

## **Semiotic Mechanism of the Cultural memory**

**Khatuna Bolkvadze (Georgia)**

Doctoral Candidate, Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University

[x.bolkvadze@gmail.com](mailto:x.bolkvadze@gmail.com)

**Key Words: Cultural Memory, Communicative Memory, Collective Memory Semiotic Mechanism, Ethnic Group, Religious Transformation, Ottoman Georgia**

People were always interested why the nations so strongly differ from each other; why the representatives of different ethnic groups speak, dress, celebrate, have the different religion and lifestyle in general? In ethnographic literature the term “ethnic” means a group of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, religious, linguistic, or cultural heritage. What happens if the different ethnic group conquers the other one for more than three centuries? How the conquered part of the country is left in the memory of native country/people? And what are the concepts derived by this act. These issues have been become problematic in Georgia, especially in Adjara the western part of it. The present article briefly describes the place of one region, namely Adjara in the memory of Georgian people living in other parts of Georgia. The main attention will be paid on the concept of Christianity as the most important and specific aspect of Georgian people.

Every nation exists with its history. It is the treasury of the nation which they care of, find their identity, religious unity, which they remember and transfer from generation to generation. According to Jan Assman “Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of identity, both on the personal and on the collective level”. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a “diachronic identity”, built “of the stuff of time” (Luckmann). This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. Memory may be distinguished among three levels: inner (neuro-mental), social and cultural. On the inner level, memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system. This is our personal memory, the only form of memory that had been recognized as such until the 1920. On the social level, memory is a matter of communication and social interaction. It was the great achievement of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs to show that our memory depends, like consciousness in general, on socialization and communication, and that memory can be analyzed as a function

of our social life (*Les cardessociaux*; *La mémoire collective*). Memory enables us to live in groups and communities and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory.

The specific character that a person derives from belonging to a distinctive society and culture is not seen to maintain itself for generations as a result of phylogenic evolution, but rather as a result of socialization. The “survival of the type” in the sense of a cultural pseudo-species is a function of the cultural memory. According to Nietzsche, while in the world of animals genetic programs guarantee the survival of the species, humans must find a means by which to maintain their nature consistently through generations. The solution to this problem is offered by cultural memory, a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation.

The term “communicative memory” was introduced in order to delineate the difference between Halbwach’s concept of “collective memory” and our understanding of “cultural memory”. Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective that is cultural, identity. Cultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing time. These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (reaction, practice, observance).

Georgians constitute a majority of the population in Georgia. The majority of Georgians are orthodox Christians. According to Orthodox tradition Christianity was the first preached in Georgia by the Apostles Simon and Andrew in the 1st century. Georgians nominally identify themselves with Orthodox Christianity for traditional, cultural and historical reasons.

As a border region under the suzerainty of various empires, both Adjara and Georgia as a whole have a long and complex history with different religious traditions. A sizable Georgian Muslim population exists in Adjara. This autonomous republic borders Turkey and was part of the Ottoman Empire for a longer amount of time (three centuries) than other parts of the country. Invading Ottoman Turks in 1453 signaled an end to Georgia’s regional influence. Under Ottoman control, Adjara underwent a widespread religious transformation from orthodox Christianity to Islam. Though there is a lack of records from this period, it is generally thought that the conversion process occurred at different rates according to socioeconomic status. Most Adjarian noblemen are believed to have accepted Islam relatively

soon after the Ottoman annexation, as conversion to the empire's hegemonic religion guaranteed some degree of political and economic continuity through the preservation of existing local power structures. Additionally, there were tax incentives for converting, since the Ottoman millet system entailed a lower tax rate for Muslim segments of the empire's population. On the other hand, large swathes of Adjara's peasant population likely remained Christian for significantly longer, converting to Islam after several generations.

The concept Ottoman Georgia took the most important place in the consciousness of Georgian people that time. Many articles have been written and published describing the condition of Ottoman Georgia. Ilia Chavchavadze, the public figure of Georgia in his article writes "Ottoman Georgia and we have the same history, moreover we speak the same language and namely those parts played the vital role in survival of Georgians self-identity. While Byzantium, Persia and Turkey were fighting to conquer our beautiful country, the part of Georgia, which is now ruled by Ottomans was fighting for survival of our religious, education and for establishment of united government. The first place where Christianity rooted was exactly those parts of Ottoman Georgia. When Arabians invaded Georgia trying to spread Islam, current Ottoman Georgia was struggling for Christianity. And now we are not afraid that our brothers living in the "Ottoman Georgia" are Muslims, we hope the happy day will come when we will be again all together. Georgian will prove that he/she will accept his/her brothers with love and warmth. But if blood spill is not avoidable until the day comes, Georgians will not hesitate they will sacrifice themselves and protect the value our ancestors were fighting for during two thousand years".

