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International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»**SOCIAL ACTIVISM OF OSSETIAN WOMEN:
TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITIONS AND BOUNDARIES**

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Abstract

A study of historical experience of a traditional society shows that its life was determined by males who solved issues of war and peace, economic problems, regulated community and family relations. In a traditional society, social contradictions and conflicts as well as preventive and peacemaking practices are inevitable. Along with conflicts, the earliest forms of social self-organization, whose mechanisms were transformed into a special system of interactions that ensured internal stability, have been developed. Using the example of traditional Ossetian society, the spheres and boundaries of female participation in public life, their dynamics during periods of social transformations were determined. Economic, social and cultural factors of the post-reform period which contributed to the expansion of the boundaries of female presence in society and improved women's social status were identified. These include a high position of women in Ossetian society, seasonal works, large-scale widowhood, changes in the form and structure of family, female education, development of an urban lifestyle and urban culture. Preliminary conclusions allowed us to change the well-known thesis according to which only the Soviet regime provided women with an opportunity to realize their potential. Boundaries of women's participation in public life changed long before the establishment of Soviet power. It was identified that ethnic stereotypes had existed for a long period. Traditional and modern mental gender attitudes were compared.

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1. Introduction

The relevance of the problem of traditions and boundaries of women's participation in social life is due to insufficient knowledge of this process and its significance in modern conditions, when the problems of women's participation in peacemaking, settlement of social conflicts are being discussed.

It is known that the traditional Ossetian society, which is male in terms of its social determination, assigned women a role of hearth keepers. At the same time, the presence of women in public life was envisaged both in rituals, festive culture, and peacemaking processes. The voice of female society was taken into account in resolving issues of blood revenge and reconciliation. Elder women, widows and women having sons were especially respected.

The era of post-reform modernization has changed the gender balance. It divided large families and formed small ones with more democratic etiquette. The new era forced males to work in different parts of the world. Women did not take part in seasonal works, but without male support, they expanded their functions in the household and social life. Difficult conditions of the new bourgeois society, wars and revolutions of the first third of the twentieth century gave rise to widowhood as a social phenomenon that increased the responsibility of women.

The post-reform era brought an unprecedented breakthrough at the educational and cultural levels. The Ossetians regarded education as a powerful social tool for the individual and a way of integration into the Russian cultural space for the entire people. The Ossetian women have shown unprecedented activity in their efforts to get education.

Educated Ossetian women became teachers – educators of their people, manifested themselves in the field of culture and education. An educated woman became a participant in public life, her social status was very high. A special category is Ossetian urban women participating in various cultural, educational and charitable activities.

Thus, women's social positions had changed long before the Soviet power was established. The Soviet government provided women with rights and freedoms, but in the Caucasus, women's activities were limited by ethnic stereotypes. The article aims to determine the modern status of women.

2. Problem Statement

Ossetian ethnographic literature describes the role of women in the traditional family, her inheritance and property rights, economic activities, moral and spiritual characteristics, place in traditional ritual life. Some authors mention the duality of women's position in the Ossetian society: low their status in the family and honorable position in society (Khadikova, 2003). A common methodological flaw is the terminological and chronological ambiguity of the concept of traditional society. This article aims to describe the transformation of this traditional society in the era of post-reform modernization, which significantly changed some traditions, preserved other ones and gave rise to new ones. The social and cultural upsurge of the post-reform period and subsequent modernization epochs has been thoroughly studied (Dzagurova, 2011; Dzalaeva, 2000; Dzalaeva, 2016; Gutieva, 2008; Kanukova et al., 2019; Osetiny, 2012 etc.).

However, a significant part of these changes related to the gender process was not reflected in Ossetian studies.

Therefore, the article aims to study social activities of Ossetian women in the context of the dynamic social development and taking into account ethnic stereotypes.

