

Features Of The Virtual Religious Space Formation In The Conditions Of The Cultural Border Of The Southern Outpost Of Russia

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Abstract : Problems, related with the formation of religious space and confessional identity, occupy a special place in the field of cultural security. Today the confessional space of each region is formed with the active participation of transnational religious networks. It leads to the rise of conflict level especially in heterotopic spaces. Cultural and confessional diversity in regions are inherently unstable, that's why the higher degree of "diversity", the greater risks of ethno-conflict situations. One of such place is Astrakhan region, the southern gateway to Russia. This territorial space is characterized by interethnic contacts with representatives of neighboring states. Long cohabitation of different ethnic groups in close proximity, in the same natural conditions, similar ways of historical development lead, as a rule, to the commonality of material and spiritual culture, when a synthesized cultural tradition is gradually formed and includes both cultural and religious values of the whole society and its own peculiarities. In these conditions, the model of confessional space formation depends largely on dynamic changes, determined not only by the heterotopicity of the research territory, but also by the activity of regional religious actors engaged in proselytic activity in the virtual space.

Index Terms : Identity, confessionalism, virtual space, heterotopia, outpost.

1. INTRODUCTION

Society can exist only by supporting people's sense of solidarity and common identity, which is achieved by periodic repetition of rituals, recreating a joint sacred past (often collectively imaginary). In this regard, heterotopic space is not a concrete geographical location, but more like a way of seeing it, so without focusing on certain significats, tied to the cultural memory of the population, the modern intercultural dialogue is impossible. But the significats are easily mythologized, moving from the reality of fact to the reality of myth, and vice versa, the historical fact of the significat is embedded in the mythological scheme. Taking into account the fact that a wide variety of ethnic actors participate in the formation of cultural memory in the heterotopic territory, it's clear that their signatures are diverse and sometimes mutually exclusive. As the example we can take the Astrakhan region as an open society that includes many foreign elements, transforming them into a single cultural tradition, while maintaining their ethnocultural specificity. This is clearly seen in toponyms and everyday life of the inhabitants of this area. Reflection of local identity in rituals and customs, associated with specific landscape features, is gradually transformed into myths and legends, that the Land of Astrakhan is so generous. On the one hand, it shows the formation of a supra-ethnic and supra-religious regional culture, on the other hand, peoples' interpretation of the same events or phenomena becomes a

point of bifurcation, ready to cause sharp disagreements at any moment. The internal factor of instability is exacerbated by external factors of globalization and high levels of migration. The territory of heterotopia is characterized by the higher mobility than inland, displacement of large groups of people, new forms of cultural and social contacts. These are the most vulnerable points of stability in multicultural society, which is adjacent to other territories and is under "migration pressure". The problems of communication in all spheres: economic, religious, domestic, are the most acute here. The emergence of new transcultural formations actualizes for science the searching samples developed and tested during the historical development of coexistence in a single cultural field of different traditions and mentalities.

2 THE PROBLEM SETTING.

Under the influence of social transformations and intercultural interactions, the change of socio-cultural identity in the direction of multilevelty is fixed. The process of formation of multilevel identity in the space of heterotopic territories is the most indicative; therefore, the Astrakhan region - the Russian territory of the Northern Caspian Sea - was chosen for analysis. Within the framework of this research, the authors were interested in the problem of transformation of "native" confessional identity in the process of intercultural contacts with other peoples, inhabiting one territory. The research is based on the analysis of archival documents and supplemented with content - analysis of virtual regional resources with religious themes. Within the framework of the article the authors showed the dynamics of changes in the confessional space of the Astrakhan region, analyzing the virtual resources formed by regional actors representing different faiths, religious associations and denominations.

3 THE FORMATION OF THE ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL SPACE OF THE ASTRAKHAN REGION: THE MAIN STAGES.

