

From folk song to jazz and rap: elite and popular musical cultures of Tbilisi

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Published in *City Culture and City Planning in Tbilisi, Where Europe and Asia Meet*,
edited by Kristof Van Assche, Joseph Salukvadze, and Nick Shavishvili, with a
Foreword by Andre van der Zande. The Edwin Mellen Press.

This essay examines the dynamics of the enduring practices and discourses of two contrasting cultural ideologies in the musical culture of Tbilisi: the elite and the everyday popular cultures. These ideologies have roots in urban-rural, national-foreign, West-East, elite-hick and other dichotomous perceptions. The essay will examine the contrasting ideologies by exploring two major, developing post-socialist Georgian popular song genres as embodying two aesthetic-ideological positions. At one end of the continuum is a local adaptation of African American rap, favoring an approach to music as “social message,” a socio-political engagement and experimental treatment of language. At the other is jazz-folk-classical fusion ensembles, which seem to favor musical experimentation and innovation through highly sophisticated musical-instrumental and vocal arrangements, while folk and abstract philosophic ideas expressed in their song lyrics seem to transcend everyday reality and obvious socio-political commentary.

Rap builds its innovative approach predominantly through its use of language, absorbing new ways of everyday popular forms of city talk and using it in ways that change the poetics, accentuation and syntax of Georgian language – elements that together comprise a “language ideology” reflective of the emergent new urban subjectivities. Rap’s relatively simple melodic-harmonic musical language and folk-jazz-classical fusion’s sophisticated musical language and verbal poetics are used in an urban intellectual elite discourse that pits high individual art against popular music produced for homogenized mass consumption.

In June 2008, I gave a talk at the Folklore Archive of the Shota Rustaveli Institute of Georgian Language and Literature in Tbilisi about Georgian rap and jazz-folk fusion as the two contrasting aesthetics in modern Georgian popular music. In the discussion that followed the talk, two major ways of thinking about the two genres emerged among the attending academics. The one held that the key difference between rap and jazz or classical music is that classical, jazz or any other form of sophisticated *intellectual* music is music created by individuals for consumption by individuals of a higher musical-intellectual preparation than the consumers of rap and

pop are. In similar fashion, some academics described rap and pop as music for the collective masses and for an “ordinary” audience. Clearly, in this academic discourse *individualism* as an expression of elite music was determined on the basis of the knowledge of the complex musical structures involved in jazz and jazz-folk fusion, which rap and pop lack. The other way of thinking that surfaced during the discussion tended to beware ideological high-vs.-low taste elements by suggesting that Georgian rap should be examined as a social-musical practice embedded in the dynamic of Georgian society and its urban culture. The latter way of thinking clearly reveals recent post-socialist developments in the interpretative scholarly and legal thinking about culture, power relationships and taste hierarchies.

Elite vs. popular culture in Tbilisi: a historical perspective. The historical and social origins of *elite versus popular mass culture* discourse in Georgia are to be sought in earlier developments of the nationalistic and modernizing trends that started during the times of Russian colonization since the 19th century. The following section explores the dynamic of and thinking about urban culture in Tbilisi from a historical perspective as well as from the more general perspective of an ideology of taste, which distinguishes elite culture from its popular counterpart.

In 19th century Tbilisi, the elite-popular dichotomy developed within the ideological framework of “Orientalism,” as a way of opposing the Middle Eastern-Armenian-Muslim backward-looking foreignness of Tbilisi’s cosmopolitan lower-class culture to the modernizing effects of the newly introduced European culture cherished by the newly emerged urban elite. Despite the fact that Tbilisi was the capital of Georgia since the 5th century AD, it was a residency for various foreign conquerors and an ethnic and cultural melting pot. Christian Georgians, Armenians, and Muslim Azerbaijanians and Persians lived side by side for centuries, developing a strong cosmopolitan urban culture among the working class and merchant populations.

As is noted in the literature about Tbilisi, East Georgian city social life and culture was defined by its Asiatic character, particularly until the Russian colonization in the 19th century and even until the beginning of the 20th century; because of Georgia’s weak statehood, city and rural cultures were not well integrated and existed as independent from each other, producing the multi-ethnic Eastern model of urban Tbilisi culture on the one hand and the ethnic Georgian model of culture in rural

areas.¹ Tbilisi guilds of the 18th-19th centuries [*amkari*; *saamkro*] were professional associations of tradesmen and craftsmen of multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition. Deriving from such a cosmopolitan social background, religious tolerance of a non-ethnic consciousness was a defining element of Tbilisi's culture.² In the 19th century, when discovery of a national cultural character became central to the Europeanized national elites' search for identity, the city culture lost its claim to define Georgian-ness and this right was passed to the rural culture,³ for rural Georgians were viewed as the autochthonous population of Georgia.

A widely recognized cultural symbol of Tbilisian cosmopolitanism was Sayatnova (1712-1795) – Armenian poet, singer and *saz* [a long-necked fretted Turkish and Azerbaijani folk lute] player who worked as Georgia's penultimate king Erekle's court musician and who wrote poetry and songs in Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani Turkish.⁴ The poet-songwriter Ietim Gurji (1875-1940), son of a Turkish-born Georgian, was another such symbolic figure. Songs by Sayatnova and Ietim Gurji are often sung by the *duduk'i dast'a* [the *duduk'i* – a double-reed blown instrument – ensemble] and individual singers today. Sayatnova is believed to have introduced the 5-line strophic verse form *mukhambazi* (*mukhamas*, “five”)⁵ of Persian poetry, a characteristic form of *ashugh* [also *aşiq* and *aşeq* – folk poet, singer, and a player in Transcaucasia, Turkey, and Iran] poetry. According to Sayatnova's words, he mastered *chonguri* [Georgian string plucked or strummed instrument] and was the first to adapt Georgian poetry to Persian tunes.⁶ Sayatnova's songs, and the whole local musical culture of the 19th century. Tbilisian ashugh poet-singers and *sazandari* [a Middle-Eastern ensemble of instruments *kemanche*, *tar*, *naghara*, and singer] became the core of the Oriental [*aghmosavluri*] repertoire practiced and consumed either among the lower caste Tbilisian tradesmen and workers (in case of ashugh art) or non-Georgian, predominantly Armenian, musicians educated in the Persian classical musical tradition of *mugham/dastgah* (in case of *sazandari*).

¹ Vladimer Vardosanidze, 2000. Georgian Culture and Urbanization. *Urban Design Studies* 6: 106.

² Vladimer Vardosanidze, 107.

³ See Vardosanidze 2000: 105-107.

