The Problem of “Foreign-Other”
Characters in the Postcolonial
Georgian Literature

Svetimtaučio personažo, arba
kito problema pokolonijinėje
gruzinų literatūroje

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Annotation

Because of its discoursive character, literature plays an actual role in the establishment and spread of the national stereotypes. Literature presents imagological views of different nations and ethno-stereotypes characterizing their national consciousness, i.e. evaluative views about other nations and cultures, which comprise an expanded scale of assessment – from extremely positive to extremely negative. The post-colonial Georgian literature presents two interesting literary processes – post-colonial reflexion and post-colonial mythologisation. These processes are analyzed on the example of two novels – Chabua Amirejibi’s Gora Mborgali (1994) and Otar Chiladze’s Avelum (1995), which discuss imagological issues from an interesting angle and reveal post-colonial reflexion and mythologisation.

Keywords: national stereotypes, imagological views, post-colonial Georgian literature.

Santrauka

Dėl savo diskursyvumo literatūra vaidina svarbų vaidmenį įtvirtinant ir skleidžiant nacionalinius stereotipus. Literatūra pateikia imagologinius požiūrius į skirtingas tautas ir etno-stereotipus, apibūdinančius jų tautinę savimonę, t. y. pasiūlo vertinamąjį žvilgsnį į kitas tautas ir kultūras, apimantį plačią skalę – nuo labai teigiamų iki labai neigiamų vertinimų. Pokolonijinė gruzinų literatūra leidžia kalbėti apie dėjimus literatūrinis procesus: pokolonijinę refleksiją ir pokolonijinį mitologizavimą. Šie procesai yra analizuojami dviejųose romanuose: Chabua Amirejibio Gora Mborgali (1994) ir Otar Chiladzės Avelum (1995), kurie įdomiuose kampu aptaria imagologinius klausimus ir tuo pačiu atveria duris pokolonijinėms refeksijoms ir mitologizavimui.

Esminiai žodžiai: nacionaliniai stereotipai, imagologiniai požiūriai, pokolonijinė gruzinų literatūra.
Gora Mborgali’s Literary Imago-Types

Chabua Amirejibi’s Gora Mborgali and Otar Chiladze’s Avelum are the texts proving an intellectual impedance directed towards the Soviet empire. In view of chronotype, Chabua Amirejibi’s Gora Mborgali covers almost two centuries – from the 19th century to the 80s of the 20th century. History of Georgian people living in the Russian/Soviet violent empire is revealed in the framework of the given chronotype. The plot core of the novel is based on the narrative of the Georgian political prisoner Iagor Kargareteli (Gora Mborgali) who escapes from the Transpolar region’s prison camps for the sixth time. The main character’s 2,500 kilometer journey to freedom goes through Tundra and Taiga. While being alone with own self for five months, the fugitive stubbornly moves towards his goal and spends time in memories and thinking. He recalls all those, who have formed his moral orientations, whose decent or indecent deeds have taught him coinciding life lessons. It is noteworthy that the six hundred and sixty-page novel is distinguished with the diversity of the gallery of characters; those are the individuals who have played certain role in the moral training of Gora during different stages of his dangerous adventures.

Misha Filipov’s character is distinguished among the literary imago-types of different nationalities represented in the novel. Misha, born in polar Taiga, already was a professional hunter when he was fifteen. He volunteered for the WWII and was captured by Germans. He was saved from death punishment by joining the “Vlasovian” army. He chose the right time, escaped and joined Ukrainian partisans. After the war he returned to his family house, got married and lived peacefully with his wife and children. Due to a misunderstanding (he was confused with an executioner of one of Ukraine’s prisons), he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years of prison camps. Misha could not cope with the thought that he had to serve sentence instead of some villain. Therefore, in five years, he collected documentation and kept sending them with appeal for rehabilitation to different state bodies, as, according to him, “… if others fail to prove your truth, you have to do it yourself; … if others do not want to return to you what they have taken, you have get it back yourself.” (Amirejibi, 1995, 23)

In anticipation of the restoration of justice Misha did not waste time. He worked out an escape plan and did not realize it only because the additional investigation of his case brought results: he was found not
guilty and freed with rehabilitation. Before leaving the prison camp, Misha gave Gora his escape plan and all the necessary items. Gora’s sixth escape would have failed if it was not for Misha Filipov and his scrupulous escape plan. Due to that, during his journey through the endless Tundra and Taiga, Gora always recalled his unbroken and iron-willpower, Siberian friend with honest respect, whose efforts had finally brought results: in different ways, but both he and Gora found the freedom they dreamed of.