Despite the spontaneity of the process of transcultural intersections Russian multyculturalizm should be considered in the assimilation variant "Region-vs-Center"[11]. There, the

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Center plays the role of a “representative” [5] of the system as a whole connecting it with external world. As for the region, it is one of the “semantic statuses” [5] of this system as a specific socio-cultural landscape. This is a centuries-old tradition leading to a certain “indifferentism” [10] in relation to ethnic and religious specificity. This is a significant factor historically forming the basis for interfaith dialogue. A special role in this dialogue was assigned to the outskirts territories which act simultaneously as the boundary (demarcator) and clamp (connector) of the periphery and center. This determines the specificity of the outskirts regional cultural landscape and its border character where a culture based on the fusion of different traditions is created. Here “the geographical frontier gives rise to the cultural one” [6] where the most diverse ethno-confessional groups have been interacting for a long time. Astrakhan region is a kind of crossroads of cultures and religions. Using this example we can consider the processes influencing the formation of confessional space and analyze the main vectors of religious transgressive transitions that have been observed in the region since joining the Russian state under the influence of the Center’s assimilation policy. Being the “Gateway of Eurasia” Astrakhan region was an outpost separating Muscovy from the “Great Steppe” (“Astrakhan is far from Moscow and wide between the frontier Muslim states”). At the same time it opened its way to rich oriental markets on the Hvolyn (Caspian) sea and caravan routes. The Russian tsar calling the nomadic population of the Astrakhan steppes to Astrakhan “under the sovereign’s high hand” was forced to be very careful because there were problems in managing the heterotopic space “unheard of in purely Russian cities” [20]. He freed the nomadic population from tribute for three years and granted full freedom of public and religious life. Nevertheless, the serious concern of the Russian authorities was the spread of Christianity among foreigners “not urging them to baptism” [21] but explaining to them “the benefits of the Orthodox faith” [12]. For a long time transitions from one religion to another remained a problem of the denomination from which the adherents had flowed out. They were mainly determined by internal preferences and the conscious choice of a shifting forced to overcome numerous obstacles including moral ones. But it was unacceptable to deceive the Orthodox with another faith, as evidenced by the decree of 1750 which stated the strict prohibition “to convert the Russian Orthodox subjects, whatever title they may be, into the other law under fear of torture and burning without any mercy.” [12]. Kalmyks accepted both Christianity and Islam, but this happened more under external pressure than out of inner conviction. The Kazakhs fell under the influence of the Tatar culture. It was the Tatars who spread Islam among the Kazakhs. In the madrasahs emerged they taught exclusively the Tatar language for a long time. The demand of the authorities to teach Russian in schools was “not sympathetic” [7]. Catholics did not openly propagate their faith, but accepted willingly Orthodox to the Slavic-Greek-Latin school at the cathedral. An example of religious tolerance was the Cossacks: Orthodox, Muslims, Catholics, and even Old Believers. Kalmyk Cossacks, as a rule, were baptized, but in daily life they steadfastly adhered to the customs of the Buddhist religion. There was even a Jewish sect, although the residence of the Jews was forbidden on the territory of the Army. In total, the Army of about 30 years was headed by three Catholics and two Lutherans. But, even being different on ethnic and