⁴ Ioseb Grishashvili, 1957. *Lit'erat'uruli Nark'vevebi* [Essays in Literature]. Tbilisi: Sakhelgami, 220-223; Zezva Medulashvili, 2006. *Sayatnova*. Tbilisi: Caucasian House, 5 (in Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani).

⁵ Grishashvili, 1957, 220.

⁶ Grishashvili, 1957, 220.

Reflecting the trend in the late 19th century literature and poetry to replace the Oriental mukhambazi with the European sonnet,⁷ part of the Georgian patriotic Westernized urban elite rejected urban popular music of the Middle Eastern-derived *duduk'i dast'a* and *sazandari* ensembles and advocated the establishment of the European classical musical culture, which included both music written by Western composers and that written by newly-emerged Western-educated Georgian composers. It is this triangular distinction between urban music associated with the city's multi-ethnic, backward, lower-class Oriental population, the music of urban elites associated with upper class intellectualism, modernity and progress, and the music of autochthonous rural populations that constituted the core of debate about good and cheap kitsch music in the Georgian urban society of the 19th century. Rural music, by virtue of its polyphonic structure and association with ethnic Georgian identity, was viewed as a natural source for the creation of classical, Europeanized Georgian music. Therefore, within this musical-ideological triangle, rural and European were integrated and pitted against the city's Oriental music.

In the course of the modernization and Westernization of Georgia during the 19th century, the multi-ethnicity, religious tolerance and cosmopolitanism of Tbilisi started to give way to a more mono-ethnic nationalistic and Westernized version of city culture. While generally endorsing the political and historical necessity of the European model of modernity, Georgian writers and Tbilisi-dwellers developed a kind of nostalgic ideology through which they idealized "old" Oriental Tbilisi and simultaneously, within this ideology of "nostalgia" accepted the marginalization and ultimate disappearance of this Eastern cosmopolitanism. Ioseb Grishashvili (1889-1965), the well-known Georgian poet, expert of Tbilisi culture and a son of Tbilisian mason clearly expressed such nostalgic feelings. By labeling this stratum of Tbilisi as "old Tbilisi" [dzveli Tbilisi], Grishashvili celebrated and simultaneously relegated it to the irretrievable Oriental past and to the times when the guilds of tradesmen, *qarachogheli*, symbolized the hard work, virility, honor and carefree leisure displayed at the traditional Georgian feast *supra*, often accompanied by *duduk'i dast'as* and ashugh poetry and songs.

In this distinction between the "old" Tbilisi and "new" European Tbilisi, an ideology of lower-class people [mdabio xalxi] as distinct from high-class European-

⁷ Harsha Ram, 2007. The Sonnet and the Mukhambazi: Genre Wars on the Edges of the Russian Empire. *The Modern Language Association of America* 122/5: 1548-1570.

educated society [ganatlebuli sazogadoeba] emerged with regard to verbal language, musical culture and taste. For example, the place of amusement for lower-class people was *Ortach'alis baghebi* [Ortach'ala gardens] where one would hear Oriental music, and for those of European upbringing there was the *Musht'aidis baghi* [Musht'aidi garden] in Tbilisi. In his discussion of the ashugh poets such as Givishvili (1850-1916), Sk'andarnova (1850-1917) and Akhosp'ireli (1880-1921), Ioseb Grishashvili stressed that these popular poets and their Persian- and bazaar-influenced poetry emerged amidst the plebeian class and as such were close to the hearts and minds of the working-class people. While high-class society held entertainment shows at their homes, "our ashughs performed for ordinary people in squares [*moedani*]," and such free performances were more affordable and understandable.⁸ However, the educated elite, while highly critical of such bazaar language, did not entirely reject this popular art in order to maintain links with the lower-class population of Tbilisi.

Some Georgian patriotic writer-politicians characterized the Middle Eastern tunes of popular Tbilisian music in more malevolent tones. For example, Ilia Ch'avch'avadze defined vocal rural polyphony as the central feature of the national music aesthetics and clearly distinguished it from monophonic vocal-instrumental Persian music, declaring that the two had nothing in common. The writer K'ek'elidze condemned Besik'i, the ashugh Georgian poet who brought the melodies of Middle Eastern bazaar into Georgian life.⁹ Newspaper columnists criticized Bagrat' Bagramiants, Tbilisian ashugh of Armenian nationality who, in their words, completely discredited Georgian traditional folk song: "Our folk songs slowly get swept off the earth, disappear, and die... we are not any more able to distinguish good from bad, and some riff-raff 'singers' like the *tar* [a long-necked lute with a body in the shape of a figure-eight] player Bagrat'a [Bagrat' Bagramiants¹⁰] discredit our national treasure..."¹¹

In the beginning of the 19th century Georgian folk rural polyphonic song was still absent from the predominantly hybrid Transcaucasian Tbilisian music culture that featured strong Armenian and Persian components. However, with the growing anti-colonial national-liberation movement during the 19th century, the rural singing

⁸ Ioseb Grishashvili. 1928. *Dzveli T'pilis Lit'erat'uruli Bohema* [Literary Bohemia of the Old Tbilisi]. Tbilisi: 1928, 78-9, 95.

⁹ Inga Bakht'adze, 1986. *Kartuli Musik'aluri Estet'ik'is Ist'ortidan* [From the History of Georgian Musical Aesthetic Thought], Tbilisi: Metsniereba, 107 (in Georgian).

¹⁰ In fact, Bagrat' was known as a singer and the frame drum, *dhol* player.

¹¹ (Sakhalkho Purtseli 1914 c/f Bakht'adze 1986, 101).

traditions of ethnic Georgians became central to the patriotic elite's pursuit for national cultural identity. In contrast, the Persian and Armenian flavor of Tbilisi's cosmopolitan musical culture uncomfortably suggested non-Georgian and multi-ethnic and multi-cultural composition of Georgia's capital. Folk song and Western classical music thus became the two building materials for the music of elitist consumption: 1) Folk song with its roots in the Georgian ethnicity and 2) Classical music with its roots in Western civilization and its association with progress and modernity.

Modern perceptions. At the beginning of the 20th century and especially during the period of the socialism, the Oriental-European dilemma was ideologically resolved because socialism aspired towards classical European forms of culture, which were seen as a structural fundament of the new art forms imbued with a socialist content. While classical music stood higher in the canon of taste, because of its roots in the dominant autochthonous ethnic population, rural folk song nevertheless attained an honorable status within the national cultural hierarchy. Once only practiced in villages as part of communal celebrations, work, and religious life, folk song was rapidly becoming part of the nationalist discourse and socialist mass culture.

