

Religious identities in motion: citizens of Moldova and citizens of the Bible

My presentation explores the mutations occurring in the religious identities in the Republic of Moldova. My argument is that the religious factor is important and current, despite the predictions made by secularisation theories.

When we talk about the return of religion to public life we do not have in mind, in any sense, a return of religion in the form it had before modernity, but instead a reconfigured, dynamic religious sphere. One that has abandoned the probate sphere – where it had been imprisoned by the rationalist pathos of modernity – and is now a legitimate part of civil society (Casanova).

We also talk about another transformation of religion – that related to individualisation processes (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim). In the religious domain, suggests Olivier Roy, individualisation has meant the transition from *religion* (understood as a relatively stable body of canons, underpinned by a coherent ideology and managed by a private institution – the Church) towards *religiousness* (understood as a private option, idiosyncratic and flexible, eclecticism and instability, personal piety to the disadvantage of canons).

Although born in the West, these social trends have contributed decisively to the transformation of the religious landscape in the Republic of Moldova, especially after the USSR collapsed and Moldova became gradually integrated in the European society through migration, the media, economic and legal models etc.

Some observers of orthodox Christianity (Agadjanian and Rousselet) have postulated that the greatest challenge for Orthodox Churches in the post-Soviet era was that of *freedom*. On the one hand, the Orthodox Churches have gained – in Bulgaria, Russia, Moldova – prestige and the status of document churches, having at the same time the freedom to proselytise and run their activities. On the other hand, the same set of freedoms has also become accessible to non-Orthodox churches: Catholics, Protestants and neo-Protestants, Muslims.

The religious identities of Moldovans have been built around two main pillars: *localism* (combining the ethnic and the religious identity – as is mainly the example of the Orthodox Church in Moldova) and *globalism-universalism* (detaching the ethnic from the religious identity and asserting the primordality of the religious element above all others – national, ethnic, political – as is mainly the case of neo-Protestant cults). *Therefore, on the one hand citizens of Moldova, and on the other hand citizens of the Bible..*

The Orthodox community, both through its institutional voices – the Moldovan Metropolitanate – and through those of non-institutional voices, such as those of journalists, intellectuals, bloggers and sympathisers, use in religious debates the strategies of localism –the canonical territory, the connection between religion and the people/nation. Defending the religious identity becomes equivalent with defending the national identity.

On the other side, the non-Orthodox cults (chiefly the Baptists) use the opposite strategy, that of the universal. The ethical and legal universality is represented in this community by the Bible. Biblical principles and precepts have priority over any other grounds, be they economic, legal, geopolitical or cultural.

To conclude, religious identities in the Republic of Moldova are in constant motion. They are flexible and adapt dynamically to the various factors, be they of global (structural) origin – globalisation, interdependencies –, or of local-contextual origin – political projects or struggles, individual preferences. Also, religious identities recombine with other identity-related forms – ethnic, national, political –, giving rise to hybrid forms, capable of satisfying the individual preferences of communities and individuals.

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Area of professional and personal interest: the sociology of globalisation, theology, the sociology/anthropology or religion, public spaces, film, philosophy, cultural sciences.