Sociocultural Paradigms of Post-Soviet Georgia in Modern Fiction Texts

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Abstract

General Background: The study of cultural trauma and memory is increasingly significant in post-Soviet contexts. **Specific Background:** In Georgia, the collapse of the Soviet Union and conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali have shaped both national identity and literary expression. **Knowledge Gap:** The relationship between cultural trauma and Georgian literature remains underexplored. **Aims:** This study examines how Georgian writers, including Naira Gelashvili and Shota Iatashvili, use fiction to address cultural trauma and moral values. **Results:** Georgian literature from the 1990s reflects collective trauma and redefines national identity, offering moral reflections on war and societal change. **Novelty:** By integrating trauma theory and cultural sociology, this research provides new insights into Georgian literature's role in processing national trauma. **Implications:** The study highlights literature's function in exploring the collective unconscious and calls for further research on trauma in post-Soviet literature.

Keywords: sociocultural paradigms, traumatic memory, reflection

Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, in the literary space, strategies for analyzing fiction texts were noticed to compete with theoretical studies of other fields. Such possibilities of writing are conditioned by the change in the status of literature, which, as the only field for understanding various events or problems of our time, ceased to exist at the end of the last century (Eyerman, 2001). At the same time, it is this space where a serious disproportion between individual memory and general anthropological experience is reflected. This incompliance is significantly evident when analyzing Soviet/post-Soviet identity. In such a situation, writers tending to the postmodern

way of thinking take on the function of researchers, trying to understand the problems and perspectives of the Georgian cultural discourse. Since the 90s of the last century, the issue of national identity has become increasingly relevant in Georgian literature, which can be considered a syndrome of mental vulnerability.

It should be noted that the representatives of the social and humanitarian circles of the West raised the question of how it is possible to discuss the issues of the traumatic past and historical memory almost half a century ago. It must be said that the study of traumatic disorders began much earlier by Z. Freud. Although the syndrome of collective trauma and traumatic memory initially became the study object of psychologists, the scale and diversity of the issue led to the interest of scientists from various fields (sociology, history, psychology, political science, literary studies...), which is completely natural since the understanding and research of historical memory cannot be the object of study of only one particular field (Anikin, 2017)

In the sociological scientific discourse in the 80s of the 20th century, the concept and methodology of trauma was developed by the famous American researcher Jeffrey Alexander, this concept was developed by Ron Eiermann. Researchers focus on events containing trauma that have led to collective stigmatization and threatened national identity. According to their concept, these events, on the one hand, lead to the ruling out of a certain group of society, and on the other hand, to the unification of this very group around the trauma.

In modern humanitarian sciences, new directions are formed, which changed the old structure and expanded the research area, since it has connected with various disciplines. The multidisciplinary approach put the field to face new challenges since, on the one hand, it became necessary to share the experiences of other countries, and on the other hand, to conceptualize the research. In this type of research, the concept of trauma and issues associated with cultural trauma, historical memory, and memory studies in general are of particular interest (Bregadze, 2013).

Method

One of these directions can be considered the sociology of culture (cultural sociology), the founder of which is the above-mentioned Jeffrey Alexander with the work: "The Importance of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology" (2013). The goal of the direction is to search for the explicit and hidden thoughts in society, which, according to the researcher, define the meaning of civilization, bypassing politics and economy. "Cultural sociologists and researchers pay little attention to the identification of moral issues, and do not consider emotional issues of collective significance as an important element of their research, however, individuals and groups are influenced by ideas that originate in the bowels of society and are crucially important even when they are invisible. It is important to make visible the invisible thoughts deposited in the collective consciousness. The purpose of cultural sociology is a kind of psychoanalysis of sociology, the purpose of which is to reveal the social unconscious through myths in society". (Alexander, 2013)

According to the assessment of the researcher, if the desire for the sacred and the need for purification is as relevant for the modern way of life as in the past, it is the object of study of cultural sociology to the extent that myths, codes, and narratives play a special role in understanding the historical memory of traditional countries (Alexander, 2003).

We believe that the establishment of cultural sociology (as mentioned above, Jeffrey Alexander separates two terms - sociology of culture and cultural sociology, in the context of the issue raised by us, we consider it suitable to use the term cultural sociology – N.M.), as a different

scientific direction of sociology, is important as many examples can be given when moral sentiments or cultural traumas have changed the course of world history (The collapse of the Soviet Union, the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Russian-inspired Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts) (Sztompka, 2001).

