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Multiculturalism and National Identity in the 20th Century Georgian Musical Space

Marina Kavtaradze, PHD, Professor

Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire (TSC)
8/10, Griboedov str., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Summary:

Georgian culture has developed in close connection with foreign cultures. Consequently, Georgian art created its individual image at the crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures. Georgia also had intensive cultural contacts in the 20th century, a great part of which was spent in the Soviet "brotherly" family; what happened when it was found in a closed space? When under totalitarian conditions, communication was allowed only with the brotherly republics? What conditioned its image? In this context it is interesting how the Eurasian perspective of multicultural Georgia was changing and how the problems of compatibility of multicultural and transcultural oneness was managed.

Keywords: *Multiculturalism, National Identity, Georgian Music, Music of Tbilisi
Josef Bardanashvili*

Introduction

Juxtaposition and coexistence of different cultures is an urgent theme nowadays. In many West-European countries problems of multiculturalism are still topical. Correspondingly discussion about the issues related to this theme has been shifted into the sphere of art.

Since olden times Georgian art developed in intensive contact with foreign cultures. In this context it is interesting how Georgia's multicultural Eurasian angle changed over the time and what the problem of compatibility was between the unity of multiculturalism and transculturalism in it. Georgia had intensive cultural contacts in the 20th century as well.... but large part of the epoch Georgia was part of Imperial Russia and later a member of the Soviet "brotherly" family; what happened when Georgia found itself in the closed Soviet space? What determined its image? What was the self-identification of a non-Georgian artist in traditional multicultural society?

The paper sets the problem and attempts to partially answer important questions.

Multicultural space of Tbilisi

The problem of multiculturalism is also topical in Georgia and not only in the 20th century, most precisely, in Tbilisi, which is still referred to as the cultural capital of the Caucasus. In the 19th century Tbilisi was a harbor for many nationalities and ethnic groups, who influenced certain stages of the city's cultural development and formation of its cultural image.

Tbilisi culture is distinguished in its "polyphonic" character, which means not a mere co-existence of cultures and subcultures, but their diffusion and dialogue of course, on the one hand Tbilisi culture is part of Georgian culture, but on the other hand it is a multicultural phenomenon, where many different cultures merge [1].

From the viewpoint of the stylistic specificity and musical structure urban folk music and poetry are concentrated around two poles embracing two basic trends – eastern and western. Accordingly the specimens of urban musical art are differentiated into two groups with polar stylistic-artistic elements. The eastern branch is deeply rooted in Georgia's historical part and by its nature is related to the music of the peoples of eastern countries. The western one has a comparatively short history; Georgian national culture took shape on the basis of the lowland aristocratic, ritual and spiritual ecclesiastic culture in the 1860s-1870s. In this context, from the viewpoint of *the Tergdaleulis* (the Georgians educated at Russian universities), to some extent, the 19th century is a century of the opposition between “the Tiflis (Tbilisi)” culture i.e. the culture of “the commonality” and the Georgian or the “elevated”, aristocratic cultures; it also was a century of dualism.

From this standpoint, at the beginning of the 20th century there were at least four cultures in Tbilisi: “Imperial” Russian, European (in the form of both “western” in general and European subcultures), “old Tiflis” and Georgian culture. Therefore it is interesting how the function of Tbilisi and the attitude to it was changing in the course of time. “The old Tiflis culture” per se is what Ioseb Grishashvili thoroughly described in his book “The Old Tbilisi Literary Bohemia” [2] and was an “archaic” and “exotic” phenomenon as early as the 1920s. It should be noted that “the Tiflis Culture”, on its part, is divided into several subcultures according to their religious or ethnic traits. These are: Armenian, Islamic, Judaic-Hebrew, Assyrian, Yezid and others. Over the centuries, in Tbilisi peoples of various nationalities and confessions (Armenians, Azerbaijanians, Germans, Jews, Russians and so on) lived side by side with the Georgians, creating multicultural atmosphere, where, historically the problem of being “mine” and “somebody else's” never became acute [3].

Musical life of the 19th century is distinguished in variety. Sevastianov, a friend of Pushkin's, provided the musical panorama of those times, when describing the dinner given in his honour in Ortachala he writes: “Here there was *zurma*, dances, Lezginka dance, doleful Persian songs, and *Alaverdi* and *Yakhshiol*, and Byron on the stage, the European-western mixed with the Oriental-Asiatic” [4]. Against this motley background European music gradually started gaining power. The first tour of an Operatic company to Tbilisi was followed by founding a repertoire theatre, in everyday life mandolin, *balalaika*, accordion and especially guitar came into popular use, which resulted in the revival of concert life.

