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**FIVE LIVES OF “KHANUMA”<sup>1</sup>****Kavtaradze Marina**

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**Abstract:**

*The contemporaries of dramatist Avksenti Tsagareli (1857-1902) probably never imagined how popular his play “Khanuma” (1882) would be in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and most importantly, how many times it would be changed on the stage and screen – names of the personages, development of the story and music. Interpretation of the play like a mirror reflected the culture and history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Georgia and not only Georgia. Basing on the comparative method the paper discusses musical interpretations of Avksenti Tsagareli’s “Khanuma” during a century in the context of their creation time and its five lives: First Georgian comic opera – Victor Dolidze’s “Keto and Kote” (1919), the movie “Keto and Kote” with Victor Dolidze’s and Archil Kereselidze’s music, theatre performance “Khanuma” of Robert Sturua and Giya Kancheli (1968), opera-fantasy “Barbale” of Vakhtang and Jansugh Kakhidze (1986) and the musical “Keto and Kote” of Nika Rachveli (2011).*

**Keywords:** Victor Dolidze’s “Keto and Kote”, Avksenti Tsagareli’s “Khanuma”, multilingualism, old Tbilisi, nationalism, multiculturalism

**Introduction**To the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of V. Dolidze’s “Keto and Kote”

The contemporaries of playwright Avksenti Tsagareli (1857-1902) probably never imagined how popular his comedy “Khanuma” (1882) would be in the next era and how many times it would be changed on the stage and screen including personage names, history and music. The interpretations of the play, like a mirror, reflected history of Georgia, the Tbilisi life mode and Georgian culture in general.

Khanuma’s narrative was popular in every socio-political environment: the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Tbilisi; before and after the Sovietization of Georgia; in Stalinist epoch; during the “thaw” and in the post-Soviet world. It was turned into opera, a musical, feature films; went beyond the borders of Georgia and the Soviet Union. Due to numerous interpretations of “Khanuma”, the opinion of today’s viewers and listeners about the play is often completely different from the original text. However, its narrative was never changed accidentally and was almost always related to the fundamental issues of Georgian identity. The paper deals with Tsagareli’s “Khanuma” and its musical variations on the background of Soviet nationalism, and basing on its five versions; puts questions such as why the work became the object of so many modifications [we mean first Georgian comic opera “Keto and Kote” (1919), which will turn 100, this year; feature film “Keto and Kote” (1948) with Viktor Dolidze’s and Archil Kereselidze’s music; Sturua’s and Kancheli’s play “Khanuma” (1968); Vakhtang and Jansugh Kakhidze’s opera “Barbale” (1986) and Nikoloz Rachveli’s musical “Keto and Kote” (2011)].

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### **The hybrid city and nationalism; multiculturalism or interculturalism?**

The issue of neighborhood and coexistence of cultures is very important in our modernity. But, the problem of heterogeneity and multiculturalism existed much earlier and with other accents in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Tbilisi, which was regarded as the cultural capital of the Caucasus. Representatives of many nationalities and ethnic groups who had gathered in Tbilisi, made peculiar influence on certain stages of cultural development of Tbilisi – as a city, and formation of its cultural image. Representatives of different nations and cultures also had different religious beliefs. Despite these radical differences, they lived side by side freely and harmoniously in Tbilisi.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the population of Tbilisi was particularly heterogeneous. Any city, including Tbilisi, is a fruit of some culture, but on the other hand, the city itself determines the character of culture. A city is a creatable integrity, based on diversity and exceptionality, and their unity. The analysis of Tbilisi culture has revealed three basic layers, which create urban culture: 1) traditional layer of historically existing culture; 2). the layer of modern, contemporary culture; 3). selective layer of culture; the latter provides constant selection of the modern-contemporary and historically existing, the acceptance and denial; interconnects the old and new, determines their co-existence and forms urban context. [1]

