

LEVON SHANT'S ARGUMENTS ON INDEPENDENCE AS NATIONAL-SPIRITUAL AND CIVILIZATION FACTOR

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“The idea of having an Armenian civilization without full national existence. without state independence is a desperate self-deception or a semi-conscious confession that the days of the Armenian people are numbered”.

Levon Shant

Abstract

The article analyzes the political-philosophical concept of Levon Shant, a prominent Armenian thinker of the XIX-XX centuries. Shant substantiates the idea of polycentrism denying monocentrism in intercivilization relations. He believes all civilizations are displayed by individual uniqueness conditioned by people's national and cultural originality. He stresses the national factor which reveals more profound qualities. According to the Armenian scholar's theory, the nation is “an organism producing civilization” and the nationality is the fundamental principle to identify people. He refuses the aspects according to which the national and nations disappear during the process of civilization. On the contrary, the development of civilization is the key condition for nations' prosperity, independence, equality of rights, manifestation of national and political identity, as well as for the solution to national problems.

Keywords: Levon Shant, independence, civilization, national factor, national-political identity, sovereignty of the state

The interpretation of the issues of natural-historical origins and development tendencies of civilizations, of cultural identity of peoples and national identification is necessary to substantiate political independence and national-and-state sovereignty as the highest values, to discover the possibility of preventing intercivilizational and regional conflicts. In this respect the philosophical-political concept of Levon Shant, the prominent Armenian thinker of the XIX-XX centuries, has a modern value.

Based on the historical-and-philosophical study of the cradles of civilization, Shant argues for the **idea of multicentrism of civilization**, by which he substantiates the interaction of different civilizations. According to him: “Human civilization originated in different parts of the world, but due to location, position, climate and other geographical and economic reasons, for the first time it reached a complex and high level of development on Asian soil, mainly in the basin of four major rivers – the Yangtze, Ganges, Euphrates and Nile...”.¹ He views China and India as isolated countries. Emphasizing the cultural potential of the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Shant asserts: “... it is on the heritage of their combination that the modern magnificent edifice of human civilization was founded and built”.² With this cultural and civilizational heritage he reasons the existence of a modern European-Western civilization as well, concluding: **there is no pure, solely European civilization** and without inheritance, only Asian civilization would exist.

Shant interprets the essential attributes that define Asian and European civilizations. **Asia is a continental civilization**, which conditions the natural and spiritual being of Asian peoples, the state and legal systems, the theocratic way of governing. The religious factor is dominant in cultural and civilizational processes. According to him, in the Asian civilization “the religious connection and consciousness... are much deeper and stronger than the state and national...”.³

Europe, on the contrary, is a **maritime civilization** and “... the breath, importance and influence of the sea is significant all over the European continent”.⁴ Historically, that influence was significant in ancient city-states, in ancient Rome, in European countries. Shant considers the Anglo-Saxons, who played a great role in the establishment of Western civilization, to be the most “maritime”. Maritime civilization is more dynamic, practical, inclined towards the principles of **political independence and democracy**.

However, both types of civilization are ambiguous. According to the Armenian thinker, “not all parts of Europe are equally European, nor do all periods and all peoples represent the same civilizational value”.⁵ In different historical periods Asian peoples have also manifested themselves in different shades of Asianness, local or ethnic uniqueness, but they generally bear the stamp of the same civilization.

Shant also points to the contrast between Asian and European civilizations as the embodiments of radical conservatism and progress, tyranny and democracy. Hence the centuries-old enmity and struggle between them that has continued with dominance by one of the civilizations. He presents the historical sequence of this dominance in the following historical periods:

- The 1000-year triumphal march of the **Assyrian and Babylonian** civilization, followed by the Persian civilization.

¹ Shant 2008a: 157.

² Shant 2008a: 57.

³ Shant 2008a: 159.

⁴ Shant 2008a: 160.

⁵ Shant 2008a: 162.