The people that Gora had been raised among significantly affected his moral orientations. Since childhood, he used to hear not only the stories and advises from his father and grandfather, but also the adventures of their friends, interesting stories about human honesty, mutual respect and support. One of such narratives, which Gora remembered very well and recalled in the faraway Tundra was about Ukrainian Vlas Iakovlevich Iaremchuk – grandpa Gora and Revaz Goshkhoteli’s friend. Revaz Goshkhoteli was a member of the National-Democratic Party. According to him, in 1920, just before Bolsheviks took over Odessa, Vlas Iaremchuk, who was in great trouble, came to Revaz Goshkhoteli with a letter from their mutual friend and asked for five hundred rubles, which he needed to free himself from the White Guards. Several days later, in Odessa, occupied by Bolsheviks, Vlas freed Revaz Goshkhoteli and his friend detained by the Red Army, returned the confiscated valuables, but was not able to pay back the five hundred rubles. Several tens of years passed by and Vlas Iaremchuk, who was on vacation in Tskaltubo and was already a high official, found Rezo and returned the debt – an envelope with fifty “chervonets” in it. Goshkhoteli did not touch the money: it was the property of the National-Democratic party and he said, he couldn’t have taken it. Iaremchuk did not keep the money either and finally the friends found the solution and spent it for charity. Despite the fact that Gora’s family clearly did not like the Soviet regime and its representatives, grandpa Gora and Rezo highly respected the Ukrainian hero of the given story, as the person with human dignity and honesty.

Gora deeply believes that the human dignity does not have nationality. Gora met Azerbaijani aristocrat, Iranian pilot, Hassan Farvizfur, in the northern prison camps and respected him highly. Like Gora, Farvizfur has gone through very dangerous life journey. He ended up in Siberia because of his sense of justice and revolutionary ideas. Just like all the other prisoners, Farvizfur also dreams about escaping and has even tried
it several times, but has failed. The failed escapes have resulted in his sending to the stricter regime colony where political prisoners had to work in mines. Finally, after Stalin’s death Farvizfur was granted amnesty and met Gora in Tbilisi.

After escape from Imerpolareti prison camps, Gora’s journey is eased by randomly met worthy people. Among them stands out the original character of the former political prisoner, representative of the northern people (it is not clear which people), Kolia. He has been educated in the Institute of Northern Peoples of Leningrad. Despite the politicized Soviet education system, Kolia has from the beginning understood the sense of the Soviet “friendly” politics: “We, northern peoples, are enslaved people. It does not matter if Russians are sitting on our heads or our own politicians. We are enslaved. People, who have lost hope for freedom and independence, will always remain as slaves.” (Amirejibi, 1995, 94) It is obvious that the Soviet intelligence would not leave a person with such viewpoints without attention. Kolia was sent to prison camps, but his spirit was not broken. In a conversation with Gora, Kolia presumes that the time has changed (allegedly, it is already the so called “stagnation” period); people seem to have awakened, although, for the given process (for awakening) a candle is necessary: “… There should be someone opposing; people must have his hope; there must a person who will be followed. The candle must always be lit!” (95). Kolia expresses his opposition to the totalitarian regime or as he says himself, being in the role of the candle, by going to the center of the settlement once a month and conducts a meeting: “Politicians, get out of here! Hail to the freedom of the northern peoples” and so on. Local authorities do not pay attention to him, as to a “crazy one,” but Kolia still achieved his goal by such actions: He has managed to mobilize the locals; they expect him to appear in the settlement and “… they have gathered yesterday again. I left and listened from a distance – they continued the meeting! This means I have finally won, doesn’t it?” (96)

Along with the inner feeling of freedom, Gora is characterized by the sense of justice and because of that a certain place in his memories is given to life episodes related to the characters with the given feature. Those episodes clearly show how many talented and educated individuals were victimized by the Soviet repressions. Gora recalls the old Jewish musician, Aliakhnovich, who left the most precious Amati violin to a Ukrainian boy, whom he taught to play instrument himself; Russian
Shilin, whose life story is the confirmation that after certain period of time, the offenders participating in the Great Terror of the 1930s became victims themselves. Repressions of the 1930s were not survived by Gora’s Tbilisi friends, German Bruno Koch and Oleg Kolesnikov, who had a Persian mother. At the start of the war, their families were exiled to the Middle East. Gora recalls Armenian, Iura Kobulov with gratitude – son of the well-known Beria’s right hand Bakhcho Kobulov, who recognized Gora in one of Moscow’s ice-cream stores after he had just escaped from prison and did not turn him in.

