

Cultural Identity and "Freed Literary Ideas" in the perspectives of Intercultural dialogue

(Abstract)

On the way of new history regulation integration of culture into Euro-Atlantic cultural space represents an important challenge. This issue in the state of post-totalitarianism regimen is especially actual. At that moment new genre, subjects and faces in movies, television space and literature have special charge. Modern cultural process is looking for special forms, by which it would be possible to match Georgian culture to European standards.

The word "Europe", of course, does not mean nivelized space, united culture or even political monolith. This is union of varieties, it is obvious, that Europe has strong feeling of common history, many events happened in the history of Europe, which touched many countries, however obvious feeling of different peoples and their life exists.

According the model of natural forming and development of civilization the first is culture, we mean western, protestant culture, an incarnation of which is its social aspect or, the first is culture and then states are built on it. In Georgia, as in all other totalitarian state, these processes developed in another direction, so called violent model dominated, which resisted to western civilization essence, when first we receive the state and then state makes new culture. Totalitarian consciousness forbade fabulous shows, mystic and sacral problems, so called "non-materialistic plural subjects" in each direction of art. These directions received the perspective of ideological realization and "green light" in visual art during last ten years.

In 2006 the research executed by the method of "Euro-barometer", sociological research widespread in Euro Union, showed that between Georgian and western cultures there are both similarities and differences., for example, in attitude to religion, family, the essence of authority and the quality of its strength-balancing. But in whole Georgian culture is not self-sufficient and with its regional variations it is the part of European culture or civilization. In the same time, it is characterized by pragmatism.

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Integration of culture with Euro-Atlantic cultural space is a significant challenge in the process of new historical regulation. The given issue is especially important for a post-Soviet period country. At that point the new genres, themes and images in cinema, TV-space and literature gain specific meaning. The modern cultural process in searching for certain forms, which would allow adapting Georgian culture with European standards.

Europe has many, strong co-perception of common history, mutual intersections; there have been many events in the history of Europe which affected not just one specific country, although there is quite clear perception of different peoples, their lifestyles.

The word “Europe” does not of course mean a leveled space, a united cultural or even political monolith, which would be one from Scandinavia to the Pyrenees. Europe is a union of diversity so of course there is something in common: it is the very strong co-perception of history; in the history of world civilization there are a lot of facts of intersection in the history of Europe; when the events underway affected not just one specific country, but Europe in whole. We can also recall such historic events that caused mental shifts in the population of Europe not just on the level of specific ethnic groups, but at the level of the whole continent; on the second hand there is a quite clear perception of diverse people and their lifestyles. If we bring Europe and the European Union down to one, common characteristic by means of pure political-cultural viewpoint, it is a victorious liberal democratic space where liberal ideology has moved to governing center. Despite the fact that European countries are very diverse, there are common principles of government and lifestyle.

The discussion about Georgian culture being European, or non-European started in 1990's; Degree of integration became decisive: compatibility with general principles of liberal democracy, dialog ability in urban environment, openness to other opinions and positions and at the same time overcoming own “Nostria”: an individual facing an individual.

European citizen knows that he is being asked, a lot depends on him and his opinion is respected. What are the main principles of an independent society? – Independent media, protection of human rights. In a victorious democracy a human being, an individual is the main figure. He has the perception of having power.

Are we ready for Georgian culture to integrate with European cultural and Euro-Atlantic space? When speaking about Georgia we must consider two issues. To what extent our culture is compatible with general principles of liberal democracy, meaning to what extent our cultural-mental area can integrate with European countries considering its historical and cultural peculiarities.

There is an opinion that Georgian culture has a very strong spirit of being European and different political approach is necessary. Additionally, there also is a so called “Georgian dominant culture”, which leads us to a question: what is current Georgian dominant culture? - In the Soviet reality social-realism was dominant; governmental policy in cultural environment (till the end of last century) looked like a “mechanical orange”, while the mechanical orange is an absurd term. A national is not an orange that can be transformed mechanically; it is a living organism.

Georgian culture is a Christian culture. Religious moment is very significant and largely defines the culture. Orthodox religion has more ambition and requirement to actively participate in the life of a country. Church and State authority space is wider here than in Catholic areas. Additionally, Georgian nation has a unique and well formed image of aesthetes, which has always been detected in Georgian culture, although from time to time it was being suppressed by political aggression from different totalitarian regimes: (Mongol, Persian-Iranian, Russian...)