- **The Greco-Roman** millennium in the spirit of the West, with a new value system of culture and statehood, which became the basis of the civilizational domination of the West. Shant emphasizes the civilizing role of **Hellenism** and **Christianity** in the lives of a lot of peoples during this period. Interpreting Christianity as a combination of Middle Eastern and Greco-Roman religious understandings, he affirms that: “as a moral and social ideal it is a completely new leap of human thought and feeling, a leap that goes beyond the civilization brought by the sea”.⁶ However, the political realities of the time distorted the Western spirit, and Greco-Roman civilization declined.
- **The Muslim** millennium, which began with the rise of Islam in the Middle East, the establishment of Arab statehood and the power over various peoples. The Arab civilization flourished with the rapid development of various spheres of culture. According to Shant, in this period “the ideas East and West are identical with the words “Muslim” and “Christian”. And the irreconcilable... war between the two begins...” He also sees a commonality between Christianity and Islam, with the following remarkable political observation: “Both Byzantium and the papacy... by their very spirit and understanding have become utterly Eastern” and “papacy has an ardent desire to resemble the Eastern Caliphate”.⁷ The decline of the Muslim civilization was caused by the Turanian tribes, who, without adding anything to this civilization, dominated the Arab and Persian cultures.
- **The new era of civilization** marked by the awakening of the West that began in the 15th century. It was conditioned by the discovery of new sea routes and countries, colonial policy, economic, trade and political developments. According to Shant, the Western spirit was being reborn, “...the ancient Greco-Roman, the ancient European man, only with much wider horizons... with the participation of many nations...”.⁸ As a result, **the democratic principles of public administration, religious freedom of thought, the ancient understanding of human virtues and practical philosophy** became relevant. The East could not resist this new value system.

There is a unique argument for the **interaction of civilizations** in Shant’s concept. According to him, in the prime of any civilization, the defeated civilization is always subject to the perceptions and spirit of governance of the dominant civilization, bearing cultural influences as well. Thus, just as the West was influenced by Eastern spirit and culture during the dominance of Muslim civilization “... Muslim countries also, in order to survive at least as secondary states, are forced to borrow weapons, ideas, institutions, parliaments and forms of economy from Europe completely contrary to their essence and psychology”.⁹ This is not about imitation at all. He brings the example of

⁶ Shant 2008a: 164.

⁷ Shant 2008a: 165

⁸ Shant 2008a: 167.

⁹ Shant 2008a: 168.

the Japanese people, who are closer to the sea, as “it is Europe at the easternmost end of Asia”.¹⁰

Shant does not unequivocally predict the prospect of Western civilization: he does not expect either decline or unprecedented development. He simply states with political optimism that ***the West still has an inexhaustible potential*** which can be discovered in different cradles of Western civilization: “When the Anglo-Saxon element is exhausted, Germany and the North come behind it... And behind the Germans is the Slavic element, in particular the Russians, so the reserve forces and historical possibilities of the European thought and spirit are still very large”.¹¹

Shant rejects ***monocentrism*** not only in intercivilizational but also in intra-civilizational relations. He does not rule out the dominance of the Eastern spirit as the result of the retreat of the European spirit. In this case, he considers possible the awakening of China based on neo-Confucianism. And if that happens, he considers the only way for individualism and liberalism to be “the road to America, to the islands”. Thus, while acknowledging ***the civilizational identity of all countries and the right of nations to independence***, he emphasizes the qualities and responsibilities of a “maritime civilization” in uniting the peoples of the world. But he does not advocate the idea of the monopoly of Western civilization at all.

Shant explains the foundations of civilizations and the criteria for identification of nations on the basis of the ***idea of nationality***. He analyzes the following natural-historical factors of the existence of nations and differentiation of peoples:

- ***Origin, blood relationship and racial typology***: recognizing that family and kinship are the primary natural connection between people, Shant affirms that people interpret their identity in the image of their national ancestor. And although the individuals of not all nations are related by racial origin, nevertheless, it is the “characteristic ethnographic composition” that distinguishes one nation from the others.
- ***Homeland, geographical factors***: these are important for the formation and existence of a nation. In addition, “the source of the greatness and decline, expansion and constriction, successes and failures of a nation... is the position and condition of the country where it lives and the historical conditions associated with that position.”¹² But sometimes different peoples live in the same country, or they are divided into several states. The border of the homeland is elastic, and “not all parts of the homeland represent the same geographical identity”, therefore, “different parts of a people are not subject to the same geographical signals”.¹³ Evaluating the influence of geographical factors on peoples, Shant concludes that

¹⁰ Shant 2008a: 168.

