at different times managed to construct the so called *connective structure* (to use Jan Assman's¹ term introduced in the memory studies) with the native fraternity and how they managed to maintain their identity in the entirely foreign cultural and language settings of Turkey. Accordingly, historical and ethnographical accounts are drawn into the analysis.

At the outset, it must be noted that when speaking about the ethnic Georgians in Turkey, one needs to distinguish between the autochthonous ethnic Georgians who lived and live in the historical Tao-Klarjeti (i.e. in one of the historical provinces of Georgia, now in Turkey) and the muhajir Georgians who migrated from Georgia to Turkey after Russo-Turkish war (1877-78) and settled in uncultivated and foreign for them Marmara Sea vicinities. After the Russo-Turkish war (1877-78) the historical territories of Georgia within the Ottoman Empire were freed and restored in the historical borders of Georgia. Georgian territories were freed by Russian troops but the native population perplexed and lost in the religious diversity were leaving their estates and migrating in the inner territories (vilayets) of Turkey². In 1921, Turkey and Russia divided Georgia among themselves and the most Georgian territories regained during the war of 1877-78 were returned to Turkey again. The war and its after effects, as is thought, resulted in the wave of *muhajirs*³.

¹ Jan Assman, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2012 [2007], p. 15-147.

² Zakaria Č'ič'inajé, *The great emigration of Muslim Georgians in the Ottoman Empire, muhajir-emigration* [In Georgian], Tbilisi: Archil Kereselijé, 1912, p. 77, 179-182; Nino Okrosčvartijé, *Family and Family Life of Turkish Georgians: The Case of Hayriye Village population, Inegöl Region, Turkey* [In Georgian], Tbilisi, Ilia State University, 2014, p.11-51, www.iliauni.edu.ge.

³ Inga Ğutijé, «The problems of Language and ethnic identities among the muhajir Georgians» [In Georgian], *Papers of Caucasian Ethnology*, XII, universali, Tbilisi, 2010, p.145-165; Rozeta Gujeĵiani, «Current ethno-cultural processes among the ethnic Georgians of Marmara Sea Region» [In Georgian], *The Third Annual Conference in Humanities at Georgian University*, Tbilisi, 2011, p. 111-117.

The word combination *muhajir* Georgians refers to the Muslims of Georgian descent, who had left the homeland and immigrated after Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) to Turkey. Though according to some scholars migration process started much earlier than the Russian troops entered Ajara¹.

The special literature on *muhajirs* is rather scanty, but nevertheless there are various opinions about the phenomenon. Some scholars think that the migration was caused by the identification of religion with nationality and that *muhajirs* were forced to leave the homeland (such was the opinion of Zakaria Chichinadze², who gathered oral histories among the *mukhajar* Georgians themselves during the travel throughout Turkey at the end of the 19th century. As he noted, one could not find a single place among the Georgian Muslims where they would not retell what happened long ago when the population of the gorge had been forced to leave their villages. Others argued that it was not an escape. On the contrary, *muhajirs* themselves who settled in Inegöl emphasized that it was immigration and not a flight, which might imply that they followed the decision of the Berlin Treaty that had proclaimed the civil rights about migration. As for the flight, according to some narratives they had started in 1927, according to others - in 1939 and ended in 1942³.

As is known, migration might have taken place for several economic, religious, or simply for relocation, etc. reasons. According to Zeki Saritoprak's definition, the term for migration in Islam is *hijra* and the active participle of the word is *muhajir*⁴. Over centuries, the term has been applied to a number of Muslim refugee and emigrant groups and among them to the Georgians.

The above said leads us to the further explanation of the term: *muhajir* as a quranic word (and as such having to do with sacredness) implies migration

¹ Inga Ghutijé, *op. cit.*, p. 145-165.

² Zakaria Č'ič'inajé, "Muslim Georgians and their villages in Georgia" [in Georgian], Universali, Tbilisi, 2013 [1913], p. 130; Zakaria Č'ič'inajé, 1913, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³ Nodar Kakhijé, "Some reflections on *muhajir* processes in the Georgian Periodicals (according to the accounts on Ajara in the magazine of *Droeba*", *Ethnological Problems of South-Western Georgia* 2, Batumi, 2008, p.15; Inga Ghit'ijé, *op. cit.*, p. 145-162.

