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INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN POSTMODERN SOCIETIES AND ITS POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS – GEORGIAN CASE

Abstract: *This article deals with the topic of intercultural dialogue in postmodern societies and discusses its political implications particularly focuses on the case of Georgia, and analyzes the extreme importance of intercultural dialogue in today’s diverse, multifaceted and closely interconnected world. In today’s era of globalization, migration and digital communication, it is vital to reflect on the role of intercultural dialogue and understand its essence, although we should not forget that in the past, cultures were isolated and even seemed to exist in vast spaces. Now the reality is completely different, cultures today coexist and interact more closely than ever, which makes intercultural dialogue a crucial tool for promoting understanding and inclusion. The political implications of intercultural dialogue seem particularly interesting because, on the one hand, it has the power to positively influence policy areas, prepare political basis for immigration into the country, to impact the education system, and also to balance social integration by promoting inclusive approaches. Moreover, intercultural dialogue encourages the emergence and intersection of identity issues with politics and nationalism, which can strengthen or weaken social cohesion. These are the issues that the world is currently facing and it is trying to understand what is the role and power of intercultural dialogue, which in some cases acts in such a way as to trigger nationalist sentiments in societies or provoke resistance from societies that do not want to participate in cultural exchanges at all and even distance themselves from these processes. It is precisely the phenomenon that has to be studied and analyzed as its tension and ambiguity is important today. It is precisely this question that is essential to answer today: can intercultural*

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*dialogue bring political stability to the country or not. As for Georgia, it is a multi-ethnic society, as it is a country located at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Therefore, it is logical that the importance of intercultural dialogue is particularly noticeable in Georgia, as it is a country that has chosen the path of Western integration, including the aspiration to the European Union and NATO, poses unique challenges, because only in this way is it possible to balance minority rights, social cohesion and national identity. By analyzing the opportunities and challenges facing Georgia, the article aims to create a framework for understanding the complex role of intercultural dialogue in modern politics and society*³.

Keywords: *intercultural dialogue, postmodern, societies, globalization, migration, politics, communication*

Introduction

Postmodernism, which emerged in the late 20th century, is a philosophical and cultural movement that challenges deeply held norms and unique truths. It is characterized by skepticism and distrust of narratives of both religious and scientific, political ideologies - all-encompassing explanations, such as religion, science, or ideology, that claim to provide absolute truths about the world. Postmodernism rejects such claims, arguing that these are superficial "truths" and are socially constructed, often serving the interests of dominant groups while marginalizing others. For postmodernism, social values are presented in a completely different way⁴. It supports pluralism and believes that many identities, beliefs, and different worldviews can coexist harmoniously without any hierarchy. This is why it is clear why postmodernism recognizes diversity and rejects the imposition of any strict cultural-moral standards. And gives priority to practical considerations derived from one's own experiences⁵. This philosophical position promotes a more fragmented, decentralized view of society, where individuals and communities create their own meanings and values. The essence of postmodernism is inter-culturalism. It is a unique method, perspective, and approach to building and strengthening the unity of

³ J. Applegate, H. Sypher, *A Constructivist Outline*, [in:] W. Gudykunst (ed.), *Intercultural Communication Theory - Current Perspectives*, "International and Intercultural Communication Annual" 1993, Vol. VII, Beverly Hills: Sage.

⁴ J. K. Burgoon, A. S. Ebesu Hubbard, *Cross-cultural and intercultural applications of expectancy violations theory and interaction adaptation theory*, [in:] W. Gudykunst (ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication*, Sage 2009, pp. 149-171.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

society. It is a theoretical framework that emphasizes dialogue, cooperation, interaction, and mutual understanding between cultures. Here it is necessary to clearly define and distinguish what distinguishes multiculturalism from interculturalism⁶.

Theoretical framework

Unlike multiculturalism, which is often focused on the coexistence of different cultural groups with minimal interaction, and supports the exchange of ideas and integration into society. Interculturalism helps and encourages societies to cope with the challenges of diversity by tolerating differences, respecting cooperation over segregation, and seeking a balance between cultural inclusivity and fostering common ground. This highlights the importance of adaptation and openness in building inclusive and dynamic societies. It is a key instrument that paves the way for modern societies to cope with the challenges of globalization and diversity⁷.