¹¹ Shant 2008a: 168.

¹² Shant 1979: 23.

¹³ Shant 1979: 25.

the homeland is not the main condition for dividing nations and uniting different parts of the people.

- **History** whose role is most important for the existence of the people. The past of a nation is only its own, by which it is separated from other nations. But, as the thinker points out, history is important only for those who know it. Thus, “Neither the origin, nor the homeland, nor the physical and mental composition, nor the past” are enough “...to include an entire nation in itself”.¹⁴

In Shant’s concept, these natural-historical factors are valued as the basic conditions for the formation, national characterization and development of the people, under the influence of which **cultural-civilizational factors** are formed. They are:

- **Customs, traditions** that affect national psychology: “Every people, every nation... has its own particular and unique national color of way of life, work, habits and daily routine”.¹⁵ However, it is well known that peoples close in terms of civilization (e.g. Europeans or Asians) have similar habits that do not characterize the entire national identity.
- **Language:** it stems from the spiritual formation of the people, from the depths of national psychology. Language is connected with the nation’s thinking, judgment and character. It plays an important role in religious, scientific and educational, cultural, administrative and other processes, being a state value. But language is not the main factor that distinguishes peoples.
- **Religion:** it relates to the political, moral and legal existence of peoples. Shant stresses the **identity of national churches:** “...every nation has its own god, its own church, its own creed and its church ranks”.¹⁶ Proof of this is the non-uniformity of Buddhist, Muslim and Christian peoples, both in the inter-religious and intra-religious (creed) sense: “Every nation forms the same general principles and worship according to its soul, its history and its conditions”.¹⁷ For example, Catholicism is different for the French, Spanish, and Polish, the same as Protestantism for the Prussian, English, or German. Orthodox peoples are not identical either. Thus, Shant does not consider religion to be the only factor that distinguishes peoples, especially since sometimes certain parts of the same nation adhere to different confessions as Armenians, adhering to Armenian confession, Greek confession or Catholicism.
- **State:** the forms of state structure and governance, administrative bodies correspond to the level of civilization of peoples. According to Shant: “The higher the civilization, the greater and the deeper the differences and inequalities”.¹⁸ He

¹⁴ Shant 1979: 28.

¹⁵ Shant 2008c: 85.

¹⁶ Shant 1979: 33.

¹⁷ Shant 1979: 34.

¹⁸ Shant 2008c: 70.

also acknowledges the fact of borrowing state-and-legal systems, at the same time affirming that ***the same form of the state structure is manifested in its particular way by different peoples***, especially during the political organization of the society, the formation of the state apparatus and the exercise of power: “Each nation forms or adapts its state according to its race, its place, its history and its composition...”.¹⁹ According to Shant, the state is the most visible external integrity of the people. And if it is united in one state, the latter becomes a subject that separates and represents the people. But there are also **“artificial”** states that have subjugated many tribes and nations. And in this case “... the state cannot personify one people; it cannot separate and integrate one people”.²⁰

- **Culture:** cultural creations are a means of expressing the national spiritual potential, ideas and emotions that unite people and are embedded in the “temple of thought of humanity”, but they are not the only distinguishing factor either.

Thus, in Shant’s viewpoint, none of the natural or cultural factors characterizing peoples can **separately** “become an absolute principle of separating one people from others and including all parts and individuals of one people as a whole”.²¹ According to him, some ideologues saw the “lack” of this absolute principle as a basis for denying that peoples are separate national communities. In their opinion, there are only certain groups of people who are related by origin to one human community, by language - to other ethnic groups, and by state - to other nations. Therefore, it is impossible to establish one principle that distinguishes peoples.

