

Frontier Orientalism and the stereotype formation process in Georgian literature

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INTRODUCTION

Georgia, located in the Caucasus at the crossroads of Western and Eastern civilizations, has historically been a multicultural country, where the traces of contacts among different cultures coexist with indigenous cultural features. Historically, the country passed through the dominance of various neighboring super-states, including the Muslim Persian and Ottoman Empires. But in the early 19th century, after appealing to Orthodox Christian Russia for military partnership against its Muslim neighbors, the Georgian nation was eventually colonized by the Russian Empire. While dominant political powers constantly tried to spread their cultural influences, Georgian identity and social consciousness has historically been formed in the context of political and cultural resistance against colonizing forces. At each stage of these historical transformations, Georgian society faced issues related to its cultural identity issues and to the country's position between Orient and Occident. Both these historical processes and the unambiguous choice made by the modern Georgian state to claim a part of the European political and cultural heritage make it evident that Georgia belongs to a Western type of cultural identity and sees itself as belonging to the European space.

Georgian representations of the nation's historical relations with the Islamic space largely mirror the corresponding Western narratives analyzed by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (2003, 60–61):

Yet where Islam was concerned, European fear, if not always respect, was in order. After Mohammed's death in 632, the military and later the cultural and religious hegemony of Islam grew enormously. [...] And to this extraordinary assault Europe could respond with very little except fear and a kind of awe not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the 17th century the "Ottoman peril" lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life.

In defining his concept of "frontier Orientalism", Andre Gingrich places the Caucasus region in the same category as other countries outside of Northwestern Europe which had significant interactions with the Islamic world:

Unlike the first group, its countries had not been classical colonial rulers of important Muslim territories overseas. But unlike the third group, it did not entirely lack colonial interaction with the Muslim world. [...] however, the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires exercised a more or less durable rule over marginal Muslim lands in their vicinity: Spain in northwest Africa, Russia in central Asia and the Caucasus and Austria and Austro-Hungary in Bosnia (1998, 100–101).

According to Alexandre Etkind, “the Russian Empire was distinguished by its liminal location between West and East” (2011, 29). As Susan Layton argues, in the Romantic era, characterized by a strong drive toward eastbound travel, Russian travelers in search of an exotic experience clearly found it much more satisfying to Orientalize Georgia rather than to note its similarities with Orthodox Russia or its antagonism to Islam (2005, 195). Taking into account the difficult historical experience of Georgia and, in particular, its successive domination by imperial states of both Muslim and Christian culture, the goal of the present paper is to explore the context and scope of the representation of Muslims in Georgian literature. Based on an analysis of several Georgian literary texts, this paper examines whether the ways in which they represented Muslims fall within the theoretical framework set by Said’s *Orientalism*, as well as by Gingrich’s notion of “frontier Orientalism”. In parallel, the similarities and differences between Georgian perceptions of the Russian invaders and those of the Eastern Muslim rulers are surveyed.

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AS A CULTURAL FRONTIER

According to Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism, three factors have contributed to turning even the simplest representation of the Arabs and Islam into a highly politicized matter: anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, the Arab struggle against Zionism, and its effects upon their perception by American Jews, as well as by liberal circles and the general population, and the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible for people in the West either to identify with or to dispassionately discuss the Muslim world (2003, 27–28). In contrast to Said, who discussed Orientalism as an established practice in Western academic culture at large, Andre Gingrich uses the notion of “frontier Orientalism” to define the stereotypical images of Muslims, used in cultural materials pertaining to the realms of folklore, pop culture and social life. Frontier Orientalism can be seen “as a complement to or a variant of orientalism in general” (1998, 118). In his article “Frontier Myths of Orientalism”, Gingrich, like Said, defines political interest as the driving force of frontier Orientalism and, focusing on the case of Austria, discusses its two-fold relationship with the Muslim world: “[T]he issues of domestic and foreign relation with the Muslim World have strong contemporaneous implications but it should be recognized that these current interests are to some degree the result of historical processes as well” (100). By analyzing the experience of Austria, Gingrich concludes that attitudes toward the Islamic world changed throughout history depending on the political context prevalent at any given time. Specifically, as Gingrich explains in his 2015 article “The Nearby Frontier: Structural Analyses of Myths of Orientalism”, perceptions of Islamic culture are directly connected to existing political realities: when

Muslims were fighting for the Austrian state, they were considered “good” Muslims, while those who were not taking part in the process or were fighting on the opposite side were referred to as “bad” Muslims (63).

