

## A Georgian Figure in a Modern Turkish Novel: Alev Alatli's “Katsi”

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### Abstract

Turkish-Georgian relations stem from a history of over two thousand years. The deep and vast relationships two cultures are reflected in various platforms primarily history and then literary works.

The Georgian characters mentioned throughout the Turkish literary works before 20<sup>th</sup> century were discussed in the episodes as countrymen of the beloved, perception of Georgian ruler, the Georgian girl striking with her nobility and beauty, and working for her country abroad...etc., but before the collapse of the Soviet Union came into prominence within the diaries of the Turkish literature writers rather than the one that is mentioned in Turkish Literature for their hospitality and conservatism.

Alev Alatli, representative of the Modern Turkish Literature dealt with Georgian Katsi figure on multi-layer platforms in her work called *Following Gogol. Not Enlightenment, Compassion! /Gogol'ün İzinde. Aydınlanma Değil, Merhamet!*

**Keywords: Georgians in Turkish Literature, Georgian Identity in Turkish Literature, Compassion vs Enlightenment**

### Introduction

Turkish-Georgian relations dated back to the history of over two thousand years. According to some historians these relations started with the raids of Kimmers known as the Caspian by the South Caucasus in 8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Tellioglu, 2006: 6-7); according to some others the relations started with giving land to those 28 Turkish families who defeated Keyhusrev (633-584) at “Creek ‘Zanav’” in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC (Kırzaoglu, 1992: 19); according to the Georgian Almanac *Moktsevai Kartlisai* the relations started with Bun Turks’ welcoming for the arrival

of Alexander the Macedonian to Mtskheta in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (330s) (Thomson, 2003: 19-23).

In subsequent periods Turkish descendants like Huns, Khazars (Brosset, 2003: 13-15), Seljuks (Tellioğlu 2006), Kipchaks (Alasania 2002: 793-97), Harezmis, Tatar-Mongols (Shengelia, 2011: 111-121), Timur (Paydaş, 2006:419-437), Karakoyunlus, Ottomans (Uzunçarşılı, 1954: 104-110; Gümüş), and Republic's Turkey (Sürmeli, 2001: 619) continued relationships with Georgians.

Members of the two cultures who have deep historical relations found positive and negative reflection in both nations' literature. Many Turkish authors either mentioned a Georgian character or had portrayed Georgians in various ways in their works before Modern Turkish Literature author Alev Alatli. It is worth remembering the works that mention Georgians from past to present in terms of better understanding it is.

#### **A. Georgians in Turkish Literature: From Past to Present**

Georgian characters were mentioned or concluded in *Battal Gazi Epic* in 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, Turkish Literature work (Solak, 2013), Oghuz Turks' epic legend *Kitab-ı Dedem Korkut* dated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD (Lewis, 1974: 9; Chlaidze, 2008: 20-21), 17<sup>th</sup> century Turkish Poet Nefî's (1572-1635) satire named *Siham-ı Kaza* (Nefî, 1998: 156-164; Shonia 2006), 17<sup>th</sup> century minstrel Karacaoglan's (1606-1679) verses (Solak, 2013), 17<sup>th</sup> century Turkish voyager Evliya Çelebi's (1611 – 1682) *Travels/Seyahatname* (Helebi, 2001:303-308), 18<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman Poet Enderunlu Fazıl's (1759-1810) *The Book on Women/Zenânnâme* (Fazıl, 1286:46; 87), 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist Ahmet Mithat Efendi's *Georgian Girl or Revenge/Gürcü Kızı Yahut İntikam* (Ahmet Mithat, 2003: 25,29,30,41,47,51,130; Solak, 2010: 398), from the 20<sup>th</sup> century 1<sup>st</sup> term authors Şevket Süreyya Aydemir's *Man Searching for Water/ Suyu Arayan Adam* written in the beginning of 1900s (Aydemir, 2005: 211), military-originated author-journalist Ahmet Refik Altınay's work in which he collected his travel writings, written in 1919 *On the Ways to Caucasus/Kafkas Yollarında* (Refik, 1919: 7).

