

THE REFLECTION OF THE ETHNICAL TERMS “CAUCASUS” AND “CAUCASIAN” IN GEORGIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract. *Contemporary Georgian Literature offers interesting interpretations of the terms “Caucasus” and “Caucasian,” but the discussion about this problem was started much earlier, in the beginning of 19th century, when the livening up of the ethnical concepts of “Caucasus” and “Caucasian” was witnessed in Georgian literature and public thinking. The historical shift of Georgia into the new epoch of colonialism, which can alternatively be called “The Epoch of Russian Colonialism”, caused the accentuation of the above mentioned concepts. Russia used the privilege of the orthodox country, confronted Georgians with non-Christian people of the Caucasus and deprived them from their political independence. The reaction of Georgians towards Russian colonialism was characterized by double standards, which were clearly reflected in Georgian literature of the period of Romanticism, first of all, in relation to the interpretation of the concepts “Caucasus” and “Caucasian.”*

The genuine goal of the colonial policy and their social strategies were pointed out clearly in the 1850–60s. The Georgians’ response to colonialism was modified and the previous ambivalent status was replaced by the radical confrontation: the main goal became the idea of the peaceful Caucasus on the condition of protection of national identities.

The problem became rather different and more complicated in 20th century Georgian literature, when the relation towards the ethnical problem was newly established within the frame of Soviet ideology and offered the different, non-ethnical interpretation of the terms "Caucasus" and "Caucasian": the national borders were ignored and integrated within the model of Homo Sovieticus. Later, when the Soviet regime was destroyed, the terms "the Caucasus" and "Caucasian" caused the establishment of a new type of discourse, which determined the new interpretational standard of Georgian literature of the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century.

Keywords: *Caucasus, Caucasian, Russian colonialism, Georgian literature, National identity.*

Introduction

The article deals with the analysis of the interpretative peculiarities of important for the Caucasian region ethnical terms "Caucasus" and "Caucasian" in Georgian literature of 19th–20th century, from the very beginning to the destruction of Soviet regime. The main goal of the article is to display the influence of the understanding of those terms, as well as the political and cultural relations towards the Caucasian people on Georgian literature and social life. One of the prior objects of the article is to explain the connection between the "Caucasian problem" and the process of the formation of a national identity. This problem has become very urgent today, because of new political trends and strategies in Caucasian countries. The analysing process will be based on some famous samples of Georgian literature, using the comparative method.

The Main Text

Modern Georgian literature offers interesting interpretation of "Caucasus" and "Caucasian." However, thinking around this problem commenced much earlier—back in the 19th century, when the theme of Caucasia clearly acquired topicality in Georgian literature and social thought. This actualization was caused by the historical transition of Georgia into the period of new colonialism, which can be otherwise called "era of Russian colonialism."

As is known, the beginning of Russian colonialism in Georgia dates from the early 19th century, though movement towards this process was noted earlier—from the day of the signing of the Treaty of Georgievsk (1783), and, to a certain extent, even prior to that. From the early 19th century tsarist Russia comfortably took over the status of colonizer, proceeding consistently with the implementation of the strategic plan of colonization. The political strategy of Russian colonialism was defined from the outset by the principle of dividing and breaking up of the occupied regions of Georgia and

Caucasia as a whole, while the social structure assumed the form of a micro-model of the social system of the Russian empire. What was the attitude of Georgian society to the standard of the new colonialism and in what form was it revealed in Georgian literature?

Given Georgia's experience, the status of "being conquered" was not alien to her; at various times Georgia was occupied by Iran, Arabia, Turkey, and by the Mongols. Hence Georgia's traditional response to colonialism was marked by anti-colonialist movement under the token of preservation of her religion, which primarily implied protection of religious values. In the period of Russian colonialism the status of the conqueror changed radically: the Russian conqueror acted under the policy of "co-religionist" enemy and friend. On the one hand, she enjoyed the privilege of an orthodox country, and on the other, she set Georgia against the non-Christian peoples of Caucasia, depriving her of the necessary political distinctiveness. The initial reaction of Georgian society to Russian colonialism assumed the form of a double standard. This was clearly reflected in the life and literature of Georgian society in the period of Romanticism, primarily from the viewpoint of the interpretation of the concepts "Caucasia" and "Caucasian."