religious grounds all the Cossacks were united by service and mutual economic interest. The foundation of orderly life with the growth of Russian settlements in Astrakhan was formed by the end of the 18th century. From this time the active missionary activity of spreading Orthodoxy among the Gentiles began. Missionary societies often organized schools during Orthodox missions. Schools taught not only literacy, first of all Russian one, but the Word of God was also taught; the Orthodox Gospels were translated into Kalmyk, Kazakh, and Turkmen. The Russian authorities did a great job in order to “incline to Orthodoxy” [7]. However, the nomads reluctantly embraced Orthodoxy, only when it was absolutely necessary, and their sedentary life was generally a burden. However, they were respectful of both the Christian religion and the Russian people. Nevertheless, these different cultural worlds gradually developed into one cultural tradition. It has a certain similarity with the cultural values of Russian society and at the same time has its own unique character. Visitors have always noted the traditional tolerance of Astrakhan people. It was visually manifested in the close proximity of Orthodox churches, Armenian-Gregorian churches, a synagogue, a Catholic cathedral, a Lutheran church, a Persian caravanserai, Tatar mosques, and Buddhist kuruli. In Soviet times, the “international consciousness” was raised [8] as part of the formation of a new nation – the Soviet people. In this direction, according to local history expert V.M. Quiz, we can talk about the emergence of a new community – the Astrakhans [2]. It marks the achievement of a dynamic balance between ethnic and religious groups living in the region. This is an example of a frontier territory. This is an open-circuit system which is a zone of intersection of cultures with a high degree of “variegation”. The 90s of the twentieth century upset the existing balance, and the ethnic and confessional factor becomes a tool for the formation of a new identity. As a result, ethno-confessional stratification of society, the “ethnization” of social relations, and the politicization of everyday conflicts occur, reducing them to the confrontation of “Own” and “Alien”. Another significant factor is the new geopolitical position of Astrakhan Region as a border. It determines the heightened interest in the security system, including cultural one. Astrakhan region, as a border region, assumes a significant burden of migration flows from the Central Asian post-Soviet republics, as well as from the conflict regions of the Russian Federation, primarily from the North Caucasus. The change in social structure led to the growth of ethnic self-consciousness and, as an extreme option, to the manifestation of nationalism and ethnic confessional confrontation to one degree or another. In the 2000s, Astrakhan again becomes an outpost, however, a new cultural space is being formed. This space is marked by increased attention not only to the ethnic characteristics of peoples, but to religious affiliation. The issue of confessional identity becomes a mainstream. A new identification factor is added. This is a virtual space that provides ease of access, geographic independence, unlimited audience, and anonymity of communication. This contributes to the rapid distribution of the necessary hashtags of ethnic and religious nature, including extremist ones, across different accounts. It uses “recognizable style, slogans, and symbols” [18]. It is the network structure that today plays a leading role in the formation of identity at both the group and individual levels. Sites of traditional confessions are active. Orthodox, Buddhist, and Islamic ones are among them. Special attention is paid to work with young people. For example, the

Commonwealth of Orthodox Youth is actively involved in implementing volunteer projects arranging holidays and tea drinking, posting photo stories about its activities in social networks (vk.com). A scientific Internet portal of the history and current state of the Church Slavonic language has appeared, Internet conferences of Orthodox youth organizations of Russia and Europe and educational webinars of the Synodal Department of Youth Affairs, etc. are held [16]. With the assistance of the Regional Spiritual Administration of Astrakhan Region, the Astrakhan Islamic College holds a series of intellectual games between the men's teams of Muslims, as announced on the official website <https://islam30.ru>. In May 2019, a regional competition was held for the knowledge of the 30th juz of the Holy Quran among children (boys and girls under the age of 15 inclusive, who know by heart all the suras of the 30th juz " 'Ammah"). The All-Russian Muslim Children's Camp was organized under the auspices of the Council of Muftis of Russia on the basis of the summer camp "Zerkal'nyy" of Saratov Region. On Islamic culture topics, youth Islamic forums are held in Astrakhan. One can read and watch the video about all the news on the site. The Buddhist network, represented by the Buddhist Center of the Diamond Way Traditions Karma Kagyu in Astrakhan city also actively works. The site contains videos of meditations and music for them, sermons by lamas from Buddhist universities, collections of Buddhist prayers from various schools, etc. In 2019, the electronic journal "Buddhism.Ru" began to be issued. Some articles of it can be downloaded for free in the application for smartphones (official website). There are even new terms, "bloggisattva" and "cyber Sangha", reflecting the growing presence of Buddhism in the global network. On religious sites, the information is given not only for a particular confession, but also highlights significant world and regional events. At the same time, all information is constantly updated. On the one hand, such informational work contributes to the involvement of a wider circle of parishioners (provided that they are able to operate the PC) and followers. On the other hand, switching to an online religion¹ (for example, the "Lampada"², "pure online communities", which have no off-line representation in Buddhism, online prayers in the Meccan and Medina mosques, etc.) minimizes (or excludes) direct communication between co-religionists and reduces moral responsibility for their actions. E.E. Poteryaeva (Yekaterinburg) believes that in this case religion loses its main function – the traditional therapeutic, compensatory function, provoking personality crises [17] as a result of the loss of social competence. Along with traditional religions, sites, chat rooms or interest groups related to the transgressional processes of transition from one religion to another – the retirement into non-traditional cults or acceptance of Islam are becoming increasingly important. Today, faith can be changed with one click of the mouse. The question arises as to how such a virtual transition can be called a transgression and how it affects the change in an individual's identity. The virtual world does not oblige to anything, so often a change of faith here may well be perceived as a simulacrum, a game that does not fundamentally change the world view [13]. In the 90s the main work on the confessional transition was conducted in an "off-line mode". Preachers who more often represented extremist religious associations came and conducted disputing. As a result unusual for Astrakhan oblast confessions such as neo-Pentecostals, separated Baptists, Sufists, and Vaishnavas

