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Transcultural Writing and Non-hegemonic Universalism. Reading *Ali and Nino* in the Context of Global Literary Studies

The kinetic sculpture of Tamara Kvesitadze that adorns Batumi's seashore promenade may appear, at the first glance, as quite an unattractive pair of tailor's dummies. Its full appreciation requires the ability of reading the literary allusion implied in the sculptural form. What is more, this work conceived in 2007 and installed at the location in 2010 only reveals its full meaning when put into movement: the figures perform a slow dance periodically merging with one another, only to take a distance from one another once again. The dummies represent Ali and Nino, the heroes of a book written in German and published in Vienna in 1937, that nonetheless is often seen as the most notorious, almost the "paradigmatic" Caucasian novel. Meanwhile, the sculpture and the literary work it evokes may also be seen as a symbol of transcultural writing in which traditional identities perform a complex dance, merging and re-emerging as distinct, well-defined and isolated.

Ali und Nino is a novel narrating a romance between a young Muslim, descendant of an Azerbaijani noble family Shirvanshir, and a Christian, a Georgian princess Nino Kiplani, set in Baku in the first decades of the 20th century. The love story may also be interpreted in terms of the difficult encounter of East and West, as well as the disturbed modernisation of the Caucasus in the shadow of the Russian Empire on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution. The fate of the young couple, destined to marry in spite of the divergence of their religious backgrounds, takes a dramatic turn when Nino is kidnapped by Melik Nachararyan, an Armenian friend of Ali. After a pursuit on horseback, Ali attacks his rival and stabs him to death with a dagger. Having spared Nino's life and breaching in this way the paradigm of honour killing, he flies to Dagestan in order to avoid the vengeance of Nachararyan's family. This is where Nino joins him so they get married. Nonetheless, the destitute happiness of the newly wedded couple is destroyed by the encroaching History. As the Bolsheviks recapture Baku, Ali and Nino flee to Iran, where the Christian woman is more painfully confronted with the Muslim identity of her husband. Apparently, a new balance is established with the creation of Azerbaijan as a modern country, in which Ali might play the role of an ambassador. Yet once again the irruption of History takes the form of the invasive Red Army. Nino flees with her child to Georgia, while Ali dies in battle.

Initially rather an obscure text in the margin of the literary movement of its time, the novel signed with the pseudonym Kurban Said became, several decades after its original publication, an international bestseller translated into some thirty languages. Also,

it focused a significant critical attention, especially due to the mystery and contradictory hypotheses concerning the true identity of the author. This issue is usually regarded as clarified after the launching of Tom Reiss' captivating monograph, *The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life*, the result of an in-depth research concerning the person behind the pseudonym Kurban Said, the presumed author of *Ali und Nino*. As Reiss claims, the novel was written by Lev Nussimbaum, aka Essad Bey, a writer and journalist of Jewish origin, born in Kiev, who actually lived in Baku during his childhood. This is how the "paradigmatic" Caucasian novel proves to be written by an outsider, representing – and to a certain degree also falsifying – the Caucasian reality for his European audience.

In spite of their suspicious authenticity, such texts as *Ali und Nino* focus an increasing scholarly attention in the age of proliferating transcultural identities. Following the hypothesis of "dissolution of cultures" (*Auflösung der Kulturen*), proposed by Wolfgang Iser more than a quarter of a century ago (cf. Iser 1992), recent scholarship privileges the study of literature that travels between cultures without belonging to any of them entirely. In many ways, Lev Nussimbaum who "steals" a voice, a history and an identity that is not entirely his own may be seen as a precursor of recent generations of transcultural writers, who appropriate alien strands of cultural tradition or literary history in quite a similar way. Such a literary endeavour becomes increasingly popular among the authors. Just to give an example, such is the case of the Tibetan writer and activist Jamyang Norbu who published, in 1999, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes: The Missing Years*, filling the gap in the biography of the famous detective (two years of his absence after the duel with the arch-criminal Professor Moriarty, when Sherlock Holmes was believed to have perished at Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland). Norbu appropriates the paradigmatic figure of the 19th-century English culture, completing his fictional life with adventures in India and Tibet. An analogous strategy is used by the Angolan writer José Eduardo Agualusa who gave, in his novel *Nação Crioula* (published in English under the title *Creole*), a new lease of life to the 19th-century Portuguese literary figure of Fradique Mendes (originally created by Eça de Queirós and his friends in Cenáculo, an informal club in Lisbon, where the representatives of the so-called "1870" literary generation gathered for dinners and exchanged ideas). In the Angolan novel, the Portuguese dandy traveller is supposed to join the struggle against slavery, suffering a peculiar process of creolisation.