Historically, Georgians associated their state’s mission and function within global contexts to the Christian faith. In concrete terms, the country represented a certain watershed between the Eastern Islamic and the Western Christian spaces. This vision was formulated already in the early medieval centuries in Georgian hagiographic texts: in the *Abo Tbilelis Tsameba* (Martyrdom of St. Abo Tbileli, 786–790), Iovane Sabanisdze defines Georgia’s role as that of preserving the faith on the periphery of the Christian world (2010, 89). Because Georgians belonged to Christian culture, they had close political and cultural contacts with Byzantium, a civilization whose achievements they even aimed to surpass. In his *Zveli Kartuli Literaturis Istoria* (History of Old Georgian Literature, 1923), Korneli Kekelidze, the scholar who systematized the study of medieval Georgian literature, sees medieval Georgians as an ambitious nation that placed an emphasis on its own religious and cultural mission (1981, 40). Against this background, the self-identification of Georgia’s statehood was premised on the existence of a strict demarcation between the Islamic space and this nation of Orthodox culture. Due to historic circumstances and to the constant threat of attacks and domination by neighboring Muslim super-states, this Islamic space, as well as its culture and society, were perceived by Georgians as hostile and dangerous, while the names of the rulers of neighboring Islamic states such as Tamerlane (1336–1405) or Shāh Abbās I of Persia (1571–1629) are still remembered as those of the most brutal conquerors of Georgia.

Georgian hagiographic texts place a particular emphasis on the nature of Christianity, which they saw as the only true religion. However, it is worth mentioning that Muslim civilizations also played a certain role in Georgian culture. In mid-medieval times, when the country was politically strong, these two fundamentally different Christian and Muslim cultures co-existed without clashing within the Georgian space. For example, according to Muslim historians, King David the Builder learned Islam from the original sources, went to mosques and invited a Muslim Sheikh and an Islamic judge together with Orthodox members in one of the commissions working on Christian affairs (Kekelidze 1981, 39). In the 15th century, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans, Georgia’s connections with the Western world were cut off, and it became strongly influenced by the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Because of this loss of political power, the idea of the nation’s mission to be the protector of Christianity as a frontier country was suppressed in the Georgian consciousness. While the unified Georgian kingdom disintegrated into a number of smaller kingdoms and principalities, society realized that physical survival and the preservation of the Christian faith were at stake. The political domination by the Ottoman Empire or Iran often implied the conversion of Georgian kings and other political leaders to Islam, while the aristocracy and commoners could preserve their faith. An ethnic Georgian who converted to Islam was no longer regarded as a Georgian, but was described as “Tatarized”, as it was for instance the case with Rostom (1565–1658), king of Kartli between 1633 and 1658, who was raised in Iran and converted to Islam.

As a result of various periods of domination by Islamic states and of some changes in the political borders of the Georgian state, the native Christian population came to reside within the boundaries of Muslim polities. In 1614–1617, two hundred thousand Georgians were deported to Iran by Shāh Abbās I and forced to convert to Islam, but they still maintained the Georgian language and the historical memory of being ethnically Georgian (Bartaia 2009, 126–127). Later on, the Western and Southern regions of Georgia (Lazeti, Adjara, Samtskhe, and Tao-Klarjeti) found themselves within the territorial borders of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, the population of these regions had to convert to Islam. Part of the population of the historical Hereti region of Georgia, on the territory of today's Azerbaijan, preserved Christianity, while part of it adopted Islam (Nozadze 2010). As for the population of the territories which remained under Georgian rule, because of the Islamic political domination it had to repeatedly re-identify itself as Georgian and Christian, even within the boundaries of its own state. On the other hand, it had to seek ways to guarantee its self-preservation while subjected to forced co-existence with the Islamic Empires, by implicitly maintaining their Georgian consciousness and performing Christian rituals. When the Russian Empire appeared as a new political player in the Caucasus region in the 18th century, it began its relations with Georgia with the status of an ally. The declared goal of the Empire in its relations with Georgia was to protect it as a neighbor of common religious faith from the aggression of the Islamic Empires. Georgian society, exhausted by continuous wars against its Muslim neighbors, welcomed Russia as a savior. In this period, the positive acceptance of Russian Empire can be seen in David Guramishvili's epic poem *Davitiani* (1787). However, beginning in 1801 when Russia broke the terms of the Treaty, annexed Georgia and turned it into a colony of its empire, the notion of Georgia as a co-religionist country completely disappeared from the official Russian narrative. Instead, it started to become Orientalized, and represented as a semi-Muslim, semi-wild, and exotic area.