As for dialogue, it can be said that it is the main axis of human communication, which serves as a bridge between individuals and cultures and establishes a close connection between them. This form of dialogue is supported by philosophical theories, especially those of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Martin Buber, according to which the methodology and theoretical framework of how we interact with others and the world around us, are formulated and explained⁸. These theories not only provide the key to understanding human interaction, but also they remain relevant in the context of intercultural exchange in modern societies. Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the process of understanding and interpretation. Gadamer argues that understanding cannot be considered a simple activity, but rather a process that occurs through interaction - an ongoing interpretive conversation, for example, between an interpreter and a speaker or between a text that carries specific information. In his view, when individuals from different backgrounds engage in dialogue, they interpret and create new possibilities, one might say new understandings, that go beyond individual perspectives. In intercultural exchange, Gadamer argues that people from different cultural backgrounds can engage in a dialogical process that makes understanding more diverse and interesting. For example, when two people

⁶ L. A. Samovar, R. E. Porter, *Communication Between Cultures* Wadworth 20, Channel Street, Boston MA 02210 US Eight Edition 2021.

⁷ T. Antenehm, *An integrative approach to intercultural communication in context: empirical evidences form higher education*, Giessen, 2019, pp. 1-132.

⁸ J. Cohen, *Form and Content in Buber's and Schweid's Literary-Philosophical Readings of Genesis*, "Religions" 2019, No. 10(6), pp. 398-410.

from different cultures speak, each person's cultural horizon is broadened as they try to understand the other's experiences, beliefs, and values.

The process of dialogue becomes a tool for overcoming misunderstandings and achieving a common understanding, which is crucial in today's multicultural societies. Martin Buber's philosophy, or the concept of the "I-Thou" relationship, offers another philosophical justification for the essence and nature of dialogue⁹. Buber distinguishes between two categories of interaction: the "I-It" and the "I-Thou" relationship. In the first, the "I-It" encounter is ego-centric, a separate, individualized experience, as if interpreted from another lens or dimension. In contrast, the "I-Thou" relationship is a genuine encounter, where individuals engage with each other as individuals, not as mere objects or tools. This encounter is characterized by high social activity, openness, mutual respect, and the recognition of the other as a fully human being. In the context of intercultural dialogue, Buber's theory suggests that true understanding can only occur when individuals approach others from a place of equality, openness, and respect. When people from different cultures engage in "I-Thou" relationships, they come to know each other not only as members of their own culture, but also as people who can break stereotypes and prejudices. Such dialogue allows for the recognition of a common humanity and fosters empathy, making it an important tool for promoting peaceful intercultural exchange in modern societies¹⁰.

According to the works of Gadamer and Buber, the theory of dialogue, is not just a simple everyday conversation or exchange of information. It is a rather complex transformational communication, an interpretive and relational interaction that requires openness, respect and mutual engagement, the process of interpretation being engaged in a dialogue, where understanding is both shared and simultaneously created, while Buber's "I-Thou" relationship emphasizes the ethical, relational and fully human nature of authentic dialogue. Therefore, the above theories develop a deep understanding of how meaningful conversations shape our relationships and our understanding of the world and others.

What difficulties can Georgia overcome through intercultural dialogue?

Georgia, despite its small population and area, occupies a strategic position with direct access to the Black Sea and Turkey. The USA policy changes

⁹ H.-G. Gadamer, *Sections of Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, Translation revised by J. Weinsheimer, D. G. Mars, London and New York, Continuum 2004, <https://mvlindsey.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/truthand-method-gadamer-2004.pdf> (14.10.2024).

¹⁰ J. Cohen, 2019. *Form and Content in Buber's and Schweid's Literary-Philosophical Readings of Genesis*, "Religions" 2019, No. 10(6), pp. 398–410.

