

The Trauma of Internal Displacement in Teona Dolenjashvili's Novel "The Bird Will Not Fly Out"

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Abstract:

The reflection of the conflicts of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region is interestingly and multifacetedly presented in modern Georgian literature, in these types of texts special attention is paid to the image-icon of the displaced person. In this context, Teona Dolenjashvili's novel *The Bird Will Not Fly Out* is interesting. The text is based on real stories of displaced people from Abkhazia and Syria, which allows the author to present the essence of internal displacement in a global context as one of the most painful problems of the modern era. The bearer of the stigma of an internally displaced person is a displaced girl from Abkhazia – Nata, who managed to escape from the burning Sokhumi at the age of six, although she constantly lives with those painful memories that time could not dispel, moreover, the compulsively inflicted trauma of her childhood changed her worldview forever and even becoming an already famous photojournalist, war as a ghost, always accompanies her.

This novel exactly fits into and is in line with the theoretical framework of post-colonialism, internal displacement, victory and collective trauma, the author with intense emotional passages manages to outline the concept of internal displacement as a collective trauma in the background of war, the most destructive event for humanity.

Keywords: Georgian literature, Internal displacement, Collective trauma, War, Stigma

Since the last decade of the 20th century, the political processes developed in Georgia have been the subject of research in various fields of science. In the post-Soviet era, the conflicts that developed in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions caused the most grievous consequences. The utmost complex political situation made it difficult even to perceive the joy caused by gaining independence in a certain part of society. The "trauma of victory" (Sztompka, 2000) was being increasingly more clearly perceived following the socioeconomic and political crisis that determined the nihilistic attitude of society. The mentioned processes have entered the Georgian literature in a very interesting, large-scale and multifaceted way, and different concepts are identified, the study of which is the basis of scientifically valuable and interesting conclusions for researchers.

The **subject of our research** is Teona Dolenjashvili's novel "The Bird Will Not Out", which presents the real stories of internally displaced people from Abkhazia and Syria, which allows the author to present the essence of displacement in a global context as one of the most painful problems of the modern era.

The purpose of our research is to present based on the novel:

Literary representation of epochal events

Concepts of displacement as a collective trauma;

The authorial interpretation of the war as a paradigm.

The discussion of the mentioned novel is relevant in the context of the **theoretical framework** of post-colonialism, internal displacement, victory, and collective trauma. The author manages to highlight the markers of internal displacement as a collective trauma against the background of **war**, the most destructive event for humanity, with intense emotional passages.

To conduct the research, we have determined the **methods** of comparative analysis, and we also used a complex literary theory approach.

Research on the concepts of collective trauma is becoming increasingly relevant in scientific discourse. The processes developed in post-Soviet Georgia are well presented in the Georgian literary narrative. The literary representation of the era provides quite rich material and identifies the signs of collective trauma presented in the theoretical discourse. In these types of texts, which we can conventionally call "war literature", epochal tragedies are presented under the subjective attitude and judgment of the writer. The ongoing wars and conflicts in the world have displaced millions of people, leaving an indelible mark on their collective consciousness. On the one

hand, traumatic memories and, on the other hand, a completely new environment that did not manage to dispel the stigma caused by displacement, created a different, unusual situation. The famous American researcher, one of the authors of the theory of trauma, Jeffrey Alexander, develops the opinion that the wars taking place in the 20th century made it necessary to comprehend the memories containing the trauma and fight against them (Alexander, 2012).

The theories of traumatic memory and postcolonialism lay the foundation for the theory of the famous French researcher Claire Gallien about IDPs, which implies understanding the image of the internally displaced person as a traumatized object in fiction. Several scientists express their opinion in the scientific discourse regarding the mentioned issue, among them the studies of Claire Gallien, Marie-Angela Paladino, Melissa Chaplin, Benedict Letelier, Olivera Jock, Valeria Anishchenkova, Corina Stan are particularly interesting (Mindiasvili & Kucia, 2021).

We consider the theory of "trauma of victory" (the author of the term – P. Sztompka) interesting for a complete understanding of the novel. When a society strives selflessly to achieve a global goal, the community unites, overcomes many seemingly insurmountable obstacles, believes that the only correct strategy for the well-being of the country is to strive for that goal (for example, gaining independence), the victory obtained through difficult vicissitudes becomes a trauma, because social cataclysms become the basis of universal nihilism (Sztompka, 2000).