Although political relations between Georgia and the Islamic world, along with the cultural influence of the latter upon the former, belong to the past and have been overshadowed by subsequent Russian rule over the country in the 19th and 20th centuries, the stereotypes developed in that period still prevail in the Georgian social and cultural space. One of the reasons that can account for this phenomenon is that, during the 20th century, this collective memory of the period of Muslim rule over Georgia was revived in a number of historical novels such as Levan Gotua's *Gmirta Varami* (1958–1962) or Revaz Japaridze's *Mdzime Jvari* (1973–1976), as well as in films like Mikheil Chiaureli's *Giorgi Saakadze* (1943–1946). With regard to the ways in which Georgian social consciousness has related to these different Muslim groups, I argue that it has been over-determined by an existential fear, sparking from centuries of difficult cohabitation under conditions of colonial and imperial rule. In this article, the ways in which Georgian literature has represented Muslim populations, in particular those groups that were deprived of political power and did not participate in colonizing processes, will be compared to the image of Muslims associated with colonial or imperial powers.

PERCEPTIONS OF MUSLIMS IN GEORGIAN LITERATURE

While Georgia's cultural and political contacts with Muslim nations were very limited during the Soviet period and were only re-established in post-Soviet times in a very different form from earlier ones, largely of good neighborly relations, some Georgian texts of the contemporary period still reflect stereotypes from the past, while other works have attempted to go beyond them and rethink the literary representation of Muslims. According to these characteristics, we can distinguish two different types of representations of Georgian Muslims in Georgian literature: the non-assimilated Georgian Muslims, who converted to Islam as a result of Muslim rule and live among the rest of the ethnic Georgian population on the territory of modern-day Georgia, and the assimilated Georgian Muslims, most of whom live on territories in today's Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran that historically formed part of Georgia. This second category includes the Meskhetian groups that were forcefully exiled during the Soviet period. As for the representations of non-Georgian Muslims, we can distinguish those related to the dominant ethnic group of former imperial rulers (Persians and Turks) from Muslims belonging to smaller ethnic groups from the Caucasus region and living on territories annexed by the Russian Empire and now within the boundaries of the Russian Federation (Chechens, Ingushians, Dagh-estanians, Circassians, and others).

For the Georgians, Muslim rule endangered national identity. According to Homi Bhabha, colonial discourses are mainly based on a set of race- and gender-based differentiations and are characterized by what he calls a "strategic articulation of 'coordinates of knowledge' – racial and sexual" while "their inscription in the play of colonial power as modes of differentiation, defence, fixation, hierarchization, is a way of specifying" (2004, 105). From a Georgian perspective, religious affiliation was a clear and dominant marker that shape discourses and stereotypical images with regards to Muslims. Therefore, the safeguarding of religious identity became the fundamental pillar of Georgian statehood and constituted the basis for the formation of national consciousness. Despite this, being a neighbor to Islamic states had some influence on the culture of Georgia. The best expression of the synthesis of Eastern and Western cultures is the 12th-century poem by Shota Rustaveli, *Vepkhistkaosani* (The Knight in the Panther's Skin), whose plot develops in Eastern countries (India, Arabia) and which also includes Muslim characters.

