

Aspects of Oral Communication

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Uta M. Quasthoff

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HELGA KOTTHOFF

Verbal Duelling in Caucasian Georgia¹

Ethnolinguistic Studies of Three Oral Poetic Attack Genres

0. Introduction

We used to think about confrontation and cooperation in antagonistic terms. Opposition and argument have been described as "troublesome" conversational events, marking a "failure of social relations" (Allen/Guy 1974). In anthropological linguistics, however, notions of argument and attack have focused on how artistically the genres of dispute are realized. Dissent is not always played down and minimized in order to "save face", but may be used to effect a larger sense of cultural affirmation of community through a dramatization of opposing forces. Dissent often strengthens the coherence among the speech activities. The speakers orient themselves to each other in their formulation process. Many cultures seem to practise forms of celebration of opposition. From the anthropological literature we know about the art of verbal duelling in the black communities of urban American cities (i. e. Abrahams 1962; Kochman 1968; Labov 1972; Mitchell-Kernan 1972), about the attack strategies of Turkish boys (Dundes/Leach/Özkök 1972), verbal duelling in Chamula (Gossen 1976), Galicia (Tolosana 1978) and about other regions (Edwards/Sienkewicz 1990). Goodwin pointed to children's conflict performances which provide an effective way to accomplish the arrangement of social identities among peers (1983; 1990). Schifffrin (1984) and Tannen (1981) showed how conflicts are acted out as social events in Jewish neighbourhoods in the U. S. Similar observations hold for some German settings (Kotthoff 1989; Nothdurft 1993). The more confrontationally the conversation develops the more elaborate the antagonism is often stylized. The display of opposition demands a special form of cooperation (Kotthoff 1993 b).

I would like to turn our attention to a region which up to now has attracted little ethnolinguistic interest. Caucasian Georgia provides a wealth of sophisticated oral poetic genres. In rural Georgia some genres of argument and attack are dramatized sociable events. Not only verbal attacks take place in sophisticated ritualized forms, but also lamentations and toasts. In the event of a death

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Levan Dzeiranashvili, Winfried Boeder and especially to Elza Gabedava for help and support.

in a rural area, the women of the village come together and create highly stylized laments, and at the Georgian dinner table wine is not touched until an elaborate toast has been made².

In this article I shall present case studies of dispute genres which I came to know during my stay in Caucasian Georgia³. All my examples stem from Eastern Georgia. Because of the great regional variety in all communicative genres, I shall name the place of origin of the dialogue in each case.

I present the seemingly strange and "exotic" language data in the appropriate contexts, illustrate their structure, and explain, when necessary, the cultural background for a better understanding of the text; at the same time I wish to keep in mind the interrelation of communicative and social structures. However, as Edwards and Sienkewicz point out (1990: 3), it is the oral medium itself which sets up the strongest barrier between the observer and the performance. Not every listener hears the spoken words in the same way:

Understanding a performance in an oral culture requires a special mind-set, a cultural harmony which excludes from the oral world any outsider, whether literate or not. In many ways an oral performance, which can be fully understood only by members of its audience, is as esoteric as a composition aimed at a literate elite, such as a poem of Ezra Pound (1990: 3).

1. Features of orality

The genres of argument and attack presented here are only to be encountered nowadays in rural areas. The further away the villages are from Tbilisi, the capital, the more popular the poetic dispute genres are. Oral performance and tradition mostly depend on a stable community with a close-knit social background. Especially genres of dispute demand a stock of knowledge about possible opponents and the chance to observe one another which is more difficult to manage in urban areas.

As Georgia has been a fully literate society for a long time, we deal with the "secondary" form of orality, as Ong (1978) described orality in a literate context in order to distinguish it from the primary orality of a culture yet "untouched by writing or print". (See also Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume).

The most popular dispute genres of the mountain villages in Eastern Georgian are the *gašaireba*, the *galeskeba*, and the *kapioba*. *Kapioba* is a speciality of the high mountain region Pšavi, the other two genres are more widely spread throughout the country. The *kapia* are nearly exclusively male rituals as is also one subtype of the *gašaireba*, an obscene insulting one, whereas the *galeskeba* constitute a less gender specific activity.

² For the poetics of Georgian laments see Kotthoff 1993a and for the toasts see Kotthoff 1991. and Kotthoff forthcoming a and b.

³ I lived in Georgia for a total of 24 months, teaching German literature and linguistics at the Cavcavadze Foreign Languages Institute.

The *gašaireba*, the *galekseba* and the *kapioba*⁴ are three oral poetic dispute genres which have linear structures⁵ and often rhyme. The *kapia* represent a highly improvised, witty poetic song genre in two-line forms peculiar to the area of Pšvi, whereas the *šairebi* and the *leksebi*⁶ are verbally handed down forms in which formulas and prefabricated lines can be more easily integrated. The *kapia* appear to enjoy the highest reputation among East Georgian mountain people because of their high standard of improvisation. *Gašaireba* are fourline dialogues. They contain two sub-groups: the *šairi*, used in courting, and the *šairi*, in the form of sexual verbal attacks. The former takes place between a man and women in front of a mixed audience; the latter is reserved only for men amongst themselves. Both represent a mixed form between formulaic and improvised texts, as is typical for most oral performances (Edwards/Sienkewicz 1990). The *galekseba* today take the form of monologue-like poetic letters, transmitted through a mediator/messenger, who recites the verses made by the sender for the addressee in front of an audience. Their functions also fulfill courtship or attack intentions. These *leksebi* are recited monologues that do not have a melody. They demand a similar poetic response, thus inviting the addressee to a subsequent dialogue sometime in the future. They represent a mixture between the oral and the written mode.