It is possible to find Georgian characters or Georgian identifications in the Republic term Turkish Litterateur Ali Fuat Cebesoy's book called *Moscow's Memories/Moskova Hatıraları* (Cebesoy, 2002: 124-125-126); Turkish poet came to Tbilisi in 1953 Nazim Hikmet's *Art Writings* (Hikmet, 1993: 265); nationalist author Nihal Atsız's *Letter* written to his son Yağmur Atsız later published in Otuken Magazine; Necati Cumali's memory book

*Revizyonist* who visited Tbilisi in 1973-74 (Cumalı, 1979: 82-97); social-realist author Fakir Baykurt's Georgian memories published in the journals "Yazın" (Baykurt, 1987, 1988) "Türk Dili" (Baykurt, 1989); Demirtaş Ceyhun's memories *I Apologize to the Whole World/ Bütün Dünyadan Özür Diliyorum*, written on his travels to Georgia (Demirtaş, 1989:87-94); Nobelist Turkish Litterateur Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red/Benim Adım Kırmızı* (Pamuk, 1998) written at the late 1990s and *Snow/Kar* (Pamuk, 2002: 290, 312); Ayhan Sarıhan's travel writings *There are a lot of problems Sir, a lot! (Georgian and Azerbaijan impressions) /Var Çok Piroplam Apanti, Çook (Gürcistan ve Azerbaycan İzlenimleri)* (Sarıhan, 2002: 11, 16, 18, 19, 24, 45, 60, 63, 68, 125.), Nedim Gürsel's story *Return to Sorrent/ Sorrent'ya Geri Dön* (Gürsel, 2003: 30); Kevser Ruhi's stories *Amber Women/Kehribar Kadınlar* (Ruhi, 2004) and *Choruh With Crazy Hairs/Saçları Deli Çoruh* (Ruhi, 2009).

The Georgian characters mentioned throughout the Turkish literary works before 20th century were discussed in the episodes as countrymen of the beloved, perception of Georgian ruler, the Georgian girl striking with her nobility and beauty, and working for her country abroad...etc., but before the collapse of the Soviet Union came into prominence within the diaries of the Turkish literature writers rather than the one that is mentioned in Turkish Literature for their hospitality and conservatism.

## **B. Alev Alatli: "Katsi"**

Alev Alatli (1944 -), a novelist of Turkish Literature is an author who has been trying to build up awareness of the values by experiencing the interdisciplinary compositions.

One of the main characters is Georgian Katsi in the first book *Not Enlightenment, Compassion!*, belonging to Alatli's novel series called *Following Gogol /Gogol'ün İzinden* which was written in 2003 that focuses on a large part of Soviet Russian history.

The word 'Katsi' (first mentioned in the *Misty Milk/ Sisli Süt* (123-138) section in the novel was accidentally used in addressing the mode 'Katso' (Alatli, 2003: 128) that has a dictionary meaning as 'man' (male).

The Georgian figure in the novel is not only limited with Katsi. Beside this there are references to many other Georgian figures and their events like Georgian Stalin (p.117-118, 404) who marked the 1930s Soviets and even World History, a legal thief (воры в законе) Georgian Iyoseliyani's mysterious ties (p. 356, 360) with leaders and up to their power (p. 357) throughout Russia during the Soviet times which was at the the verge of disintegration.

The most cited figure is Georgian Katsi in the novel. Katsi had exiled to the city Vorkuta where the Soviet Union had an exilement camp known as *Vorgulag*. The story of the Georgian Katsi who was exiled to Siberia with the elimination program of Stalin, is told by Baris Tuliyeu who is a Gulag prisoner and “state criminal” because of Leninism.

Katsi is a Georgian stove maker, like some other prisoners in Siberia, imprisoned in a cold jail cell so-called “kondley”. Prisoners are not served hot dishes. However, for a moment a soldier walking towards to a jail cell is seen while entering the “kondley” with hot soup in his hand. This soup is received as special gift to Katsi from the boss by those prisoners who saw it.