3. Research Questions

The subject of this research is social activities of Ossetian women in the dynamics of social development from traditional society to the era of social transformations; factors which increased women's presence in public life, its forms and results. In general, women's participation can be seen in two social areas:

1. Participation of women in traditional peacemaking practices.
2. Expanding women's participation in the development of education and culture.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to identify features of the gender process in post-reform Ossetia in the context of interaction of traditions and innovations of the transformational eras, determining the boundaries and forms of women's participation in public life of the Ossetian society, the role of gender traditions in modern conditions.

5. Research Methods

In this study, the principles of historicism and scientific objectivity were used. They are based on various sources: ethnographic descriptions, statistical data, and periodicals.

The comparative method made it possible to determine the dynamics of the subject which is social activities of Ossetian women.

6. Findings

The high social status of women in Ossetian society is reflected in the etiquette norms. Misikov (1916) writes that when women are walking past sitting men, even very old ones, the latter always stand up, greeting them. The women shyly stop to walk, and if there is an old woman among them, she thanks them quite loudly for their attention and asks them to sit down. Then they continue their journey. No matter how many men are sitting, everyone stands up, even if one woman walks past them ... All men should stand up and pay honors to older women (Misikov, 1916).

In traditional Ossetian society, the most noticeable area of women's social activities was participation in conciliatory practices. Women remove their headscarf from their heads in order to calm down hot-tempered men. This cultural and historical phenomenon is reflected in the Ossetian folklore (Kusaeva, 2018; Sokaeva et al., 2019).

Women participated in reconciliation of blood enemies. An opinion of an injured woman – mother, sister – was mandatory. Along with the woman's headscarf as a symbol of reconciliation (Osetiny, 2012), there were less known but effective ways of conflict settlement. In particular, the obligatory consent of women of the injured party to reconciliation, ritual touching to the victim's mother, concluding an interethnic marriage to suspend the conflict or blood feud, raising a bloodline child, etc. However, there were cases when women insisted on revenge (Besolova & Abaeva, 2019).

Thanks to women's participation, in particular the initiative of Ossetian teachers, in the post-reform period, new conciliatory strategies appeared, new peacemaking forms were used: the contribution of the guilty party to the construction of a building for a rural school, improvement of the church, rural streets and places of worship, other socially useful benefits (Daueva, 2017).

Economic and social factors have changed the position of women. Destruction of traditional large families weakened strict etiquette norms, the woman was provided with an opportunity to discuss the family budget and defend her own interests and interests of her children. New rights brought new responsibilities, especially in economic life. If in a large family, with its gender and age division of labor, each woman had a whole range of responsibilities, in new conditions she was responsible for organizing all economic activities.

A new phenomenon in the economic life of the Ossetians was seasonal works – mass labor migrations of the male population to earn money. At the beginning of the twentieth century, men got a chance to earn money leaving the family for a long time and going to other Russian provinces, America, Canada, China, Australia, etc. These were male migrations. Ossetian women took full responsibility for the maintenance of the family and household. Many women earned money by selling food and sewing. Many women went to Vladikavkaz to work in wealthy families as cooks, laundresses, dressmakers, nannies. Statistical sources contain data on the employment of Ossetians in the urban economy. In particular, in agriculture there were 66 women per 1,000 men, in industry – 141 women, in trade – 162 women; as a servant – 607; 1400 women were involved in other economic activities (Dzalaeva, 2000).

In addition to seasonal works, widowhood resulted from wars and revolutions of the first third of the 20th century became a factor increasing social activity of women. Widowhood as a widespread social phenomenon has given rise to a respectful attitude to a widow.

The unprecedented expansion of female economic functions created a qualitatively different gender ratio in family and society. The most spectacular reflection of these changes was found in the socio-cultural sphere, in particular, in the desire of women to study. In the middle of the 19th century, the first attempts were made to create classes for girls, in particular in Kora-Ursdon (Dzalaeva, 2016). But the most successful and promising was the school for girls created by the Ossetian educator and priest Akso Koliev. This was the first female school in the region, and its graduates were the first Ossetian teachers. Adhering to the well-known wisdom that female education is education of the people, the Ossetians believed that female education would educate the entire nation. The graduates of this school became real companions: they overcame great material and moral difficulties when opening female schools even in high-mountain villages. They purchased books. Even if an educated girl did not become a teacher, she raised and educated her children, which also brought benefits to society (Gutieva, 2008).