A line structure can always be identified for all the three genres and the rhythmical nature and metrical structure is comparably strong⁷. Rhetorical strategies such as repetition, contrast, triple denomination of subjects, extravagant wording, quick wit, dramatic climax, and citations are typical.

Using different criteria, one can distinguish among three attack genres (Luckmann 1989)⁸. All three have a predictable internal organization combined with an apparent freedom of expression. A high level of improvisation takes place within a well-defined structure. But the levels of improvisation, dialogicity, and musicality differ. The spoken *leksebi* rely on a written script and have a more monologue-like form than the other two. Only the *kapia* are always presented with a melody and have the highest degree of creativity.

All the genres take place in front of an audience. In all three genres the listeners have direct contact with the speaker, and all three genres are embedded

⁴ These are the genre names.

⁵ Hymes (1977) considers line structure as an important poetical criterium.

⁶ Leski actually only means poem (*leksebi* is the plural form); in this article I mean exclusively verbally passed down poems. *Galekseba* characterizes the process of poetry and applies to spontaneously created, lyrical texts which are verbally presented by a third party. *Kapioba* describes the process of creating *kapia* and *gašaireba* the process of creating *šairi*.

⁷ While set rhythmical units structure some oral epics (i. e. Greek and Yugoslav according to Lord (1960)), metre has been more difficult to establish for other cultural contexts (Edwards/Sienkewicz 1990: 57). Georgian laments and Georgian genres of verbal duelling show a strong rhythmical organization (Kotthoff 1993 a and forthcoming).

⁸ Luckmann (1989) talks about genres if there is a recognizable orientation to textual typicality as part of cultural knowledge.

in the organization of daily life. Furthermore, they put an aesthetic dimension on stage. Entertaining functions are combined with important social and psychological functions. People gladly comment both on the quality of form and content. For the listeners, the evaluation of formulations takes on a central role. "Focus on the message for its own sake, evident in the patterning of speech" manifests, according to Jakobson (1960), the poetic function of language.

Praise of oneself or others, boasting, verbal challenge and attack are central functions of the duels. Thereby the genres help to establish and re-establish social bonds and to preserve the social equilibrium. To be good with words demands close observation of the surrounding social world, too. Attacking previously unknown qualities of the opponent shows that a good performer is more than a man of words. (He (or she) is the one who makes people see new dimensions of the subject. He has to combine good entertainment with drawing attention to shared social values.

The opponents constantly orient themselves to the audience. People talk about the performances set on stage during the evening later. The evaluation of special turns is also a common theme. When a calendrical festivity is spoken about, one necessarily also talks about the excellence and originality of the oral performance presented at that occasion. Excellence is judged by the perfect fulfillment of the generic norms, and originality is judged by the creativity used within the given procedure⁹. Both should be optimally matched.

For my research on the oral poetic genres in Georgia, I would prefer an approach combined of cultural anthropology (Greverus 1987), the ethnography of communication (Gumperz and Hymes 1974), and conversation analysis (Moerman 1988¹⁰). Using this approach for my studies of Georgian ethnopoetry would actually require collecting and transcribing all the data in question by myself, because such recordings hardly exist. However, during my stay in Georgia I was not in a position to record all the data, and because my own corpus of data is not yet extensive enough to supply a complete presentation of poetic dispute genres, I have integrated my corpus with the data that ethnologists from Tbilisi have generously provided me with.¹¹

2. *Gašaireba*

Not only courtship but also verbal attack is put on stage as poetic art in rural Georgia and – interestingly – can be closely combined.

⁹ Wienold 1971 discusses excellence and originality as general evaluation criteria for poetic texts.

¹⁰ I have found, however, that rigidly restricting ethnolinguistics to the level of conversational microphenomenon, such as Moerman (1988) suggests, inappropriately reduces the perspective on the respective culture. The appropriate place for conversation analysis in anthropological linguistics remains to be discussed at another place.

¹¹ These data of the *gašaireba* and *galekseba* are "purified" in the sense that many conversational features such as pauses, laughter, hesitations, and reactions from the audience are left out. Up

Gašaireba normally have four lines. Unlike the *kapioba*, the *gašaireba* are not highly improvised and sometimes consist mostly of verbally transmitted, formulaic parts. When an instrument is at hand, they are sung; otherwise, they are spoken. For the instrumental accompaniment, the Georgian string instrument *panduri* or the bagpipes *štvari* come into consideration.¹² One type of *gašaireba* deals with a relationship between a man and a woman, their courtship and oftentimes rejection. This is the type that we shall more closely examine. The distribution of roles is relatively set: the man courts the woman, and the woman more or less strongly rejects the man. She attacks him because of shortcomings which she perceives as such, and he defends himself by expounding on his qualities and abilities and by blaming her for not recognizing them.