alleviate the vulnerability of the mission's geo-economic interests in the region, but this often comes with trade-offs such as Russian involvement, weak democracies, and Islamist influence, which hinder Georgia's democratic development and threaten its independence and territorial integrity. Georgia's historical past, geographical location, and political landscape have shaped its unique cultural and social reality, which is now part of the Georgian diaspora. The country is located in the South Caucasus, bordered by Russia to the north, Turkey and Armenia to the south, and Azerbaijan to the southeast. It has a rich history of interaction and coexistence among its unique multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious groups, which has influenced the formation of its interesting, multi-faceted national identity. Intercultural dialogue in Georgia is therefore essential to overcome the divisions between the ethnic Georgian majority and minority groups, of which the country has a rich experience¹¹. The country has experienced significant ethnic tensions and internal conflicts, particularly in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are now occupied by the Russian Federation (it should be mentioned that the loss of these territories were the result of the conflict, inspired by the Russian Federation in Georgia and the subsequent bloody inter-ethnic war led to the suspension of the dialogue). The point is that in these separatist regions, ethnic Georgians were forcibly displaced and the local Abkhazian and Ossetian populations were involved in conflict with Georgian forces. These unresolved conflicts continue to influence political discourse in Georgia and require intercultural dialogue to address issues of ethnic identity, self-determination, and territorial integrity¹². In the post-Soviet context, intercultural dialogue can become a tool for rebuilding trust, promoting reconciliation, and creating a framework for peaceful coexistence, although political realities and Russian influence complicate the situation up to now. Georgia's geopolitical location has placed it in a zone of tension and competition between Russia and the West, especially since the country declared independence from the Soviet Union. Moreover, the military presence in Georgia's breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has raised questions about national sovereignty, security, and the role of intercultural dialogue in peace building. The August 7, 2008 is considered to be a drastic date for Georgians as brutal Russian military forces advanced ahead and invaded part of Georgia. The conflict itself was over in

¹¹ L. Bryant, *As Anti-War Russians Flock to Georgia, Tbilisi Warms to Moscow*, Voice of America 2023, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/as-anti-war-russians-flock-to-georgia-tbilisi-warms-to-moscow-/7133090.html>> (14.10.2024).

¹² E. Sepashvili, *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade with the EU: Dynamics and Prospects for Deeper Integration*, "Kiev National Economic University Proceeding" 2018, No. 1 (1).

several days, but the consequences were severe¹³. The above mentioned war could change not only the geopolitical environment, political reality but it had a great impact on the further movement of migrants not only in inter-boarder scale but it also trigger new flow of migrants across border¹⁴. Therefore, intercultural dialogue is particularly relevant here, as it provides a way to resolve tensions between Georgians and their sister nations, recognizing historical grievances and national aspirations. Regarding the need for cultural dialogue in the Georgian integration region, Georgia is home to a significant number of ethnic minorities, including Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, and, following the 2022 war in Ukraine, Russians and Ukrainians who immigrated. These communities often face challenges in terms of integration and recognition in Georgian society. Promoting intercultural dialogue is vital for social cohesion, ensuring that minority groups are heard and represented in the political and cultural landscape. It is also worth noting that the Georgian language remains a critically important issue for the integration of minority communities. Although Georgian is the official language, many minorities speak their native language at home. This naturally creates certain challenges and difficulties, including for the non-Georgian population in accessing education, employment and full participation in the democratic process. Promoting multilingual education and policies that foster intercultural understanding can contribute to greater inclusion and political stability¹⁵.

Multicultural Dialogue in a Religious and Political context

Religion is very influential in the reality of Georgia, Georgia is a country that adopted Christianity back in 337 and since that day this religion is considered the state religion. The Orthodox Church plays an important role in the culture and politics of the nation, influencing various aspects of public life. As the dominant religious institution, the Church often shapes national identity, public values, and social norms. Its influence is especially noticeable on the political landscape of the country, where it has historically been intertwined with nationalist sentiments, which provides a sense of unity and continuity for the Georgian people, especially in the context of post-Soviet state-building¹⁶. However, Georgia is also home to various religious minorities, including Muslims, Catholics, and Jews, whose participation in national dialogue is

¹³ A. Silagadze, T. Zubiashvili, *Parameters of the European Union and the Post-Soviet Georgia's Economy*, "International Journal of Multidisciplinary Thought" 2015, No. 5 (3).

¹⁴ T. Antenehm, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-132.