The hybrid forms of art such as Eastern and Western branches of urban folklore, *Mukhambazi* and Avksenti Tsagareli's plays were created in such environment. But what was the relation between these forms and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Georgian nationalism? How did they co-exist in the same space? Was the city and its representation a social and ideological battlefield? "Khanuma" is the work, in which hybrid look of Tbilisi is reflected best, therefore, Georgia as well. Tsagareli's "Khanuma" artistically describes the Caucasian peoples' realistic complexities of living together in the same city and their social life; here we deal with Georgian and Armenian space, coupling of a noble and a merchant family, with their characteristic features, positivity and negativity, human weaknesses and virtues, which reflects the reality of Tbilisi in the second half of the 19th century. Tsagareli's "Khanuma" bears this very concept. [2]

Hybridization and heteroglossia, is the language spoken in Tbilisi in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Hybridity" and "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin's term) of "Khanuma" implies that any voice can speak in any "register"<sup>2</sup>, each personage speaks a different "language" and dialect. In "Khanuma" heteroglossia in literary understanding and hybridity in social understanding is the "symbol of Khanuma" and symbol of old Tbilisi. [3; 4]

On the one hand, "Khanuma" created by Avksenti Tsagareli in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was the play which the Soviet ideology used for its own purposes, as a symbol of unity of different cultures, as the best tool for the positive sides of multiculturalism.

But even though there were numerous iterations of Khanuma in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aforementioned quality of the play was constantly hidden and transformed, i.e. the hybrid nature of Khanuma was lost in all subsequent iterations.

Multiculturalism (internationality) was the policy of nationalism, supported by the Soviet Union and its ideology. Yuri Slezkine, the Russian-born American scholar, has a concept about Soviet nationalism, which he calls "*Communal Apartment*", where everyone is in his room separately, but at the same time united in one space (Slezkine, Y., „The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic“). Why were they afraid to emphasize the theme in the Soviet epoch? Because multiculturalism, which is not heteroglossia, separates. This is the policy of nationalism, which Soviet Union strengthened through its ideology. [6]

<sup>2</sup> A hybrid statement is a passage with the participation of one speaker, for example, the author, and one or several types of speech. "Heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, M., 1934) is the principle of plurality of dialects and speech styles. Such an understanding of the language is opposed by "monologism", disputed by Bakhtin, implying the desire to create a metalanguage, trying to subdue this indomitable heterogeneity. In some cases, the word "monologism" is used by Bakhtin as a polite designation of Stalinism. Bakhtin attributed heteroglossia not only for the dictionary distinction of the speech of different social groups, but also to the whole social, cultural, and ideological context of the novel. [5]



### Viktor Dolidze's "Keto and Kote" (1919)

Tsagareli's "Khanuma" is the work, which laid foundation to the first Georgian classical comic opera and its "heresy" has continued on Georgian (and not only Georgian) theatre, opera stage and cinema for almost a century.

To characterize his personages Tsagareli often applied means of musical expression, especially urban songs. The personages of Akopa, Vano Pantiashvili and others were described by means of music (naturally, in the comedy these songs were applied as quotes). According to the contemporaries, if Akopa was characterized by means of a love-lyrical song of *qarachokheli* (petty merchant), Vano Pantiashvili was presented by means of Russian salon romance.

First scenic performance of V. Dolidze's opera "Keto and Kote" created according to Tsagareli's "Khanuma" was held at Tbilisi Opera House in 1919; with A. Tsutsunava as executive director, and S. Stolerman – conductor. Tsutsunava's first performance significantly contributed to the success of the opera. The success was incredibly great; the next day entire city sang or hummed the melodies of the opera. From 1919 "Keto and Kote" was staged in almost all seasons at Tbilisi Opera House.<sup>3</sup> [8]

In 1954 "Keto and Kote" was staged with significant changes at Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko Moscow Academic Music Theatre (director – V. Kandelaki). Stylistic unity of the opera was broken; the opera went beyond the original both dramaturgically and musically, S. Polotin and T. Sikorskaya wrote new Russian variant of the libretto, added one more act to the existing three – Kote became a revolutionary and was persecuted by police throughout all 4 acts, there appeared a new personage - Darejan. Finally Makar married Darejan and everything ended happily as in Dolidze's "Keto and Kote". The music was also the subject of experiment, composer V. Muradeli wrote a few new pieces, but they did not fit the score.