Nevertheless, Islam had penetrated the majority of Adjara's population by the beginning of the nineteenth century-approximately the same time that Ottoman rulers began to treat the region as a strategic asset. The Russian Empire's expansion into the Caucasus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the Russo-Ottomans Wars of 1828-29 prompted Istanbul to increase its authority in Adjara. Adjara's elite, bolstered by links to authorities in Istanbul, exhibited opposition to Russian expansion in the region and rejected Russian calls to switch allegiance. Relations between Muslim Adjarians and Christian Georgians in the surrounding regions also deteriorated, as the two sides carried out raids and military forays into each other's territory.

Following Turkey's defeat in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Adjara was ceded to the Russian Empire. Russian authorities attempted to partially alter the demographic character of Adjara by stimulating Christian migration to the region. Concomitantly, Soviet

atheist policy and the orientation of regional and local power structures had consequences for Islam. Though mosques and spiritual boards continued to function throughout the 1920s, the intense political centralization in the 1930s that came as a result of Stalin's consolidation entailed the complete dismantling of Adjara's Muslim spiritual boards and closure of mosques and other religious institutions. Local authorities were of a decidedly more anti-Islamic orientation as well, in many cases transforming mosques into storage sheds. Moreover, Soviet nationality policy led to the construction and entrenchment of a Georgian national identity which, while not explicitly pro-orthodox, conveyed an implicit historical association with orthodoxy and thus created an environment in which Georgian Orthodox Church would eventually surge.

The religious transformation in Adjara began with structural developments that arose during the waning days of Soviet central power. The Georgian Orthodox Church was able to consolidate its position as an independent power base, advancing its mission with little state oversight and eventually serving as a de facto state consultative body and powerful lobby group. Thus the centrality of orthodoxy for post-Soviet Georgian national identity, combined with upper Adjarians' increased levels of social mobility to other predominantly Christians cities and regions within Georgia, have had clear effects on many Adjarians' religious identity. The orthodoxy-nationalism nexus and the expansion of the Georgian Orthodox Church was one of the most consequential developments with regards to religious identity in Georgia.

Religious transformation was significant in Batumi the capital of Adjara. Building temples in most cases near the residential areas help people to be closer to church. The most part of citizens are orthodox. Some residents in upper Adjara began to reconfigure their religious orientation in accordance with the new "expectations" associated with national identity. While initially confined to the lowlands, the number of conversions has spread to upper Adjara in recent years, particularly in Keda and Shuakhevi districts and to a lesser extent in Khulo district. Religious transformation has shown similar patterns among the younger sections of upper Adjara's population, though with considerably higher rates of conversion to Christianity. Key to the youth conversion process is intersection between social mobility and the orthodoxy-associated brand of national identity so prominent throughout the rest of Georgia. Christianity's dominance in Batumi and in other regions of Georgia is an obvious geographical element of the conversion process, especially when viewed in light of younger Adjarians' migratory patterns to the cities.

So, generally the above described situation shows that religious conversion processes have been started in Adjara region. It is not easy for the residents of the region, especially for the elder ones and living in highland of Adjara, to accept Christianity at once but their desire, geographical location, migration, governmental support and the history as the most important factor help them to do so. The fact that Adjara was conquered by Ottomans in the seventeenth century and the ruling lasted during three centuries had the painful trace on Adjarians' belief. In the memory of Georgian citizens living in the other parts of Georgia Adjarians still are considered as Muslims, sometimes they are called even Turks. There are many cases when the representatives of the other regions of Georgia think that Adjarians do not wear The cross (the symbol of Christianity), do not go to the church, are not baptized and they consider them to be the descendants of Turks, Muslims. Even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century one can find newly published, illustrated maps of Georgia on the counters of book shops where there are shown characteristic images of each part of Georgia (Kartli, Guria, Kakheti etc.) in the most cases churches and traditional clothes and Adjara is the only region where instead of the temple mosques are illustrated. Even now Adjarians have to claim that they are orthodox while talking about religious themes with other Georgians.

It is evident that concession of Christianity for Georgian had fatal consequences. In the cultural memory of the ordinary Georgian people Adjarian was not considered as ethnic Georgian. What does the Georgenes mean? First of all it means Christianity, Orthodoxy. The fact is that the Adjara's Muslim identity has been weakened in light of political developments and globalization which caused association between Georgian orthodoxy and Georgian national identity. The ongoing process of converting from Islam to Christianity is obvious and many Adjarians are becoming Orthodox but perhaps it will take centuries for restoring the religious identity and to change the Georgian cultural memory.

### **Applied literature**

JAN ASSMANN Communicative and Cultural Memory- An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, Berlin, New York 2008, p. 109-118;

Collective Memory and Cultural Identity Author(s): Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka Source: New German Critique, No. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring - Summer, 1995), pp. 125-133 Published by: New German Critique Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488538>;

Thomas Liles –Islam and Religious Transformation in Adjara-ECMI working paper  
(European center for minority issues) -February 2012;

Арошидзе Марине; Путкарадзе Тамаз -Болгария глазами Грузии 2013- pp-4-13;

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/109EDUhdDrrCKzmmVANrZiY7lgkLqi1qBvm2qBFJF2jk/edit>- Iia Chavchavadze- “Ottoman Georgia”.