Since the 1960s, due to the many revivalist folk ensembles and their stage performances, rural folk song paradoxically started to become part of Tbilisi's urban elite. Rural folk song began to be heard in urban (and urbanized Soviet rural) environments – festivals, on the concert stage, radio and TV. This trend complemented the growing national awareness and increasingly mono-nationalistic tendencies in the Georgian society of the Soviet period.¹² Within such antagonistic perceptions of the relationship between rural and urban cultures, folk song eventually came to be viewed in two separate interpretive categories: 1) as part of the social life of the people, embedded in the social practices of its supposed carriers, the rural population, and 2) as actual songs as a sound, regardless of who performed them – villagers or urbanites. The songs recorded from the villagers in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th gradually became a sound category only, part of archives or repertoires of urban folk ensembles.¹³ Rural polyphony which once

¹² Ronald Grigor Suny, 1994. *The Making of the Georgian Nation*, 2nd ed. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

¹³ Folk song as a sound category resembles the notion of heritage as a mode of cultural production, which gives the endangered or outmoded a second life in the form of performances at festivals and exhibitions (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995. "Theorizing heritage," in *Ethnomusicology* 39/3

used to be practiced exclusively by villagers in rural areas, became absorbed and appropriated by the urban elites through their folk ensemble practice from the 19th century,¹⁴ and from the last decades of the 20th century also through the folk-jazz-classical fusion music, as one of the ingredients for musical experimentation. In contrast, hybrid and kitsch “urban” music became the feature of the village-originated lower-class urbanites who migrated to the city and who, instead of preserving their rural polyphonic singing traditions, absorbed new Western mass popular musical influences.

With the disappearance of the Middle Eastern heritage from the mainstream urban culture during the socialist and especially post-socialist period, the dynamic of urban musical culture and its ideological interpretations have adopted a more multi-dimensional character. In Tbilisi’s increasingly Europeanized and globalized atmosphere the mixing of Western popular, jazz, and rock as well as world music sounds irrespective of their Eastern or Western origins has become commonplace. Besides, today music is to a less degree part of social life of the population than it is of music business and professional musical production and mass consumption. As a result, the elements of Oriental urban Tbilisian music are nowadays treated by professional musicians and audiences of folk-jazz and ethno-music ensembles as one of the multiple global sound ingredients available for experimentation and stylistic fusions rather than as a manifestation of social practice associated with specific ethnicities. Therefore, the association of the Eastern sound with a backward Oriental population has dissipated. Rather it is the elite-hick dichotomy that defines discourses about urban music in today’s Tbilisi.

In the following section I will discuss the two genres of folk-jazz-classical fusion on the one hand and rap on the other as central to modern Tbilisi’s musical culture. I will show the ways in which the implicit interpretation of these two genres as either *elite* or *hick* reflects and shapes an ideology that pits elitism against provincialism, mass popular culture for ordinary *hick* listeners against the individualistic art of jazz and folk song, as expressed during the above-mentioned discussion that followed my talk at the Institute of Georgian Language and Literature.

(1995): 369; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004. “Intangible heritage as metacultural production,” *Museum* 56/1-2 (2004): 52-65.

¹⁴ See Nino Tsitsishvili, 2005. *National unity and gender difference in Georgian traditional song-culture* (PhD, Monash University).

Urban music and the ideology of taste and class. Rap has been the most rapidly accepted foreign global influence on the popular musics of the world since the 1980s. Adopted by local non-English speaking communities, rap has been adapted to expressions of local identities and concerns as well as to local linguistic, musical and ethnographic realities.¹⁵ At least in Georgia, the Westernizing and modernizing effects of rock, and especially jazz and classical music, have been felt as more positive and less homogenizing and threatening, apparently because of rap's perceived simplicity and primitiveness, its association with marginal and disadvantaged populations as well as the fact that rock, jazz and classical music have long been established in the hegemonic canons of taste through the socialist period. From such a hegemonic perspective, rap is often viewed as incapable of adapting to the local Georgian culture. Comments like the following are frequently found in internet chat rooms: "Does Georgian rap exist at all?" "I can't think of the Georgian language and rap blending together." When I asked a folklorist friend who works at the Tbilisi State Conservatorium for her opinion about Georgian rap, she replied: "Lex-seni [[lit. "poetry addict," the name of the most successful rapper in Georgia today]? I don't have any opinion about rap." Some of my Georgian friends tell me that the major audience for Georgian rap is the youth who have arrived in the city from villages recently, or as often expressed more blatantly: rap is favored by low-class migrants from rural areas, and rappers are "*alali gorsalebi*" [genuinely uncivilized hicks]. The elite-hick dichotomy has thus assumed an ideology that pits urban environment as representing the civilized Europeanized city atmosphere against the rural hicks who immigrate to the city, settle in its outer suburbs, and appropriate Western tasteless mass popular culture.

Thus, while in the past (the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries), the urban-rural opposition was interpreted and imagined as Oriental/non-Georgian-ness vs. Europeanized Georgian ethnic identity, during the 20th century until today the clear distinction between urbanites and rural culture has been blurred and acquired new meanings. Firstly, an increased migration of peasants into big cities and towns after the abolishment of serfdom in the Russian empire in 1861 and later during the

¹⁵ Noriko Manabe, 2006. Globalization and Japanese Creativity: Adaptations of Japanese Language to Rap. *Ethnomusicology* 50/1: 1-36; Tony Mitchell, 2003. "Doin' damage in my native language: the Use of 'Resistance Vernaculars' in Hip-Hop in France, Italy, and Aotearoa/New Zealand," in *Global Pop, Local Language*, edited by Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll. University Press of Mississippi.

socialist period, changed the ethnic composition of Tbilisi; it became increasingly mono-ethnic Georgian city. Secondly, the concept of *kalakeli* [urbanite] and *kalakis mk'vidri* [a city-dweller] applied to Tbilisians in the 19th century also acquired new content as more and more rural Georgians became city-dwellers. Some of these rural individuals managed to climb upward on the ladder of social hierarchy and become elite, while others settled in the outer suburbs of Tbilisi and assimilated to the lower working class.