<sup>3</sup> The opera was staged in Batumi (1920) and Zimin Theatre Moscow (1923) under A. Tsutsunava's direction. A new performance, director – K. Pataridze, conductor – S. Azmaiparashvili, artist – L. Gudiashvili, was prepared for the Decade in Moscow (1937). Composer G. Kiladze was the author of new orchestration. The introduction of the opera was changed the way it is performed today, he created new recitatives and supplied them with orchestral accompaniments, included "Mravalzhamier" in act III. It was also decided to add act IV, music by Kiladze, text by I. Grishashvili (V. Dolidze had already passed away). But because the stylistic difference was very catchy, act IV was withdrawn until the Decade and the opera was still in 3 acts.

In 1940 Tsutsunava staged Kiladze's edition of "Keto and Kote" once again. From that time until 1988 this very variant of score was performed at Tbilisi Opera House. In 1986 after unsuccessful performance – the Kakhidzes' "Barbale" directed by R. Sturua, in 1989 it was decided to make a new performance (dir. G. Lortkipanidze), for this Shaverzashvili was ordered to renew the score. In 2018, the opera appeared in a new production at Tbilisi Opera House (dir. I. Khutsishvili).

New performance of “Keto and Kote” appeared in 1986 (dir. art – M. Mshvelidze). as Jansugh and Vakhtang Kakhidze’s version (dir. R. Sturua) with the title “Barbale”. The personages of Keto and Kote are somewhat shifted back, the personage of the matchmaker Barbale comes forward, etc.

Here is what changes in Dolidze’s libretto in relation to Tsagareli’s play: personages of the libretto are basically of Georgian ethnicity, Sona is replaced by Keto; Makar Tkuilkotriyants – Tkuilkotriashvili: with Tsagareli everybody has his double (e.g. Timothe – Akop), in the opera Timothe disappears and appears as two: the *kinto*/traders Sako and Siko. Khanuma is replaced by Barbale; Kabato – by Babusi, Vano Pantiashvili becomes Levan Palavandishvili; in “Khanuma” Sona’s family is Armenian, who fled from Persian aggression and arrived in Tbilisi, but Akop is afraid that Sona’s marriage to a Georgian prince will contribute to the loss of their Armenian roots, i.e. nationalism is observed on both sides. In “Keto and Kote” the couplets for Sako and Siko with Armenian refrain “janaia, janaia” as characteristic of Armenian *kinto*/traders, were written by Ioseb Grishashvili – the best connoisseur of old Tbilisi. Grishashvili’s influence is observed in the stylization- typification of *kinto*/trader as well as in his duplication. *Kinto* becomes a vessel in which the Georgians invest undesirable qualities (lustful, swindler, lazybones and liar, including Armenian merchant – symbol of capitalism).

V. Dolidze’s creative work was nourished by the intonations of Tbilisi urban folklore. The music of the work is genetically linked to the Eastern and Western branches of urban folklore, for example Levan’s aria, Sako’s and Siko’s couplets (ex. 58, 59), their intonation source is the vocal repertoire of petty traders and merchants (see, ex. 43-46).

From purely musical standpoint in “Keto nad Kote” introduces Eastern and Western “hybrid” urban song with its entire context inculcating objective environment as the background of the opera. Despite the changes in libretto the intonation world of Eastern branch urban folklore is the basis, which shows stylistic peculiarities of Dolidze’s creative work. In “Keto and Kote” the composer creates unusually live pictures of Tbilisi life mode, where the experience of European opera genre is organically merged with the peculiarities of urban music-making. [9]

### Feature Film “Keto and Kote” (1948)

Feature film “Keto and Kote”, which is essentially the first film-musical in Georgia, was made in 1948 (director – Vakhtang Tabliashvili, scriptwriter – Tushmalishvili). Basing on Dolidze’s music themes composer A. Kereselidze created original music.