The *šairebi*, that only take place between men, are mostly ritualized attacks of obscene content and strongly related to the "ritual insults" of black American or Turkish boys, which Abrahams (1962), Kochman (1968), Labov (1972), and Dundes/Leach/Özkök (1972) have all discussed¹³.

The attacks, that are carried out between a man and woman, seem to be less widespread in other cultures, although there are reports about similar contests such as the one of Tolosana (1978) about those in Galician villages. Both forms of *šairebi* can be spontaneously evoked wherever people come together, such as on the village square or at social events.

The *šairebi* combine courtship and attack, praise and blame. The man emphasizes his desirable qualities. She degrades him so that he must publicly defend himself and persuade the whole community about his ability to be responsible for a family. Blaming and praising can exist side by side as part of the same speech event (Edwards/Sienkewicz 1990: 83). Praise can be transformed into blame in case the honoured person does not respond in a desirable way. The speaker can even start boasting, as we shall see.

Elguža Dadunašvili from the Rustaveli-Institute of the Georgian Academy of Science kindly provided me with the following *gašaireba*. I am very thankful for his contribution which he recorded in 1988 at a village festival in the community of Achalzixe. Sitting together with neighbours and friends, a man called Elisbar (E) began the following poetic dialogue with the woman Šušana (S)¹⁴:

to now Soviet anthropological linguistics not demanded to work with "natural data" so strongly as it is the case in the West.

¹² In the film "Xevsuruli baladi" by Šota Managaze, for instance, *gašaireba* can be found.

¹³ In other cultures as well, stylized and partly ritualized attacks have been found; see, for example, Whyte (1955) and the literature cited in Edwards/Sienkewicz 1990.

¹⁴ In the transcripts the transliteration from Georgian follows the conventions for scientific transcription in the journal GEORGICA with one exception. I note the q just as q. In the text I also use the scientific conventions without distinguishing aspirated and unaspirated sounds. It is very problematic to translate transcripts. The lines cannot represent identical contents because of different word orders in the two languages.

- 1 E: gogo, čitel kabazeo
Girl, on the red dress
- 2 nemsı dagkidebiao
you have a needle hanging
- 3 tu čem sıtqvas ar gaıgeb
if you do not understand my word
- 4 cecxli çağkidebiao.
you can burn.
- 5 Š: neta ar iberebode,
If you just would not inflate yourself,
- 6 tavi mogak didatao
you consider yourself important,
- 7 šeni cxviri gamodgeba,
your nose could be used
- 8 arıanulas xidatao.
as a bridge over the Artanula.
- 9 E: ocdaxuti žužulebi
Twenty-five chicks
- 10 važukžuke ezošio,
I would let peep in the courtyard,
- 11 čemistana kargi biči,
such a good chap as I,
- 12 ver gagivlis ezošio.
will not be able to stop by your courtyard.
- 13 Š: tpeši ševal, ševžvrebi,
I walk through the forest, push my way through,
- 14 gamoviřan puřuros,
I will drag out rotten wood,
- 15 me gveri ar gaviķareb,
I will not get involved,
- 16 šenistana uřvinos.
with such a dummy as you.
- 17 E: čvens ezoši šemosula
In our courtyard have come,
- 18 ķurdęeli da meliao,
rabbit and fox,
- 19 gogo, šenma sıqvarulma
girl, your love,
- 20 guli gadamiliao
has crushed my heart.
- 21 Š: netav ar iberebode,
If you just would not not inflate yourself,
- 22 niaxuris počivit
like the weeds from creeping ranunculus

- 23 muceli gagberebia
your stomach is blown up,
- 24 gazapxulis gočivit.
like a spring piglet.
- 25 E: čoxa čoxas davakere
The čoxa¹⁵ I hemmed from another piece
- 26 axal čoxas žobiao,
is better than a new čoxa,
- 27 axlandelsa gogoebsa
in comparison to today's girls
- 28 kvrivebic ki žobiao.
even the widows are better.
- 29 Š: mařarebelze aveli
I boarded the train,
- 30 momazaxes biletivo,
someone behind me called because of the tickets,
- 31 čemo bičo, giřalaře
my boy, I have betrayed you,
- 32 nu gak čemi imedio.
do not hope to win me over.
- 33 E: ras čamivli, čamomivli,
Why do you always pass me by,
- 34 řemodgomis karivita?
like the autumn wind?
- 35 gaskdi gulze, ar řagiqvan,
you heart shall break with anger, I'll not take you
- 36 čamogaxmob sarivita,
I will let you wither like a vegetable stem.
- 37 Š: oryobeři řeviare
I shortly walked between two fences,
- 38 mayla řqali avasxio,
I sprayed water in the air,
- 39 řenistana mořaires
for such a řairimaker as you
- 40 tavze lapi davasxio.
I pour the dirt over your head.
- (20.0)
- 41 Š: řiskvils puri davařare
On the mill I strew wheat,
- 42 čamovida řialito,
it fell noisily down,

¹⁵ Traditional Georgian men's clothing

- 43 šairebši ver mažobeb
 with šairebi you cannot triumph over me,
 44 ginda gaskde yralito.
 even if you burst from roaring.