In speaking about the "double standard", what I have in mind is the ambivalence or misunderstanding that has existed in Georgian society and literature regarding the co-religionist colonizer: 1. one part of Georgian society, deprived of the necessity of protecting its confession, loses the motivation for anti-colonialist struggle from the beginning and—totally disoriented—moves to the position of ambivalent expectation; 2. the other part tries to convince itself in the reasonableness of the "new era" and in the need of protection by a powerful co-religionist country (that is allegedly capable of returning Georgia back into European society); correspondingly, they considered service of the Russian throne their patriotic duty—even under grave doubts and vacillation; 3. there is also a small group of people that clearly feels the tragedy of the opposition of the idea of welfare, masked behind the idea of religious unity, and national originality, and seeks to awaken the stupefied society at the cost of their own heroism. Son disagrees with father, brother with brother, friend with friend: society is dissimilated, while literature clearly mirrors each detail of this fateful dissimilation: all questions or doubts, wavering or fear, indecision or bravery are deposited in the layers of thought, accumulate and find their way into literature. The idea of "Caucasian" unity is already relegated to the historical past; some of Georgian poets dressed in uniforms of Russian generals, on the orders of the colonialists fight the leaders of the Caucasian movement and, having done their duty, sadly mourned the historical might of Georgia, which is now turned into ruins; all who secretly sympathizes with the idea of "Caucasian" unity are punished, e.g. Prince Aleksandre Orbeliani, prior to the plot of 1832, receives a most severe warning because of a supportive letter sent by him to Shaml (Leader of the Caucasian anti-Russian movement), and is shifted to the camp of "undesirables" for the empire¹. Caucasian confrontation and dividing the Caucasian peoples, under the mask of Orthodoxy, turns into a major plan of Russia's policy; accordingly, the

1 Tsereteli, A. *rchevi tkhzelebatai khuttomeuli* [Selected Works in Five Volumes] v. III. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo Publishers, 1989, p. 101; Ghaghanidze, M. *dzveli da akhali saqartvelos mijnaze* [At the Boundary of Old and New Georgia]. Tbilisi: Memkvidreoba Publishers, 2010, p. 87.

notion "Caucasian" is differentiated into separate designations—Georgian, Armenian, Chechen, Dagestanian and so on, and for each of them any "other" is the carrier of the symbolism of enemy rather than friend. Here we can recall the story of the kidnapping and captivity of the women of the house of Prince Chavchavadze by Shamil². In this general chaos and discord phrase, the great Georgian romantic poet, Nikoloz Baratashvili, assumes special significance: "The unity of faith will bring no good for the state, if the character of nations differs"³. It may be said that Baratashvili was the only Georgian intellectual of the first half of the 19th century in Georgia who not only got down to the bottom of the principal problem of the Georgians, but made his position known. The poet's phrase, as quoted, demonstrates his belief in the uselessness of the traditional confessional means of fighting against colonialism and the need to look for a new way: this is the way of national struggle that must salvage Georgian identity and statehood. But Baratashvili's appeal—notwithstanding quite a few like-minded supporters and, of course, predecessors—was destined to come true later in 1860s.

From the 1860s, the genuine purpose of the political course and strategy of the new colonizers acquired more intensity: Russian vicegerent Vorontsov's liberal (though essentially imperialist) rule in Georgia was replaced with radical imperial policy; Russia's plan of transforming Georgia into a peripheral zone of political and cultural development took clear shape, conforming to the classical interpretation of "colony." Due to this, the ambivalent response of Georgian society to Russian colonialism (characteristic for the romantic period) changed to radical opposition: the historically worked out confessional strategy of the anti-colonial movement was replaced with national movement. It was not fortuitous that the leader of the Georgian public movement, Ilia Chavchavadze, snatched at the figure of Nikoloz Baratashvili. Ilia—and not only he—followed Baratashvili in relation to the Russian colonial policy: the 19th century Georgian realistic literature is instinct with the sentiment of protecting national identity and this attitude forms the basis of the writings of Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Aleksandre Qazbegi, Vazha Pshavela and other Georgian classic writers. The idea of nationality was directly related to the resuscitation of the historical notion of "Caucasian": if Georgia dissociates herself from the other regions of the Caucasus, she will find herself in isolation—face to face with Russian empire. Against this backdrop, Akaki Tsereteli's poem "Shamyl's dream" sounds as an appeal and stand: it is not accidental that Akaki threw this poem as a gauntlet at the general of the Russian army and poet, Prince Grigol Orbeliani, by which he underscored the differing stance in relation to the Caucasian problem of the "children's" (new generation of 60s) camp from that of the "fathers" (old generation of 30s). Akaki's phrase "and let us not give ourselves up as slaves to the *giaour*" (the term means "Russian")⁴ is symptomatic: before long A. Qazbegi altered radically the literary interpretation of the notions of "Caucasian" and "Caucasus," shifting them to

2 Drancey, A. *shamili tkve qalebi* [Shamyl's Captive Women]. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo Publishers, 2002.