These dissimilar works have one thing in common: the transmission of figures and ideas between distant geographical and cultural contexts, paying little attention to literary affiliations, nationalities and crystallised identities. Instead, they create new, hybrid configurations. What is more, they attempt to fill, in their own way, the gaps of those established national literary traditions, just like in the case of Agualusa, who uses the creative powers of fiction to supplement the absence of humanitarian awareness in the 19th-century Portugal. The spleen of the dandy has been filled, *a posteriori*, with meaningful activity, creating an alternative history of Portuguese literature and culture. Similarly, such an attempt at "filling a gap" might also be observed in 1937, when the foreign author

writing under the pseudonym Kurban Said decided to create a sort of syncretic Caucasian novel that did not exist, merging various cultural spheres, as well as national and religious identities in a melting pot of a single narration. What is more, arguably, he was also filling a gap in the established system of German-speaking literature, introducing his Caucasian story into its cultural horizon.

In recent literary studies, there are many endeavours at creating a new language adapted for the description of transcultural phenomena that such novels as *Ali und Nino* anticipate. This peculiar process of merging identities into a new whole and overcoming them in search for a synergistic narration that may be resumed with the postmodern notion of “transculture”, partially an intellectual descendent of the concept of “exotopy” (*vnenakhodimost*) created by Mikhail Bakhtin (cf. Bakhtin 1986). Russian-American scholar Mikhail Epstein defines transculture as “an apophatic realm of the ‘cultural’ beyond any specific culture or cultural identity” (Epstein 2009: 332). More recently, a less radical, and at the same time more exhaustive attempt at creating a vocabulary of transcultural literary studies has been proposed by Arianna Dagnino, namely in her recent book *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility* (2015). This new language seems particularly well adopted to the interpretation of transversal literary expression, such as that of the presumed Azeri Jew who converted to Islam and narrated his Caucasian love story in syncretic, culturally ambiguous and “exotopic” terms, since he was, at the same time, an insider and an outsider in the region he expressed in a peculiar way and mediated for his European readers.

New currents in literary studies experimenting with transcultural notions form a challenge for the traditional schools of reading and criticism. Not only those schools that use the lenses of national literature or work with the Bloomian notion of “Western canon” silently identified with the universal one (cf. Bloom 1994). Also the post-colonial school requires an urgent methodological re-framing. New writers active in various parts of the globe are determined to break free from the servitudes of their historical and geographical condition (including the post-colonial one). Just as the Viennese writer trying to provide his European audience with some insight into the Caucasian reality, they address the readers in a common, translocal sphere of communication and meaning, not reduced to any particular place or territory. They exploit the new conditions of symbolic equality and unrestricted access to the humanity’s variegated heritage that were prepared by the marginal, maverick voices de-localising the major, hegemonic literary systems, such as was the case of Lev Nussimbaum.

The work toward the creation of transcultural terminology is an open, ongoing task that requires, among other aspects, the redefinition of problematic concepts, such as universalism that undoubtedly backed up, at least to some extent, Nussimbaum’s writing endeavour. The term “universalism” may be considered as problematic, because it has been deprived of its legitimacy by postcolonial school (criticising it together with the concept of “civilising mission”). It has recently been replaced by the notion of “pluriversalist” sphere of communication. The terms “pluriversalism” and “pluriversalist” have been used,

among others, by Walter Mignolo (2011). Instead of creating such a neologism, the notion of universalism may also be refreshed and re-framed by new qualifiers. This is why I prefer to speak of the non-hegemonic aspect of the new universalism, reinvented from the peripheries.