It should be emphasized that war and **internal displacement** are relevant topics not only for Georgian literature. The famous French researcher, Claire Gallien, believes that the artistic image of the exile in the literature of this or that country bears epochal signs and it is necessary to study it from different angles, especially considering postcolonial theories (Gallien, 2018). That is why the literature created about IDPs is becoming more and more popular all over the world and is even being formed as a separate column, which, we think, determines the **relevance** of the topic we have presented.

It should also be said that the political processes taking place in Georgia since the 90s of the 20th century determined the thematic interpretations of Georgian literature, and the literature of the IDPs was increasingly reflected in the artistic discourse (Teona Dolenjashvili, Ekaterine Togonidze, Giorgi Sosiashvili, Guram Odisharia, Zeinab Metreveli, Rezo Tabukashvili ...) The subject of our interest is the mentioned novel by Teona Dolenjashvili, where

the trauma of displacement is presented in a particularly realistic way and allows for making various interpretations.

In his famous concept of collective trauma, Jeffrey Alexander states that cultural trauma occurs when members of society realize that they have been forced to endure horrific events, the imprinting of which in their memory has permanently and fundamentally changed their consciousness (Alexander, 2004: 79).

The hero of Teona Dolenjashvili's novel, Nata, is a member of the very society that remembers everything – the burning Sukhumi, the Tchuberi pass, the road to displacement, and the stigma of a displaced person, which the character is **unable** to escape from.

Nata, a displaced girl from Abkhazia, bears the stigma of a displaced person. At the age of six, she ran away from the burning Sukhumi with her relatives, but she constantly lives with those painful memories that time could not erase. Moreover, the compulsively inflicted trauma of her childhood changed her worldview forever, and even the already famous photojournalist, the past trauma like a ghost, constantly accompanies/follows her.

Nata – date of birth – 17.06. 1987 – this is how the novel begins, as if the unpretentious date, which the author uses as an artistic detail, prepares the reader to read the tragic story(ies), it is especially interesting that the author expands the scope expressing the collective trauma and the actions take place in two geographical areas, in different time and space, Georgia and Syria. The chronotype model presented in the text emphasizes the global problem and its scale, since the war is a terrible event everywhere, in Georgia, in Syria, and its consequences destroy the psyche of people, creating a collective trauma in the war-torn society, which will never be able to get rid of the psychological stigma that the war caused. "In the war, not only unwritten and written moral laws and rules established during peacetime are changed, but also the war changes the human essence itself. It violates eternal human nature. But I have thought about it many times, that maybe the human essence and nature are exactly like that and war calls each thing by its right name?!" (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020) – The author asks a rhetorical question and, against the background of various stories, head-spinning, tragedy-filled records or passages, tries to show the reader how values are devalued, virtuous and moral categories are broken, and people become different in war, especially since, as the author notes, the narrative is based on the real stories of IDPs from Abkhazia and Syria.

The original narrative thread and plot allow the reader to understand many problems presented in the novel in a global context, (willingly or unwittingly) uniting the following characters around Nata:

1. Isida – date of birth: 26.02.2010, Aleppo, a girl who knows that fear, unlike oranges, has no smell, who turns her mother's body into armor against fear, and who is undergoing surgery without anesthesia. Witnessing death, destruction, tragedy, and unbearable pain, the little girl realizes that war brings devastating and irreparable consequences: "That's right: we won't be anywhere, except for dry statistics in news chronicles, in numbers – that so many died, so many were impaired, so many survived. That's right: no one can see us anymore – the living and dead ghosts of the ghostly, illusory town" (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

2. Abdullah – date of birth: 11. 09.2000, Aleppo, running away from himself because of the fear of hunger, who "wrapped in a cloud of hunger" in order to not sacrifice two weak and hungry women to die of hunger in the bread line, hallucinates the faces of the children who have been eaten by death, although the feeling of hunger takes over everyone and everything and dims the heart and mind, his philosophy of death is as follows: "I well understood one simple and obvious law of death: that death has only one face and after that everything does not matter"... Abdullah becomes a disseminator of chemical weapon, however, for him, as for a traumatized object, this too does not matter" (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

