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**GEORGIAN POLYPHONY, MUSICAL IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM**

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**Summary**

*Georgia is a multi-ethnic country and one of its obligations as of a country with Western orientation is not only to respect the musical culture of ethnic minorities, but also to assist them in preservation and development of their musical traditions.*

*At the same time, Georgia is a contemporary national state with centuries-old “unique” and “self-originated” (Ilia Chavchavadze) musical culture whose obligation is to preserve and develop Georgian musical traditions.*

*There is no contradiction between these two theses.*

*An attempt to elucidate: 1) whether Georgian polyphony is the expression of national identity, as many scholars believe; or is such only for its part, as opponents think; and 2) what kind of interrelation there is between Georgian community’s care of traditional polyphony and nationalism, with the consideration of the numerous definitions of the latter – is given in the paper.*

*The paper also answers the questions what kind of relation is between national and musical identities and how many musical identities human can have in multicultural melosphere. Stressed is the difference in the understanding of phenomena of nationalism in totalitarian and democratic political systems.*

*The article analyses the situation in Georgia and since it is impossible to give simple answers to these questions, she offers her viewpoints on the afore-mentioned issues for discussion to the audience.*

**Key words:** UNESCO, Georgian, musical, culture, polyphony, nationalism, national, identity, multicultural, ethnic minority

In 2001 UNESCO proclaimed Georgian polyphonic singing a Masterpiece of the oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. In 2009 journal “Music and politics” published Nino Tsitsishvili’s<sup>1</sup> article “National ideologies in the Era of Global Fusions: Georgian Polyphonic Song as a UNESCO-Sanctioned masterpiece of Intangible Heritage”. [1] In the article the author critically discusses the concept reflected in the conventions [2] of this organization, which lies in the foundation of its activity in the sphere of preservation intangible cultural heritage. From this standpoint Tsitsishvili is not alone to criticize UNESCO.

Despite (and maybe for this) being a UNESCO expert in 2009-2013, I also thought about its preservation concept, because noticeable in it is “Idealistic vision of the world, consisting of diverse cultures, which supposedly live in harmony and mutual respect, via defending global ethical and human rights”. [3] At the same time I consider that the challenges, due to which “Mondiacult” [4] in Mexico (1982) dropped a boundary between tangible and intangible cultural heritage and offered new vision of culture to the world was correct and timely.

In the 1980s the world was involved in rapid processes of cultural integration and globalization. According to new concept, these and other conditions, made spiritual culture completely unprotected, the traditions and moral values transmitted orally from generation to generation determine identity of human/theme and maintain world's cultural diversity. To protect the latter, the above mentioned Conference set as an objective to the world looking for new forms of collaboration, in response to this the afore-mentioned UNESCO conventions were elaborated.

Tsitsishvili's article aimed to discuss Georgian polyphony in connection with UNESCO concept and in the discourse of *rights to culture*. The author wanted to show the contradistinction between multiculturalism and multiethnicity of Georgian population and the proclamation of Georgian polyphony – the only form of Georgian nation's artistic expression.

In the article Tsitsishvili asserts, that the ideas supported by UNESCO coincide with traditionalistic and mono-ethnic nationalistic tendency of Georgian ethnomusicological elite and cultural policy makers, and that long-lasting nationalistic cultural policy, recognizing superiority of Georgian traditional polyphony, found an ideological niche thanks to this declaration. [1:6]

Certainly my paper neither aims to advocate UNESCO nor to discuss Tsitsishvili's article. The article which I accidentally came across on internet simply coincides with my collaboration with UNESCO, working on the issues of identity, familiarization with up-to-date literature and correspondingly with new scientific paradigms in recent years and what is no less important, relations with foreign students as part of the educational program of the Centre of Polyphony.

This was an the impulse for me to offer paper, in which I would try to elucidate whether Georgian polyphony is the expression of the Georgians' national identity, as many scholars believe, including me, or it is such only for certain part of them, as the opponents think. I will also try to answer the question what is the difference between Georgian society's care of traditional polyphony and its nationalistic aspirations, and what provides grounds for the so-called "outsider" ethnomusicologists to put equality sign between these? But for this I should try to answer the questions such as: Does national identity overlap musical identity? How many identities should have one in the multicultural melosphere (Zemtsovsky)? What does nationalism mean and how does nationalism work in totalitarian and democratic political systems?