Over decades, juxtaposition of various culture representatives contributed to the formation of Tbilisi's multicultural society. On this very concept bases Avksenti Tsagareli's comedy “Khanuma” (1882), and created during the brief period of independence Viktor Dolidze's first comic opera “Keto and Kote” (1919), the characters of which come from Tbilisi multicultural space, where naturally coexist Armenian *kintos* and match-makers, prince Levan – reared in old “Tiflis” traditions, Kote and Keto – the new generation Georgians familiarized with European culture.

Urban song is presented with all its diversity, Western-Eastern stylistic layers, with their entire context creating the objective environment of their existence as a background of the whole opera. Intonation world of multicultural urban folklore is the basis, which shows the stylistic peculiarities of the content and intonation of Viktor Dolidze's oeuvre. The opera music tells not only the stories, which took place in the formation process of new relations, new social structure in the 19th century Tbilisi, but also provides a live picture of the people of different identities, with their weaknesses and dignities; this world is an inseparable part of the multicultural Caucasus, which on the whole, creates a tolerant, multicultural city, where everyone has equal rights, regardless of ethnic origin, social status and religious affiliation.

Jewish Music with Georgian Accent

Multiculturalism highlighted culture as identity. The concept of identity was elaborated by Erik Erikson after the WW II as the theory on the development of a human being, mostly used in individual psychology and lesser in relation to classical national concepts. But it was actualized from the 1990s under the conditions of increased interest to the identity problem. Despite this, the formation and transformation processes of collective and individual identity are lesser studied. In this regard interesting is the creative figure of a Georgian-Jewish composer Josef Bardanashvili.

“I cannot part with Georgian culture” - these words belong to Josef Bardanashvili the most prominent composer of the 1970s generation, who has successfully worked in Israel since 1995, but his creative work equally belongs to both the Israeli and Georgian music cultures. As he notes with his usual humor - he creates “Jewish music with Georgian accent”. He belongs to the ethnicity, which has lived in Georgia for 26 centuries and unlike many civilized countries never suffered persecution and harassment. [5]

From the standpoint of national identity Bardanashvili’s style is binational: he is the firstling of two cultures – Georgian and Jewish. In the first period of creative activity he introduced the features of Jewish national culture on the ground of Georgian cultural traditions, but in Israeli multi-cultural environment, he naturally introduced his own style enriched with Georgian music features, characterized by the synthesis of different national traditions, European, Asian and other modern values.

European and Asian elements are present in the mentality and culture of modern-day Israel proceeding from the historical and geographical reasons. Besides, what has become typical of modern music, in terms of stylistic pluralism, existed in Israel much earlier. Eclecticism was included in the very idea of Israeli State, which was to become the shelter for the Jewish world, for the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Diasporas. For this modern Israel boasts the multiculturalism, which does not exist anywhere else in the world.

Under such quality of multiculturalism, the relevance of national music becomes questionable, at one glance. Bardanashvili’s words refer to this: “Interesting for art is personality, a person is an image, and image bears national features. Objectively there is no Jewish music; there is the potential sustained by some intonations, motifs, phrases, then – the potential sustained by the synthesis of different musical cultures, to which the Jews added individual and national flavor; joy in minor and melancholy in major – nobody else has this except us and this is probably our nature”. “I feel close to Georgian by spirituality, polyphony, artistry, elevated spirit of prayer; to Jewish by its most characteristic feature - flexibility, polysemy, which is expressed by the musical symbols constructed on double coding principle”¹, “it’s a sign of the coexistence of different cultures“ (Symphony #2 “Way to”).

In this respect, it is impossible not to remember Shostakovich’s words about Jewish music: “It may seem cheerful when it is actually tragic. Jewish music is almost always laughter through tears. The Jews suffered so much that they learned to hide their despair. This property is close to my understanding of music: there should always be two layers in it...”

As a sign of national self-identification Israeli composers use Tanach texts, programs and a number of sacred music genres; Synagogue and Georgian chants are also used as sign-symbols in Bardanashvili’s works: opera “Journey to the End of the Millennium”; “Children of God”; Symphony #3 on the level of genre semantics; “Bameh Madlikin” (“What makes us sanctified”); “Prayers” and many others.

¹ Quotes from I. Bardanashvili’s private conversations and correspondence

Josef Bardanshvili is one of the composers, in whose works postmodern intertextuality and the opposition "own – somebody else's" has been shifted not only to the interstyle level, but also to the level of relations between the culture styles characteristic of the 21st century.

Although for him Israel opened the way to the world recognition, Georgia remains the composer's second homeland, which always fills him with the sense of nostalgia. I do not want to be considered as the composer who has gone, hopefully, I will remain in Georgian music" – these words belong to the composer, who continues the 26-century-long tradition of Georgian-Jewish cultural relations.