The above text deals with triumph and defeat, such as can be displayed in the ritualized attacks in other cultures. The person who cannot counter within the established rhyme structure loses. Šušana won this jeering courtship duel; after a seemingly eternal 20-second pause, Elisbar could not counter. The way in which Elisbar reacted to his defeat is not evident in the transcript. He could have, for instance, simply laughed or he could also have left the table to express momentary feelings of insult.

Elisbar begins with the traditional four-line verse. The first two lines are formulaic starters and made little concrete sense to my Georgian informants, whereas the third and fourth lines were interpreted as a sign of Elisbar's self-assertion. "You can burn" is an idiom and means "you can go to hell". Elisbar presents himself assertively and impatiently with Šušana's indecision.

This dialogue very quickly assumed a form of mutual attack and rejection. As early as in line five, Šušana very clearly rejects Elisbar's not too friendly way of courting. In Georgia the nose seems to play an important role in measuring the beauty of a face, metonymically it often stands for the entire face. In lines 7 and 8, Šušana criticizes Elisbar's long nose which means that he is not good-looking enough for her.

Both sides use strong expressions right from the start. This humorous exaggeration points to the ritual character of the event. But to a certain extent, such an exaggerated exchange of attacks has a serious intention, too. Play and reality go hand in hand. Elisbar courts for Šušana publicly. Showing his poetic skills is part of his courting; her own higher performance abilities prove that she is too good for him, not only in the sense of poetic contest.

In lines 9 to 12 Elisbar brags about his good qualities and wealth. The lines 11 and 12 combine his self-praise and his belittling of her.¹⁶ Within the borders of this genre self-aggrandizement is accepted by the audience. In response, Šušana describes in lines 13 through 16 what she will do to keep him away from her. "Rotten wood" is good enough for the "dummy".

In the succeeding stanza, Elisbar lets the night set in (fox and rabbit represent nightfall) and signifies the end of his patience by using conventional phrases. The use of traditional formulae could point to his waning ability to carry on the dispute. That is love for her crushed his heart is both a compliment and a critique.

Lines 21–24 connect in an indirect way with the preceeding lines. They can be used relatively interchangeably. Šušana attacks him once again ritually for his arrogance, using extravagant derogatory images.

¹⁶ Edwards/Sienkewicz (1990) discuss other examples from anthropological literature which show the links between praise and blame.

From lines 25 to 28 Elisbar compares the young girls with a new *taxa* (*axali* means new and young in Georgian). However, in comparison to a new *taxa*, the young girls do not please him and, therefore, neither does Sušana. Elisbar articulates very clearly the low societal esteem of widows. The *šani* continues as an attack contest.

Sušana uses pre-formed travel images, thereby indicating that she has many opportunities and that he does not even have the slightest chance of winning her over. Elisbar takes up this image of travelling in lines 33-34, and indirectly reproaches her for her flightiness and points out to her that she will one day regret disdaining him. He degrades her.

In line 37 to 40 the message is made up of the opposites of water and dirt. Normally one pours water and not dirt. In this passage, however, she would pour dirt over his head instead of water as she would not want to waste the precious water on him. The thematic connection with the previous lines is rather weak in this passage. It is most important, that she topped his attack. She will not regret not having taken him as a husband but instead pour dirt on him. Then Elisbar takes too long of a pause which clearly indicates that he can no longer keep up with Sušana. She launches into another four-line verse which clearly proves her to be the winner, and she proceeds to rub this in his face. He lost the verbal contest and he will not win her over either.

I was told by the Georgians that if a man wins the *gšaiwba*, his chances concerning the woman actually are improved. Quickwittedness and verbal dexterity are highly esteemed characteristics for a man. Being a good performer, he could gain considerable social status within the community.

The battle was carried out in a stable structure. On the average, each line contains nine syllables. Up to line 8 every second line rhymes with "ao". In line 9 the last word ending with "ebi" rhymes with the "eba" ending from line 7. Then, in lines 10 and 12, "ezošio" is used. Sušana begins with the previous "ebi"-rhyme again and establishes a rhyme in lines 14 and 16 with "os". In addition, Elisbar creates in lines 17-20 a new end rhyme. Sušana follows suit with a new rhyme pattern in lines 21-24. In lines 26-28 Elisbar then falls back on the "iao"-pattern from line 18-20. The end rhyme pattern remains rather loose until the very end.

Unfortunately, the audience's reaction is not conveyed in the transcript. In general, the weaker component is more or less decided during the attacks. Sušana rejects Elisbar's courting attempts. Even if she had had the slightest inclination towards him, she still would also have rejected his attempts; however, she would have done it in a friendlier fashion. She would have attacked him in a way that would have given him the possibility to demonstrate his abilities and good qualities. He would have strengthened his courtship attempts, showered her with compliments. Thereby making it understood that he had recognized her underlying positive resonance. She could, for instance, jokingly suggest that he would not be able to feed a family whereby he would then have the opportunity to prove the opposite to the audience.