Objecting to this view, Shant rests upon a simple rule of logic, namely when defining a concept it is necessary to identify the essential features of the object being defined. For example, he defines the concept of **“people”** as follows: a people of a certain ethnic origin, living in a certain geographical environment, having a historical past and present, having a certain mentality, customs, traditions, religion and state structure, being the inheritor of a unique culture “...is a completely different and unique entity compared to other similar entities”.²² Thus, the individuality of the people is revealed only by the combination of natural and cultural-civilizational potentials.

Shant interprets personality with the notion of **“nationality”**: “We call the individuality of peoples a nation” because “what separates and differentiates one people from other peoples is its nationality, and what unites the parts and individuals of one people are its national features”.²³ Therefore, nationality is the **basic principle that identifies and characterizes peoples**, which determines and combines the other factors.

¹⁹ Shant 1979: 31.

²⁰ Shant 1979: 32. The concepts about “natural” and “artificial” states see Sarvazyan 2013: 86-89.

²¹ Shant 1979: 40-41.

²² Shant 1979: 42.

²³ Shant 1979: 43.

The following idea is unique in Shant's concept: ***national identity crystallizes with the development of civilization***. He proceeds from his own premise that "...what is called humanity... is not a regular string of like-minded and equal, merciful and round souls", but "...a living forest with innumerable colors, endless forms... with endless juices, where everyone grows and lives one's own life... for oneself and all for one another".²⁴ If a person has individuality, their perceptions and aspirations bear the stamp of identity and they value ***the independence of their self*** more. Similarly, the lower the level of civilization is, the less noticeable the uniqueness of the people is. And with the development of civilization "the differences... embranchments are emphasized, private inclinations and personal development of each; a language of its own, understanding of a new form, religion of its kind, another kind of state structure, new kind of people".²⁵ The former sense of "community self" turns into a ***national consciousness***, as a result of which ***the national identity is valued as the independence of the individuality of the nation***.

Shant rejects the views according to which the national and nations disappear in the dynamics of civilization. On the contrary, "civilization... is the main condition for the development of nations, the strengthening of national features... and the assessment of its uniqueness".²⁶ Peoples are valued to the extent that their national identity, cultural viability and will to self-organize are specified.

The subject of civilization is the nations, because ***"all the organs of a nation are the organs of civilization, and the nation itself is an organism that produces civilization (emphasis added by L.S.)"***.²⁷ Shant interprets the concept of ***"nation"***: "A nation is not a simple collection of individuals of the same race, but a more complex, higher, unique and complete body composed of the connection of those individuals... with its own composition, new phenomena, new forces and new consequences".²⁸ And "civilization is the state the nation-organism has reached".²⁹ Nations were formed out of natural-historical necessity, so it is impossible to arbitrarily change, assimilate or destroy them.

Shant's interpretation of the ***nation-state*** relationship is remarkable. Without reservation, he affirms that ***"nationality is wider than the state"***. Indeed, when examining the problem on the basis of history, it becomes evident that nation is an older category than society, state or civilization. ***Nations are the natural primordial types of mankind***. They form unique political and administrative-and-economic systems. Along with the development of civilization, small powers unite, forming "...an economic-administrative integrity, with one center that includes the whole nation, i.e. becomes a

²⁴ Shant 2008c: 88.

²⁵ Shant 1979: 49.

²⁶ Shant 1979: 50-51.

²⁷ Shant 1979: 69.

²⁸ Shant 1979: 64.

²⁹ Shant 1979: 69.

national state”.³⁰ In fact, Shant means the *natural state*, which performs a political function of uniting the nation. However, the situation is different in the case of domination, when a new type of state, *an artificial state*, is created due to the lack of equality of rights between the ruling and subordinate peoples. He mentions three types of domination:

- **Tax domination** with the predominance of the ruler and the preservation of a certain degree of national sovereignty of the subject.
- **Full domination**, when the occupied country is annexed to the ruling state, being subjected to its legal-political system. In this case, the subject loses its statehood, but not its nationality.
- **Genocide**, when they try to deprive the nations of their homeland, to destroy the nations, their culture and civilization through massacres.