It is the 21<sup>st</sup> year of Katsi’s exilement when Tuliyeu met Katsi. According to the Bosses of the camp, Katsi commits a crime each and every week. He rejects working on Sundays.

He works on his stove during the whole week. He never takes a brick (Bricks that he uses for the interior design of the stove) on Sunday and prefers to stay in his cold cell on Mondays. He completes making a stove within 6 hours while others complete this task within 30 hours. This means a contribution to the worthless salaries of those captains and lieutenants. If it were up to them, they would not lock Katsi in a cold cell but KGB was there. Furthermore, the KGB was concentrating on Katsi because he was reading the Bible. Moreover, he never reads it secretly. He reads it openly in plain sight. The words spoken by the political officer of the camp, “Everybody knows that there is no God”, do not influence him. Katsi becomes a deep matter. The *Bezboynik Journal*, which was published by the Association of Radical Atheists with the content that proves (!) Jesus Christ was a crook, is read to Katsi. These suggestions do not influence Katsi. He returns again his cell and acquires the banned book and never gives up reading it.

Prisoners describe him as an extraordinary fearless slave. They dish the dirt among themselves about the soup that is sent to him like ‘Boss feeds the slave, so that slave can feed the boss’.

One day, the cell door in which Katsi was imprisoned at -50 °C without food and water is opened by two soldiers. When the soldiers went to release Katsi, whose Kodley penalty finished, found him with crippled legs. He could barely have his oat soup at the refectory. After a while, it was heard that known the camp controller sent him to another place. This means that he will become an outsider and his recent days in this world. Tuliyeu says that “...when I went to see him he was sitting bent double to protect himself from the ice

stalactite hanging from the ceiling in ward that soot-blackened and was reading the Bible in his hand. The book's pages which swim from camp to camp are scattered, and tiny handwritten pages are added instead of those lost pages. Katsi's attitude leads to a lot of changes in the inner world of the prisoners (p. 128-134).

Katsi's ribs are broken as a result of the resistance to keep alive a colonel who exposed to torture. Colonel is neither Katsi's national nor his close friend. The only phenomena that makes Katsi think on is the brutish treatment towards mankind fact (p. 163). The mercy that appeared to him as a result of this treatment overlaps with the upper-chord and he becomes a character on whom the mercy in the novel embodies.

Despite the stead at the wars on behalf of the Soviet Union, the return of Katsi to Gulags makes sense. Moreover, he returns from the war with superior service medals. When this news is heard in the Gulags a committee on which there is also stove-maker confronts him. Katsi shouts that badges are the evidence of participation in the war and also cries that he is not a bitch. (According to some who live in Gulags participation in the war on behalf of state which put them there means being a bitch). A thief prisoner who looks like Lenin because of his bald appearance assaults Katsi; "Participation in war for a yellow dog is a treachery. After such, is it the state that you assumed to be your friend which put you here many times rather than your homeland? In spite of everything he continues his own job - making stoves without interfering with those people who do not have "Hollies" in their life (p. 365).

## **Conclusion**

The plot of the novel focuses on Russian Alexey's and Turkish Güloya's experiences in terms of the perception of Gogol's mercy. Katsi figure, who is far away from the perception of enlightenment and humanity, but coming from the center of the traditions' mercy, in the novel is close to the central figures, perfectly embodies the main theme of the novel in his personality by paying attention to internalization of Georgian male identity (in The Knight in the Panther's Skin Tiger's Tariel figure), his perseverance, determination, attitude about keeping faith in God regardless of the hard pressure (reads the Bible openly), his resistance to modernity's intention to transform human spirit by offering prosperity, fairness, rebellious behavior, the perception of homeland, proficiency (doing the 30 hours works in 6 hours), his self-sufficiency even though isolation, thriftiness (oat soup), benevolence and respect to

human honor without separation (his help to unknown sister), his respect to works regardless of thinking about rewards. When thinking about the entire novel, Katsi's figure stands for a concrete example of mercy oriented life while modernity and enlightenment do not pay necessary attention this lifestyle.

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