

## ქართული იდენტურობის პოლიტიკური ექსპლუატაცია თანამედროვე სიმღერაში

სტედლერი კატარინა  
ჰუმბოლტის უნივერსიტეტი

მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ საქართველოს მოსახლეობის ეთნიკური იდენტობის განსაზღვრისას რეგიონული კუთვნილება მათთვის მნიშვნელობის მქონეა, შეიმჩნევა ქართველ ერთან, როგორც ერთ მთლიანობასთან გაიგივების ტენდენცია. დაახლოების სწრაფვა ერში შესაძლოა გამოწვეული იყოს სხვადასხვა ისტორიული, პოლიტიკური და სოციალური გარემოებებით. საქართველოსა და მის ორ რეგიონს, აფხაზეთსა და სამხრეთ ოსეთს შორის კონფლიქტის გამომწვევი ერთ-ერთი მიზეზი, შესაძლოა სათავეს იღებდეს როგორც სახელმწიფო რიტორიკიდან, ასევე ხელოვნების მოღვაწეთა ერთგვარი კულტურული “კონტრიბუციიდან”. განვლილი წლების მანძილზე მუსიკოსები უმღერდნენ საქართველოს, როგორც ერს და განსაკუთრებულ ყურადღებას სწორედ ქვეყნის ერთიანობაზე ამახვილებდნენ. 2008 წლის აგვისტოს ომმა რამდენიმე ცვლილება განაპირობა ქვეყანაში. ჩემს სტატიაში ეს ცვლილებები განხილული იქნება ტრანსფორმაციამდე და მისი შემდგომი პერიოდის მუსიკალური მონაცემების მიხედვით, იდენტობაზე როგორც რიტორიკის, ასევე პოზიციონირების გავლენის თვალსაზრისით.

## Political Exploitation of Georgian Identity in Contemporary Song

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In September 2008 an article was published on Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty’s website proposing that *Georgian Artists Battle Moscow With Music*. The article introduced that the previous war in August between Tbilisi and Moscow over Georgia’s breakaway region South Ossetia was fought not only on the military front. Songs – intended to encourage the nation and weaken the enemy – were sung at political rallies, posted on websites and shown on Georgian TV. Various artists and singers seemed to have joined the armed forces (Rekhviashvili, 2008).

The image of artists uniting with the military during a crisis is nothing new. In Georgia a tendency of cooperation between musicians and politics could be witnessed over the past years, also before the generated conflict in August 2008. The war has brought upon a change in both (state) rhetoric and the positioning of Georgian identity in contemporary song. The aim of my article is to trace this transformation.

### *Before the War or War Preparation*

Over the past years both, the government and the opposition have made song part of their political repertoire. Musicians have taken sides in election campaigns and have shown their support actively when participating at rallies. Next to these rather personal statements in the political world, music has and is being used as the *voice of a nation*.

In 2005 the governing party *Ertiani Natsionaluri Modzraoba* (United National Movement or UNM) launched a program called *P'at'riot'i* with the main goal to "raise patriotic understanding in the youth, help young people to grow up strong in body and healthy in spirit [and] to develop high ethical qualities in the young people" (UNM, 2007). To fulfill these ambitious goals, summer youth camps were organized in the countryside – thousands attended these camps in the past years.<sup>1</sup>

To support the program, an annual song contest called *P'at'rinot'i* – combining the words "p'at'riot'i" (patriot) and "not'i" (note) – was initiated. Its aim is first, to encourage musicians to compose new patriotic songs and second, to circulate the awarded songs within Georgia. After the competition's finals, the best patriotic song is not only honored as such, but a professional music video is being produced.

### *Patriotebi – Patriots*

In 2007 the artist Zaza K'orit'eli, better known as Zumba, won the *P'at'rinot'i* contest with his song "Gamarjoba Apkhazeto" (Hello Abkhazia). The melody of the song is beautifully composed with some references to traditional music. The lyrics are based on a poem by Galakt'ion T'abidze, a well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century poet. They are an ode to Abkhazia and the author's longing for this black sea region. The video, which has been produced, shows the long awaited departure of numerous people, young and old, from different Georgian cities and regions towards Sokhumi, the Abkhazian capital. It is a joyous departure by bus, plane and boat – though in 2007 this was an impossible, even provocative undertaking due to the still tense political situation, established after the war in the early 1990s.