According to Shant, when a dominant state allows its subjects to preserve the elements of their national civilization, it is always afraid that this will lead to political independence and sovereignty. We can conclude that **the national civilizational value system is the basis for the restoration of independence and state sovereignty of the subject nation**.

According to the thinker: “Domination is in essence the enemy of the nations that have always been dominated and of the idea of “nation” in general: it promotes the idea of “state”.³¹ The ruling government prioritizes the state language, religion, and culture, forcing its subjects to identify themselves with those foreign civilizational values; and in their absence simply destroys the culture of its subjects in an attempt to assimilate them. It is obvious that the idea of a state is being manipulated for the sake of the dominance of the nationality, civilization and culture of the ruling country. Therefore, according to Shant, **it is only during the dictatorship that the idea of a state takes precedence over the idea of a nation**. And in this case, “...the phenomenon of crushing and destroying the individuality (identity – L.S.) of nations is demonstrated, as well as the contempt for the national idea, although all this is done to increase and spread the number, position and civilization of the ruling nation, i.e. eventually once again for the victory of the national idea”.³²

The problem under discussion is related to **the issue of sovereignty** which in Shant’s concept is discussed at the national, state and civilizational levels. According to him, the independent people “...must be the owner, supervisor and controller of their country, their government, their civilization and their economy: the basis of any social phenomenon is the people, and whatever is done must be done by the will of the people and for the people.”³³ He considers the idea of **the sovereignty of the people** to be the main lever of the political and cultural movements of the XIX century. He sees all

³⁰ Shant 1979: 86.

³¹ Shant 1979: 88.

³² Shant 1979: 90.

³³ Shant 1979: 90.

revolutions as the offspring of that idea, even in the East, contrary to the opinions that democratic ideas are alien to Eastern conceptions.

The result of the realization of the idea of the sovereignty of the people is **the parliamentary governance, the representative system, the republics**, etc. According to Shant: “One of the inevitable conclusions of that idea is **the demand for independence** of the subjugated and dominated nations, and the implementation of that demand is the series of liberation wars of the last century and a half.³⁴ He values the prudent policies of those countries (especially England) that assume the principles of independence and sovereignty, transforming the imperial government into a federal system of governance. In this context, he refers to the Soviet state, which he calls a “false federation”.

Shant predicts with political optimism that human civilization can condemn any domination, as it rejected human slavery in the past. According to him: “It is a mature understanding and the reality of tomorrow that **every nation has the right and must have its own independent existence, legally equal to the others**, no matter how small: it is sufficient to have reached a certain level of maturity (emphasis added by L.S.)”.³⁵ The slogan “**Every nation - its own state**” is equivalent to the principle of **justice**. It has been the natural desire of all peoples for centuries, and now it has become a legal consciousness and a political demand. The relationship between the nation and the state is coordinated in the following conclusions of Shant:

1. There has never been a state without a nationality: “...Every state... has tried to strengthen and spread its own civilization”,³⁶ not tolerating the existence of another national civilization within its state borders. And the main task of the subject nation is to preserve its national identity and civilizational individuality.
2. In natural-historical conditions the state is “...just one factory of a nation... a kind of a social nervous system and nervous center”. If in the early stages of the development of the society there were many administrative political bodies, “... along with the development of civilization they strive to unite and form one center, one government, one national state”.³⁷
3. As a result of domination, nations lose state structures, but the process of civilization leads to the principle of self-determination, the right of nations to self-governance, and the restoration of political independence.

According to Shant, ideal is the model of civilization, according to which “every nation has only one state, and every state serves only one nation, when humanity must recognize only the nation-state”.³⁸ Certainly, this model differs from the European understandings of a nation-state, in which the national factor is ignored, and the origin

³⁴ Shant 1979: 91.

³⁵ Shant 1979: 94.

³⁶ Shant 1979: 95.

³⁷ Shant 1979: 95-96.