This type of *jairi* is a form of public courtship and an attempt at public marital preparation. In the villages where strong gender segregation rules prevail, there is very little opportunity for premarital contact between young men and women. Sexual relations before marriage are strongly disapproved of; it is especially taboo for women. Virginity is still a strong factor in Georgian life today. Especially in villages, almost all forms of spare time interaction between a young man and a young woman are also looked down upon. All advances have to take place before the eyes of the public.

A function of this public poetic courtship certainly lies in the fact that it makes relationships easier to control. This public process of courtship may also be a reason why the woman is not able to express her true partiality for fear of being viewed as giving in to his courting and thereby could be seen as also being in possible danger of giving in to his sexual advances and having premarital sex. The woman takes on the role as the protector of morality in this society. She has to subjugate her life much more strongly to these moral rules than a man, thus the society also grants her a special power of judgement. She is allowed to exercise this power in the way she composes her lamenting songs¹⁷.

With the exception of the poems of courtship and of mockery between the sexes, *gašaireba* take place only among men and before a male audience. In a rather crude way, *gašaireba* often consecrate sexual themes. The only constant theme and coherent factor between the *leksebi* is the way in which the men mutually attack each other about their sexual preferences, irregularities, and adventures. In contrast to the observations made by Dundes/Leach/Özkök (1972) in Turkey and by Abrahams (1962) and Labov (1972) in the United States, the sexual *gašaireba* in Georgia are performed by old men as well as young, although this is not a frequent occurrence. Generally, a man can claim at an opportune moment to another man i. e. that this man has been fooling around with a sheep. The other then tells him, for instance, that he has slept with his sister and describes the scenario in detail¹⁸. The men strive to outmatch each other by violating taboos as is known about "sounding" and "playing the dozens". Unlike among young Turkish and Afro-American men, the winner here is not he who can outdo the other in his obscenity; it is rather he who can keep up the rhyme the longest and who has the largest repertoire of interchangeable formulae. Young boys start practicing this art of ritualized attacks at a primary school-age. An informant, who is also concerned with folklore, told me that in his youth boys thought it was fun to pronounce these "dirty" words¹⁹.

¹⁷ The death ritual of lament performance is still quite widespread in Georgia. Women lament for their dead in the company of other women with improvised poetic texts. The lament songs reconstruct and express the village's larger system of moral values and interpretations. In Eastern Georgia, the genre is limited to women only, and women constitute inofficial religious practices via this expressive genre.

¹⁸ Two ethnologists kindly provided me with this example after some inquiring.

¹⁹ A similar observation is made by Bierbach (1988) among Italian boys who, when telling jokes, emphasize the use of obscene expressions more than the actual punch-line.

The *gašaireba* has a function in the socialization of a boy into manhood²⁰. Manhood in Georgia means much more than in Western cultures, having to take the initiative sexually. In public, women must demonstrate sexual naivety. Within the *gašaireba*, the male youths seem to sublimate their sexual interests. Ethnopschoanalytical approaches²¹ could certainly provide more in depth insights into this subject.

Compared to Western society, sexual themes in Georgia and in the former Soviet Union are officially much more taboo. Interestingly enough, this topic is still handled in the most direct manner within unofficial folk culture. The difference mainly lies in the strong distinction between the public and private sector, which has become increasingly blurred in the Western world.

3. *Kapia*

In the mountain region of Pšavi, the communicative genre of the *kapia* is more highly regarded as is the genre of *gašaireba*. *Kapia* consist of two-, three- or four-lined, improvised, witty dialogues that are interchanged with a monotone, consistent melody. Every village has its own melody which is individually interpreted during the performances. However, the region of Pšavi possesses a communal basic melody. Music serves as an important compositional frame for the dialogues. The verbal text must be adapted to the strophic structure of the music. The strophes are expanded by vowel elongation and fillers.

The *kapia* always deal with social themes, usually in a more polite manner than *gašaireba*. A *kapia*-performer humorously attacks someone with a poetically stylized flash of wit; in response, the other player has to quickly react with a two-, three- or four-lined verse. Quick-wittedness is expanded to the highest level of expertise. Similar to the *gašaireba*, the *kapia* also contains the rule that the opponent who can no longer counter has lost. The degree of difficulty of the reactions stems from having to make a witty point within the preceding rhyme structure. One must work very quickly within the framework of the poetic form. Unlike the *gašaireba*, one cannot fall back on pre-formed formulae. *Kapia* unite competition of content with formal collaboration.

Kapia can be performed everywhere. Usually, however, they are conducted at the table where quite a few people are gathered drinking wine. Women can be present as an audience; only elderly women participate actively in the dialogues. The reason for this, I was told, is because *kapia* can often become very offensive, and if the *kapia*-performer from a neighbouring village were, for instance, to offend a young woman, the host village would have to be angry at the neighbouring one. The entire village community identifies itself with the moral integ-

²⁰ Georgian women did confide that obscene *šairi* are truly not carried on among the women, not even in a weaker form.