3 Baratashvili, N. *Nikoloz Baratashvili 150. nashromebi* [Nikoloz Baratashvili 150. Works]. Tbilisi: Sabchota Sakartvelo Publishers, 1968, p. 145.

4 Tsereteli, A. *akaki tseretlis ikhzelebata otstomeuli* [Complete Works in 20 Volumes]. V. Tbilisi: literaturis institutes gamomtsemloba, 2010, p. 16.

an emphatically anti-Russian plane: in his texts a tragic fear takes shape of a nation that invades Georgia, and generally, the Caucasus, with “strange” language, morality, traditions and customs; in his fiction characters connected with Russian rule are from the beginning conceptualized in a negative context or the other way round, if a character is negative he is definitely interpreted in a Russian context; while the peoples of Georgia’s mountain region are associated with heroism, self-sacrifice, nobility of mind, love; nor should the fact be devoid of interest that Qazbegi never expresses his, the author’s, social, political or ethnic stand while describing the relations of Georgians and other peoples of the Caucasus mountain (and we are well aware of the methodological inclination of realist writers to record their position); on the other hand, the writer’s stand is unshakably national when it concerns the relationship of Georgians and Russians or Russophiles. The same tendency may be observed in Akaki Tsereteli’s poem *Gamzrdeli* (“Tutor”), in which we have Abkhaz characters both positive and negative, while their tutor is a Kabardian: the author accentuates the ethnic differences, but only the ethical and moral values of Human Beings. Nor should we forget Vazha Pshavela’s famous characters from non-Georgian mountainous regions—Mutsal and Joqola and the respectful attitude to them of Georgian mountaineers. The ethical and social *pro et contra* underpinning the scale of values of Vazha Pshavela’s characters goes beyond the standard of narrow separatism, reaching the deepest layers of humanism. Interestingly enough, the full paradigm of the accents of the Caucasian theme, discussed above, is given with artistic mastery by Jakob Gogebashvili in his *Iavnanam ra hkma?* (“What Did the Lullaby Song Do?”). Against the backdrop of the tragic fate of a Georgian family the aggravated ethnic confrontation between Georgians and Lezghins towards the close of the story transforms into overall harmony and idyll. Thus, the question asked early in the 19th century of “why we should stand together in the absence of confessional unity?” transforms towards the end of the same century into the question of “what have we to disagree upon in the presence of a common enemy?”

The more paradoxical it is to note that the “Caucasian question”—so ripe and intellectually prepared—cardinally alters its perspective in 20th century Georgian literature when, owing to the historical and political cataclysms of Soviet totalitarianism, the attitude to the issue changes, even being split into several stages: revolutionary and post-revolutionary, ideological diktat, the Patriotic War, liberalization and post-liberalization.

The best example of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary conceptualization of the problem is found in the works of the 20th century Georgian classic writer Mikheil Javakhishvili, with special emphasis on his novel *Jaqo’s Dispossessed*. The anti-hero Jaqo Jivashvili is a character distinctly bearing the symbolism of the time: wearing an Ossetian cap, Ossetian *chokha* (traditional Caucasian dress for men), Tatar socks, Dabakhana shoes, Georgian sword and Russian rifle: “Jaqo is a Sharikov artificially created by the epoch, serving his creator with dog’s fidelity”⁵. Mixed up in him is everything that had retained the make-up of independent units in the 19th century: whereas the