During his life, Gora had a chance to communicate with people of different nationalities and of course they were not always of high moral standards. The investigator of the Tbilisi Inernal Prison, Artashes Mikhailovich Markarov, is an episodic character, whom Gora remembers as an embodiment of cynicism and sadism. When the sadist doctor was pulling out Gora’s healthy teeth, major Markarov was cynically asking if he had anything to add to his previous testimonies. However, Gora did not turn into a bad person from meeting this type of people. He never tried to avoid difficulties at the cost of moral compromises. Thus, the history and memory create the texts, which rise postcolonial writer’s desire of “rewriting” the texts for the purpose of “improvement” and liberation from the trauma of colonialism. Amirejibi’s *Gora Mborgali* presents literary imago-types of different nationalities. They reveal the author’s conception more vividly.

*Avelum: Searching for Markers of Truthfulness*

Memory subjectively reflects the past. Sometimes it appears as a biased discourse, distanced from reality, analysis of which as of markers of truthfulness of the past is impossible without some special documents. This thesis is comprehended in Otar Chiladze’s cult novel, *Avelum*. The reader perceives the image of the main character of the novel, Avelum, as the “mixture” of the interaction of the depth features of writer’s memory and of the narrative created by him. From the beginning, Chiladze defines his (author’s) role in the novel:

Dear reader, take my word that it would have been a lot better if he, who’s story I am going to tell or more precisely, on behalf of who I will have to speak, would have written about his adventure and most probably you will also have trouble with distinguishing us, which will along with certain confusion, bring you great inner freedom. (Chiladze, 1995, 3)
It is clear that in the given part of the text, Chiladze refers to one of the well-known techniques of postmodernism – author’s mask, which has become the subject of discussion by literary critics many times. In Avelum, the author also uses other techniques of postmodernism, such as reminiscences, symbolic, double coding, and etc. It should also be noted, that when comprehending the epochal events, the author also uses the postmodernist irony, which aimed at not mocking some event or a person, plays certain “correcting” role while trying to comprehend the events of the past and present. “We are the people of symbols” – the author emphasizes it when discussing the name of the main character. The author clarifies that Avelum is a Sumerian word and stands for free and full-fledged citizen. The given ironic passage of the novel reflects the contradiction between the name of the character (namely its symbolic meaning) and the political situation, which he has to live in. It is clear that nothing could be said about freedom and full-fledged citizenship during the Soviet totalitarian regime.

The comprehension of tragic moments in the history of Georgia is related to Avelum’s – to the author’s with original handwriting – life, i.e. the moments that were marked as traumatic memory episodes in his mentality (the Great Terror of the 1930s; March 9, 1956…) and have reasoned the spiritual crisis of the main character, which, on the one hand, is related to the oppression of individual freedom by the Soviet empire and, on the other hand, to the process of estrangement between generations (Avelum and his father; Avelum and his daughter). The author generalizes Avelum’s fate and represents the fate of the citizens of small countries and small nations occupied by the totalitarian country, who with time lose faith, desire to resist and finally give up to their destiny. Those who give up, prefer “…the fate-deserved imprisonment to freedom.”

Avelum attempts to break away “from the evil empire” by fleeing “to the empire of love.” His love story develops in parallel with three women: his wife, Georgian Melania, who he has a daughter with, Russian Sonia, who underestimated Avelum’s love and married someone else, and French Francoise, who “smuggled” Avelum’s and her unborn child from the Soviet Empire and given birth to Avelum’s second daughter in France. From the aforementioned three, the most interesting is Francoise’s character (Sonia is represented only fragmentally and does not exceed the imago-type of a Russian woman stereotyped in Georgian mentality). It has to be noted from the beginning that just like Sonia, Francoise also
understands that she will never take Melania’s place in Avelum’s heart: “Melania’s place for just as unachievable for Sonia as for Francoise and none of them ever hoped for that.” (Chiladze, 1995, 247) Despite the fact that Avelum and Francoise have a child together, they are mental incompatible, as “… aside from words or feelings expressed in words, they did not have anything in common: neither homeland, nor language; neither past, nor future. Nothing!” (305) To the author Avelum’s endless travel from Tbilisi to Moscow and from Moscow to Paris (or from the colony to the metropolis and later, towards freedom) is an attempt of self-consciousness, understanding of one’s own role in the world and establishing one’s rightful place there.