As a result, city culture became more sophisticated and multi-layered: the perceived Eastern backwardness of its Armenian, Muslim, Jewish and Kurdish population was now pushed to the margins and co-existed with the new socialist-derived urban elite and rural ethnic Georgian newcomers to the city. Apart from Georgian-non Georgian and East-West dichotomies a new dichotomy between rural uneducated newcomers-hicks and elite Western (or Russian)-educated urbanites emerged. This ambiguity towards the rural-urban relationship also reflects Soviet policies and Soviet-period attitudes towards the city. For example, because the annihilation of national cultures during the Soviet times occurred mainly by means of drastically changing urban centers, rural culture became the icon of national identity and culture and the Georgian peasant “the one who has reached the moral and philosophic heights and is a repository for folk wisdom.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, the rural culture was limited and could not reach broader levels.¹⁷

According to Paul Manning, it has been a view among the older, Soviet-time intelligentsia of Tbilisi that the *kajebi* [devil-like creatures denoting the same category of people as *gorsalebi* i.e. hicks] have “swamped” the city and threaten the hegemony of canons of taste associated with urban elites. Terms like *kaji* [“a horned devil”], *gorsala*, or *goimi* “hick” are associated with parvenus (either newly arrived villagers or nouveau riche) who have no culture or taste [in the sense of Enlightenment and manners] but only value foreign cars, money and the building of new, fashionable homes that are incompatible with the older city architecture,¹⁸ all of which constitutes a kind of low-taste hybridity and kitsch.

¹⁶ Vladimer Vardosanidze, 105.

¹⁷ Vardosanidze, 105.

¹⁸ Paul Manning, 2008. “The City of Balconies: elite politics and the changing semiotics of the post-socialist cityscape” (forthcoming) in *Urban cultures, urban futures. City culture and city planning in Georgia*, edited by Kristof Van Assche, J. Salukvadze, and N. Shavishvili. Mellen Press. Georgian version: Tbilisi: Tbilisi State University Press. Also available at: <http://www.dangerserviceagency.org/workingpapers.html>

In one Georgian example (of rap), the rapper personifies a Svanetian man. Svans, highlanders of the Svaneti province, are viewed ambivalently by the intelligentsia, who see them from the point of view of two contradictory elite discourses about rural Georgians. One sees them as purely ethnic Georgians preserving the purest Georgian folkloric tradition (as opposed to the urban hybrid culture of Tbilisi) while the other regards them as backward hicks lacking progress and modernity, like an internal exotic other. For example, a popular Georgian joke has it that a Svan went on the internet but couldn't get off it. This rap seems to be a joke about Svans made by non-Svanetian, presumably Tbilisian, musicians. The singer tells us: "I left my wife and children to wolves in the mountains, I came down to valleys and I am singing rap." He also refers to his gun and sword, attributes of a Georgian highlander type of macho masculinity, all of which reveals that the rap takes the form of a style of joke about Svanetian backwardness and stupidity that has proliferated in everyday conversations in the aftermath of socialism.

The rap demonstrates a certain [urban and elitist] attitude to those low class yet ethnically Georgian populations who have migrated from their villages to the city and want to be modernized [by singing rap]. The elite's attitude towards villagers thus becomes clear: Svanetians are good so long as they preserve "folk wisdom" and the ethnic purity of Georgians by staying in their villages [and not changing], but they become backward hicks when they emigrate and no longer feed the intelligentsia's imagination about the ethnic authenticity of village "folk" life. The use of the words and tune of the traditional Svanetian folk polyphonic song-dance "Shina Vorgil" against a background of imported rap and the specific Svanetian heavy accent is ambiguous in this respect, serving simultaneously as a metaphor for a desired continuity with an older tradition and a sign of rustic backwardness.

Folk-jazz-classical fusion and rap as the two ideological-aesthetic positions in modern Georgian popular music. Perceptions surrounding urban vs. rural and elite vs. hick dichotomy are involved in a broader discourse involving the ideology of class and taste – high art music vs. music concerned with everyday trivial matters consumed mainly by lower-class uneducated city-dwellers. In particular, folk-jazz-classical fusion signifies the elite development in Tbilisi's and Georgia's urban music, while rap and other forms of popular mass consumed music are seen as the music for hicks and undifferentiated masses.

Jazz-folk fusion ensembles have often been characterized as “Modern Georgian Ethno-Music.”¹⁹ For example, one Russian journalist described the music of the Stuttgart-based Georgian folk-jazz fusion ensemble The Shin [Home] (a trio comprising three Georgian musicians – bass guitarist, guitarist and percussion-player-vocalist) – as “a brilliant dialogue between an acoustic guitar à-la flamenco and a fretless bass, a mischievous percussion and a supersonic guruli [Gurian]-singing”²⁰ The complexity of musical texture derived mainly from the Western jazz or classical styles in combination with the harmonic-melodic language of folk polyphonic songs seems to be the main criteria for defining such music as an individualistic, sophisticated yet national high art.

One example of folk-jazz fusion by the ensemble The Shin²¹ offers a creative elaboration of the Svanetian (western Georgian mountainous province) traditional dance-song “Qansav Qipiane.”²² The Shin’s interpretation of the Svanetian three-part song is called “Swanny Waltz of Mr. Qansav Qipiane.”²³ This dance song, normally performed in quadruple meter in a three-part polyphonic structure of chordal units, is creatively transformed in the Shin’s interpretation. Indeed, at the beginning of the song the Svanetian dance would be hardly recognizable, if it were not for the singer’s vocal line on the words of “Qansav da Qipiane.”²⁴ Starting in a rhythmic waltz (3-beat meter) swing, this jazzy metamorphosis unfolds in the style of a jazz-improvisation with highly sophisticated chords and funky jazz-rock riffs, chordal progressions and modulations not found in its Svanetian prototype, until it eventually reaches a climax by resolving into its traditional folk archetype in the original 4-beat meter and three-part chordal structure.

Such sophistication of musical texture is not surprising given the fact that most of the musicians involved in this and other similar jazz-folk-classical fusion ensembles are professionally trained and highly skilled. At different times they would have worked as leading composers and musicians in various groups, including folk

¹⁹ Group “Detsishi” (S,Z,N. Lezhavas). *Modern Georgian Ethno-Music*. CD. Tbilisi: Studio 33^a.

²⁰ <http://www.theshin-music.com/press.php>

²¹ Prior to emigrating to Germany, The Shin members together with other musicians formed an ethno-fusion ensemble “Adio.”

²² *EgAri*. The Shin. CD - JARO42782, 2006. JARO, 2006.

²³ On some occasions the song is called “The Epic Waltz of Mister Qansav Qipiane.”

²⁴ I am grateful to Lauren Ninoshvili who noted that both the mock rap and The Shin have chosen to represent Svanetians in their music. They represent them from different perspectives: one mocking the Svanetians’ social backwardness and the other using the Svans’ traditional music as a sound material detached from its social bearers and social life, as scaffolding for their progressive jazz-like improvisations.

and chant choirs, rock and jazz bands, State Theater and film productions. The folkloric basis of these ensembles, enriched by complex structures of Western music, makes their style capable of representing both the grassroots politics of national folklore and modern progressive art.