5 Ratiani, I. *teqsti da gronotopi* [Text and Chronotope]. Tbilisi: Tbilisis Universitetis gamomcemloba, 2010, p. 143.

basic question in relation to the Caucasian peoples revolved round their disharmonious or, on the contrary, harmonious existence, in Soviet conditions it transformed into the problem of being-nonbeing: Jaqo—the product of the “new times”—is the result of the so-called “Soviet integration”; he is a typical individual “without kith or kin” in whom it is hard to say where a Georgian begins and where a Daghestanian ends, where an Ossetian begins and where a Russian ends. Who needs such distorted integration that is tantamount to destruction? Of course it is the colonialist—the Russian empire, now hidden behind the incomprehensible symbiosis of Soviets. Against this backdrop, the position taking shape in the works of Georgian writers—Konstantine Gamsakhurdia and Leo Kiacheli acquires somewhat nostalgic significance in relation to the Caucasian problem. Although the texts are often screened with social themes serving as an eye-wash for Soviet ideologists, going deeper, one can feel the attitude of Georgians’ respect and mutual appreciation of the identity of Caucasian peoples. However, this is only an exception. “My address is neither my house, nor street, my address is the Soviet Union.” This is the slogan that obliterates differences. Can anyone be bold enough to speak of the differentiation of the Caucasian ethnos, with an ethnic Georgian—Stalin at the head of the Soviet dictatorial regime? The political need for integration was especially enhanced in the period of the Patriotic War, when the mental model of the Homo Sovieticus entered the phase of its historical might: the Patriotic War played into the hands of dictatorship, appeals for consolidation in the face of the common social threat, further removes the necessity of defining identities. It should be noted that the situation did not alter in the post-Stalinist period of the so-called “Thaw.” The concept “we” had long since taken the place of “I” and this replacement was one of the major achievements of the colonialist policy of Sovietized Russia. However, the “Thaw” of the 60s was reflected to a certain extent in the period of the so-called “Stagnation”: in the late 70s the phrase the “image of Caucasian ethnicity” was aired first timidly and then resolutely. I would name Giorgi Danelia’s film *Sparrow-hawk* as the first marker, in which the problem of the issue of ethnic identity may be perceived beyond tragicomic chiaroscuro, while the relationship of two good guys—a Georgian pilot and an Armenian driver bears the traits of consolidation of two Caucasians lost in a vast, foreign Russian environment (however, the stage-manager has to pay tribute to Soviet conjuncture by the method of revealing the negative character of the other Georgian). Although in Danelia’s film a positive rather than negative interpretation of the problem is given, one thing is clear: Baratashvili’s “character of nations” is again declared, the foundation of the empire has been shaken and is awaiting new processes. The tense political and economic environment of the 90s aggravated the toponymy of ethnos, Soviet dictatorship was coming to the end of its existence, while the ethnic units come close to the phase of recognition anew, though as expected, with a negative interpretation: the policy of “Soviet unity” is buried in the ruins of the empire, but the way is cleared for no less hazardous open ethnic confrontation in the Caucasus region. From the 90s, as a result of the break-up of the Soviet system, the concepts of “Caucasia” and “Caucasian” gave rise to an absolutely new type of discourse, defining the interpretation standard of

Georgian, as well as non-Georgian literature of the end of the 20th and early 21st century in relation to this issue. However, this is a topic of another essay.

Conclusions

The article “Reflection of the Ethnical Terms “Caucasus” and “Caucasian” in Georgian Literature” deals with the problem of interpretation of ethnic terms and relations, as well as the question of national identity within the frame of literary process. The main conclusions might be declared in a following order:

1. Contemporary Georgian Literature offers interesting interpretations of the terms “Caucasus” and “Caucasian,” but discussion of this problem was started much earlier, in the beginning of the 19th century, when the livening of the ethnical concepts of “Caucasus” and “Caucasian” was witnessed in Georgian literature and public thinking. Historical shift of Georgia into the new epoch of colonialism, which can alternatively be called “The Epoch of Russian Colonialism,” caused the accentuation of the above-mentioned concepts.

2. From the very beginning, the strategy of Russian colonial policy envisaged the division of the occupied regions of Georgia and the whole Caucasus; moreover, the social structure acquired the image of the micro-model of Russian social system. What was the attitude of Georgian society towards the new standards of colonialism? Owing to its historical past, Georgia was quite familiar with the status of “conquered”: in different epochs, Georgia had been occupied several times. The reaction of Georgian society towards colonization, traditionally, was an attempt to maintain their own religion and the anti-colonial movement primarily entailed in itself the defence of religious values. The status of the conqueror has altered drastically during the epoch of Russian colonialism; Russia has tried the mask of a friend-foe with whom Georgians shared religion: on the one hand, Russia used the privilege of the orthodox country; on the other hand, confronted Georgians with non-Christian people of the Caucasus and deprived it from political independence. The reaction of Georgians towards Russian colonialism was characterized by double standards, which was clearly reflected on Georgian literature of the period of romanticism, first of all, in relation to the interpretation of the concepts “Caucasus” and “Caucasian.”