From Tabliashvili’s interview: “In 1945, after WWII “Georgian Film” studio invited me to make the movie “Baratashvili” [...]. Preparation works took long. Meanwhile our movie was cancelled and shooting films on historical themes was banned [...]. The Party elite decided that only entertaining films should be made in order to distract the people – tired of war from problems”. On the list of the movies, approved and signed by Stalin himself, “Keto and Kote” was one of the first”<sup>4</sup>

It is noteworthy that nobility was socially unacceptable for Soviet ideology, but it is interesting how this issue is disguised in the first shots of the movie, where an old lady enchanted by Kote’s singing asks who the singing rich man is, and the merchant answers: “no, granny, he is a student, ordinary like us”. From the Soviet standpoint a petty merchant is a hard worker, and Kote of noble origin is socially equal to him; i.e. the reality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is put within the frames of Soviet ideology. As for the hierarchy, also remarkable is the final scene of the movie, where in front of Makar and Levan, who have just returned home the doors alternately open, introducing *kintos* - the lowest layer of society, then *karachokheli*/ petty traders, then Georgian national pair

<sup>4</sup> Parallel to the boom of musicals in America Vakhtang Tablaishvili managed to make the first Georgian musical in which he brought together almost all Georgian cinema, theater and opera stars (including Vaso Godziashvili, Batu Kraveishvili, Medea Japaridze, Giorgi Shavgulidze, Nato Vachnadze, Tamar Chavchavadze and others); from 12-year-old Leila Abashidze, to almost 90-year-old Elisabed Cherkezishvili; Medea Japaridze, who reminded American critics of legendary Mary Pickford.

(dancing *Tsekva* kartuli/Georgian dance), and finally Keto and Kote – the newlyweds, the dream has come true with happy end.

### **Sturua's "Khanuma" (1968)**

In "Khanuma" directed by Robert Sturua at Rustaveli Theatre (1968) with Giya Kancheli's music, Sturua also goes beyond the original. We can say that the performance was a synthesis of music theater and comedy show, with the stylistics of imagination theatre. „In this play my music sounds most, than ever“ – says Giya Kancheli [10]. Despite the huge amount of music in the performance, Kancheli did not create a "musical". These were independent turns, which acquired dramatic function in the action.

The director completely modernized Avksenti Tsagareli's play; added the prologue and text, the actors often improvised. Tsagareli's comedic situations, full of artistry, were revived on the stage. R. Sturua was first to offer the so called "open rule" of play (N. Gurabanidze), when actors improvise scenes. Sturua's performance was a variation on the themes of Tsagareli's "Khanuma", a parody on Tsarageli's comedy.

In Sturua's performance (1968) social-political sides of the play were pushed to the background, heterogenic spirit of the play was not maintained either. The director was interested in the personages revived in comic prism and the love story more than social equality, compatibility of traditions and the themes arising from interculturalism. Robert Sturua completely modernized the play written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, deprived the play of the social basis and showed the pictures of the 19<sup>th</sup> -century Tbilisi to the viewers" [11], and the example of this is Russified Prince Levan in Erosi Manjgaladze's interpretation (dressed in Russian frock coat; russicisms in the text, etc), as well as singing a table song in Russian mode. Tsagareli's Vano Pantiashvili (Levan – in Sturua's version) is a man from the village, who easily changes registers in the conversation (speaks in a dialect, mispronounces words, addresses Kote in French manner "prince Kotie", speaks Russian poorly and with grammar mistakes, which is emphasized with Tsagareli; he greets Khanuma with "salam aleik", but addresses Makar in Persian, emphasizing his Oriental origin, i.e. he maneuvers in different poly-linguistic layers. He collects money in his estate, comes to Tbilisi, wastes the money, hence the origin of his family name – Pantiashvili (one who wastes). He dreams to marry a rich woman and return to the estate. Sturua's Europeanized prince Levan can hardly speak Georgian, speaks Russian, sings in Russian manner, etc. It's hard not to agree with Jansugh Ghvinjilia's opinion that, social conflict of the play had already lost its sensitivity at the time, the life which had created comic situations of "Khanuma" was not organic any more.[12]

### **Paraphrase on the themes of "Keto and Kote" i.e. "Barbale" (1986)**

In Vakhtang and Jansugh Kakhidze's "Barbale" (dir. Robert Sturua, 1986) both libretto and music are changed. The Kakhidzes aimed to show old Tbilisi at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before WWI, not the city with open balconies, Oriental colouring, but European Tbilisi. Not merchants, petty traders, but nobility and half Europeanized social class. Actually this is our modern urban culture and probably this explains the loss of the naïve, original "Pirosmani's soul", which is so fascinating in Dolidze's "Keto and Kote".

