

Crisis of National Identity in Literary Discourse – The Soviet Experience and the Contemporary Context¹

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The literature of the so called third world countries attracts the attention of the contemporary culture and literature scholars. These countries, including Georgia have been colonial countries for a long time and had to fight for the maintenance and preservation of its national identity.

It is noteworthy that in the studies of the theorists of post colonialism, such as Bill Eshkroft (2001), Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), etc the Russian Empire, the Soviet countries, their literature and culture is not included in the post colonial discourse. They considered India, North Africa, the Caribbean Central and South America, China and Japan, the Pacific archipelago, Malaysia, Australia, North America and Ireland the countries under imperialist ideology influence.

With regard to the Soviet Empire they prefer the term “totalitarian state or governance”. However the effort to study the literature of these countries using post-colonial methodology is perceived in Eastern European countries. To illustrate it we can see the collection of scientific articles „Baltic postcolonialism”, in which the scholars of Eastern Europe use the term colonizer and colonized to refer the Soviet Union and the countries within it. “Applying colonialism and postcolonialism’s apithets is still a matter of debate to some. resistance to the application of these terms overlooks the facts that Russia and/or the Soviet Union were colonial empires – that Russia was a colonizer and the Soviet Union was one as well” (Kelertas, 2006.)

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Several forms of political governance have been dominated in Georgia during its history and this made influence the social mentality. The goal of the presented paper is to define upon what foundation the national narrative was based in the beginning of the XX century, before the Sovietization of Georgia and later, at the end of the century, in the post-Soviet and Post-Communist period, when the country had to make relationships with the rest of the world independently. The paper also intends to show to what extent the interests of these two worlds coincided and whether they caused the crisis of values.

To illustrate it we discuss the works of two Georgian writers: “The Loggers of Jako” by Mikheil Javakhishvili and “The Basket” by Otar Chiladze. The first is created in 1924 during the colonial period and the second uncovers the post-colonial reality of Georgia. We have studied factors and the context which created Georgian national narrative at the early stages of the colonial period and how these processes are reflected in the literature. The Georgian socio-cultural attitude towards nationalism in the post-colonial reality is also analyzed in the paper.

To begin with, Georgian literature scholars distinguish several discourses in the post-Soviet period Georgia, which were forming national, Soviet and modernist narratives. Until the break down of the Soviet system triggered the important cultural changes, there had been three literature spaces in Georgian literature: formal, Soviet ideology literature space, its contradictory, literature space orientated on national ideas and traditional realistic esthetics and the literature space orientated on the contemporary world culture area, modernist esthetics (Tsipuria, 2005).

National ideology replicated in new national terms is the determinant of the form of any nation's existence. That is one problem with nationalism: its results are written across the formerly colonized world, usually in the fabrics of newly independent states whose pathologies of power, bedevil political life. The other problem is that the cultural horizons of nationalism are fatally limited by the common history of colonizer and colonized assumed by the nationalist movement itself. Imperialism after all is a cooperative venture. (Said, 1990).

There were two cultural centres for the Georgians. One was the colonizer, the Russian Empire and the second – Western world and culture, which was inaccessible for them. Generally, in the cultural values dissemination viewpoint, the centre has dominant position towards the colonized countries, while the latter is characterized by certain resistant attitude to the colonizer. Therefore, as imperialism increased in scope and in depth, so too, in the colonies themselves, the resistance mounted.

In the fictions analyzed by us the resistant attitude turns into nihilism. The perceptions of the characters of the old values are already postmodernist, which shows that the national discourse, which dominated in the colonial period was in crisis.

There are several image-models in “The Loggers of Jako” by Mikheil Javakhishvili. Teimuraz Kheistavi is a manifestation of Georgian nation, his wife, Margo is a symbol of the country and their lodger, Jako Jivashvili, a representative of other ethnic group, symbolizes a foreign force, which comes and conquers their homeland, possessions and eventually even the wife of Teimuraz. The position of the author is that the nation is no longer able to patronize their country and therefore, in the author’s view, the way out is to cooperate with the regime.

The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes, myths, and religions, these too are enabled by the land. And along with these nationalistic adumbrations of the decolonized identity, there always goes an almost magically inspired, quasi-chemical redevelopment of the native language. What is the Georgian reality like since gaining independence?

By Otar Chiladze the process of deconstruction of the national narrative is manifested in a number of forms:

1. The author gives several image-models in his work. Elizbari is a symbol of the national ideology of the country. In the post-colonial reality the image of other was replaced by “familiar other”, Razden Kasheli, which symbolizes the Soviet governance and mentality. He represents an impeding factor of society development. Their children, Antoni and Liziko as if lived in the free space and have the opportunity to make independent choice, but as the course of events shows this is only illusion and myth. The world with its way of life and past experience, values and etc, is absolutely different from the world for which the country, gaining independence from the totalitarian governance, strives. Now the struggle goes on inside the individuals, to reject those values, which are constraints for the development of the society. The crisis nature is related the fact, that the author regards the liberalization processes impossible. Liziko, a symbol of future, is pregnant which manifests Soviet ideological values. Therefore, her choice in any case is tragic, so it is practically impossible to discard Soviet ideology and treat Soviet trauma.

2. The nation has missed a certain period (we mean Soviet period) to defend those values for which is fought under Soviet governance, such as national identity, which is formulated as “Homeland, Language and Confession”. At the very beginning of the independence period Georgian people had to face the world, in which the above mentioned problems were no longer actual, so the

interests of the Georgians and the rest of the world turned out to be contradictory. This triggered crisis events and nihilism.

3. For the author the homeland itself is non-existent, only the land has survived, which is only an empty word for the majority of the society. The integrity of the land is destroyed and few people try to save it, though they know that the defeat is predestined for this battle.

The attempt to define the post-colonial and the rest contradicts the capacity of post colonial theories to demonstrate the complexity of the operation of imperial discourse. We have suggested that we need to ground the post-colonial in the „fact” of colonial experience, but it is probably impossible to say absolutely where that experience and its effects begin or end.

The crisis of national identity may be caused by such factors as that mentioned by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*. Namely, the Eastern People have inferiority complex because of realization that they are not properly involved in the Western culture and are not recognized by this culture. “Simplistically and idealistically to the nation of opposing and alleviating coercive domination, transforming the present by trying rationally and analytically to lift some of its burdens, situating the works of various literatures with reference to one another and to their historical models of being” (Said, *Orientalism*, 1978)

The research shows that the processes of deconstruction of the national narratives and identities and formation of the new ones are going on against the background of crisis in Georgian reality. Despite its historical experience Georgian nation could not find those common values and identities which would have been accepted by the majority in the society, sharing of which would have become the new stage of the development of the nation.

So, the colonialization is a passed stage, but the post-colonial stage is more important, at which the form of governance, social classes, all the fields of social life and the actual discourses of post colonial theory should be re-constructed. Shift of nationalism to the post modernist stage made many changes. Georgia has Soviet experience and has to make contacts with the new multi-ethnic and multicultural world. Georgian nation realizes that the values it was defending and referring to as the manifestation of its identity are losing importance in the contemporary world. Therefore Georgia still has a difficult way of self-identification to pass.

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