In the theory of nation there are three basic schools: Primordialism, ancient paradigm, according to which nation is a natural social group with common shared culture and history. [5:1] Modernism, which regards nation as the result of the modernization and industrialization of nation's social development [5:9] and ethnosymbolism, originated in the 1980s as the criticism of modernism. [5:89]The latter attributes crucial importance to symbols, myths, traditional values and the nation's strive towards creation of state, in the formation of nation and nationality. It considers modernism as Europe centric approach.

I, myself, share the idea of ethno-symbolism, this is why my attitude to nation, nationality and identity, differs from modernists' viewpoint, however none of these theories denies that "nationalism, more precisely, the idea of nation, is an artifact and its origin is connected with particular social-political and cultural occurrences in the history of humanity". [6:40]

Smith sees the support of nationality in the sense of solidarity National identity is the most fundamental parameter of human identity, based on this or that national culture (language, social practice, various, including domestic and religious tradition, etc) and person's solidarity with its bearers. [7:17]

The sense of human national identity is formed by culture. Alongside the development of music anthropology/ethnomusicology was formed the consideration that “music is a valuable instrument for the cultural and social analysis”. [8: 13] From here there is only one step to the recognition that there is close relation between music and ideology [9: 184-190] and that “music is the chief resource for the realization of personal and collective identity”. [10] But it should be mentioned that when speaking about national identity, its determinant is verbal language. Today music is also considered as the system of signs and lingual structure, this is why musical identification should be regarded as one of the types of lingual-cultural identification.

For the formation of national identity genetic code and historical memory providing continuity is less important than man’s vital socio-cultural environment. [11: 194-195] This is why formation of national/ethnic identity went on differently in different epochs. Georgian scholars (Kekelidze, Ingoroqva, Amiranashvili, Beridze, Javakhishvili and others) ascertained that in Middle Ages the maturation process of the idea of creating united state was preceded by the national epoch of Georgian literature, formation of Georgian architectural style and of Georgian polyphonic chant from Greek single-part hymns. This idea was shared not only by Georgian secular and ecclesiastical figures, elite and intellectuals, but by the country’s entire population, who sacrificed their lives to defend the country. They constituted the “imagined community” [12:6], the members of which “never knew or met the other members, nor heard about them, but despite this lived together with them in their minds” and the motivation of their activities could only be the sense of national identity.

Thus, in early Middle Ages already existed common Georgian national identity, with Georgian polyphony as one of its determinants – distinguishing national musical culture from other ( not only of other faith, but coreligionistic as well) cultures.

Generally, natural state for culture is when it is directed towards safeguarding specifically inimitable, unique on the one hand and enrichment of the “native” via the relations with and sharing “foreign” culture. The function of protecting-preservation provides necessary succession, continuity of tradition, but the function of mastering-enriching provides its constant renewal. Proceeding from the social and political situation, in which culture exists, it selects corresponding strategy or tactics.

Under the thread of enemies’ raids or under colonial conditions or even in independent country with civil or ethnic conflicts and with poor demographic prognosis, like Georgia today, traditional culture and correspondingly the community bearer of this tradition naturally feels unprotected. Under these conditions the so-called “symbolic culture” or the one considered as “discernment signs” (Georgian language, Georgian polyphony, etc.) (G. Orjonikidze) necessarily becomes the identity basis for the whole ethnos as “Imagined Community” and the object of particular protection.

Can separate cases of spontaneous-fragmentary care be regarded as mono-ethnic nationalistic state policy in the country without the concept of cultural and educational, cultural and economical balance? The fact, that the conferences on polyphony initiated in the 1980s Georgia are continued as symposia from 2002, does not mean that before UNESCO declaration the Georgians did not estimate their tradition or were not aware of Nadel’s, Stravinsky’s, Lomax’s and others expressions about it. Thus, before UNESCO proclamation Georgian polyphony already had its niche, both aesthetic and ideological.