Although Georgian society had relationships with Muslim polities for centuries that often resulted in the Islamization of part of the population in certain border regions of Georgia, one can hardly find a text in modern Georgian literature whose main character is a Muslim or a Georgian convert to Islam. I argue that this factor clearly indicates that the existential fear coming from long-term Muslim rule is still strong in the socio-political and cultural consciousness of Georgians. In everyday life, Georgians often mention with a sense of national pride the Fereydanians, a group of ethnic Georgians living on the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the assimilated Georgians living in the Republic of Turkey, and the Ingilo people living in the historically Georgian region of Hereti on the territory of today's Azerbaijan. For all the positive associations that these groups possess in Georgian imagination, there

exists no important work of fiction in Georgian literature that represents the lives of characters belonging to these types of environments, or that gives insights into the formation of their attitude. In addition to the abovementioned existential defiance of Muslims on the part of the general Georgian population, such an absence could also be a result, on the part of Georgian authors, of the necessary caution with which political realities, such as the geographic proximity of Muslim states on the one hand, and the politically-charged issue of Muslim ethnic minorities in Georgia on the other hand, have been dealt with in the Georgian context.

Muslim groups with no historical ties to Muslim imperial powers, primarily indigenous groups from the North Caucasus, have been more frequently represented in Georgian literature. Characters of this type are particularly present in the work of the 19th-century poet and writer Vazha-Pshavela (pen-name of Luka Razikashvili, 1861–1915). In his epic poems *Stumar-Maspindzeli* (*The Host and the Guest*, 1993) and *Aluda Ketelaury* (1992) Muslim characters are described as the representatives of a hostile ethnic group constantly at war with Georgians, while negative attributes such as “infidel” or “unbeliever” are used to describe them. However, it is worth mentioning that even deadly enemies are appraised according to their personal character traits and virtues. The bravery, intrepidity and dignity of enemy combatants are therefore an object of respect and sympathy in the work of Vazha-Pshavela. For instance, in *Aluda Ketelaury*, a dying Kist (a Chechen subgroup in the North Caucasus) gives his gun to his Georgian murderer, because he appreciates his bravery and fearlessness and declares: “Let it be yours from now on, you unbeliever, so that it doesn’t fall into hands of somebody else” (1992, 279). The behavior of the Kist changes the consciousness of the Georgian character, taking him to a higher stage of ethical values. Evidently under a politically free environment Georgian culture is not in hierarchical and dominating relation to the Islamic culture, but on the contrary, the latter makes a positive contribution to the development of the former. A scene in *The Host and the Guest* is also interesting in this regard. Another Kist character, Jokola, realizes that his Georgian guest is actually an enemy but nevertheless tries to protect him from the aggression of his own community, defending his position as follows: “He is my guest this day, though he owes me a sea of blood, I cannot betray him [...]” (1993, 57). Obviously, notwithstanding the permanent hostility between Muslims and Christians in the Georgian context, such literary texts present their relationships as determined not by state, ideological or religious interests, but by general human principles. Personal virtue, dignity and kindness are therefore portrayed as more determining than ethnic or religious origin.

RUSSIAN RULE AND SUBSTITUTION OF THE COLONIZER’S IMAGE

Until the 18th century, Georgians had mostly interacted with and needed protection from Muslim rulers. Russian rule made the experience of “doubleness” in the Georgian consciousness even more ambivalent. While existing stereotypes of Muslims remained strong, Georgian society had to self-identify again from a cultural point of view and needed to form a certain relationship with an entirely different colonizer, the Russian Empire. In the 18th century, the Georgians believed that the

political and military partnership with the Russian Empire did not imply the threat of colonization, and Russia was not the object of any negative stereotypes in Georgian literature. However, developments in the early 19th century showed that, although Russia was a Christian empire and had much in common with Georgia from the standpoint of cultural identity, its colonial and imperialist policies were equally dangerous to Georgian culture and identity as the policies of the former Muslim rulers. As Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (2010, 4) has suggested,

the imperialist policy of Russia aimed at creating a new so called “Eurasian” ideology and narrative as the counterparts of the Western values. Asia was one place where Russians could be the Europeans’ equals. [...] for all Russians when saw the East as an arena for atavistic imperialist conquests for the sake of conquest. Many of his compatriots have had a less straightforward view of the East. And even if most Russians considered themselves to be European, this did not necessarily translate into an antipathy for Asia.