³⁸ Shant 1979: 96-97.

of nations is viewed as the result of modern socio-economic developments.³⁹ Linking the existence of statehood with national integrity and unity, he affirms: “Every nation is its own master and must choose both the form of its internal government and the external condition of its state”.⁴⁰

Shant does not accept the idea of cosmopolitanism, rejecting the slogan: “The whole world is my homeland, all humanity is my race”. According to him, the policy of the peoples and their relations are based on the idea of **national independence**. If in previous centuries the rights of the royal house were given importance, now **the idea of the sovereignty of an independent nation** is perceived as **a factor in the development of civilization**. And tyranny, enslavement of peoples and denationalization “...are seen as obstacles to the development of civilization and as immoral phenomena”. Hence comes the issue of “the separation of forcibly joined nations, and the need to unite the forcibly divided parts of the same nation, by which history and reality gradually take the national path”.⁴¹

Thus, the dynamics of civilization is manifested by 2 tendencies: on the one hand, the disintegration of states and the formation of free and independent nations, on the other hand, the establishment of international relations between newly independent states.

Since the old times political communication between nations has led to the idea of an international organization to limit the militarism and expansionism of powerful states and to regulate international relations at a legal level. That was the role played by the La Haye conference and the League of Nations, although their activity was imperfect. International politics should be aimed not at the annihilation of nations, but at their cooperation. According to Shant, the basis of international solidarity is not the states, but **“the nations that have existed and are the natural basis of human groups and unity, as well as those nations that will gradually become the main units of universal connection and alliance** (emphasis added by L.S.).⁴²

Shant finds improbable the assumption that there can be an “ideal union” in the world, i.e. one nation, one state, one civilization. Therefore, the idea of a united, undifferentiated, like-minded humanity, according to him “is more of a religious need than a political and civil one”.⁴³ In this context, he criticizes anarchism, positivism and Marxism: “... Socialism by its very nature is not a friend to small nations, small existence and small independences, it is the supporter of “big” races and “big” peoples...”.⁴⁴

³⁹ See the European theories about the issue in Nation and Nationalism 2002: 26-51, 121-145, 236-263, 332-346, 364-380. Hubner 2001: 22-35, 135-152.

⁴⁰ Shant 2008a: 171.

⁴¹ Shant 2008a: 171.

⁴² Shant 1979: 118.

⁴³ Shant 1979: 120.

⁴⁴ Shant 2008b: 145.

Shant's premise of *the nation as the natural-lifestyle basis of civilization* is based on a philosophical argument. Public life is a unity of counterbalances. On the one hand, it tends to create similarities in its components, which in turn multiplies the commonalities that bind nations together, on the other hand, "the more complicated a nation's civilization becomes, the more and stronger their special nuances become... On the one hand there is equalization, on the other hand - *individualization*. On the one hand it is centralized, striving for identity, on the other hand - *decentralized, striving for dissimilarity, diversity, uniqueness* (emphasis added by L.S.)."⁴⁵ Thus, Shant has a remarkable view on the historical-political perspective of nations, according to which: "The development of humanity and civilization leads us towards greater decentralization, towards small nations, of course with a common alliance".⁴⁶

The issue of *the identity of Armenian civilization* has a special place in Shant's concept. Regarding Armenia as a country located at the crossroads of the East and the West, he expounds on the criteria for the identification of the Armenian nation. According to him, *nationality* is the primary and main characteristics of Armenians in comparison to other nations. Another significant factor is the adoption and nationalization of *Christianity*, which fundamentally changed the Armenian political and civilizational position, making them more closely associated with the West. Armenians used to be associated with the western, especially with ancient civilization, but, in Shant's opinion "...half of their blood being Urartian... they were connected to the East with their behavior and manners, understandings, spirit and disposition: they were the people of the East".⁴⁷ After all, *national culture is synthetic*, which has had a significant impact on civilizational developments.