However, these young girls were supported by Ossetian men, especially in Orthodox villages. It was the men who made decisions on the construction of school buildings, collection of funds to pay salaries to teachers, and contributed to the school enrollment of village girls. By joint efforts, in 1867–1878, the first female schools were founded in Alagir, Salugardan, Mozdok, Ardon, Olginsky, Dargkokh, Humalag, Dargavs. Female education in Ossetia was better organized than male one.

The first schools, both for women and men, were parish schools, founded in almost all villages with Orthodox parishes (Kanukova et al., 2019). But by the end of the 19th century, secular schools appeared in villages where education of girls and boys was joint. Many Ossetian families sent their children to city schools. There was a wide range of educational institutions for girls in Vladikavkaz. In addition to ordinary female schools, the Ossetian female school, the Diocesan Female School, secular female city schools were founded. In 1913, the Teacher's Institute was founded. The status of a rural teacher was very high; even village elders could turn to her for advice and help. In general, female Ossetian teachers were active participants in society, participated in discussions of such acute issues of education as replacing parish schools with secular ones, teaching the native language and others.

The problems of female education were solved by many Ossetian educators, who supported female schools and teachers, and stood up for professional female education (Anthology, 1993). But they were under the influence of ethnic stereotypes. It is interesting to note that enlighteners associated prospects of female education with a woman-mother, educator, teacher, but did not assume her greater social activity.

Ossetian women founded libraries, museums, published periodicals, participated in various public activities. They were well-known doctors, social activists who held charity events in their native language. In every urban Ossetian house, relatives who arrived to study found shelter (Dzalaeva, 2000).

There is a stable opinion that there are no women in the peacekeeping sphere, full equality in many areas has not yet been ensured and female resources and opportunities are limited (Dzagurova, 2011). Sociological studies were conducted to identify barriers that hinder women's peacemaking. The main one is the traditional idea of the role of a woman as a hearth keeper, a teacher capable of forming a culture of interethnic communication among representatives of the younger generation. Women are not involved in negotiation processes but should take part in them because many of them have competences necessary to conduct such negotiations.

In public discourse, there are two positions on the role of women in peacemaking activities: women should participate in conflict resolution and peacemaking as they can better assess long-term perspectives of peace and find new opportunities for dialogue; women should participate in peacemaking activities.

The irreconcilable ideology on frozen conflicts in the Caucasus is so strong that it affects women's participation in peacemaking. There are women who publicly proclaim slogans and appeals that are very far from peacemaking. In social networks, there are irresponsible and even provocative statements, reproaches and appeals addressed to men and young people. Unfortunately, this poorly educated and uncultured part of female society is active today. Involvement of these women in various peacekeeping actions will not bring positive results. With this aggressiveness, they hinder the majority of intelligent, but less active part women in their attempts to establish a dialogue and get involved in the peacemaking process.

7. Conclusion

The tradition in Russian historiography to associate changes in the position of women with Soviet power and Bolshevik policies is not confirmed by Ossetian materials. The main factors in the modernization of gender relations were the region's accession to Russia, entry into the Russian market, educational activities of Orthodox missions, which involved the construction of churches, parochial schools, including those for women; development of the urban cultural space, early formation of the Ossetian intelligentsia, the influence of the urban lifestyle. Women were active in the education system, cultural enlightenment and charitable activities. Educated Ossetian urban women patronized rural youth in obtaining education, helped to raise the educational and cultural levels of the people. The business world of the city was represented mainly by men. Gender stereotypes allowed for joint activities of men and women. In modern conditions, peacekeeping can become a field of joint actions. Gender boundaries are not needed and the practice of joint peacekeeping initiatives will be successful.

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