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Patriotism for Cosmopolitanism: Postcolonial Reading of Vazha-Pshavela's essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism"

Supposedly, the most difficult problem of Georgian postcolonialism is how we can maintain a critical distance from the nationalistic mood in its canonical works. Of course, when the Russian rule of Georgia was (is) being extended, nationalism was the primary form of resistance to Russian imperialism. At the same time, however, we must be aware that postcolonial critics sometimes charge nationalism with parochial ethnocentrism and chauvinism.

One of the most eminent poets of the 19th – century Georgian literature, Vazha – Pshavela (1861–1915) makes a quite important and interesting declaration about this problem in his essay "Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism" (1905). He insists that persons first come to love the environment where they are born and raised, and then, based on this patriotic consciousness, develop a cosmopolitan reason for fraternity. Especially, when considering the time's historical context, it is natural to understand that the poet supports patriotism against cosmopolitanism; even so, we must pay attention to the fact that he does not deny cosmopolitanism completely. In his works, a kind of affection for place, which could be understood as the ecocritical term "sense of place," can be observed. However, the poet does not imagine the mountainous area merely as a place where a certain ethnic group (should) live dominantly but where another group lives also (yet they are antagonizing each other), along with nonhumans that are being represented as anthropomorphized. In a word, he creates a "bioregional" place in his imagination. Here, patriotism does not mean intolerant and ethnocentric emotion but could be construed as what is open to all dwellers in the bioregion(s) and therefore should become a foundation for a cosmopolitan world.