spread. Today such work is moving to the Internet space. For propaganda, even "Skypes of sheikhs", "electronic muftis" and "virtual jamats" appeared on the network. In the virtual space such work is conducted point wise focusing on individuals, but it is structured in such a way that users have a strong belief in the integrity of the organization and the close unity of its members. In the region, the problems associated with manifestations of xenophobia, ethnic intolerance, ethnic and religious extremism, and terrorism remain relevant. In 2017, the Agency for Youth Affairs of the Astrakhan Region created a cyber-team from among students of the information security department of the Astrakhan State University (Astrakhan cyber-forces) in order to monitor the Internet to identify signs of extremism.

4 CONCLUSION

As the world becomes more complex, the person of traditional culture increasingly seeks to return to familiar, traditional forms of socio-cultural identification. The revival of religious and ethno-cultural values will be largely explained by this factor. The changes taking place in society construct an innovative understanding of identity as a dynamic but not a "static reality" [15]; it changes under the influence of adaptation and integration processes; social transformations and interactions. Today, the network structure plays a leading role in the formation of identity at both the group and individual levels. It makes sense to discuss the phenomenon of going beyond "own" ethno-culture and the diffusion of initial cultural identities. As any culture, defending its identity, has to open at the same time to a wide external borrowing, the problem of influence of network structures on these processes, carrying out their proselytic activities in the virtual space, is becoming more and more relevant and requires a detailed scientific analysis.

5 NOTE

1. K. Helland divides "religion online" (informing users about religion in general, about events), focused on real "offline" activities and "online religion" aimed at virtual religious activities on the network. Refer: Helland C. Online Religion as Lived Religion. Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet/ In: Krüger, Oliver (Hrsg.): Online – Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet: Volume 01.1 Special Issue on Theory and Methodology. Retrieved from <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/5823>.
2. The Lampada program offers an unconventional and innovative approach to conducting out-of-frame worship for Orthodox Christians, namely, to prayers in front of sacred images depicted on icons, lighting candles and (or) lamps, where the use of real icons and candles is impossible or prohibited. In this case, the "Lampada" suggests the use of the "virtual" (digital) form of icons, candles and lamps. In addition, the distribution package of the program includes: the Orthodox calendar, litany and the version of the program for mobile devices (pocket PCs, smartphones and cell phones). The program is accompanied by a user manual and a detailed description of its mobile versions. Price for one license 200.00 rub. Platforms: Windows 95 | Windows 98 | Windows ME | Windows

2000 | Windows XP | PocketPC | Windows Mobile
2002 | Windows Mobile 2003 | Windows Mobile 5.0 |
Symbian OS. Language: Russian

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