Recent scholarship in comparative literature tries to address a double question. Firstly, why do the writers transgress the limits of their locatable cultural position? And secondly, how do they achieve such a radical de-localization, trying, at the same time, to get through to the international reading public? In order to answer these questions in a more reliable and exhaustive way than it has been done till now, it is important to pay sufficient attention to the precursor texts, such as *Ali und Nino*, rather than remain with the newest literature, born under the present-day, globalised conditions. Already during the late colonial or imperial era, if the decade of 1930 may be qualified in these terms, Nussimbaum's novel attempts to bring localised, highly idiomatic Caucasian concepts close to the international readership in a way that does not correspond exactly to the ideological policy of any of the empires interested in the Caucasus. Nussimbaum, at least such as he is depicted in the suggestive biography published by Tom Reiss, is a hobbyist, an Orientalist in his leisure hours and for his private pleasure, not included on the payment roll of any imperial power. This is why his peculiar perspective may be qualified as non-hegemonic. It also explains why such a text may partially fall out of the scope of examination in classical post-colonial approaches, centred on empires, their civilising mission, their loyal servants and subalterns. The meaning of *Ali und Nino* participates in such a logic only in a part. Another, quite crucial part of the novel's meaning deals with personal, private, intimate realities in the margin of the imperial Great Games. It is this individualistic dimension that the transcultural reading strives to put in the limelight. The study of transcultural mechanisms of constituting the meaning permits to grasp the human potential of transgressing the limitations imposed by the cultural inscription of the individual.

The aim of transcultural literary studies is to examine the strategies used by the writers who aspire not only to transcend their own cultural inscription or to penetrate into alien cultural domains, but also to question the legitimacy of cultural boundaries, distinctions and frontiers. The study of transculture clashes against many traditional views and concepts in the humanities, even against such basic presuppositions as the intra-cultural construction of meaning, its cultural pre-determination. In comparative literature, this new approach leads not only to the necessity of a radical deconstruction of the traditional concept of national literature, but also, what is crucial, to the necessity of elaborating new tools and conceptualizations for the description of the translocal nature of the literary phenomena it examines. Once again, this notion has recently been intensely explored and deconstructed both by the creators of new literature and the literary scholars. Just to give an example, the prominent American comparatist Emily Apter focused on *Manituana* (2007), a historical novel authored by a group of Italian writers who signs as Wu Ming (a pseudonym signifying "no names" in Chinese). As she claims (cf. Apter 2013: 330-

334), their aim was not only to explore the anti-individualistic and dispossessive strategies of the “anonymous” writing, addressing the issues concerning the post-11th September America as well as the entire world, but also to resist the automatic classification as “Italian” literature. Also other English-speaking researchers in comparative literature, such as David Damrosch, could promptly put in the limelight new authors and works transgressing the frontiers of local or national literary systems, treating foreign contents as their own, legitimately inherited tradition.

Quite similarly, Nussimbaum’s writing, a precursory phenomenon in relation to much of the recent writing evoked above, lacks the backup of a consolidated national literature, just as it plays with pseudonym convention and “anonymous” writing that gave rise to the polemic concerning the true identity of the author. It also forms an atypical phenomenon questioning the national definitions. Trying to give a German-speaking literary expression to a Caucasian reality, the novel transmitted to the international audience the idiosyncratic key concepts that were completely new to most readers in the 1930s, and that are arguably quite novel for many foreigners also in the beginning of the 21st century. They were enveloped in a narration expressed in one of the major languages of western Europe, yet coming from outside of any major literary-cultural system that those readers might be able to acknowledge. On the other hand, the text still carries a potential of de-localising and de-nationalising the concept of German literature as well as the present-day area of German Studies. This is why the novel serves as a springboard to recent transgressions of the obvious classifications, such as those provided by the traditional, 19th-century concept of national literature. As it has been recently shown in the volume organised by Carl Niekerk and Cori Crane (2017), inscribing *Ali und Nino* in a pedagogical practice of a contemporary classroom, the novel may even become a productive school reading, fostering the reflection on the contemporary society in which, quite similarly to the Caucasus in the 1910s and 1920s, the tensions created by competing and merging identities are often sorely felt. At the same time, as the editors of the volume declare, “looking at Kurban Said’s *Ali and Nino* as world literature can help us make the case for the relevance of similar texts whose themes embody tensions between the global and the local” (Niekerk, Crane 2017: 8).