Another ensemble, Tbilisi-based group called St'umari [a guest] can be categorized as ethno-music (world music) fused with the elements of classical style. However, St'umari as well as The Shin resist a simplistic categorization of their music as folk-jazz or folk-classical fusion. For example, The Shin resists the “folk-jazz fusion” label and claims to have initiated an individualistic and uniquely creative transformation and innovation of Georgian traditional music, using multiple resources in this process. St'umari's member Nino Janjghava characterizes their music as a genre of family music-making [*ojakhuri muzitsireba*] (p.c.-interview). As another member of St'umari said, they take inspiration from all the musical experiences they have gained through our musical careers. However, like The Shin, one fundamental element among St'umari's many stylistic resources, without which the Georgian-ness of their music would not be perceived, is Georgian traditional folk music. St'umari's music often combines harmonic progressions based on Georgian traditional chords, on the relationships between the chords which are based on the interval of a second, as well as on chords reminiscent of European rock tunes arranged for an ensemble of violin, flute, guitar and vocal. Creating a subtle ambience of an ethno-classical-rock alternative form of chamber music, St'umari requires (and is capable of reaching) a relatively small audience of educated listeners who appreciate their musical experiments, cryptic lyrics and relaxed performance style (p.c. – interview).

Georgian-ness in these two urban approaches to popular music – jazz-folk-classical fusion and rap – is realized via distinct aesthetics and ideologies of relationship to the world, to their audiences and to the production and consumption of music. Lex-seni, one of rap's most successful mainstream proponents in Georgia, views popular music as a production for the *masses* not in a derogative sense, but in the sense of realizing a need to be viable as artist and reach broad and versatile audiences. Unlike the aesthetics of some alternative and less mass-oriented ensembles, rap-popular artists are not afraid of creating for the “masses” for, in contrast with the elitist fear of mass Western-derived music, they see the ability to create catchy mass-consumed music as reflecting a talent for hard-work, and a

knowledge of show business, and as a marker of the new market economy and way of Western lifestyle and mentality to which Georgia has long aspired.

As one rapper said, The Shin and similar ensembles attract Western audiences by the complexity and ethno-folkloric character of their music; such audiences are usually much smaller than those attracted by mass-consumed popular music concerned with more contemporary topics and simpler, more familiar musical material (p.c. – interview). Anthropologist Sam Binkley suggests that kitsch may be viewed not as a form of popular culture which is necessarily derived from high art and as such opposed to it in a hierarchy of culture, as Adorno and Horkheimer have argued,²⁵ but rather as possessing an aesthetic of its own, that capitalizes on repetition and conventionality as a value in itself.²⁶ In popular music studies too, popular music is analyzed in close relation with the continuation of the pre-speech functions of the human body and mind with a focus on repetition; what Richard Middleton, based on previously available research, described as “primitive” natural bodily desire, a source of pleasure combined with the capitalist society’s Fordian repetitiveness.²⁷

As an example of this familiar repetition, the same Georgian rapper, Lex-seni, referred to the recent video hit by himself and Nino Chkheidze, which is a combination of an original rap-style song and the popular 19th century West Georgian urban, catchy and easy love song “Santelivit Davdnebi” [I will melt like a candle]. According to Lex-seni, who is the author of the song, this hit has helped to revive the old song by showing it in a new, contemporary light (p.c. – interview). While Lex-seni advocates the idea of fusing different stylistic elements including Georgian traditional polyphony rather than adhering to an exclusive rap aesthetic, at the same time, he sees grass-root folk songs and underground music as unable in themselves to reflect modern social realities and respond to the requirements of a broadly based, modern city audience. Therefore, modern Georgian popular music in general and rap in particular can be seen as continuing the tradition of the 19th century urban Tbilisi music as an avenue for experimenting with new hybrid styles for mass consumption. However, in contrast to 19th century urban culture, modern urban music absorbs new

²⁵ Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1991. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming. New York: Continuum.

²⁶ Sam Binkley, 2000. Kitsch as a Repetitive System: a Problem for the Theory of Taste Hierarchy. *Journal of Material Culture* 5/2:131-152, p. 133.

²⁷ Richard Middleton, 1990, *Studying popular music*. Milton Keynes; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 284-288.

political influences associated with Americanization and Westernization on the one hand and neo-traditional folk revival movements on the other.

Music, language and ideology in modern urban music. At the beginning of the 1970s and the 1980s, Georgian popular music developed within the framework of *Est'rada* – the Soviet-style of pop that was censored and funded by official Soviet cultural institutions. Each Soviet republic including Georgia had its own, vernacular *Est'rada* – vocal-instrumental [vok'al'no-inst'rument'al'nye] ensembles performing light, catchy pop tunes, the lyrics of which were concerned with conventional expressions of love and sentiments acceptable to official Soviet ethics. As a form of counter-culture to this official Soviet mainstream, Western-influenced popular and rock bands in the style of The Beatles, Deep Purple, Pink Floyd and other influential groups emerged among the Western-oriented youth of the 1980s, for whom the West and the United States in particular represented idealized symbols of freedom and wealth.

Many Western-style bands such as, for example, the Tbilisi-based band Blitz, played the music of The Beatles, and many of them wrote original songs in English. More recent ensembles who have written lyrics in English include Soft Eject and Embryon as well as other bands who have been active since the 1990s and in the beginning of the 21st century. The rationale of writing in English was that the Georgian language, with its phraseology and poetics based on traditional values and images, was unsuitable for the expression of a modern counter-culture.²⁸ English thus was seen as capable of expressing protest, individual and more unconventional images of love and relationships, while Georgian was used for more traditional value-based expressions of feelings.