The differences in text between Galakt'ion T'abidze's poem, Zumba's song – as presented at the *P'at'rinot'i* competition – and the music clip, which was produced after the success at the song contest finals, are worthy of note:

The lyrics are based on T'abidze's poem but have gradually been altered for both the song and the video. For the first strophe, Zumba follows the original poem. Yet afterwards he adds to the lyrics, prolonging them for his means, in a similar manner as T'abidze had written his poem. So Zumba's text continues, within the general meaning

of the original, further as a memory of a loved place, far away. But there are some small details, which, in the end, give the text another connotation in regard to the war of 1992-93 over Abkhazia and the years of constant tension, which were to follow.

In his song, Zumba adds the line: “erti tsa gvakvs erti mze da erti zghva” (we have one sky, one sun and one sea). This line contains both reconciliatory and admonitory aspects. The shared entities addressed in the augmented line refer to attributes of nature, but can be translated to life and especially living-together in general. Those who realize and decide to share, what they have in common, will be able to live in a peaceful society. The words seem to reach out, with a subtext though, that refusing the offered hand of diplomatic co-existence will not change the fact that Abkhazia still and definitely belongs to Georgia.

To intensify the political dimension of the music clip, the original poem underwent even further changes. One added line, for example, claims ownership to the Abkhazian sea directly and therefore to the Abkhazian region in total: T’abidze’s “momenat’ra zghva, romelits vrtselia” (I miss the sea, which is so vast) becomes “momenat’ra zghva, romelits chvenia” (I miss the sea, which is ours). This altered line expresses a Georgian-nationalistic and centralistic point of view.

Next to such changes in text, the visual dimension of the music video are produced perfectly for its purpose to declare the unity of the nation in song. At the *P’at’rinot’i* competition, Zumba had performed together with the folk group Chveneburebi, who were singing the traditional back vocals in between the verses. For the music clip, distinguished Georgian singers from different generations and musical backgrounds like the romance singer Nani Bregvadze, the rapper Aleksi Kavtarade alias Lekseni, or the pop singers Nini Badurashvili and Diana Gurtskaya<sup>2</sup> sung and stared together in their longing for Abkhazia and their happy departure towards Sokhumi. The selection of various artists drew the image that the whole music world was united in the question on Abkhazia – this musical union in political thought could suggest that next to all musicians everybody in Georgia is united. And precisely for that reason, the clip was ideal to show to and convince a large audience that Abkhazia is part of Georgia, and will always be. In 2007, the video was broadcasted both on state television and in Tbilisi’s metro stations, alternating with commercial-like clips promoting Georgian military.

In addition to the production of the music clip by *P’at’rinot’i*, Zumba and the other contributing artists were honored by President Mikheil Saakashvili. Some received the *Order of Vakhtang Gorgasali of the Third Rank*, the others the *Order of Merit*. President Saakashvili expressed the impact of the video, published both in Georgian and in English on the *President of Georgia Homepage*, as follows:

Clips such as this are created by the epoch in which they originate, not just by composers and directors. A new ideology has taken shape in our country. There is a new spirit, a new mindset, a new mentality. This is the new Georgia’s message to Abkhazia and the rest of the world. Everything in this clip is very beautiful. Georgia is an especially beautiful country and it is getting more and more beautiful with each passing day. This clip was a joint project. It is hope, it is energy, it is youth and it is the new Georgia. It is an indicator of how far we have come and what great prospects we have.

It is a juxtaposition of where we were and where we are now! (President of Georgia Press Release, 2007)

Though the UNM initiated the *P'at'rinot'i* competition, the contestants do not necessarily support the party as such. One can trace the identification with the fatherland (mamuli) back as far as to Chavchavadze's *Mamuli, Ena, Sartsmunoeba* (fatherland, language, religion), or even farther. For the musicians taking part at the *P'at'rinot'i* competition expresses a relevant musical attitude towards supporting their fatherland.

However, the propagation of the winners' music clips must be considered as a politicized act towards regaining national integrity. In this regard, the governmental line to reestablish Georgia's political and geographical entity must not be forgotten.

There are also songs apart from *P'at'rinot'i*, which aim to support the governmental goal to restore national integrity. Nini Badurashvili's "Psous ts'q'ali" (Water of the Psou) addresses, in the music clip, young Georgian troops directly, when she sings about regaining the separatist region of Abkhazia. The river Psou flows along the Southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus in Abkhazia – as well as on the border to Russia – and eventually into the Black Sea. In the song's chorus the idea of reclaiming land as shown in "Gamarjoba Apkhazeto" can be traced concerning this river: at first Nini Badurashvili sings "dali et, gmirebo, es psous ts'q'alia" (drink, heroes, it's the water of the Psou), which is then changed to "dali et, gmirebo, es chveni ts'q'alia" (drink, heroes, it's our water). The Psou is also declared as still being a Georgian river.