At the first glance, *Ali und Nino* presents itself as a beautiful and insightful book about love, making it fall quite unpretentiously under the proposed denomination of “non-hegemonic universalism” that might be applied to human emotions. Nonetheless, another problematic core of the novel is the notion of “civilization” as a nexus of identification, and thus the complicated, often ambiguous dance that people and peoples perform around this crucial concept. The text actually opens upon a geography lesson, in a colonial school that represents in this instance the Russian dominion over the Caucasus. The pupils are invited by the schoolmaster to decide themselves, to define their identity in sharply cut, unambiguous terms that the imperial pedagogy forces upon them. They are thus drawn into the orbit of quite a hegemonic universalism as they are supposed to choose their side in a clash of civilisations. Nonetheless, the Caucasian heroes of the novel obstinately try

to avoid such an unambiguous definition; they try to maintain their in-betweenness as the essence of their “Caucasian-ness”. Tragically, the history ends up forcing them to choose their allegiance; what is more, it tends to repeat itself, proving the solidity and strength of hegemonic claims. At the close of the narration, Ali is shot by the Russians on the very same bridge where his grandfather died in similar circumstances.

The problems related with love, as well as maintaining a durable relationship, form the most striking and emotionally engaging part of the hero’s predicament. But the treatment of love and relationship inscribes both the principal figure, Ali, and other protagonists of the novel in an imposed scheme of “civilised” and “uncivilised” normativities. The reader can see males confronting their sexual rivals and adopting behaviours dictated to them by their cultural background. The “wild”, “uncivilised” aspect of those confrontations is accentuated on many occasions, especially in the culminating scene when Ali attacks his Armenian rival in a wolfish manner, with bare teeth. The hero is also confronted with the problem of losing his honour. The “choice of civilisation” imposed by the Russian schoolmaster becomes even more cumbersome when it comes to the treatment of the female body. The central Caucasian issue, as it appears under the pen of Kurban Said, concerns the extent of male control over the woman and the sanctions to be applied in any case of disruptive behaviour or infidelity. Nussimbaum’s novel exemplifies abundantly those dilemmas and the stakes that concentrate around the female figure. But it is significant that the hero transgresses the strict code of honour, rejecting the impulse of aggression directed toward the female; he rejects the offers of building a private, domestic hegemony. On the other hand, the narration also accentuates the possibilities of finding positive solutions through the female presence, just like in the case of diplomatic relationships that might be easily established, because Nino is able to comply with European dressing codes. What is worth accentuating in this place is that the traditional, apparently “uncivilised” culture serving as the heroes’ background ends up dictating solutions that moderate the violence against women. The relationship with Nino, that appears as constantly menaced by the requirements of Islamic and Caucasian definition of male honour, is preserved till the end of narration and the tragic death of Ali.

If my individual perception counts for anything, I must confess that even before reading Tom Reiss’ *The Orientalist*, I had no doubt that *Ali und Nino* was written by a European, not a Caucasian hand. At the time of my first reading of the novel, I assumed that the necessity of the choice of civilisation was imposed; it did not seem plausible to me that it could emanate for the Caucasian subject himself or herself. At the same time, the European authorship of the texts appeared to me as patent, because the lovers knew too much about their own identity, took it as something abstract, as if they know only too well they are “the Orientals”. Nino sees the things too clearly, opposing herself to the Persian harem lifestyle, just at the moment when her fragile condition of a refugee makes such an opposition extremely untimely and improbable. The experience of shame is imposed by a European instance at yet another moment, when Nino’s horrified glance spots Ali among other Shiites during the festivities. Or rather, she is forced to share the horrified glance

of a European ambassador, observing the flagellant procession. On the other hand, the narration is by no means untrue. Typically for any Orientalizing fiction, the entanglement of truth and falsification is not easy to solve. As I have already suggested, the element that strikes me as universally true – contributing to the non-hegemonic universalism coming from the peripheries – consists in the pertinent and persuasive way of presenting the choice, the “either ... or” essentially alien to the Caucasian subject, as a form of oppression exerted, in this instance, by a Russian schoolmaster. The very same Russian schoolmaster that might have formed also the schoolchildren in my native Poland, causing the alienation of the imperial subject that was presented, just to give an example, in Stefan Żeromski’s novel *Szyfowe prace* (*The Labors of Sisyphus*) published in 1898.