3. The genuine goal of the colonial policy of Russia and its social strategies were pointed out clearly in the 1850–60s: Georgia was transformed into the peripheral zone of social-political and cultural events, which corresponded to the classical interpretation of the concept of “colony.” Correspondingly, the Georgians’ respond to colonialism has also been modified and the previous ambivalent status was replaced by the radical confrontation: Religious strategy worked out by anti-colonial movement was replaced by the strategy of protection of national identity. The 19th century realistic literature is noticeable for its defence of national identity and it forms basis for the creativity of Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsereteli, Al. Qazbegi, Vazha-Pshavela and other realist writers.

The main goal was the idea of peaceful Caucasus on the condition of protection of national identities.

4. The problem became rather different and more complicated in 20th century Georgian literature, when the historical and political events, itself, have divided the relation towards the ethnical problem into different stages: stages of revolution and post-revolution, ideological dictate, world war, liberalization and post-liberalization. But each of these stages was established within the frame of Soviet ideology and offered a different, non-ethnical interpretation of the terms "Caucasus" and "Caucasian": the national borders were avoided and integrated within the model of Homo Sovieticus.

5. Later, when the Soviet regime was destroyed, the terms "Caucasus" and "Caucasian" caused the establishment of a new type of discourse, which has determined the new interpretational standard of Georgian literature of the end of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century towards this problem.

As it is already mentioned above the topic of this article is one of the most important scientific issues in a contemporary Caucasian region, reflecting its political and cultural interests.

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ETINIŲ SĄVOKŲ „KAUKAZAS“ IR „KAUKAZIETIS“ ATSPINDŽIAI GRUZIJOS LITERATŪROJE

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***Santrauka.** Nūdienos Gruzijos literatūroje aptinkame įdomius sąvokų „Kaukazas“ ir „kaukazietis“ aiškinimus, bet diskusija dėl šių sąvokų prasidėjo daug anksčiau, XIX a. pradžioje, kai sąvokų „Kaukazas“ ir „kaukazietis“ vartosena labai padažnėjo Gruzijos lite-*

ratūroje ir visuomenės gyvenime. Prasidėjęs naujas istorinis Gruzijos gyvavimo laikotarpis – vadinamoji „rusiškojo kolonializmo epocha“, užaštrino minėtų sąvokų reikšmę. Rusija pasinaudojo ortodoksinės šalies padėtimi ir supriešino gruzinus su nekrikščioniškomis Kaukazo tautomis bei atėmė iš jų politinę nepriklausomybę. Gruzinių atsakas į rusiškąjį kolonializmą buvo dvigubi standartai, kas aiškiai atsispindėjo romantizmo laikotarpio Gruzijos literatūroje, ir visų pirma tai rodė sąvokų „Kaukazas“ ir „kaukazietis“ interpretavimas.

Tikrasis kolonijinės politikos ir jos socialinių strategijų tikslas išryškėjo 1850–1860-aisiais. Gruzinių reakcija į kolonializmą pasikeitė ir ankstesnę ambivalentiškumą išstūmė radikalus konfrontavimas: pagrindiniu tikslu tapo taikaus Kaukazo išsaugojimas paliekant nacionalines tapatybes.

Problema labai pakito ir dar labiau susikomplicavo XX a. Gruzijos literatūroje, kai į etinius aspektus imta žiūrėti per naujai įsigalėjusią sovietinę ideologiją ir radosi naujas neetinis sąvokų „Kaukazas“ ir „kaukazietis“ interpretavimas: tautų ribas imta ignoruoti ir visus imta integruoti į homo sovieticus modelį. Vėliau, sugriovus sovietinį režimą, sąvokos „Kaukazas“ ir „kaukazietis“ suponavo naują diskursą, kuris iškelė naują XX a. pabaigos ir XXI a. pradžios Gruzijos literatūros interpretavimo standartą.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Kaukazas, kaukazietiškas, rusiškasis kolonializmas, Gruzijos literatūra, tautinis tapatumas.

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