Therefore it was in Russia’s political interests to Orientalize the Caucasus rather than protect it from Islamic Empires, in order to create its own “East” and demonstrate its mission and power.

At this stage of historical development, a sense of national identity started to manifest itself in more ambivalent ways in Georgian literature. Georgian society had no understanding of whether a historical enemy such as the Ottoman Empire should be regarded as a friendly state and as a potential ally in the struggle against Russian encroachments in the Caucasus. For instance, during the 1804 Mtiuleti rebellion against the Russian Empire, Georgian noblemen went as far as contacting the Ottoman Empire and got a promise of support (Bendianishvili et al. 2012, 156). The strategy of the noblemen was to generate an open conflict between the two empires, a strategy on whose adequacy we can hardly make a proper judgment today since the rebellion ultimately failed. It is supposedly around that time that a stereotypical phrase spread in Georgian society according to which “the Tatar is more trustworthy and will not betray us”. It emphasizes the fact that the Russian Empire, which came with the declared goal of giving protection to its co-religionist neighbor, in fact hid its real agenda to the Georgian people. The word “Tatar” itself has negative connotations in Georgian and denotes the Muslim community in general, comprising all the Muslim nations, including Turks, Persians, Azeris and other Caucasian Muslims. From the beginning of the 19th century onward, the Russian gradually replaced the Muslim as the historical enemy in Georgian consciousness, as well as in literary and cultural representations. Despite the fact that Russia’s support was crucial for Georgia to reaffirm its rule over a number of Islamicized border regions (such as Adjara and Samtkhe), Georgian society’s perception of these events remained ambivalent, because, while it indeed led to the return within the boundaries of Georgia of previously lost historical territories, it also was a direct result of expansionist policies of the Russian Empire.

The question of the integration of Georgian Muslims within the predominantly Georgian state was also a challenge for the national community. As mentioned above, Georgian literature largely avoided reflecting this question. However, in 19th-century Georgian journalism, one can find the opinions of a writer and public figure such as

Ilia Chavchavadze, which played a determining role in shaping the ideas of the sovereignty of the Georgian nation. Chavchavadze regarded not religion, but rather the idea of a common history as a fundamental factor:

In our view neither common language nor common religion and national origin can keep people so closely together, as common history can. [...] That is why we are not afraid of the fact that our brothers living in the Ottoman part of Georgia are Muslims today. I wish the happy day came soon when they joined us, we became brothers with each other again, and proved again, that the Georgians do not go against human conscience and they fraternally accept brothers separated long ago (1957, 462–465).

In the second half of the 19th century, more unequivocal evaluations of Russia as a colonizing power appeared. Very few literary texts of the period represent Russians as positive and educated figures who take an active part in the social life of Georgia together with native Georgians. Instead, the dominant images are stereotypical ones, in particular when it comes to Russian officials. In Chavchavadze's *Mgzavris Tserilebi* (Letters of a Traveler, 1987), a Russian officer stationed at the Larsi border post is portrayed as thinking that the level of education of a nation is determined only by the number of its generals. Elsewhere, the narrator provides a comparison of the Russian Empire with its counterparts in Western Europe from the point of view of their cultural achievements. Looking at the Russian postal carriage, a French character makes an ironic comment on Russia's supposed belatedness, as evidenced by that mode of transportation. The Frenchman of the story feels pity for the Georgian author: "I pity you to be forced to addle your brain and shake up your stomach on a thing like that. What's to be done? If the whole of Russia travels in this manner why should I complain?" (Chavchavadze 1987, 8). At the same time, the story also emphasizes what Chavchavadze sees as the historical fate of Georgians, in particular the fact that Western civilization is bound to enter Georgia via Russia, itself a "belated" country.