²¹ See, for instance, Nadig (1982) on ethnopschoanalysis.

city of its young female citizens. Such integrity cannot, therefore, be openly attacked by anyone. *Kapia* can also have sexual themes which are handled more indirectly. Still, this potential subject strengthens the young women's exclusion from the genre. Even in other cultures, it is very common that women's behavioural scope for humour strongly expands itself with menopause (Apte 1985). Women in various Asian countries, who have been subject to strong restrictive rules, are even allowed to make sexual jokes with young men with increasing age. Apte suggests two reasons for the elderly woman's sudden role change: first, the danger of an "illegal" pregnancy no longer exists; second, a woman at that age is allowed to have a certain amount of "experience."

Women alone do not perform *kapia* with other women. It seems as though women are not found to be worthy enough to entertain a mixed audience. There is no place for them at the centre of attention. This is true for all everyday poetic events, with the exception of the lamentations.²²

The audience plays an important role in the performance of the *kapia*. Finnegan (1988) has pointed to the central role of the audience in oral poetry. In the Pšavian *kapioba* the audience always hums or sings the last words of a strophe together with the performer. This is only possible because of the stability of the melody and because of the rhyme. There is often a probability for certain words to finish the lines. The strong bonding between performer and audience seems to be one important factor for the entertaining function of *kapioba*.

Kapia begin spontaneously or with a formulaic introduction. When someone suddenly has an idea, he starts an attack on someone who is then obliged to respond. The two roles are antagonistic. The scenario usually ends in defeat and triumph. The loser should himself admit that his opponent had been the better player. The audience also indicates this by laughing at the worse player. It happens quite often that the loser leaves the party for a short period of time out of frustration. Depending on the level of defeat, this could mean leaving for five minutes or five days.

Real conflicts can also be handled using *kapia*. Labov (1972) mentioned "symbolic distance" as a necessary condition for young Afro-Americans' verbal-duelling. If actual events were referred to, the attacked boy would fall out of the pattern; instead of an exchange of ritual insults, there would then be an exchange of personal insults. In Pšavi there seems to be a special ethic in which personal insults are likewise to be countered within the pattern. It is normally the case that the opponents draw on their knowledge about each other. *Kapia* can be totally playful, but may also integrate serious facts. The poetic attacks are still considered to be both enjoyment and moral negotiation.

In Pšavi, children are not allowed to sit at the adult table in the evening. Only when the *kapia* begin are they allowed to join the adults to observe the events, thus the non-institutionalized socialization of *kapia* is handed down to the next generation. There is no formal kind of teaching.

²² Edwards/Sienkewicz (1990) report the same tendency about many other cultures.

In the following passage, I have recreated the details of a *kapia* dialogue I was able to film which took place during the course of an evening in the village of Šuapxo.

Elza Gabedava, Cotne Albutašvili, Irakli Goglauri, myself and three other people from Tbilisi arrived in the evening to the Pšavic village, Šuapxo. We visited a friend of Cotne and Irakli, called Vaxtang Mtvarelašvili. He is one of the most renowned *kapia*-performers in the entire area. Because there is no telephone in the village, we were unable to notify him of our arrival. We brought with us as many culinary goodies as possible in order to create an atmosphere in which the *kapia* would more than likely emerge. Vaxtang invited two other men, Niko Elizbarašvili and a certain Gogi. Because the three men estimated each other as adequate partners the staging of the *kapia* came about. Because of our time limitations, it could not have been made any other way. Men who are skilled in the art of *kapioba* prefer to perform them with opponents of equal ability. Normally, more or less serious topics are dealt with. If someone is attacked who is not skilled in the execution of the genre, he/she can always delegate his/her part to a more seasoned player.

Then, we grilled shashliks and the table was filled with many delicious treats; most importantly, wine was served. For at least two hours, a normal conversation with the usual Georgian toasts occurred. Obviously, the host Vaxtang should have started the *kapia* by now, but nothing happened. For medical reasons, he was not allowed to drink alcohol and he was, therefore, not in the right mood. Niko suddenly sang a two-lined verse as an attempt to attack Vaxtang. In English the texts reads as follows:

If the host does not sing and be happy,
then the guests cannot amuse themselves.

The other men sounded off the melody while Niko sang the text. Vaxtang did not react at all and thus the attempt failed. The attack was so indirect that he was not really forced to react. On this particular evening, Vaxtang and Gogi were both impeded by an illness which did not allow them to fully participate in the verbal fight. Niko "threw" another two-lined, non-addressed verse into the circle of people:

There arose bad weather
and the arable land was ruined.

Cotne Albutašvili told me later that this two-lined phrase was not improvised, but rather standardized. Such a standardized verse proves that Niko was only practising, since true *kapia* do not fall back on a repertoire.

First attempts to interpret this two-lined verse proved to be difficult, as well as the following two which Niko uttered as the other men at the table accompanied him by humming:

Oh, you my lovely, I must leave from here,
But you must stay here unfortunately.
Perhaps you will remember me,
In case something bad happens to me.

After a mutual, additional video film viewing, Cotne A. provided the following interpretation of the first two sets of lines:

Vaxtang and Gogi are sick and therefore the evening has been up to now not much fun.