Since the 1990s and especially in the 21st century, rap and some rock artists started introducing an ideology of vernacular music, according to which the world of ideas and feelings associated with modern reality is more effective if sung in Georgian because such music can reach a broader local audience. In contrast to the Soviet-style *Est'rada*, however, the new popular music in Georgia is governed by the laws of market economy – it is produced in private studios, is commercially sold and features in video-pop hit charts on TV and radio. Themes inhibited by the Soviet censorship – eroticism, love, protest etc abound in the new popular music to the extent

²⁸ According to Soft Eject's Ghia Karchkhadze and some members of the rock band Embryon, rock is an Anglo-American phenomenon and the Georgian language is unsuitable for it (p.c. – interview 2002).

that many listeners and critics are irritated by the influx of repetitiveness, catchiness and often the perceived distastefulness of tunes and lyrics combined with the sensual bodily behavior.²⁹

Rap is a medium through which Georgian artists and audiences express themselves in relation to newly emerging everyday life issues and to subjectivities that are different from those articulated in earlier, mainstream popular music. The poetics of many early Georgian popular songs were defined by conventional sentimentalism, such as, for example, occurs in Revaz Laghidze's "Gogov, gogov,"³⁰ a famous and highly popular song from the 1960s. Feelings of romantic love in this song are expressed metaphorically (they are compared to clouds, rain, snow and the sword), placing the singer in a passively sentimental and hopeless rather than an active and assertive position³¹. Lex-seni shared a similar idea during the conversation with me, according to which frequent metaphors like "sad lips" [*gabut'uli t'uchebi*] in Georgian popular love songs are dated and irrelevant to modern life. The typically passive lyricism of love poetry in earlier Georgian popular songs is enhanced by a vocal melody which follows the natural accents and rhythm of the language rather than giving the words a more creative rhythmic treatment. The subordination of the rhythm of music to the rhythm of language is a characteristic feature of most popular Georgian songs of the socialist period.³² Even the most agile rock songs, such as for example, "Menat'rebi" by the rock group Nat'vris Khe [the wishing tree], have vocal lines which smooth out the song's rhythmic rocky instrumental background. Even Georgian rap is characterized by more lyricism and melodious refrains/choruses compared to its American counterparts.

Most importantly for the present essay, these two forms of popular music – rap and jazz-folk fusion – seem to offer different models of the relationship between their

²⁹ Lasha Gabunia, 2004. *Arak'olekt'iuri Tsek'va* [dancing non-collectively]. Tbilisi: Saari.

³⁰ Excerpt from this song: It's winter, it's snowing and raining on me, But you are cheering up, the cloud lying on my heart, that is your eyes. Ooh, girl, I haven't loved anyone else before you, your love has stabbed me through the heart like a sword.

³¹ The change from passive to active grammatical structures is one way of marking changes in the Nepalese youth's attitudes to love and dating, and has largely occurred under the influence of Western rock and pop music. Paul D. Greene and David R. Henderson. 2003. "At the crossroads of languages, musics, and emotions in Kathmandu," in *Global pop, local language*, edited by Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll. The University Press of Mississippi, pp. 87-108, pp. 98-99. Lex-seni's love songs too, which I haven't shown here, are more about adopting free sex (especially directed towards women) rather than adhering to conventional symbolic images of love.

³² Overshadowing of the rhythmic by a melodic principle is also observed in other cultures such as Japanese for example. As observed in relation to the adaptation of American rap to Japanese language, the lack of accents and mono-syllabic words in Japanese makes rhyming as well as matching word-speech accents with the rhythm of rap difficult. See Noriko Manabe 2006.

musical and linguistic aspects and their approaches to referencing social concerns. While referential language seems to matter particularly in rap, it is less likely to constitute the focus of creativity in the jazz-folk fusion style. Such patterns of the relationship between music and language seem to have prototypes in earlier configurations of Georgian traditional folk music, where simple songs co-existed with a more technically-musically sophisticated and professional approach to polyphonic singing.³³ For example, in the province of Guria in the second half of the 19th century, talented and skillful singers and chanters participated in special singing sessions during which they improvised, experimented with, and created new, technically complex versions of traditional songs and even composed songs orally.³⁴ In such songs, as in many jazz-folk fusion ensembles today, verbal text frequently becomes secondary to musical experimentation.

These mastersingers and the songs they created are a complete opposite to those folk genres in which language and words in the sense of referential meaning were the primary goal of music-making. Genres such as *shairi* [in which singers mock each other humorously], *kapia* [similar to *shairi*], *galeksva* [rhyming] and even certain ritual songs such as the healing song *Iav-Nana*, were used to provide a social and political commentary on everyday reality and changing political situations.³⁵ Like rap, these “folk” genres are thought of as being “primitive;” unlike rap, they nevertheless maintain high value within the national culture.

Rap and jazz-folk music may also be compared within an interpretive framework of a distinction between music as a socially engaged or disengaged practice. Bourdieu makes a distinction between high art and popular kitsch, according to which high art claims to be autonomous and free from the ‘interests’ of politics, status and daily life. Expanding upon Bourdieu’s observation, anthropologist Sam Binkley adds that the high art’s claim to freedom from the everyday stuff is precisely what makes it necessary that kitsch produce its own universalistic claim and assert the

³³ Ethnomusicologist Edisher Garaqanidze observes that everyone could perform the wedding song “Maqruli” in Guria, but only professional singers could sing “Ts’amok’ruli” or “Chven Mshvidoba” (Edisher Garaqanidze, 2007. *Kartuli Khalkhuri Simgheris Shemsrulebloba*. Tbilisi: Int’elekt’i, 35).

³⁴ The ethnomusicologist Anzor Erkomaishvili writes that such mastersingers raised Georgian polyphony to a completely new higher level. Anzor Erkomaishvili, 1988. *Shavi Shashvi Chioda* [The Blackbird’s Song]. Tbilisi: Nak’aduli (in Georgian). According to him these singers were true composers (p.c.).

³⁵ For Iav-Nana as socio-political commentary see Kevin Tuite, 2005. *The violet and rose: a Georgian lullaby as song of healing and socio-political commentary*. Unpublished manuscript; Giorgi Alibegashvili, 1992. *Kartuli khalkhuri p’oeziis nimushebi* [examples of Georgian folk poetry]. Tbilisi: Ganatleba, 259.

petty interest, the everyday folly... and the true stuff of common humanity.³⁶ It is its engagement with the “common stuff” of everyday life and politics that distinguishes Georgian rap from Georgian jazz-folk fusion ensembles. As the “father” of Georgian rap, Shavi Princi [Black Prince], AKA Dzebnili, has said, his songs generally cover what he calls “everyday stuff.”³⁷ The rapper Lex-seni told me that his inspiration came from the times of Shevardnadze, when insecurity, unfairness and poverty were commonplace (p.c.). Apart from his political inspirations, many of Lex-seni’s lyrics can be read as conveying a direct and assertive message to his listeners to break away from tradition and emancipate themselves from imposed social norms and sexual abstinence, to be themselves and to change.