Shant criticizes the religious intolerance specific to Eastern politics, describing it as a struggle against national identity and independence. Thus, "...nation, religion and independence are always closely connected; and adhering to one's religion becomes a weapon, a means to protect one's national identity, to preserve one's state freedom".⁴⁸

The thinker values the religious revolution carried out by Trdat III, considering it *a prudent policy for the sake of strengthening independence and statehood*. Due to their religious identity, Armenians were saved from assimilation with foreign tribes, which would happen through conversion and intermarriage. Otherwise, "Armenian identity would have long been dead, becoming an element ennobling the soul and civilization of Turks, Tatars, Mongols, Ottomans and Azerbaijanis, as it partly happened". He emphasizes the role of the *Armenian religion* as a defender of the spiritual and political independence in the struggle against Christian states as well. Their aspirations to deprive the Armenian Church of its sovereignty and "...to put Armenians

⁴⁵ Shant 1979: 123.

⁴⁶ Shant 1979: 124.

⁴⁷ Shant 2008a: 180.

⁴⁸ Shant 2008a: 181.

into their political and civilizational bag” are well known.⁴⁹ It should be noted that the role of the religious factor was significant also because **the Armenian Church served only one nation**, not accepting foreigners and people of different belief in its structures.

According to Shant, one of the potentials of civilization of the Armenians is the existence of external and internal statehood in the Armenian world. External independence has always been shaky due to the independent, semi-independent or full subordination status of Armenians. Instead, they have always had a “...**strong and solid internal statehood**. The basis of that internal state formation is our ministers, the real rulers, the real owners of their land and the people on the land (emphasis added by L.S.)”.⁵⁰ The ministerial aristocracy maintained the political foundations of national independence until the XIX century, with some manifestations of sovereignty. The clergy played an important role in national life; according to Shant they are a new kind of government and an intellectual aristocracy with a high religious and philosophical value system. Religious nobility “... was the second important factor leading the destiny and policy of our people, along with our secular nobility until the Turanian centuries”.⁵¹ Both secular and religious figures sought to restore Armenian independence dreaming of a free civilization.

Shant distinguishes between two levels of application of the democratic principle: internal and external. In domestic life he emphasizes the sovereignty of the people, parliamentary governance, electoral system based on the principle of representation, civil liberties, etc.: “It is the people who own the country, and the people must be the supreme ruler of economic and political life. Every law, order and initiative must be carried out for the welfare and development of the people”.⁵²

The political scientist considers the external manifestation of the democratic principle to be **the issue of the national independence, the national liberation struggle**. This idea is presented in Shant’s concept as an “**absolute requirement of civilization**”, which is very close to the Armenian people. By the way, the Armenian nation’s inclination towards European (Western) values was tantamount to defending the idea of national independence. Submission is a threat not only to national but also to civilizational identity. The suffering of peoples begins when it ceases to strive for independence.

Thus, the civilizational viability of a nation is manifested in the existence of independent statehood. Statehood is not the basis of a nation’s existence, but it is the culmination of national identity and civilization on the level of political culture. Shant believed that **the new civilization should bring to “the belief in the equality of nations, self-determination of nations and independence of nations. And the temple of our new creed is our native land, our homeland, and we must strive and**

⁴⁹ Shant 2008a: 182.

⁵⁰ Shant 2008a: 184.

⁵¹ Shant 2008a: 186.

⁵² Shant 2008a: 189.

we do strive for its full and free rule (emphasis added by L.S.).⁵³ The full sovereignty of Armenia and Armenians requires the concentration of national spiritual-and-mental, political, economic and volitional forces, the strengthening of the national consciousness with the belief in the unshakable idea of independence.

SUMMARY

Levon Shant, prominent Armenian thinker of the XIX-XX centuries substantiates the idea of multicentrism of civilization, by rejecting monocentrism in intercivilizational relations. He believes that all civilizations manifest themselves with individual uniqueness, which is due to the national-cultural identity of independent peoples. Shant considers the national factor, which reveals deeper civilizational qualities, to be the main factor in the identification of nations. According to the political scientist, the nation is an “organism that produces civilization”, nationality is the main principle that individualizes peoples, and the issue of national independence is an “absolute requirement of civilization”. He refutes the views that the dynamics of civilization leads to the elimination of nations and nationalism. In fact, the development of civilization is the main condition for the independence of nations, progress, equality, the expression of national-political identity, as well as the solution of national issues.

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Translated from the Armenian by Syuzanna Chraghyan

⁵³ Shant 2008a: 215.