Avelum is aware that unlike Francoise he is not a son of a free country, that “…a chained man does not have the right to love; he must first let himself free; must become a human first.” (279) For her part, Francoise, a free citizen of a free country, does not fully realize the results of the collective trauma that Avelum has overtaken, the trauma that has confused his head and left the indelible mark in his memory. Jeffrey C. Alexander claims that with the appearance of collective and cultural trauma, certain social or national groups’ members feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander, 2004, 5). For Avelum (and for Georgian people in general) such an event was March 9, 1956. His memory could not erase the peaceful meeting raided by Russian soldiers and the face of the blood-drained boy awaiting for help in an apartment house entrance on the stairs. During his whole life, since the exile of his parents, he was constantly hearing in his head the screaming of his sister, who was given away to save her from starvation. The episode related to the sister was so unimaginable to Francoise that she would not believe the story Avelum told her: “… She did not know, or did not believe that Avelum’s life was based on the gap left by the giving out of his sister in childhood and that he was not able to preserve anything fully; furthermore if it was created and gained during being in slavery.” (Chiladze, 1995, 417) Thus, despite having the mutual child, the love connection between the homo sovieticus and the citizen of a free country is doomed from the beginning, as it is based on emptiness and nothing can flourish in the emptiness.
The leitmotif of *Avelum* – “Each of us forges our own ark,” which reminiscently is related to Noah’s Ark, warns us that all the empires will be destroyed during the great flood. That is why humans, as much as they can, must fight for survival. Avelum is late to realize that it is necessary to set future landmarks during the fight survival, although, it is impossible to do it without understanding the past, without revising ties with the past. According to the writer, each individual “is the sum of at least three generations”: grandfather, father and his own self. At the end of the novel, Avelum takes the effort to unite the three generations. Love of his endangered daughter Ekaterine forces him to overcome fear, to find her in Tbilisi streets, amid the whistling bullets and to give her the last advise: “Go, take care of your child!” This phrase revives the broken connection between father and daughter, on the one hand, and mother and child (Ekaterine and her younger son), on the other hand. Avelum, who has been striving towards “flying” to freedom, is killed by a stray bullet, but before that he faithfully serves parent’s debt to his daughter.

According to the renowned author of postcolonial theory, Leela Gandhi, postcolonialism can be considered as the intellectual resistance to one of the main results of colonialism – forgetting of mythologized past. Gandhi believes that the return to colonial emotions reveals complex and antagonistic relations between a colonizer and a slaved, which unites contradictory nuances of the palette of feelings – from hatred to obedience. (Gandhi, 1998, 4) The novels analyzed in the article are the creative illustration of Gandhi’s viewpoint.

**Conclusions**

Considering the aforementioned material, the following conclusions can be made:

1. Chabua Amirejibi’s *Gora Mborgali* and Otar Chiladze’s *Avelum* are the texts proving an intellectual impedance directed towards the Soviet empire. They enable us to control the past and remember the events “forgotten” by the history.

2. In both novels the *history of a nation*, its *past* and *subjective memory* represent the most important paradigms, which enable the characters of the novels to indicate their national identity. On the one hand, these paradigms form a solid foundation, which contradicts to a non-stable contemporary environment, where a
character cannot realize his/her “ego.” On the other hand, these paradigms require a permanent renovation.

3. These texts return us to “the deprived past” for the purpose of the restoration of a split hereditary line. Moreover, they present interestingly the problems of the formation of the consciousness of “foreign-other” characters, the relations filled with an antagonism and the mental incompatibility of a colonizer and a slave.

4. Therefore, the history and memory create the texts, which rise post-colonial writers’ desire to “rewrite” the texts for the purpose of “improvement” and liberation from the “trauma” of colonialism. The above mentioned novels present literary imago-types of different nationality. They reveal author’s ideas more vividly.

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