In fact, *Ali und Nino* it is the most compelling as a tentative of adopting the viewpoint of the subjects of imperial oppression by an outsider. It is an imitation of a voice, of course, but still the result keeps the reader under its spell. The text acquires a universal meaning, evoking for the reader analogous situations, analogous histories, such as my own Polish case. The universalism that emerges has nonetheless a novel quality, clearly distinct from the supposed universalisms of colonial missions and imperial ideologies. The text may be treated as an example of the search for non-hegemonic universalism, illustrative of a paradigm of subaltern history, even if it participates, at the same time, of not quite authentic vein of Orientalising writing, exemplified by the figure of Lev Nussimbaum and his romantic views on Orient and Islam, so suggestively depicted by Tom Reiss. Arguably, it acquires a peculiar value as an exercise in transcultural compassion and solidarity.

To go even further, the interpretation of *Ali und Nino* in the perspective of global literary studies requires putting this “Orientalist” identity of the author in the context of other ultra-minor (i.e. lacking a proper backdrop of national literary tradition) voices of his time. It is also important to explore, in a comparative way, as many of those peripheral texts as possible, establishing as many connections as possible between them; in this way, the scholar can capture a larger picture of non-hegemonic universalism. Such a contextualisation might be given, just to bring another example, by *Auá. Novela negra* (*Auá. A Black Story*), a Portuguese colonial novel published in Lisbon in 1934, quite close to the date of publication of *Ali und Nino*, yet on the opposite end of Europe. Its author, Fausto Duarte, that hardly ever appears as a significant name on the pages of any literary history, is still classed among the unjustly forgotten. Nonetheless, he had some fleeting moments of recognition in his lifetime. At the moment of its publication, the novel coincided with the great colonial exposition organized in Porto and won the first prize in the competition dedicated to colonial literature. In the preface accompanying a posterior edition, a well-known Portuguese novelist of the time, Aquilino Ribeiro, compared the author to Nuno Tristão, the captain who first explored the western coast of Africa in the 15th century (cf. Ribeiro 1945: 7-12). Nonetheless, later on the book attracted the accusation of pornography and offence against public morality; such a charge, for sure, was not totally unjustified due to daring eroticism transmitted by the text, contrasting quite sharply with

the typical prudery of the Portuguese society of the time. Nonetheless, it is yet another non-hegemonic book about love.

The idea of comparative reading of these two novels may still appear as hardly justified. Both of them were published in European metropolises (Vienna and Lisbon) in the 1930s by rather obscure authors. At the first glance, this is where their resemblance ends. Certainly, both of them are, in their own ways, beautiful and insightful love stories. Yet another common denominator between Ali and his African counterpart is the fact of his belonging to the Islamicised Fula (Peul) tribe. The “Orientalist” vein of Fausto Duarte presents him with a considerable extent of admiration and sympathy as a descendant of the noble Moors celebrated in the medieval history of the Iberian Peninsula. The complex ethnic, cultural and religious landscape of the former Portuguese Guinea (today’s Guinea-Bissau) may also be compared to the diversity of the Caucasus. Last but not least, Duarte’s novel acquires importance as the foundational text of the regional literature, just as *Ali und Nino* is often regarded as the “paradigmatic” Caucasian book. But even more importantly, the encounter of these two texts may throw a new light, as I presume, on the question of vital choices imposed upon people standing on a cultural and ideological frontier. They are invited to opt for a loyalty to a construct that is essentially alien to them, and that is insistently proposed to them as a –or the– “civilisation”.