Result and Discussion

From the last decade of the 20th century, various concepts of cultural trauma can be observed in Georgian literature, although one circumstance should be noted that, unlike researchers, writers do not aim to express personal and public markers of trauma. They see trauma as a metaphor and a means of analyzing anthropological experience. First of all, this experience refers to the Soviet past and the post-Soviet reality (Gaprindashvili, 2012).

In our opinion, it should also be taken into account that if we consider modern Georgian literature from the standpoint of cultural sociology, we will make sure that issues unresolved by science (such as the causes of cultural trauma) are raised in fiction. It can be said unequivocally that the introduction of socio-psychological aspects by writers in modern Georgian literature expands the area of theoretical study of the issue, which is completely natural considering the multidisciplinary character of the issues (Bakhtin, 1975).

The multiplicity of psychoanalytic issues in a way complicates the traditional understanding of research, to the extent that trauma theory as a theoretical framework for the analysis of fiction texts often, due to its nature, makes it complicated to conceptualize the final research results, however, some researchers prefer not to delve into the nature of trauma and present it as a basic element of history (M. Foucault, R. Barthes, J. Deliozi, F. Lyotard).

The specific perspectives of memory studies in the Georgian scientific discourse should be noted, which, in our opinion, is related to the conceptualization of the historical past and modernity, although it is clear that Georgian researchers dive deep into the nature of events containing trauma and, among other things, emphasize its moral and emotional character (Kutsia, 2019). The study of traumatic reflections within the discussion of totalitarian discourse is particularly relevant (Mindiashvili, 2019). The issue is discussed from a literary studies point of view by researchers: Manana Kvachantiradze, Bela Tsipuria, Nana Kutsia, Nino Mindiashvili, Nona Ambokadze, Klara Gelashvili...

"The theoretical framework of collective trauma exactly corresponds to the developments in Georgia since the 90s of the 20th century, in the post-Soviet era in all of Georgia and especially in three regions of the country (Tbilisi, Abkhazia, Tskhinvali region (so-called "South Ossetia")) conflicts inspired by the Soviet Empire (90s, August 2008) put a heavy burden on the country in general and on the spirit and psyche of people in specific" (Kutsia, 2020).

It should be noted that the cataclysms that occurred in Georgia from the 90s of the 20th century completely changed the cultural environment, and the new faces that came to the literary arena enriched Georgian writing in terms of both content and genre, especially in terms of forms of expression (Imnadze, 2013).

Socio-cultural (cultural-sociological) discourse allows us to grasp the process of re-assessment of values, which left a deep and irreparable mark on the consciousness of the nation, thus, "emotional issues of collective importance" (Alexander, 2013), as an unmistakable marker of cultural trauma, are projected in the Georgian literary narrative of that period.

From this point of view, "Spasms" by Zura Meskhi (Naira Gelashvili) is interesting. It is worth noting that literary mystification (which is still a subject of dispute in literary circles) allows

the author to present the process of moral degradation of the nation in sharp colors and rather coarse forms. If we consider the above-mentioned concept of Jeffrey Alexander, it is obvious that the text presents invisible thoughts buried in the consciousness of the traumatized society, which the author tries to reveal through the conscious of the main character, because "the trauma caused by the long-term existence of the Soviet regime was replaced by the mass trauma received by the new, post-Soviet events, the discussion of which in the literary discourse becomes possible based on the narrative of Georgian writers" (Gelashvili, 2021).

The 16-year-old teenager describes a city full of "rats and refugees", where lovelessness, godlessness, intolerance, spiritual and physical degradation reign. "Parents separately searching for a way to survive hardly realize the inevitable ordeal of their only son. Behind the young character stands the whole generation of the 90s - left out of attention due to epochal upheavals, immersed in the swamp of filth and disease, unable to find their way in the world surrounded by fog, disdain for everyone and everything, leading to rejection of God" (Gelashvili, 2021).

"I'm sixteen years old and I want to state what I don't hate: I don't hate God, because he doesn't exist. If I believed in God, I would have hated him. I don't think he would have preferred it, i.e. for me to believe in him and hate him. When I don't believe in him – he is by himself, untroubled by my hatred and begging, i.e., he is not. I get nervous when I think that God might exist and he believes in me..." (Meskhi, 2001) A detailed analysis of the text allows us to say that the writer tries to connect the process of moral degradation of the nation with a global event (the collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsequent processes). Researcher Oksana Moroz develops the opinion that postmodernist trends contributed to the study of traumatic memory and related issues in the theoretical discourse: "writers focus on those ill-natured feelings, anthropological experiences that determined the specificity of modern culture, literature, thus, postmodernist literature conditioned social approaches, which expanded the area for research, changed the status of literature and made it necessary to study literary reflections of cultural trauma". (Moroz. 2013). In "Spasms", the author's position is clear that, despite the extreme tragedy and degraded psyche, a spark of hope still burns in the next generation, condemnation of God and ironic attitude towards everything is replaced by the beginning of the process of transformation of the main character. "Oh my God! I hate you! So that I have spasms in all my organs, I hate you, because I realized that you exist! You exist! And you are ambushed, and I hate you! And I beg you: not for me, not me, but help Nana, God! I swear! I promise! I give you my word! That I will take the third, the third way, the most difficult way, tomorrow, as soon as Saturday morning dawns! When it is forbidden to work, I'll start to broom!" (Meskhi, 2001).