It is known, that originally the authors of "Barbale" were aimed at new orchestration and minor editing. They believed that editing was also necessary for Tsutsunava's performance. And indeed it's impossible to preserve the performance staged 57 years ago in its original form, but, when the concept of Sturua-Kakhidzes' performance was finally formed they decided to go deeper into Dolidze's material. Scenic situations of secondary personages were changed, new scene, intrigues were created; Dolidze's opera lost main thing – the "spirit" of Tbilisi, its hybrid language....

Not only the orchestration and overall coloring underwent changes, but also the libretto in the first place (with R. Sturua and K. Akhobadze as the authors). New libretto shows that the performance needed new music to be composed, new recitatives, editing, etc. Music for "Barbale"

was mainly created on Dolidze's melodies, musical material for "Keto and Kote" was redone, modernized and orchestrated via arrangement, variation and by the application of different composition means, the music harmony, dramaturgical accents were shifted, the before-non-existent conflicts were escalated, etc.

If Dolidze's "Keto and Kote" was nourished by both branches of old urban folklore – Western and Eastern, particularly Italian opera style, the Kakhidzes attempted to remove the afore-mentioned Eastern coloring of old Tbilisi, they expanded the harmonic sphere by using modern sounding, changed the orchestral accompaniment, however the melodies still sounded like Dolidze's and they failed to completely approximate them to the European.

Musical coloring and "spirit" of Old Tbilisi in Dolidze's "Keto and Kote" was changed in the prism of contemporary variety art; as a result, colorful image of the opera, Pirosmiani's coloring was changed into black and white, i.e. the dialogue of epochs failed.

### **Musical "Keto and Kote"(2011)**

In 2011 by the Government order, the musical "Keto and Kote" was specially created for the opening of Batumi Opera House; the musical was an ambitious post-modern project, which boasted stellar membership, was the production eclectic in all manifestations: scenography, costumes, musical language. This was a performance-inspiration, which unconsciously looked more like confrontation with old time, "old" culture. New interpretations of Victor Dolidze's opera and Archil Kereselidze's film music were authored by Nika Memanishvili, with Davit Doiashvili as executive director. In the musical the story is modified, modernized, but the clichés have remained unchanged. Accents vary according to time: Keto and Kote studied in London instead of St. Petersburg, English-language phrases (e.g. *who the hell is Khanuma?*) are embedded to stress globalization, etc.

The spectacle in which national culture is presented in a globalist post-modernist plan, equipped with multimedia and new technologies, special effects, jazz, variety art and electronic music (the couplets of Siko and Niko), arranged and edited by Nika Memanishvili, scenography and costumes by Tamar Kvesitadze, performed by Paata Burchuladze, Nani Bregvadze and Nino Ananiashvili, adorned by the Sukhishvilebi. The performance, from the genre viewpoint does not stand close to comic opera or aesthetics of a musical.

Victor Dolidze's opera composed in 1919 during Georgia's independence was an attempt to re-think national identity with respect to Europe, actually laid foundation to a new genre and tradition. Unlike it, the musical born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century became sort of a PR-event of our Government – effective, spectacular, but internally empty. An attempt to modernize classic work was less successful. However the attempt is absolutely permissible. Since the goal must be justified by the result, and not vice versa.

### **Conclusion**

The true face of the 19<sup>th</sup> -century Tbilisi, nationalism with hybridity and heteroglossia as its peculiarities, are rejected and unaccepted by the society in both Soviet and post-Soviet epochs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and even though there is a number of iterations of "Khanuma" in all historical periods and decades, the tendency to disguise these traits was introduced in subsequent interpretations of the work. There was not authentic staging of "Khanuma", its hybrid nature is lost in all iterations of Tsagareli's play. First Georgian comic opera "Keto and Kote" is the only work whose musical language has maintained this feature, despite radical changes in libretto; the opera has held the status of classical opera for a century and has been the most favorite piece for Georgian society. It is thanks to intertextuality and hybridity, that its musical language organically reflects multilingualism characteristic of Tbilisi life mode.

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