⁴ Zeki Saritoprak, "The Qur'anic Perspective on Immigrants: Prophet Muhammad's Migration and Its Implications in Our Modern Society", encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-Muhajir.

for the sake of the faith and this act actually repeated the flight of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina to avoid persecution in A. D. 622. (As is known, the significance of this migration was marked as the beginning of the Islamic calendar). This supposition is strengthened if we recollect that «the tradition of Islam considers all human beings as immigrants¹».

The most of the *muhajir* Georgians can be found around the Marmar sea region in the Bursa vilayet, where they had been settling successively. The first large wave of the *muhajirs* settled on this territory in the 1980s. The second wave – during the 1920s-1930s; besides, in the 1970s ethnic Georgians from Tao-Klarjeti also migrated to Bursa region².

Among the *Muhajir* Georgian villages, one of the successful, prosperous and interesting from the point of view of ethnic consciousness villages, is a tiny mountainous village called Hayriye (*kheirie lit.* the village of good omen) in the Inegöl district of Bursa province that had been founded by imam Haji Mehmed Effendi approximately in 1880-88. It had been settled and arranged by Georgian families of Muslim faith who migrated to Turkey from the border area between Georgia and Turkey (near Artvin) from the historic-ethnographic districts of Ajara and Machakhela. The first appearance of the Georgian *muhajirs* at Inegöl only in 1887 is explained by the fact that starting from 1879 till the mentioned period they had been roaming from place to place just to find suitable place to live, for Turkey, at that time defeated and economically weakened country, could not care even for its own population³.

In several years *muhajir* Georgians founded about seven villages, later the number of Georgian villages multiplied, the population increased in number and for today ethnic Georgians live not only in the villages of Bursa vilayet, but also in the main towns of the region and represent one of the important ethnic groups of the region⁴.

¹ *Ibid.*

² Rozeta Gujejiani, *op. cit.*, p. 111- 117.

³ Inga Čut'ijé, *op. cit.*, p. 145-165.

⁴ Rozeta Gujejiani, *op. cit.* p. 111-117.

The social construction of the space and the past

According to the ethnographic accounts¹, the first wave of Hayrhye migrants cut down the trees in the forest and started to construct for themselves an inhabitable place. From the outset, they fenced the territory and separated the inner place from the outer one.

The closed place included the village itself, hierarchal large endogamous family, based on gender and age principles, in which several generations lived together. And as usual in such families, *pater familias* was the most important person in it.

The mentioned village represented a closed place with its symbolic space which actually never (or seldom) communicated with town (i. e. with open space –N.A.). Only men could go to town. The inner space of village was thoroughly preserved. Naturally after the resettlement (transmigration) a lot of things changed, but almost everybody remembered his/her initial family name. In the beginning, the population and especially women did not know Turkish language at all, that was caused by their lifestyle. Their communication language was only Georgian. Actually they never left families and never overstepped the village boundaries. The village was an enclosed place and they seldom communicated with town. In rare cases men visited Inegöl, and therefore they knew a little Turkish. Besides, the village was surrounded by other Georgian villages and strangers seldom violated their idyll life. All that preserved the inner place and space².

Thus, Georgian language circulating through family and village was predominantly preserved and kept by women. Women were also the guardians of family customs, which implied raising of children, performing of religious rituals, observance of traditional family customs, etc.

Thus, by means of the mentioned inner space, the two worlds – the symbolic and real worlds integrated. In the societal life the household represented not only a social and economic institution but a symbolic one, as well. As

¹ Nono Okrocvarijé, *op. cit.* p. 11-79.

² *Ibid.*

Nino Okrosvavidze¹ notes this micro world actually was their identity. In this world *muhajirs* kept and held in great respect different sorts of things (that might be tools, kitchen utensils and sometimes even some species of plants e.g. a vine tree) brought with them from Georgia. All that helped them to experience (live) the ethnic space. The world of objects (tools, furniture, rooms, their particular layout, plants) that made materiel entourage contributed and supported their identity².

The above brought ethnographic data raises some questions: a). In what way does an ethnic identity maintains temporal continuity in a foreign setting, exerting its pull from generation to generation? and b) as change is generally inevitable, how this topographically organized social or communicative memory and ethnic space could collapse and change. We are inclined to think that the two counter processes (outer and inner) contributed to that. Here are meant the work of a Turkish ideological project and the shifting accent in the education policy on the study of Turkish that caused the introduction of Turkish language from school to families. This process gradually and quite naturally withdrew Georgian language from families.