Regarding this issue, researcher Ana Imnaishvili notes: "This promise to God, which was more like a shrift, seemed to change the attitude towards the character... In addition, one most important thing was highlighted: that generation [the younger generation], it turns out, was not a human-hater, despite all, along with love, faith also burns in them, that is, they do have a future" (Imnaishvili, 2010).

The "Sick City" by Shota Iatashvili is also interesting in the context of the discussed issue, the title of which itself states the author's idea that the city, which, according to the concept of trauma (Alexander, Airman), can be perceived as a "stigmatized collective", is sick.

The tragic events that took place in the country united the inhabitants of the "sick city" around the trauma but threatened their national identity and moral categories.

"The trauma caused by the tragic events, which was left by the perception of the diseased world, will never be erased from the consciousness of the generation that was taking its first steps

to enter the arena of life. According to the work, the fate of being born in a sick city is associated with eternal pain. It is impossible to escape from there; Not because it has a "high fence", but because no one will accept the "sick person", no one needs him; In a diseased city, spiritually ill people wander around" (Gelashvili, 2021).

Shota Iatashvili, like Zura Meskhi, describes the chaos reigning in the city, reassessed values, the attitude towards God is reflected in the collective consciousness, nothing is unacceptable for the inhabitants of the city, they are united by tragic events, they realize that death is inevitable, but they still try to save their souls, as they can and understand (Iatashvili,1998). Perverted dignity forces the inhabitants of the city to take care only of physical survival and to give up even the brain (!) [Thoma], income from the sale of which is so meager that it is not worth talking about, although brainless Thoma felt much better, saved his family and even got rid of depression. "The fable story of the work is a reflection of the era. In the specific example of Thoma, the catastrophe of the intelligent layer of the whole nation can be seen. It is highlighted how and thanks to what the revaluation of values took place. After the turning of the "time machine", which strata of the society came forward like a lame sheep; Who, at the cost of giving up what got the way to a new life" (Gelashvili, 2021).

The author's position is clear, it is impossible to escape from the "sick city" (closed space, collective consciousness, which was forced to undergo tragic events - N.M.), and the only way out is to heal its inhabitants along with the city. Dealing with stigma is not easy, but there is hope for survival (Kvatchantiradze, 2009).

Based on the discussed material, it can be unequivocally said that since the 90s of the 20th century, the process of collective stigmatization of the society as a result of the tragic events in Georgia was fully reflected in the Georgian literature, which threatened the national identity, but united the society around the trauma (Tsipuria, 2016).

Georgian writers focus on the identification of moral issues, and bring to light the emotional issues of collective importance in order to make visible the invisible thoughts arising from the trauma in the heart of the society and reveal the social unconscious. Therefore, the literary reflection of the cultural trauma, considering the culture-sociological discourse, is an interesting material for understanding the moral values in the consciousness of the nation.

Conclusion

The study of sociocultural paradigms in post-Soviet Georgia, as reflected in modern fiction texts, reveals a complex interaction between cultural trauma and national identity. By analyzing works of authors such as Naira Gelashvili, Shota Iatashvili, and others, this research identifies the profound impact of historic and collective trauma, particularly the conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, on Georgian literary narratives. These works not only explore the emotional and psychological aftermath of these events but also highlight the role of literature as a space for moral reflection and re-evaluation of societal values. The findings emphasize that Georgian fiction acts as a medium for processing cultural trauma and provides insight into the collective unconscious of a nation grappling with its post-Soviet identity. Implications of this research suggest that trauma, as a concept, continues to shape the understanding of national identity and societal values in post-Soviet contexts. Further research could expand on these themes by exploring additional works and authors within the broader context of post-Soviet literature and trauma studies, offering a multidisciplinary approach to understanding cultural memory and identity.

Originality Statement

The author[s] declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the published of any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom author[s] have work, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

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