As I have confessed above, I felt particularly compelled by *Ali und Nino* as a tentative of adopting the viewpoint of the subjects of an imperial aggression and oppression by an outsider. Also the novel of Fausto Duarte produces a similar charm of apparent authenticity, adopting the native hero’s point of view not only as a narrative strategy, but also as the main ideological optics. The narration is focused on the personal dilemmas of a young African man working as a colonial servant (*grumete*) of the Portuguese. Nonetheless, he faces his duties not as a definitive subservience, but rather as a formative experience that should lead him to an intimate knowledge of the White man’s usages and ways of thinking. Just as in *Ali und Nino*, the problems related with love, or rather with maintaining a durable relationship, form the most striking part of the hero’s predicament. In both novels, the reader can see males confronting their sexual rivals and adopting behaviours dictated to them by their cultural background. The “wild”, “uncivilised” aspect of these confrontations is equally striking in both novels. Ali attacks his Armenian rival in a wolfish manner, with bare teeth; the African hero wins the right to his beloved Auá in a wrestling match against another young man interested in her charms. But he is vanquished in a treacherous way, when Auá is raped by a wandering marabout (Muslim holy man or hermit) to whom, in good faith, he offered his hospitality. The religious man stands beyond the range of the hero’s physical action. Confronted with the palpable proof of a lost honour – Auá gives birth to a child that calls attention by its relatively clear complexion – the African hero asks himself what a Portuguese man would do in his place. And the absence of reliable answer is perhaps the moment in which he internally rejects the “civilized” ideological offer that had been presented to him. The “choice of civilisation” becomes

operative in reference to a female body, defining the extent of male control over it and the sanctions to be applied in any case of disruption.

Fausto Duarte's and Kurban Said's novels exemplify the dilemmas and the stakes that concentrate around the female figure. In a way, it explains why such seemingly insignificant, obscure novels as *Auá* and *Ali und Nino* stood so well the test of the time: they elucidate, through captivating narration, not only the universal mechanisms of symbolic power and oppression, but also the terms of the choices that each of us faces at a personal, apparently private and intimate level. What is worth accentuating in this place is that the traditional, apparently "uncivilised" cultures serving as the heroes' background end up dictating them solutions that moderate the violence against women. Nino does not fall victim of the Islamic and Caucasian paradigms of male honour. The West African hero, finding no paradigm of solving his predicament among his Portuguese mentors, opts for a genuinely African compromise – although his soul is literally torn apart, as Duarte depicts it, he hands out, so to speak, the female body to his former rival, the one against whom he had previously won it in a wrestling match. Be that as it may, Auá gets the chance of starting a new life. Considering their attitudes toward women at the hour of crisis, neither of the male heroes, depicted by the "Orientalist" novelists with non-hegemonic sensitivity, may be qualified as a Barbarian.

The transcultural writing of Kurban Said, just as his Portuguese fellow writer, stands against the imposed obligation of choosing a –or the– "civilisation". The Caucasian couple, divided by the difference of their credos, chose the syncretism and synergistic development advocated by their Armenian middleman. Yet again, the Orientalizing fiction operates by a stereotype: the Armenian middleman must betray them; having trusted him was Ali's mistake. The colonial principle *divide et impera* is reintroduced surreptitiously, as Ali is shown at the highest of his wolfish "Oriental" characteristics as he bites through his rival's aorta with bare teeth before stabbing him with a dagger. Quite similarly, the African men fighting wrestling matches to decide who will marry the bride are apparently shown under an uncompromising light. Nonetheless, in both cases the transcultural dimension of writing serves the purpose of bringing the alien humanity into the horizon of understanding of the reader.

The colonial lore might present the incessant Caucasian warfare – just as the West African conflicts – as endemic. Nonetheless, the non-hegemonic universalist writing presents both regions as spaces of entangled identities that create opportunities for syncretism and synergistic development, especially as it is located at the level of individual destinies and private choices, that often stand apart from the collective, majoritarian options.

Reading *Ali und Nino* in the context of global literary studies is supposed to throw a new light on the vital options structuring personal lives, presented to the heroes as the choice of a –or the– "civilisation". In regions situated as far apart as West Africa and the Caucasus, the suggested terms of such a choice hide a subtle structure of oppression. The heroes, on their side, refuse to chose, recognizing the terms that were proposed to them

as essentially false and manipulative. Although utterly vanquished, they conserve till the end the value of fidelity to themselves. The fact that the analysed text cannot be attributed to a culturally representative author – it is written by a dilettante “Orientalist” – creates an interesting intricacy, as the novel is not infrequently seen as foundational text of the regional literature.