“From Happy Socialist Future” to “Hard Soviet Past”

In the 20th century Georgia was a member of “fraternal Soviet family” during 70 years (1921-1991).

The Soviet Union laid foundation to the monocultural multinational state. Political and ideological homogeneity, which implied strict control of culture, was combined with the support of national institutions, environmental management authorities, national languages, writing and symbols (flag, coat of arms, anthem, etc) which some people living there did not even have. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, splitting into administrative units, the process was sometimes accompanied by ethnic violence.

Accordingly, in the 20th century the Georgians' national identity changed three times –within Russian Empire, Soviet and Post-soviet identities, where centripetal forces were obviously defeated by centrifugal forces. The political and social crisis during “Perestroika”, accompanied by the disintegration of values and legalized norms, divided Georgian society into two camps; at one pole there were those who remained loyal to the Soviet collectivist values in transformed and modified form, on the other pole – those who defended liberal values and individual, personal freedom. The former was rejected by the State, but did not fully get the latter; this became the basis for the value conflict.

The multiculturalism in totalitarian monocultural space of the Soviet Union resulted in the creation of an unusual conglomerate, with common ideological pressure with Soviet-style norms and different national accents.

From that perspective, at least 4 cultural layers can be distinguished in the Soviet period Georgian music: “Soviet Imperial” Great-style musical art; persecuted, banned, but actual, contemporary (modern) West-European art, classical and folk music approved and considered as acceptable by the authorities. [6]

But there was something that was constantly valued even in the Soviet epoch. We speak the same language, live in the same area and are proud of our culture and art. Traditional classical culture is common, it unites different population groups, conservatives and liberals, traditionalists and democrats, physicists and lyricists, pensioners and youth. Accordingly the elements of national culture which do not split, but unite different population groups represent the basis for the integration of citizens' national identity. In addition to unconscious national cultural archetypes there is also what is acknowledged: achievements in the nation's history (victory in war), politics, culture, etc., which is the matter of the citizens' pride and a part of the national in social identity. Music is among these for the Georgians. It was via maintaining national identity that even under Soviet pressure Georgian composers managed to create the musical culture imprinted with national originality and gain world recognition.

In the early 1990s alongside the collapse of the Regime, disintegration of the connection with the tradition was implemented via familiarization with new European composer thinking, which was

associated with European values and a possibility to escape from the Soviet-controlled space; was the completely conscious process of distancing from the Soviets, familiarization with contemporary Europe.

Accordingly, in the post-Soviet period Georgian professional school of composing mastered new forms of European musical processes, thinking principles and musical-linguistic and stylistic models, originally expressed in the creations of the composers, who appeared on the creative arena in the 1960s and young generation composers.

Conclusion

As Aldous Huxley's says "relation between culture and person has always been ambivalent..." This means that we are the heirs and "victims" of our own culture.... The impact of this bilateral power is particularly felt now, when in the 21st century, we are facing the necessity for another renovation-reformation and creation of a new culture.

In recent decades active invasion of our cultural space by Western cultural realities, or real possibility to see Georgian cultural values "with other's eyes" or "from the other shore", among other changes, significantly expanded the scope of the intraspatial area of Georgian musical culture, the mythologeme of which reminds of the tree with the roots in the sky and branches on the ground. {7}

Such outlook suggests that in the beginning of the 20th century the ground was prepared for a new cultural leap which, with basic parameters, resembled the process of "awakening the lost cultural memory and national identity".

Similar things would have never happened in the Bolshevich Empire, as the Communist ideocracy was based on the extremely simplified schemes, for which manipulation with culture was the means to maintain the power.

The process of Cultural determinism which is currently under way is connected with the first half of the 20th century i.e. the period when 'cultural break' (the 1930s-1950s) was present alongside cultural revival (years of independence, the 1910s-1920s).

In tough post-Soviet space the epithets such as: "borrowed", "marginal", "epigonous" [8] were voiced in relation to Georgian culture. This approach is intended for sincere awakening of the society and strict logic of self-esteem. Historically Georgian culture created all the sparticularly valuable, distinguished in content and form via the synthesis of the Eurasian cultures, which does not mean that it is marginal and addictive to foreign culture; "I put Hafiz's rose into Proudhon's vase, I plant Baudelaire's Flowers of Evil in Besiki's garden" (T. Tabidze)

At this stage European orientation not obruded on, but chosen by us was clearly marked out; the problem related to the processes ongoing in European music acquired particular importance after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when in the 1990s European context of Georgian music was set in completely new way and the words – "I am Georgian, therefore I am European" became the symbol of Georgian identity in modern reality.

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