Song texts of folk-jazz or folk-classical fusion ensembles are either old ritual texts, original texts based on images borrowed from old ritual or religious poetry, or texts borrowed from folk songs. St’umari’s texts often comprise ancient ritual and religious poetry or folk song lyrics, such as the song “Odoia” [work song]. A large part of the lyrics in “Odoia” is based on vocables and words which relate to the reality of past times. This is not to say that texts in ethno-jazz-classical fusion styles do not represent a reflection on modern social life; the words’ relation to the ancient imagery can be viewed as the reality of recent awakening of interest towards old folk songs and folk revival movement of the city’s cultural life. However, this reality is far from the reality brought into everyday life of ordinary Georgians by the recent socio-political changes. As one rapper said regarding the folk song “Gutnuri”’s [ploughing song] text which refers to a plough and the bull who pulls the plough, bulls and plough must have been important in the everyday life of those individuals who created and sang the song in the past. However, today, these attributes are irrelevant to the everyday life of most Georgians (p.c. – interview). By using such old texts, modern ethno-music creators subscribe to those permanent values which have been established in the national cultural value system of the Georgian people.

Among the many genres of popular music exported from the United States and Western Europe to the rest of the world, rap is the most dependent on language and message and as such offers extensive possibilities for local rappers to explore new

³⁶ Sam Binkley, 2000. Kitsch as a repetitive system: a problem for the theory of taste hierarchy. *Journal of Material Culture* 5/2:131-152, p. 146.

³⁷ Paul Rimple, 2006. “Georgian hip hop: creating a beat for the Caucasus.” 12.08.2006. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav120806.shtml>. Accessed on 4 April 2008.

social themes and the rhythmic and musical potential of their language.³⁸ Forms of talk as part of “language ideologies” enact links to group or personal identity, aesthetics and morality.³⁹ Such an approach of privileging the referential function in songs is the complete opposite of the aesthetic that informs the work of Georgian jazz-folk fusion ensembles. From a musical perspective, jazz-folk fusion is far more sophisticated and resourceful than rap in its use of the non-referential sonority of verbal language.⁴⁰ In her study of the use of non-referential vocables by traditional and new Georgian ethno-folk-fusion ensembles, for example, ethnomusicologist Lauren Ninoshvili observes that vocables are particularly effective in mediating Georgian music for non-Georgian audiences and creating affective non-referential meaning in increasingly transnational conditions.⁴¹ However, a cursory look shows that while these musicians treat words creatively, they use them predominantly as a scaffolding for their scat-type or traditional Georgian ways of improvising. What is more striking about their approach, by comparison with that of Georgian rappers, is the avoidance of socially engaged original lyrics⁴² and the retreat to well-known traditional Georgian song lyrics [and music] such as, for example, “Tskhenosnuri” [horse-riding song], or “Qansav Qipiane,” which I discussed earlier. This avoidance of socio-political engagement, whether conscious or unconscious, can be interpreted either as expressing a politically neutral position or a position of autonomous musicianship that transcends everyday social and political concerns and produces a self-referential artistic identity. I would argue that, due to its dependence on verbal language and message, rap also produces innovation in two major inter-related areas of Georgian culture: the one concerning social issues and moral attitudes⁴³ and the other the formal and expressive poetic aspects of the Georgian language, its intonation, rhythm, rhyming, accents, and syntax.

In contrast with music, language depends on referential meaning and as such is the dominant way of functional communication in society. Therefore, innovations

³⁸ Manabe, p. 1.

³⁹ Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, 1994. Language ideology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23: 55-82, p. 56.

⁴⁰ See Lauren Ninoshvili, 2008. “The archaic, the non-referential, and the contemporary Georgian song text.” Unpublished manuscript.

⁴¹ Ninoshvili, 2008.

⁴² Avoiding socially engaged lyrics together with the practice of choosing English for song-writing by Georgian popular music artists is a separate theme for ethnographic-musicological research which is beyond the limitations of this essay.

⁴³ Changes in moral attitudes of the society also facilitate changes in the grammatical and phonetic features of language. See Paul D. Greene and David R. Henderson, 2003.

in language are often most obvious and ideologically charged and, in consequence, least tolerated by the locally and nationally minded elite parts of the population, who view themselves as guardians of the purity of national language. Purity of language was also an issue in 19th century urban Tbilisi culture. In accordance with the city's multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population, Tbilisi language was a dialect of Georgian, a city tongue [kalakuri ena], which had absorbed many foreign words and intonations from Armenian, Turkish-Azeri and Persian.⁴⁴ Although Georgian elite writers did not overtly condemn such city language in order to be understood by the lower-class population [mdabio khalkhi], the language of many ashugh poets was viewed as bazaar language,⁴⁵ unlike the rural dialects such as K'akhuri, Pshauri, Mokhevuri etc.⁴⁶ Today, rap absorbs "street language" which was unknown for the Soviet-time Est'rada music.⁴⁷ New phraseology in rap includes slang words such as "amovida qelshi am idiot'ebis khelshi" [I am fed up being controlled by these idiots]⁴⁸, "akhvari" [son of a bitch/moron], "sipati" [impolite word for "face"]. These words could be heard only in everyday conversation but never in mainstream popular songs.

Using the example of the rapper Lex-seni's song Ts'adi ts'in [Move forward], in this final section I will demonstrate how the placement of accents and division/splitting of multi-syllable words across musical phrases creates a sense of a break from the traditional use of words in Georgian popular songs, while facing the challenge of maintaining the lyrics' intelligibility for his young Georgian audience and attempting to make rap a truly Georgian experience. Attitude in rap is a new socio-psychological phenomenon which determines a new approach to the accentuation in words. The new emotional dynamic, imperative phrases define new ways of accentuation.

Figure 1: Lex-Seni – Ts'adi Ts'in [Move Forward], lyrics

An asterisk after a syllable marks an accent; words and phrases that are split between two musical phrases are in italics.

ts'adi ts'in ts'adi ts'in [**Go forward, go forward**]
 Es u-nda i-tso-de shen tu ar i-tsi, [**You should get this if you haven't got it yet**]
 Am she-ni tskho-vre-bit ras ga-ni*-tsdi [**What are you experiencing in your life**]

⁴⁴ Grishashvili 1957, 13.

⁴⁵ Grishashvili, 1928: 95, 118.

⁴⁶ There are several, at least 12 dialects of Georgian in Georgia.

⁴⁷ Such street language was characteristic of the black market restaurant music of the Soviet period, the music played in restaurants by ensembles specially hired by restaurant customers or restaurant managers.

⁴⁸ Lex-seni, song Monologi [Monologue].