Cotne, who originates from Pšavi and is thus most familiar with the customs, interpreted the next pair of two-lined verses in the following way:

I would really like to abandon this bad atmosphere, but you remain in it.

Now I shall drink another glass, then start with the *kapia* again and perhaps lose.

This high-grade indirectness and stylization is also typical for the *kapia*. The cultural knowledge of the village members is what makes the lines coherent and their meaning understandable. But *kapia* are not always indirect and ambiguous. They can, in fact, be very direct.

Kapia are sung with a monotonous melody. The tone starts high, moves further upwards and falls in prolonged syllables. Because a rhyme structure is observed, the other people around can participate. They sing some words parallel with the *kapia* master, which shows that they actively take part in the process of formulation. The listeners join in singing certain words. Rhyme and melody make this kind of participation possible. They make this oral genre a social endeavour.

Somewhat later, Niko addressed another two-lined verse explicitly to Vaxtang; he responded. Here I have reproduced the transcription with the interjections from the group and the translation. Because the meaning of the lines is by no means obvious, I have noted in parenthesis what Cotne A. later claimed to be an interpretation of the text:

- 1 N: Why do you not sing, Vaxtang,
3 Your guests will begin to get bored.

- 1 N: rad ara myeri vaxtang/o:::/:
2 a: /o:::/:
3 N: Mogiçqindeba stum/re:::bi:::
4 a: /re:::bi:::/

Nikos attack on Vaxtang is quite direct. The audience only hums the last syllables.

- 5 V: This is a serious thing
7 it is not for fun.
5 V: seriozuli sakmea es/a:HAHAHA i:::/
6 a: /HAHAHAHA/
7 V: ar ari ga:::saxumre:::bi. HAHAHA/
8 a: /a:::saxumre:::bi. HAHAHA/

(We are not alone today; it is something different today.)

- 9 N: yeah, although I cannot compose,
10 I can still have fun with you.

- 9 N: e::me ki leksoba ver vi:::ci
 10 ise ki ga:/:::/gexumreb/i:::/:
 11 a: /a:::/ — /i:::/:HAHAHAHA

(I cannot fulfill any serious demands, but I am in a good mood and will deal you a sudden blow.)

Lines 9 and 10 represent an interesting combination of self-degradation and boasting. Niko claims that he is a bad performer, but not bad enough to lose against Vaxtang. Vaxtang finds no continuation and everyone laughs; he has lost.

When I viewed the video together with Elza and Cotne, Cotne mentioned that Niko probably knew right away that he would win: Vaxtang was medically forbidden to drink alcohol and also was a bit nervous because of the guests, in view of the fact that they are from the “city”. It was his mistake to show his nervousness.

After ten minutes, Niko “throws” a two-lined, traditional verse into the round, thereby forming an upward beat. This is a possible beginning for a kapia.

- 1 N: The eye and the heart strive either
 2 where the high mountains are.
 1 N: tvalic ik içevs gulica
 2 saca mayali mtebi /a:::/:
 3 a: /a:::/:

Niko demands with a hand gesture that Gogi respond to him. His reaction is not fast enough and Cotne joins in. Cotne’s sudden response serves as a challenge, since Cotne is much younger than Niko.

As Cotne repeats Nikos’ lines, he signals that he could become the principal kapia partner.

- 4 C: tvalic ik içevs gulica:::/:
 5 a: /a:::/:
 6 /saca maya:::li:: mtebia:::/:
 7 a: /a:::/:

The audience hummed the “a” nearly without a pause, knowing it would be the dominant vowel. Niko reacted to Cotne once again and a kapia was underway. The strength of the attacks which Niko threw at Cotne proved to be ritual.

- 8 N: Who invited you anyway, you have to crawl back
 9 to where you came from.
 8 N: vin dagpatiza netara, ikidan unda gazvre.
 9 saitac şmaszvre:/:::ria:::/!
 10 a: /e:::ria:::/

(You are going to get one over the head. How can you, young city slicker, even venture to do a kapia with me, an experienced man.)

Outside the boundaries of the ritual verbal duelling it would be social suicide in hospitable Georgia to tell a guest to leave the table. Guests should always feel invited. The degree of the insult identifies it as a humorous one. Here the insult calls for a quick wit.

- 11 C.: I came in here hearing a dog's voice,
12 and now all I hear are the voices of cats.

- 11 C.: Šamuel zaylis xmazeda:::,
12 mesmis kačebis xme::/:::bia::/
13 a.: /e:::bia::/

(The dog triumphs over the cats. I thought that you were dogs, but you're just harmless cats. I'll show you. Don't build yourselves any illusions.)

Cotne counters the attack. He hints at the reputation of Niko as a good dueller. He blames him.

- 14 N.: You take something into your head about your poetry
15 whereas your poetry for me is nicevo and nothing.

- 14 N.: tav mogakv leksobazeda magram šeni leksoba
15 čemtvisa ničevo d a:::rape::/:::ria./
16 a.: /e:::ria./

Niko reacts in a very direct way. Here the code shifting to the Russian "ničevo" in the Georgian lines transports a strong delineation from the city man Cotne. In contrast to rural people, the urban intelligentsia is able to speak the Russian language. To speak Russian is often associated with an alienation from one's own cultural identity.