¹⁵ M. Katamadze, *What Happened with Georgia's NATO Ambitions?– DW – 07/12/2023*, Dw.Com. <<https://www.dw.com/en/what-happened-with-georgias-nato-ambitions/a-66190054>> (14.10.2024).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

essential for the development of a pluralistic society. These communities have their own historical and cultural significance, but they have sometimes faced challenges related to integration and recognition within the Orthodox majority context. Intercultural dialogue is therefore crucial for these minorities to feel valued and heard within the broader social realities of Georgia. In this context, intercultural dialogue is essential to foster tolerance, understanding, and peaceful coexistence across religious divides¹⁷. As a post-Soviet, post-modern society, Georgia is gradually moving towards greater secularism. This secular trend, coupled with the country's modernization, is calling into question the dominant role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in public life. Intercultural dialogue can be a vital tool to balance the significant influence of the Orthodox Church with the rights and representation of other religious communities, thereby creating a more inclusive environment where all groups can coexist harmoniously. This dialogue will not only emphasize the religious rights of minorities, but will also promote mutual respect and understanding.

Furthermore, since the early 2000s, European integration and full membership of the EU family have become a central political goal for Georgia. Georgia has sought closer ties with the European Union (EU) and NATO, in the hope that this will provide both economic growth and political stability. This aspiration has led to an acceleration of political and social reforms as Georgia aligns itself with European standards of governance, human rights, and democratic values. The EU promotes intercultural dialogue as one of the main pillars of its broader integration policy. For Georgia, EU membership requires not only economic and political adjustments, but also the promotion of greater intercultural understanding and the elimination of social divisions within its borders. These divisions are often linked to issues of ethnicity, religion, and regional autonomy, and they pose significant challenges to social cohesion. Unfortunately, in December 2024, the Georgian government, without any justification or reasoned explanation, suspended the initiative to join the European Union and violated the framework of the Association Agreement¹⁸. This has caused outrage among the Georgian population and, in the meantime, Georgia is still in a very difficult political phase, which also complicates the desire to open a dialogue with the peoples of European countries. Finally, intercultural dialogue plays a crucial role in Georgia's political and social transformation. As the country navigates the complexities of post-Soviet transition, geopolitical tensions, and domestic challenges, dialogue serves as a bridge to ensure that all groups, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or political affiliation, can engage in building a more peaceful and cohesive society. Georgia's efforts toward European integration, if successful, will largely

¹⁷ L. Bryant, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ M. Katamadze, *op. cit.*

depend on its ability to address these internal challenges and create a social environment where dialogue and cooperation are prioritized¹⁹. Through intercultural dialogue, Georgia can work to build a more democratic, pluralistic society, aligning its political practices with the European ideals of equality, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Conclusion

The existence of intercultural dialogue in postmodern Georgia is a multifaceted and vital process that holds the key to resolving the complex political, social, and ethnic tensions that affect the country's geopolitical, social, cultural, political, and religious realities. In the face of challenges such as territorial disputes, diverse ethnic and religious communities, and external geopolitical pressures, promoting dialogue between different groups is crucial for building a more inclusive, democratic, and peaceful society²⁰. As Georgia continues its path toward stability and development, intercultural dialogue offers a transformative opportunity to bridge divides, foster understanding, and reconcile differences. By prioritizing communication between different ethnic, religious, and political factions, Georgia can better manage internal conflicts and create a cohesive national identity that reflects the diversity of its population. The case of Georgia highlights the importance of intercultural understanding not only for resolving conflicts but also for promoting lasting national unity²¹. Such dialogues provide opportunities where different groups can express their opinions, concerns, break down existing stereotypes, and work towards solutions that represent the interests of all citizens. Furthermore, promoting uniqueness and inclusiveness, as well as social cohesion through intercultural dialogue, ensures the fairness of political and social systems and the development of free societies²². In this way, Georgia can strengthen its democratic institutions and create a more sophisticated political culture based on respect, tolerance, and shared goals. This approach could also alleviate external pressures, allowing Georgia to pursue its aspirations for integration with the European Union and the broader international community, while preserving its cultural heritage and sovereignty.

¹⁹ M. Cecire, *Georgia's Alliance With – Not In - NATO: External Balancing, Autonomy and Community*, [in:] T. German, S. Jones, K. Kakachia (ed.), I. B. Tauris (ed.), *Georgia's Foreign Policy in the 21st Century: Challenges for a Small State*, I. B. Tauris 2023.

²⁰ A. Silagadze, T. Zubiashvili, *op. cit.*

²¹ E. Sepashvili, *Deep and Comprehensive ...*, *op. cit.*

²² E. Sepashvili, *Challenges of Innovative Policy for Eastern European Countries*, "Economics and Business" 2018, No. 11 (2).

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