3. Mariam – date of birth: 7. 05. 1998, Aleppo, Mariam is in love with Habbi, she is a 21st-century modern girl from Aleppo, who planned to continue her studies at the Academy of Arts in Paris, the war has shattered all her dreams and enrolled her in the ranks of jihadi brides, irreconcilable to fate Mariam, who, crouching in the corner of the tent, realized that the only consolation for her in prayer, even though she almost had never prayed. "I struggled against the religious fanaticism of those with my crucified God, who knew best what was human fear and treachery, pain and cruelty, therefore He was the most enduring and the most powerful." (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020)

4. Richman – Place of birth Damascus, 12.03.1974, suffered from many pains, humiliated, heartbroken, lost loved ones, cheated upon, sacrificed... Obsessed with the idea of rebuilding Palmyra destroyed by terrorists, however, a person forever scarred and changed by the war (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

Nata, sent from Georgia to Syria for a special assignment (famous photography), bears the **trauma of displacement**, when she arrived in Aleppo,

the war reminds her of her past, which is firmly imprinted in her consciousness and unconsciousness, the war brings Nata back to her childhood, the tragic images of burning Sukhumi and Tchuberi pass come alive and she realizes them as if they are current events: death, fear, hunger, and again death follow each other like movie frames in Nata's mind, the image of her mother, father and sister have stuck with her as a deep scar, the only sister died in Tchuberi, the little one could not endure the difficult conditions; her mother is a hero who endured everything for the sake of her children, being displaced she became stronger so that somehow they could survive; Nata's father is the greatest pain of hers, an demoralized father who was unable to maintain his dignity from the very beginning in Tchuberi, dignity-lost, could not overcome his weakness and plunged into the vortex of immorality.

Using the example of Nata's father, the writer describes how war changes people, how the devaluation of values takes place, how people can't overcome the collective trauma, displacement, loss of their home, and the feeling of guilt or helplessness, and how they finally die after being devastated.

Nata, who is already in Tbilisi, is the bearer of the stigma of the IDP, which was mainly helped to form by the society in which she found herself. A yellow cotton hoodie that had the imprint "Sweden" and the Swedish flag below the inscription is a symbol of displacement. "I wore this hoodie throughout my childhood and honestly hated it because, despite its Swedish origin, it quickly revealed my IDP status and brought with it the scornful looks and mocking smiles of my peers" (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

It is difficult to read without emotion Nata's thoughts on the New Year (where, in our opinion, the author combined the general image of war survivors and displaced people, i.e. bearers of collective trauma) when she discovers that, it turns out, the New Year does not actually exist, it is created by people just because... "Mother and I sat alone in silence, then mother wrapped a blanket around me and I fell asleep, I was woken up by the sound of my father's footsteps and words, saying to drink for the peace of Nino's spirit, as if he was making excuses for not being with us in the most silent and sad moments of the New Year. Father's presence or absence probably wouldn't have changed anything, because, for me, another unshakable rule and regularity of the world had been broken – the New Year, it turns out, didn't exist..." (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

Nata's parents represent a society that managed to break free from the empire and gain independence, however, the victory did not turn out to

bring happiness (“the victory trauma” (Sztompka, 2000)), a bereaved mother whose only goal is to save her second child shows amazing strength and resilience, despite being the bearer of collective trauma, she still manages to assert herself and save her child, and the father (also a trauma bearer), unable to cope with the inflicted disaster, experiences moral degradation and dies (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

Pain, harassment, and bullying, Nata had to constantly justify herself, asserting herself in a new society was not an easy task, moreover, it was even impossible, the mocking smiles of her peers emphasized her IDP status and helpless situation, her mother is a scientist, not a bread seller, her father is the captain of a distant sailing ship and not alcohol or a drug addict... – Nata often repeated to herself and to others, who found herself in another space and time, in an especially cruel one, which changed her unshakable ideas and slowly collided her with the most difficult reality... She is an IDP who is despised by society (დოლენჯაშვილი, 2020).