Songs like "Gamarjoba Apkhazeto" or "Psous ts'q'ali" focus mainly on strengthening the unity within Georgia. The breakaway region of Abkhazia is seen as part of the country, which has to find its way back to the fatherland. The national identity, which is defined in these songs, seems to be based totally on the territory issue.

#### *After the War or Defining the Enemy*

"We're in a war with Russia, aren't we? We're firing back, with whatever means we have," composer Temo Rtskhiladze said (Rekhviashvili, 2008). Together with Zura Doijashvili he wrote the song „Russia 2008“, which was distributed over the Internet as well as on various broadcasters, including Rustavi 2. The song mocks and attacks the Kremlin leadership as well as Russia as an entire nation with strongly accusing words. The video shows disrespectful images of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Russians in different stages of drunkenness. In an interview, Temo Rtskhiladze defends his song as an appropriate message to the Russian people about the dangers of Kremlin aggression (Rekhviashvili, 2008).

The song was created under the first shock of the days of war in August 2008. It is the starting point for a new trend not only a response to direct distress. A shift from focusing on the unity of Georgia to defining an explicit enemy has taken place. This enemy is namely not Abkhazia or South Ossetia, who are still meant to return from their separatist paths, but the enemy is Russia with its ambiguous actions in both past and present towards the two breakaway regions and towards Georgia.

In Spring 2009 another song drew attention throughout Europe. The band Stephane & 3G won the Georgian finals with their song "We Don't Wanna Put in" and

were to participate in this year's Eurovision Song Contest, which took place in Moscow. The title has an ambiguous meaning: a rebellion against putting in as well as against President Vladimir Putin. The written lyrics are about leaving everyday life while dancing in a discotheque. Composer Stephane and the 3G – the three *girls* and musicians Nini Badurashvili, Tako Gachechiladze and Kristine Imedadze – show another story on stage. The refrain “We don't wanna put in the negative move/ It's killing the groove/ I'm trying to shoot in some disco tonight/ Boogie with you” becomes, intentionally mispronounced, an accusation: We don't want Putin. The line “I'm trying to shoot in,” pronounced like *shoot him*, is underlined through the dancing moves of the singers. The performance leaves the three girls on the floor, apparently shot dead.

Georgia initially planned to boycott the Eurovision Song Contest in Moscow because of the August 2008 war, but nonetheless decided to participate. Then suddenly things turned against their late entry: the Eurovision Jury asked the musicians to change the lyrics of their song, because of its extreme, political content, which was supposedly violating the Eurovision competition rules. Stephane & 3G refused, blaming Russia for the jury intervention and their entry was banned for being too political (Kamenev, 2009). The conflict between Georgia and Russia obviously continued on another front.

A change in nationalism, which can be traced in contemporary song, has taken place due to the August 2008 war. The focus on national unity has shifted towards a kind of xenophobia against Russia. This does not suggest that the concern about Georgia's national unity has disappeared, but the musical centre of attention focuses rather on defining the enemy on the border in the north than on borders within the country.

### *Short Conclusion*

It is striking that questions concerning national or political issues are mainly dealt using text and images in contemporary song. Traditional musical elements are sometimes also included and can be utilized to intensify the politicized issues, but they seem not to be *national* enough to declare a specific intention.

Because of the difficult political situation in Georgia today, it seems that musicians as well as spectators tend to be especially attracted to music with nationalistic notions. It is up to stage and audience how these questions of contemporary identification are going to be dealt with in the present and the future. This interaction between musicians, auditors and politics is not static and therefore will continue to reflect the current political and also social debates.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The exact numbers, which were published on the website of UNM in 2007, are 15.000 students in 2005 and 30.000 students in 2006. Unfortunately these have never been updated over the past years. In addition the official website for the *P'at'riot'i* program ([www.patrioti.ge](http://www.patrioti.ge)) has been suspended, therefore representative numbers for the years 2007, 2008 and 2009 cannot be given.

<sup>2</sup> Nani Bregvadze, a romance singer and actress, had been quite famous throughout the Soviet Union. She performed both in Georgian and in Russian, combining her talents on stage in nuanced rendition. Aleksi Kavt'aradze, alias Lekseni, is a popular rapper, who sings about societal problems. He joined in on the *P'at'riot'i* program at its start in 2005. His song "P'at'riot'ebi" (Patriots) was the first to be turned into a music clip and featured as a kind of anthem for the *P'at'riot'i* program. Nini Badurashvili can be called one of Georgia's young present day pop stars. She has been singing together with a broad range of musicians over the past years. Diana Gurstaya is a blind singer from Abkhazia, who performed in the Georgian entry for the Eurovision Song Contest 2008 in Belgrade. Her song "Peace will come" reflected the devastation of war and called for peace.