The inner process refers to the break through the hermetically closed boundaries of the symbolic space with its customs and entering the free and open space of town; disintegration of large families and gradual abandoning of Georgian language from the family life.

As Nino Okrosvavidze³ fixed it during her fieldwork in Turkey, the final break away account had started since the 1960s and the 1970s when the villagers seeking for jobs moved to Germany (basically in Gummersbach and Bergneuschadt) i.e. in the third cultural setting; soon they also were joined by women. Break with the tradition on the mentioned political level led, as it often happens, to an inevitable thorough reorganization of the communicative memory.

¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229-230.

Memory figure of the homeland in the crystallized myths of Georgians

As is known, connective structure also implies an aspect of culture that underlines myths and histories. One of the strongest, stable and impressive symbols of the homeland crystallized in myths is the memory figure of Queen Tamar (12-13 c.) that had been circulating throughout Georgia including its historical territories. Georgian Orthodox Church has canonized her as the Holy Righteous King Tamar and the commemoration day is on 14 May (by Julian calendar). With the name of Tamar the Golden age of Georgians is associated. Scholars agree that not a single epoch had such a strong impact on the memory history of Georgia than the epoch of Tamar.

She left (departed) the visible world – but left potential capabilities behind her dug deep in her character which continued to live; throughout the centuries it had been revealing various images of her one better than other. Tamar always had been alive in the consciousness of the Georgians and this is the source of Tamar's myths. And as life is impossible without growth, so her image had been gradually becoming a radiant fruit of the creative power of Georgians... every bit of Georgia inevitably represents the fragment of Tamar myth ... when the setting sun throws its last embrace to ruins Georgian reads beyond it the smile of Tamar: when a strange bird flies across the dark woods – Georgian will hear in the flap of its wings – the tale of Tamar.

The image of Tamar is an unexhausted source of legends for Georgians. This or that places are consecrated by means of her name and one cannot touch birds or animals there; but why? Only for a sole reason: once Tamar walked there.

When a breastfeeding mother's milk dries up she appeals to a miraculous spring of Tamar to be cured. And it cures, but by means of what power? Certainly by Tamar's power for once Tamar had slaked her thirst there [...] Tamar's every step is flourished with legends and myths in Georgia. Everywhere is Tamar and only Tamar! [...] It is quite symbolical that nobody knows where her grave is. She belongs simultaneously to everybody and nobody. Her grave is the hearts of Georgians, and in the perception of Georgians this is not a grave but a beautiful vase where never fading flower of Queen Tamar blooms¹.

Tamar's image is divinized in popular memory. Various folk songs, poems and tales represent her as an ideal ruler, a holy woman often sharing certain characteristics of pre-Christian deities and Christian saints. According to

¹ Grigol Robakijé, "Tamar", the magazine *sakartvelo* [in Georgian], n° 90-91, 1918, p. 13-15. amsi.ge/istoria/gr/Tamar.html.

the wide spread Georgian beliefs she is the demiurge and the founder of the culture, the creator of the world similar to the paradise with everlasting spring in it; She controls weather, water, fertility; she can levitate, can put her prayer book on the sunbeam; she can heal and for that reason the cult of *queen Tamar the healer* (*Tamar akimdedopali*) is founded in the eastern mountainous Georgia. Her attributes are veil and fire, by means of which she captures earth from the sea and founds her kingdom. In the perception of Georgians she is the model of a successful, victorious warrior-queen. Thus Queen Tamar being the most central agent narrated in the Georgian mythology plays a significant role in the belief system of Georgians and provides an identity-model.

According to ZurabKiknadze, « while the 4th century text of the Conversion of Kartli tells about the first steps of the people – large crowds and elite together on the way of their Christianization, eight and a half centuries later, ‘Histories and Glorifications of the Sovereigns’ dedicated to Queen Tamar, renders an ideal of the Christian country as a visible paradise and brilliant Eden where ‘a lion and an ox pastured together, a tiger was joyful with goats, and a wolf with sheep’. In such a country, every stratum of the society goes up a step: peasants become noble, and noblemen become princes, and princes become kings. Kings reach the grade of a divinity»¹. Within the mentioned context, Zurabkiknaze views Tamar as an eschatological figure, and her kingdom as the place of eternal spring². It is also important to mention here that the Christian narrative associated with the Queen was gradually translated into vernacular Georgian mythology.