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ევა ა. ლუკაზნიკი
(პოლონეთი)

**ტრანსკულტურული ტექსტი და არაჰეგემონური უნივერსალიზმი.
„ალი და ნინო“ წაკითხვა გლობალური ლიტერატურული კვლევების
კონტექსტში**

რეზიუმე

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ტრანსკულტურული ნაწერი, „ალი და ნინო“, ექსოტოპია, ტრანსკულტურა, იდენტობა.

რომანი „ალი და ნინო“ მოგვითხრობს მუსულმანი და ქრისტიანი ახალგაზრდების სიყვარულის ისტორიას, რომელიც ვითარდება ქალაქ ბაქოში, XX საუკუნის ათიან წლებში. სტატიის მიზანია განხილულია როგორც ტრანსკულტურული ტექსტი. რომანის შინაარსის მოკლე წარდგენის შემდეგ, ავტორი იხსენებს ტომ რეისის მიერ გამოქვეყნებულ ლევ ნასინბაუმის მოკლე ბიოგრაფიას და ასკვნის, რომ ყურბან საიდი ფსევდონიმია, რომელიც მალავს უცხოელის ორაზროვან ფიგურას; ის ევროპელ აუდიტორიას წარუდგენს კავკასიურ სინამდვილეს. იგი ითვლება თანამედროვე ტრანსკულტურული მწერლობის წინამორბედად, რომლის წარმომადგენლები არიან ჯამიანგ ნორბუ და ხოსე ედუარდო აგიალუსი; მათი სტრატეგია უცხო კულტურული ტრადიციისა თუ ლიტერატურის ისტორიის განსხვავებული მიმართულების მითვისებაა. ისინი ქმნიან ჰიბრიდულ კონფიგურაციებს, რომლებიც ავსებენ თეთრ ლაქებს არსებულ ნაციონალურ ლიტერატურულ სისტემებში. მათ მსგავსად, ყურბან საიდი ქმნის სინკრეტულ კავკასიურ რომანს, რომელიც მანამდე არ არსებობდა და რომელმაც გააერთიანა კულტურის სხვადასხვა სფერო, ასევე, თხრობის ერთიან ქურაში გადადნობილი სხვადასხვა ეროვნული და რელიგიური იდენტობა. ასეთი მოვლენის შესასწავლად საჭიროა ახალი კონცეფციები: ეს სასარგებლო ცნებები მოიცავენ ისეთ გაგებებს, როგორცაა „კულტურის დაცემა“, „ექზოტოპია“. „ტრანსკულტურა“, „პლურივერსალიზმი“ და ა. შ. რომლებიც შემოგვთავაზებს ვოლფგანგ ველშმა, მიხეილ ბახტინმა, მიხეილ ეპშტეინმა, ადრიანო დაგინომ, ვალტერ მინოლიომ. სტატიის ავტორი, ასევე, ხსნის, თუ რატომ აირჩია ცნება „არაჰეგემონური უნივერსალიზმი“.

ლიტერატურათმცოდნეობის ახალი დინებები, რომლებიც ახდენენ ტრანსკულტურული წარმოდგენებით ექსპერიმენტირებას, პრობლემებს უქმნიან ტექსტი წაკითხვისა და კრიტიკის ტრადიციულ სკოლებს, მათ შორის პოსტკოლონიურ სკოლასაც. „ალი და ნინო“, იმპერიის იდეოლოგიის მსოფლმხედველობის თვალსაზრისით, უპირატესობას ანიჭებს ინდივიდუალურ, კერძო ინტიმურ განზომილებას; სწორედ ეს ამართლებს ტერმინ „არაჰეგემონურის“ გამოყენებას. ტრანსკულტურული ლიტერატურათმცოდნეობითი კვლევების მიზანია შეისწავლოს იმ ავტორთა სტრატეგია, რომლებიც მიისწრაფვიან არა მარტო გადააჭარბონ საკუთარ კულტურას ან შეაღწიონ

უცხო კულტურულ სფეროებში, არამედ, ეჭვის ქვეშ დააყენონ კულტურული განსხვავებულობისა და საზღვრების არსებობის კანონიერება.