In Georgia, just as in all other post-totalitarian countries the processes developed in the opposite direction: the so called violent model was dominant, which was against the essence of western civilization, when we first gain a country and then a country forms a new culture. The certain reflection of dominant culture is the direct result of the above mentioned; against this oppression which resulted in pseudo and fictional imagination of Georgian mentality and tolerance. Totalitarian consciousness prohibited fictional shows, mystical and sacral problematic, the so called “immaterial themes” in each field of arts. Those fields gained the “green light” and perspectives of ideological realization during the last decade. Such a “violent model” is absolutely opposite to western civilization, its natural model of formation and development, where there is culture first, which we call western (Protestant culture) and one of the incarnations of which is its social aspect (capitalism); i.e. there first is culture and then a country is built based on it.

Due to totalitarian politics, the aim of the “intellectual” part of the government at the end of last century was to change the “channel” of cultural flow, as they believed that the dominant culture did not coincide with European standards... and taking of planned, inconsistent and aggressive measures started. We received the result which usually is received when certain reflection of dominant culture against such oppression happened as result of violent models. The examples of this were “religious estrangement”, appearance of criminal mentality and etc. Attempts of adjusting the existing models to our culture gradually failed. The example of this can be the attempts by radical leaders to incite anti-tolerant and anti-government phobia among hundreds of thousands of citizens protesting in the streets. The society reacted to those sensitive themes diversely, which also affected the development of culture. For avoiding negative approach to any kinds of reforms the changes in certain directions should have been conducted carefully and painlessly, there should not have been attempts of attack on the institutions which create the group of our dominant culture.

Right the historical memory of culture, traditional approach and mentality reasoned the integration of our society into the civilized world.

First were tolerance and an ability of dialogue; although there were certain obstacles too: political elite made excessive negative assessments. Degree of tolerance changed, which again was the result of improper approach.

Totalitarian policy has also affected the intercultural dialogue and information availability; translation of foreign literature was limited; till the last moment there was no information in Georgian language about many world celebrated writers and many Georgian writers living in emigration, as the totalitarian regime did not accept their life and creative image. The given process did not develop just in XX century; due to its historical fate Georgia for centuries was at first under eastern and later under Slav influence...

Although, for example at the beginning of the 20th century there were trends in Georgian literature concerted with western trends. Translating of western literature started at the end of 19th century, although the process was not consistent. Due to inconsistency the given processes included trends of “carnavalization”, although, it is apparent “carnavalization” was not the aim of the creators of the trends.

“Carnavalization” – the art of turning dogmas, clichés and official ideology upside down, appeared in Georgian art space due to European artifacts. “Carnavalic” modus and culture created the new literature forms; world known, fabulous parody literature (Francois Rabelais, Erazm from Rotterdam, Don Quijote.) Parody spirit and such esthetic experience, as the most simply understandable, due to variation on the level of feelings, was gradually translated at social, economic and political discourse language starting from 18th century.

Unfortunately this was the period when Georgia had completely different historical problems and was not ready for it. Although, if we look at the stages of development of Georgian culture there have been facts of appearance of the so called democratic esthetics; liberal and democratic texts, artistic discussions appeared in Georgian cultural space from time to time. For example David Guramishvili, who was completely different from the then Georgian poets with his mysticism, attempts of deep poetic analysis.

At the boundary of XVII-XIX centuries, after the Russian political protectorate the processes developed according to the following scheme: European romanticism found its place through Russia to Europe and in Georgia; one of the most celebrated characters of that era is poet Nikoloz Baratashvili and his democratic esthetics. During the second half of the 19th century appeared the “Tergdaleulis” with their liberal-national ideology and new opinions; that reasoned even more comprehensive image of the process of culture history development. During 1879-80 the celebrated Georgian writer and public figure Ilia Chavchavadze wrote essays named “Nature and Law”. Ilia wrote that natural condition is one thing, but the law, which means social and economic interaction, creates a completely different level of living and existence. He even compares Scottish pheasant with an Iranian pheasant; Iranian pheasant may have more resources, but having far better social and economic conditions the Scottish pheasant has a lot more possibility for self-realization. The author claims that this can be achieved by decentralization and promoting local self-government.

Georgian modernism of 1910-1920’s was the greatest “explosion” of democratic esthetics; Georgians showed that they are able to share the trends and esthetics forming in Europe. This is called “peripheral modernism” and “peripheral avangardism”, but everything that came to Tbilisi at that time from Russia and directly from Europe was excellently read by the then new generation writers; they formed a Georgian symbolist group; they managed and creatively processed an enormous volume of information from European modernist schools and followed the trends well. Great artworks have been created in painting also, but unfortunately, the general that created the Tbilisi avant-garde and Georgian modernism was destroyed by “red terror” in 1930’s and it all ended.