The histories associated with Queen Tamar among the ethnic Georgians of Turkey are important. The image of Queen Tamar is one of the most important markers of identity which associates social facts of the Georgians of Turkey to the traditional Georgian culture³.

Even today when travelling throughout the historical Tao-Klarjeti the population invites visitors to see the bridges, the monasteries, the towers, the places,

¹ Zurab K'ik'najé, "Georgia on its way to Christianization: humans and the holy" [in Georgian], Tbilisi, *Caucasian House*, 2009. p. 163-171.

² *Ibid.*

³ Zakaria Č'ič'inajé, 2013, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

the stones, the roads, the springs, etc. associated with her name and retells different narratives about her and the places.

Thus, governing myth of the Georgian nation, that of Queen Tamar, is the alleged repository of national collective memory even at the level of different – Christianity and Islam – religions. The image of the king Tamar developed through intergenerational transmission which is characterized by mythology and entails an ideology and worldview.

Conclusion

When summarizing all the above said, it must be noted that the mentioned cases reveal objectivized culture that in one case has a certain structure of social or communicative memory (the term introduced by Maurice Halbwachs¹ and further developed by Jan Assman²) or the memory through communication and in the other – cultural memory with its so called *fixed memory figure* represented by Queen Tamar with reference to the diverse mythological registers and their functioning throughout Georgia.

In the symbolic world created by the communicative memory of *muhajir* Georgians, language and socialization are of great importance. And as for the cultural memory (in the case of the natives of the historical Tao-Klarjeti) the historical territory with its crystallized and objectified cultural monuments and mythology takes the leading function³. Both forms of memory hold people together with one another, give them a definite orientation and bind yesterday with today by means of socialization, customs and mythology.

In the discussed communicative memory case the referential frames of the lived communicated reality are almost broken off by social and economic requirements (needs) that gradually cause changes and disappearance of the memory and the consequence is presumably – forgetting.

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Edited, translated and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, “The heritage of sociology Series”, 1992 [1941], p. 84-119; p. 167-189.

² Jan Assman, *op. cit.*, p. 15-147.

³ Though it must be noted that the existence of one form of memory does not inevitably exclude the presence of the other form of memory in the same tradition.

In the cultural memory case the fixed point is the figure of Queen Tamar whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and as Duncan S. A. Bell¹ would argue in such a case, both memory and mythology are essential to understanding national identity. Both of them constitute a ‘myths cape’, the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed constantly².

Our case clearly shows that continuities of mythology may be maintained through a radical change in religion (queen Tamar’s mythology circulates in both – Christian and Muslim traditions), while a change in religion may be accomplished on the platform of an established mythology. Hence we share the opinion of those who think that «mythology remains a significant system, whereas religion is the constellation of practices and behaviors interfaced with mythology that provide a fundamental frame of reference for identity³».

Thus the paper tried to show how passive and neutral in its essence territory and structured place become meaningful by means of observance of traditional customs, building a symbolic space of homeland with the figure of memory represented by the mythologized image of Queen Tamar; and how all these build a bridge to homeland and how all these created the basis of belonging and of identity.

The study revealed that the protection of the mother-tongue, building the symbolic space reproducing the homeland and observance of traditional customs together with the mythological landscape helped the population to identify themselves with Georgia and Georgian-ness.

¹ Duncan S. A. Bell, “Mythscape: memory, mythology, and national identity”, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/0007131032000045905/abstract>. (November 28th, 2016).

² *Ibid.*, p. 63-81.

³ Anna-Leena Siikala Frog, «Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis», in Frog and Karina Lukin (eds), *Between Text and Practice. Mythology, Religion and Research. A special issue of RMN Newsletter*, n° 10, Helsinki, University of Helsinki, Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, 2015, p. 33-53.

The cases of *muhajir* Georgians of Marmar sea region and autochthonous Georgians of historical Tao-Klarjeti (now in Turkey) showed how the reproduced symbolic fraternity in one case rooted in everyday life and in the cultural system of the dynastic realm, in the other, declines under the impact of economic needs, increased communication and the inescapable process of migration, and how all these gradually relates them to others in deeply new ways.

How the interlinked language and territory step by step gets more fragmented, pluralized and territorialized.

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