1. It must be said that Teona Dolenjashvili outlines the image of the displaced person as a bearer of collective trauma in different aspects:

2. IDPs were forced to endure tragic events that left an indelible mark on their soul and psyche, Nata, as an IDP, is a permanent stigma carrier; Realization of being an IDP (new situation) and loss of their home;

3. IDPs have to constantly fight for self-assertion. She (Nata) too is the same as others, her classmates or people living in the neighborhood, in whose eyes she often sees disgust, and rarely – pity;

4. For the IDPs, the new residence, where they spent more time than in the previous one, could not become a real home where they can find peace;

5. Time could not dispel traumatic memories for the IDPs;

6. IDPs are stigmatized by war and are bearers of collective trauma, which nothing can ever change;

7. IDPs lost their home, native environment, loved ones, family members, and friends, which means that they will never achieve complete (former) happiness.

The judgment of Teona Dolenjashvili as a writer is harsh, however, considering the theoretical discourse presented above, it is objective – **it is impossible to get rid of the stigma of an IDP!**

As we mentioned, the theme of displacement is one of the most relevant in modern world literature, from this point of view, there is particularly interesting literature, such as "Hair of Venus" by Mikhail Shishkin,

"Escape from North Korea. A way to freedom" by Insun Kim, "Outcasts" by Alisa Chopchik, "The Beekeeper from Aleppo" by Christy Lefteri, "How God Ate Something Else", "Is Mother Home?" by Judith Kerr, "Crimea 2014. How did they make a criminal out of me?" by Sergei Melnik, "Mother and Step-mother, Diary of an IDP" by Rinat Ramazanov, "Immigrant" by Roman Krut, "Diary of a Spy" by Dariana Kalnauskine...

It can be said unequivocally that those authors who deal with the topic of IDPs/displacement perceive the problem in the context of collective trauma, which Teona Dolenjashvili does brilliantly in the novel "The Bird Will Not Fly Out", moreover, it is possible to find special creative parallels with the above-mentioned novel by Christy Lefteri, it should be noted that Lefteri, a young English writer, is exiled from Cyprus. The novel "The Beekeeper from Aleppo" was created after the writer spent some time volunteering at a UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) refugee center. The novel brought special fame to the young writer "Everyone has fallen into their own hell here – Nuri, one man sits cuddling his knees, swings and sings all night. He sings a lullaby that makes your blood run cold. I want to ask, who was he singing to before? But I'm afraid to hear the answer" (Лефтери, 2020). IDP literature theorist Mariangela Palladino, professor at Kelly University, develops the idea that migration processes in the sociocultural space laid the foundation for a new discourse that discusses the issues of IDPs, the term "Literature for IDPs" is formed. Scientist believes that the literature created by IDPs (as authors) is a kind of narrative, a traumatic memory, which also stores certain experiences (Palladino, 2019).

From our point of view, we should distinguish between the displaced and not displaced authors who create IDP literature (მინდიაშვილი, 2019). Teona Dolenjashvili is not an IDP, although special attention is paid to this problem in her novel, although the writer mentions that the book was created based on real stories, which is confirmed many times in the novel, if it were not for the special talent, depth and scale of the writer, the work would not have fully reflected the interpretations of the war or the stigma of displacement.

As for Christy Lefteri, she is a refugee, and the work conveys personally felt impressions, and seen and heard stories.

Thus, the opinion of the theoreticians of IDP literature that the literature created by IDP authors is a kind of narrative of traumatic memory needs to be clarified, to the extent that the themes of war and displacement

are also touched upon by non-IDP authors (Teona Dolenjashvili, Giorgi Sosiashvili, Zeinab Metreveli...), whose works reflected both the war literature and theme of displacement with no less intensity, therefore, according to our estimation, everything depends on the talent and abilities of the writer.

With a complex literary approach, based on the material studied by comparative analysis **methods**, we can **conclude** that Teona Dolenjashvili's novel "The Bird Will Not Fly Out" is a text of epochal importance, in which the literary representation of the events developed in Georgia is presented, focusing on the events developed in Syria allows the novel to be discussed in a context of general humanity. There are literary interpretations of the theories of collective trauma, victory trauma, IDPs, and post-colonialism, which gives the novel a special meaning. The trauma of displacement is understood as an eternal stigma, which, according to the author, is impossible to overcome. The paradigm of war established in the text is analyzed in the global context and is perceived as the most destructive event for humanity, which forces people to endure tragic circumstances that cause them to change mentally.

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