ნასინბაუმის თხზულებაში არ არის კონსოლიდირებული ნაციონალური ლიტერატურის სარეზერვო ასლები, ისევე, როგორც ის თამაშობს ფსევდონიმით და „ანონიმურ“ ტექსტზე შეთანხმებით რამაც საფუძველი დაუდო პოლემიკას ავტორის ნამდვილ იდენტობასთან დაკავშირებით. ეს ასევე, აყალიბებს ტიპურ ფენომენს, რომელიც კითხვის ნიშნის ქვეშ აყენებს გერმანულენოვანი ლიტერატურის ეროვნულ განმარტებებს.

რომანის მთავარი გმირები, ალი და ნინო ეჯახებიან იმპერიულ დისკურსს, რომელსაც გიმნაზიის რუსი პედაგოგი ასხამს ხორცს. ამგვარად, ისინი ჩათრეულნი ხდებიან ჰეგემონური უნივერსალიზმის ორბიტაში, რადგანაც ცივილიზაციათა დაჯახებისას საკუთარი მხარე უნდა აირჩიონ. მიუხედავად ამისა, ისინი გაურბიან ამგვარ ცალსახა განსაზღვრებას; ცდილობენ, შეინარჩუნონ შუალედურობა, როგორც საკუთარი „კავკასიური წარმოშობის“ არსი. სიყვარული და სასიყვარულო ურთიერთობები საკუთარ თავში მოიცავენ, როგორც მთავარ ფიგურას, ალის. ასევე, სხვა მთავარ გმირებს, „ცივილიზებულ“ და „არაცივილიზებული“ ნორმატივების თავსმოხვეული სქემით, რომლებიც კონცენტრირდებიან ქალის ფიგურისა და მამაკაცის მიერ ქალის სხეულის კონტროლის გარშემო. მიუხედავად ამისა, ალი არღვევს ღირსების მკაცრ კოდექსს, თავს აღწევს ქალის წინააღმდეგ მიმართულ აგრესიის იმპულსს; უარყოფს წინადადებებს პირადი, შიდა ჰეგემონიის აგების შესახებ. კიდევ ერთი თავსმოხვეული განზომილებაა ნინოს მიერ სირცხვილის განცდა, როდესაც იგი ალის სხვა შიიტებს შორის შეამჩნევს, დღესასწაულის დროს; ან, უფრო სწორად, ის იძულებულია გაიზიაროს ევროპელი ელჩის შემინებული მზერა, მძვინვარე პროცესიის ცქერისას.

სტატიის ავტორის აზრით, „ალის და ნინოს“ სრულად შესაფასებლად, აუცილებელია მისი შედარება მაქსიმალურად დიდი ოდენობის პერიფერიულ ტექსტებთან, მხოლოდ ასე შეიძლება არაჰეგემონური უნივერსალიზმის უფრო ვრცელი სურათის შექმნა. ასეთი კონტექსტუალიზება შესაძლოა მოცემული იყოს პოლონელი მწერლის, სტეფან ჟერომსკის 1889 წელს გამოქვეყნებულ რომანთან *Syzyfowe* და პორტუგალიელი ფაუსტო დუარტეს 1934 წელს გამოქვეყნებულ ანტიკოლონიურ რომანთან *Aya. Novela negra*. ამ უკანასკნელ ტექსტში მკითხველს შეუძლია იხილოს სექსუალურ მეტოქეებთან დაპირისპირებული მამაკაცები, რომლებიც იზიარებენ კულტურული წარსულის მიერ ნაკარნახევ ქცევებს. „ცივილიზაციის არჩევანი“ მოქმედა ქალის სხეულთან მიმართებაში, განსაზღვრავს მასზე მამაკაცის კონტროლის ხარისხს და იმ სანქციებს, რომლებიც ლალატის შემთხვევაში იქნება გამოყენებული. გარდა ამისა, რომანები ათვალსაჩინოებენ არაჰეგემონური უნივერსალური მწერლობის ისეთ შემადგენლებს, როგორებიცაა ტრანსკულტურული თანაგრძნობა და სოლიდარობა, უარის თქმა ტყუილსა და მანიპულირებაზე. მწერლობის ტრანსკულტურული განზომილება ემსახურება კაცობრიობის უცხო ნაწილის მოზიდვას მკითხველის გაგების ჰორიზონტისკენ.