Thus, on one hand Georgian culture did not completely share the esthetic school of democracy which was being formed in Europe, in independent cities and in conditions of a dialogue and received only minor experience in this.

Despite the destroying of that generation the revival again started in the 1960’s. The new generation with specifics of analytics and critics appeared in literature, cinematography and theatre fields. Despite the cultural isolation and ideological oppression the democracy and liberalism still appeared in Georgia at the level of esthetics at that time. Georgian culture of the 60’s shows the moments of not only modernism,

but also of post-modernism. Esthetic mentality of the nation managed to regenerate and “democratic esthetics” showed itself. Naturally, translating that into social, economic and political language was impossible in Soviet conditions. The process continued in 1990’s, especially in literature. Change of language of prose and poetry, re-reading of classics, parody came as result of the above mentioned innovations.

These processes have been especially apparent in Georgian culture during last five years which is reasoned by three main factors: I-freedom from totalitarian regime; II-tradition of integration of Georgian culture with European processes (at the boundary of XIX-XX centuries); III-critical-analytical and esthetic-democratic innovations in Georgian literature, cinematography and TV-space – new genres in new art reality.

The given small discussion shows that there is a potential in Europeans and Georgians, although this is not the end and the reality is still far from systemized processes. Translations in social-economic and political discourse language are not being done. The processes are somewhat amorphous and uncertain. The primacy of liberal-democratic esthetic moment always converges in the given issues, in view of learning both political and social values. The significance of stimulating and developing those elements has historically been realized by Georgian society.

As for the readiness of Georgian culture for dialogue – there is will, but it is hard to start the dialogue, not so much with Europe, or the rest of the world, but even with relative cultures (Abkhazian or Ossetian cultures) which is reasoned by political misbalance and position of mutual isolation.

The social research conducted by methods of Eurobarometer methods of the European Union showed that there are similarities and differences between Georgian and western cultures; for example in view of approach to religion, family, the essence of government and approach to its power-balancing degree. Still, in whole, Georgian culture is not isolated and by its regional variations it is part of European culture and civilization. At the same time it is distinguished by being pragmatic, maybe at the level of ideas and declarations and sometimes at emotional level when other values are more systematized due to historical-traditional data; for example the gender equality. In this viewpoint Georgian culture has a precise mental position and as the gender equality policy has followed our nation historically, it is reflected in cultural and namely in literature traditions. For example the early medieval classical Georgian literature artwork – Shota Rustaveli’s poem “Vepkhistkaosani” (The Night in Tiger’s Skin”, the subjective-fictional structure of which is based on general equality idea; there are a lot of other such examples in Georgian culture. Despite this general mainstream is hard to be understood by Georgian society, which in some way is the expression of pragmatism.

We are trying to determine what the nationality means to Georgians; isolation from the rest of the society, or cultural dialogue by considering all the diversities that are not only in the world but in Georgian also. Of course Georgian culture was always based on cultural diversity, dialogue and if it was not for Soviet Union there would be no problems and questions about estrangement from Europe.

Following questions appear to be logical also: What is the main feature of Georgian mentality; for it to participate in social-economic game; for it to feel that it has independence? Meaning, what do Georgians believe to be the marker of being Georgian? What does Georgian spirit mean for people?

In the given dynamics we should also consider the religious moment; religious nationalism – “I am an Orthodox believer – I am a Georgiab” – is of course the reality that has to be considered, although due to the above mentioned historical tolerance, the given reality is absolutely based on democratic and free choice principle, meaning “I am an Orthodox believer, I am a Georgia, this is my choice and not an obligation...” It is well known that dialogue and an individual is very important for European culture. In the process of dialogue a dominant culture should not absorb an individual, or subcultures. Countries political course is also important. A lot has to be done including on the State level; many programs and regulations have to be introduced. Adaptability of Georgian culture with the existing reality is one of the bases for its viability, which also is the challenge from European and in general democratic society and its culture, as culture, which finally is the unity of norms and regulations, largely determines the course to Europe.

Does this mean contradiction in values, or do we face different conjuncture? In such conditions the return of the country from the fiction and virtual situation that we have been in is a very important achievement. A lot has been sacrificed to that and the situation when people lost the sense of participation was also apparent.

The perspective is a fast action, striving towards open world, “to left from stereotypes” – for activating “freed ideas”, new perception.