MUSLIM AND RUSSIAN RULERS IN GEORGIAN LITERATURE DURING THE SOVIET PERIOD

Russian imperial rule gave way to Soviet rule in 1921 and in the scholarly literature on the period, there have been debates on whether the Soviet Union can be considered as a colonial power in the traditional sense of the term. Scholars such as David Chioni Moore, Violeta Kalertas, Vitali Chernetsky, Alexander Etkind and others working in Eastern European and Soviet studies have come to the conclusion that the Soviet Union undoubtedly was a colonizing power and was imbued with an imperial ideology. Therefore, according to this approach, the former Soviet nations can be regarded as post-colonial societies. Alexander Etkind points out that, at first, the Soviet Union was a source of inspiration for the followers of Marxism, "but [when] the Soviet Union shaped itself into a major imperialist power, that competed with the other global powers the free minded Marxist-leaning intellectuals found themselves deprived of their mental tool" (2011, 41). The process of substitution of the images of Muslim rulers with those of Russian colonizers is well expressed in the novella *Lambalo da Kasha* (Lambalo and Kasha, 1970) by Mikheil Javakhishvili. The plot describes the Russian-Turkish war on the territory of today's Azerbaijan and is based

on a story told by a Georgian doctor sent to Urmia by the Russian Empire. The narrative focuses on the relationship between a representative of a formerly hostile state (Iran) and Georgian characters, at a time when both are subjected to Russian colonization. The possibility for Persians and Georgians to unite against a common enemy becomes apparent when the Georgian doctor meets the new Russian-appointed Iranian governor of Urmia on a ship. The governor is glad that Russia sent the Georgian doctor to their region, a sentiment shared by the doctor since the Georgians considered Persians as a friendly nation (“Kardash-Ioldash”). In that particular case, the common experience of colonization/subjection and the hatred towards their common Russian oppressor creates grounds for friendly and warm relationships between the local Persians, the Urmian Azeris and the Georgians, despite the fact that they had historically been subjected to Persian rule. In the novella, characters often speak the language of their supposed historical enemies: the Georgian doctor speaks Azeri with the locals, and the main Urmian character of the story, Mashad Hasan, appears to speak Georgian, a language he has learned while living in Tbilisi and Borchalo.

This gesture of recognizing each other’s culture, nationality and history, in itself excludes any kind of hierarchical or subordinate relationship between the characters. As the Georgian states: “I do not understand even now by whom, when and where these invisible strings were set up, why the exhausted Persians and Turks expected to get help from a handful of Georgians. Who had been squeezed out by them? We were unable to do that. I thought I felt a mysterious link that existed among the oppressed” (Javakhishvili 1970, 355). In parallel, the attitude of Russian characters in the text is in stark contrast with that of the Persians and Azeris: for example, Bishop Pavle, sent as a missionary to Urmia, seems to entirely ignore Georgia’s history as a Christian nation. In his view, Georgia is instead a part of the Muslim world, as shown by his reaction of sympathy when he learns the Georgian doctor’s nationality: “Being Georgian is not a big trouble, the Georgians are also humans and there are good Christians among Georgians too” (326). In contrast with the Persian and Azeri characters (Lambalo, Mashdi, Izadi) that are presented positively in the text, the representatives of the Russian imperial government (Bishop Pavle, General Chernobuzov and Qasha Lazare, an Assyrian cleric who supports Russian interests in Urmia) are definitely negatively stereotyped in the story.

Another literary text reflecting the hard consequences of the Russian/Soviet imperial policies and the life of the Muslims affected by them is the short story “Mamluki” (2011) by contemporary Georgian writer Aka Morchiladze. The main subject is the story of Islam Sultanov, the Khan of Kirbal, an autonomous region in one of the Central Asian republics. Sultanov’s father is killed by the Communists and he is exiled to Georgia together with his mother where he falls prey to Soviet terror for a second time and is exiled again, this time to Siberia in 1937. The plot focuses on the period when the middle-aged Sultanov returns from exile and settles in one of the provincial cities of Georgia. His story is told by a Georgian character and therefore represents a general Georgian reflection of the lives, identity and culture of the Muslims in the Soviet and post-Soviet reality. In the Georgian space, Sultanov is perceived as a desperate man who lives isolated from his direct environment. In the words of the

narrator, Georgians “did not trust him a lot. First, he was considered a Tatar, as all Muslims are called in our country, and second, he was supposed to have a dangerous biography” (Morchiladze 2011, 12). However, this stereotyped perception is alleviated by Sultanov’s friendship with the Georgian Beso which eventually leads to his recognition by the broader community. The absolute invisibility of Islam Sultanov’s personality is an indicator of his identity as a colonized subject, as he is a representative of Islamic culture colonized by the Soviet-Russian imperialist policies:

His dignity was not such that puffed up men have. On the contrary, I have not often seen such a modest and unassuming person. He never showed off. Called Tatar behind his back, he had lived in our town for so many years and nobody knew who he was and how much he could (53).