The problem is that after the disintegration of the Soviet Union due to its geopolitical location in Georgia the situation, was as G. Tevzadze mentions when speaking about religious and national identity of today’s Georgians, the authorities have not yet elaborated the ideology of national identity and the state has weak tools to turn national ideology into identity.[6: 58-59] Correspondingly it

cannot implement national policy, or cannot do anything to achieve the aims of national state model recognized in contemporary world – to form a nation and inculcate common national self-consciousness in all citizens of the country, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or culture. From numerous definitions of nationalism (factually there are as many definitions as there are scholars), [13: 45-57] with the consideration of its dualistic nature, liberal state nationalism is not a negative occurrence and under democratic conditions it substantially differs from that of totalitarian state, e.g. nationalism of the Soviet Union. Communist ideology identified nationalism with ethnocentrism, chauvinism and separatism [14] and referred to as “reactionary bourgeois ideology”. The policy criticized by communists was counted for the results, to be attributed to “bourgeois scarecrow”.

One of the challenges for Georgia, as a country of Western orientation is to create liberal state national policy, allowing to fulfill its obligations: on the one hand to respect cultural, including musical traditions, of its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population, promote their safeguarding and development and on the other hand to protect centuries-old “unique” and “self-originated” (Ilia) musical tradition of the titular nation and provide its development.

Whether the opponents of this ideology, as they call it “false consciousness”, like national ideology or not, the Georgians had national identity in Middle Ages, 19<sup>th</sup> century, even in Soviet epoch, as they say in the “underground” and still do today. However, as it is known, identity is not a single-valued notion. [7: 3-8; 6: 50] Individual identity is the sum of the man’s social “roles” and cultural categories. National and musical identities do not coincide –together with musical identity national identity is determined by other factors (language, literature, history, etc) as well, but musical identity is nourished not only by national, but also by different type of music present in modern Georgian melosphere. Thus, Georgian polyphony is not the only, but one of the most important expressions of national identity. Also for the ethnically Georgian members of “Imagined Community”, who play or listen to *duduk* of Oriental origin, but also for those, who listen or play modern pop and rock music, American jazz or classical music....

In a word, in contemporary multicultural melosphere the indicator of individual’s musical identity is sharing of other cultural traditions, together with national ones, which makes him a full-fledged member of society.

And finally, at various times Georgian polyphony was and is one of the most important sources of the Georgians’ ethnic-national identity. Proclamation of Georgian polyphony as the masterpiece of Intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO, does not at all mean that this organization recognized it as the only symbol of the Georgians’ cultural identity. Besides, as one of the most substantial and centuries-old historical categories of musical thinking, polyphony really holds distinguished place in the symbolic culture of Georgian nation. Despite this, in polygenic melosphere of modern day Georgia, it represents only one layer of the multilayer musical identity of Georgian community.

According to the contemporary viewpoint accepted in ethnomusicology, important for research are both “insider’s” and “outsider’s” viewpoints [15:153] but sometimes the socio-cultural state of particular culture is much better seen from the inside, than outside. I think, in the case of Georgia this is exactly the case. This is why we should trust the Georgian scholars distinguished in liberal thinking (G.Tevzadze, G.Nodia et Al) that Georgia is in the transitional period from post-communist to democratic system and unfortunately it has no established national ideology and cultural policy yet. Thus, the fragmentary support which traditional cultural heritage chaotically receives from the state cannot be considered as the expression of its support to nationalism.

Future will show whether state nationalism, which is to become the ideology of multicultural Georgia, as the country of Western orientation, will be able to keep balance between safeguarding the traditions of national minorities and ethnic Georgians.

I am afraid the readers will regard my paper as extremely politicized, but I can justify this saying that identity, even musical, is closely connected with ideology and ideology is the tool for the state to govern the community.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Georgian ethnomusicologist, Ph.D., Adjunct Research Fellow at the School of Music/Conservatorium at Monash University, Melbourne

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