Sa-da-mde un-da i-qo a-se din-dji [**Until when should you be so slow**]
 Ga-i-ghvi-dze ga-da-ad-gi ts'in na-bi-ji [**Wake up, step forward**]
 Ver da-i-dje-res* (+intonation) es, [**They aren't convinced in this**]
 Go-ne-bas ver mo-u-khmes*, bevr [**They can't move their brain**]
 Ki-tkhvas ver u-pa-su-khes*, [**they couldn't answer the question**]
 Tskho-vre-ba bevrs ur-khevs*, hee, [**This life is doin' damage to many**]
 Me, me, [**Me, me**].
 Rats gin-da da-i-dje-re, ram-de-nis me-pe-te-ba [**Believe whatever you want, I come across**]
 Am-re-zi-li si-pa-ti, ar i-tsi *sa-i-dan* a-mo- [**so many crooked faces, you don't know where the menace turns up from eeh**]
gi*-var-de-ba khi-pa-ti, va

Georgian language lacks stress accents, and Georgian linguists characterize Georgian as a language with weak stress accents. Therefore, the major principle in terms of intonation and rhythm is the way in which the words in a sentence are grouped rhythmically.⁴⁹ It seems possible that the weak stress accents in Georgian create the possibility to place stress on any syllable of the word, since such novel accentuation cannot change the semantic meaning of words. In the song, Lex-seni stresses the last syllable in the word “sa-xli-dan” [lit. from the house] (p.c.), and the stress is underlined by the rising intonation of this syllable. Alternatively and more naturally he could place the stress accent on the first syllable, but accentuating the last syllable of the word enables him to create an assertive, imperative and forward momentum for his rap, which matches the text’s message as well as his bold attitude expressed in his use of slang words such as *ur-khevs* [an equivalent of “fuck up”] in this particular excerpt, where the accent again is on the second syllable. A similar effect is created when the phrase “saidan amogivardeba” and the word “amogivardeba” [will jump out] within the phrase are split between the musical phrases and the accent comes on the 3rd syllable of this 6-syllable word (underlined in figure 1).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sergi Zhghent’i, 1963. *Kartuli enis rit'mik'ul-melodik'uri st'rukt'ura* [The rhythmic-melodic structure of the Georgian language]. Tbilisi: Tsodna (The GSSR Ministry of Culture State Publisher), 11.

⁵⁰ Unusual accentuation and the splitting of words between musical phrases also occurs in traditional Georgian music. In chants, for example a word can be divided between the end of one musical phrase and the beginning of the next, as happens in this rap. Such divisions are smoothed out by a melismatic vocal style called “gamshveneba” in Georgian chant terminology. The melodic sophistication of each vocal line in the most complex polyphonic songs of the Guria province also creates challenges for the correct placement of syllabic stresses. Here such challenges are resolved by an ample application of vocables, in a fashion similar to that of modern jazz-folk fusion ensembles. Rappers on the other hand, are creatively transforming the Georgian language, not via “detours” such as melodic melismas and vocables, but by overtly changing stress-accent placements in words.

Conclusion. In the minds of most Georgian intellectuals and academics it is the expressive culture of rural Georgians, polyphonic song, that is associated with the autochthonous and archaic Georgian identity. However, while village culture signifies ethnic purity and Georgian-ness, most villagers settling in the city of Tbilisi have practiced and consumed hybrid styles that have had little in common with rural polyphonic song. These hybrid styles of the emergent urbanites are often thought of disapprovingly as cheaply erotic, kitschy restaurant music, influenced by either Persian-Turkish, Armenian and Russian mass popular music, or today, also by the “cheap,” non-elite styles of Western-derived rap and mass popular music.

Through the two aesthetics in modern Georgian urban popular music, folk-jazz-classical fusion and rap, two positions can be outlined. One, which searches for a uniquely Georgian sound, structure and meaning, is particularly developed in ethno-music and folk-jazz fusion styles.⁵¹ In combination with the elements of Western classical music, jazz (and rock), music created in this style involves those attributes which define its elite character. In particular, the high value of folk music in the hierarchy of national culture and the general perception of jazz and classical music as high art, creates ideological prerequisites by which these distinct cultures – rural folk song, Western jazz and classical music – are viewed as compatible with each other. For example, recently Georgia held a music festival “Jazz and Folklore;” And The State Folklore Centre of Georgia, the institute concerned with the purity of Georgian folklore, interviewed The Shin about relationships between jazz and folklore.

The other position is reflected in the city’s mass popular music production, a position which privileges openness to the music produced for the broader mass audiences. In this respect, modern Georgian mass popular music in general and rap in particular can be compared with the 19th century music consumed by Tbilisi’s multi-ethnic lower-class populations, a culture which did not fear to absorb street talk, everyday trivial themes, and catchy simple tunes of hybrid Oriental origin. Georgian

⁵¹ For example, ensemble St’umari’s Nino Janjghava expressed a radical opinion according to which none of the Georgian Western-derived musical styles and genres such as the national opera, ballet, symphony, rock, pop or rap can be organically Georgian. As a solution to this “problem” she suggested that the teaching of music theory and harmony at the college and conservatorium level should be based on Georgian canonical church chant tradition rather than on the European-derived theoretical knowledge and methods as it is today (p.c. – interview). However, such pro-Georgian position might overlook the fact that the European-Greek system of modes and the European theory of music and harmony have laid the foundation for the theoretical analysis and readings of many non-European musical systems including Georgia’s, as well as for ethno-music and folk-jazz fusion.

rap, in the hands of the most successful commercial artists, becomes a rich avenue for experimenting with various styles of local Georgian as well as Western-American origin. The rapper Lex-seni, rather than adhering to a strict ideology of street mentality, drugs, and criminal world, is more interested in fusing the elements of different styles and adapting American-derived rap to the taste of Georgian audiences. One of his future projects involves making a clip-recording together with the Georgian folk polyphonic choir “Kartuli Khmebi” (p.c. – interview). However, it is the simplicity and accessibility of this music for the “masses” and “hicks” that places Georgian rap at the bottom of the elite’s hierarchy of taste.

The two genres of post-socialist Georgian popular song that I have discussed in this paper create their own innovative style of groove: rap does it by means of a novel exploitation of language and its rhythmic potential and jazz-folk fusion by its fresh and experimental blending of Georgian traditional, Western jazz, rock and world music sounds. The two types of groove signify two ideological attitudes towards taste in music: music as a high art transcending political interests and everyday life, and music as an art of relating to “everyday stuff.” Some rappers’ ability to reflect on everyday life in an intelligible way suggests that such a novel and tradition-deflecting treatment of the Georgian language might be perceived by the new audiences of post-socialist generations as an attractive alternative signifying social innovation and reflecting the new ways of life to which they aspire. On the other hand, the large popularity of jazz-folk fusion and ethno ensembles among intellectuals within and outside Georgia as well as outside Georgia rests on the appeal of high culture, transcendence of everyday reality and folkloric roots.