Thus Sultanov is originally perceived as non-existent by Georgian society and he does not himself express any willingness to become more integrated either. But unavoidable daily interactions make humiliating stereotypes give way to more positive assessments of Sultanov on the part of the Georgians. As the narrator recalls, from that time his former nickname of “Tatar” was replaced by his actual name and he was even affectionately called “Sultan”.

It is obvious from the text that the Muslim community and its culture constitute a peripheral marginalized area in dominant Georgian narratives. The perception that has been formed for many centuries in Georgian consciousness that “Tatar” is an enemy is still an active stereotype in post-Soviet Georgia, largely as a result of the lack of communication between the cultures involved. The story by Aka Morchiladze discussed above is additionally interesting because it shows the gradual breaking down of the stereotypes related to colonial discourse. In the story it is illustrated by the process of the Georgian character’s consciousness and attitude formation, which is strongly influenced by the Muslim character, Islam Sultanov. In the words of the narrator: “Islam Sultanov told me everything, such things that made me think more and more, as I had had no idea of them before. I realized that this world was completely different. Maybe many people also felt it, but no one wanted to observe it then, because if one observes, you should do something” (32–33). The narrator also notes: “when I was with Islam Sultanov, I realized how weak I was and I tried to be stronger” (108). The main character is guided by the priorities of Islam Sultanov, he follows his advice to study English, get married, begin to work as a driver and finally goes to his country in Central Asia, to fight for the defense of those ideals and goals that had been communicated to him by Sultanov.

CONCLUSION

The relationship of a society with foreign cultures is determined by ever-evolving historical and political processes. The influence of politics on culture is especially obvious under conditions of colonization, when the dominant political power creates the colonial discourse and affects the colonized people. Consequently ambivalent stereotypes of colonizers are formed in colonized societies. A clear illustration of this phenomenon is the way in which Georgian literature has represented the cultures of Georgia’s successive foreign rulers, first Muslim and then Russian. Namely, in parallel

with the major shift from Muslim to Russian rule, the negative stereotypes related to Muslims were replaced by similar ones targeting the Russians.

An analysis of Georgian literary texts enables us to conclude that in Georgian literature, relationships with the Muslim space have been determined by an existential fear that emerged as a result of historical experience. That is mainly expressed in the scarcity or relative absence of Georgian-Muslim or specifically Muslim themes in Georgian literature. In parallel, a study of Soviet-era and contemporary Georgian literature points to the fact that frontier-Orientalist perceptions and discourses on the Muslim community are gradually weakening, but have found a new strength when it comes to parallel representations of Russians. This outcome enables us to think of the political interests of the Georgian state as a particularly strong power that has shaped cultural stereotypes in Georgian literature and culture at large.

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Frontier Orientalism and the stereotype formation process in Georgian literature

Frontier Orientalism. Georgian literature. Colonialism. Stereotypes. Caucasian identities.

Georgian identity and social consciousness have been formed in the context of political and cultural resistance to the Muslim world. Taking into account this difficult historical experience, the goal of the present paper is to analyze to what extent the characters of the Oriental Muslim community are reflected by the Georgian literary texts. It discusses whether their perception in literary texts is constrained by the frontier Orientalist stereotypes and the comparison between the perceptions of the Russian colonizer and the Eastern Muslim colonizer is given. The paper discusses these issues based on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and Andre Gingrich's concept of frontier Orientalism. It shows that in Georgian literature, the relationship with the Muslim space is determined by the existential fear that has emerged as a result of historical experience. However, in the modern and contemporary period, there is an evidence that such a frontier-Orientalist feeling towards the Muslim community is gradually weakening, but it is strengthening towards the Russian space.

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