- 17 C.: Give me a little time, old man
18 there will soon only be bones left of you.

- 17 C.: čotac macale berkaço
18 šengana darčeba marto zyvle::/:::bia./
19 a.: /e:::bia./

(Falls back on the cat-dog image. The dog conquers the cats.)

Niko contrasted the city and village people to the favour of the villagers. Cotne contrasts the old and young now to the favour of the young.

- 20 N.: Let's drink another, my brother's child,
21 then we will be brothers.

- 20 N.: titoc davliot, z3misculo
21 mere gavxdebit z3me::/:::bi:::a./
22 a.: /e:::bi:::a./

(You are not quite at my level, but maybe you will reach it yet. He strikes upon a condescending-conciliatory tone.)

Niko takes up the contrast of the young and old, but with the opposite value. Cotne will have to strive to reach Nikos' level.

- 23 C.: If I were to stay here for two weeks,
24 you will not profit from that.

- 23 C.: or kviras tkventan ro davrče
24 verapers gamamrče::/:::bi:::a./
25 a.: /e:::bi:::a./

(You cannot start with me.)

Cotne retrieves the conciliatory tone. He tops Nikos' claim that they could become equal partners if Cotne drank more. Niko would be happy run away from a situation where he would lose.

- 26 N.: Come with me as my shepherd.
 27 The uncle has many sheep.
- 26 N.: čamodi čemtan mčqemsada
 27 bizzas bevri hqav cxvre:/:::bi:::a./
 28 a.: /e:::bi:::a./

Niko becomes provocative once again. He ties in the dog metaphor from Cotne. But instead of someone winning, the dog is barely good enough for shepherding a flock of sheep.

- 29 V.: Please, do not fight with one another,
 30 You are both servants of the god Iaxsari.
- 29 V.: erturts nu čaečxbebit
 30 qvela iaxsris qme:::/:::bi:::a./
 31 a.: /e:::bi:::a./

(It is becoming too dangerous for me with you. Your city vs. country competition is turning pale from the fact that you both some from the same area where one prays to the same protective god Iaxsari²³.)

Vaxtang ends the duel. The audience applauds the duellers and him. They enjoyed the poetic contest. As host, Vaxtang relays that he does not want to irritate his seldom-invited guests. In principal, one can always jump into the *kapia* as a third party, cut off someone else, or build an alliance with someone.

In all cases, the second line of the two-lined verse ends in "ia", mostly ending with "ebia", thus creating a conformed syllable line structure which facilitates the participation of the audience.

All of the tokens of ethno-poetic quarrel performance in literature are represented here: 1. metaphor, 2. joking, 3. one-upmanship, 4. witty typifying, 5. mocking, 6. facial expressions such as laughing or grimacing, (not in the transcript) 7. sequentiality, 8. rhyme, 9. line structure, 10. elaborated melodical recitation, 11. active participation of the audience.

The ease with which the conflict can be terminated determines that this conflict is truly playful in nature.

Without the supplementary data analysis with Cotne Albutašvili, I would hardly have understood the ritual. Conversations and the way they naturally unfold are suitable to demonstrate "doing culture" in terms of ethnomethodology. However, the non-participating researchers do the right thing in consulting

²³ Georgia was christianized as early as the fourth century; however, in the mountain region of Pšavi, there still exists a strong mixture of Christianity and a natural religion. The sun and war god Lašari is very much honoured. Iaxsari, Dali, Kopala and Pirkušī are additionally important deities in this region about which many myths are extolled.

the "natives" in relation to their understanding of the events such as is characteristic, for instance, of John Gumperz' work. Gumperz has pointed out many times the conflicts of cross-cultural interpretation in his own work (i. e. 1982).

Kapia are not always pure enjoyment. The Pšavians told me, that they know each other very well and that they have a kind of storage about the small blemishes of their potential opponents. They keep the blemishes to themselves until the opportunity is given to call the public's attention to them. The one who can touch a sore point is very likely to be triumphant, because the opponent is too perplexed to react.

They told me about *kapia* which took place a few months ago. A Pšavian was verbally assaulted for having stolen a sheep from the colxos. Attacks and counter-attacks were exchanged in front of an entertained audience that had gathered immediately. Suddenly the man who was attacked first launched a very sharp dart against his neighbour. He accused the married man of having a lover in another village. It was not poetic fiction. The neighbour was so shocked that he was unable to counter-attack. So the one attacked first had won. His opponent left the place immediately and was not seen at public events for weeks. He had received a moral lesson and his face was really threatened. The poetic attacks condensate local values. With rhythm and music they express the conflicts and tensions inherent in the individual-community relations.

Tolosana (1978) reports about similar cases of occasional passing from fiction to reality in Galicia. If the attacks turn to reality, it is often the case that the audience has to calm them down and to prevent the performers from a physical fight. The same is purported to be true in Pšavi.

4. *Galekseba*

Galekseba is performed today without a melody. As far as I know, they have never been accompanied by a melody. Earlier they were transmitted as oral poems, but today they also exist in letter form. There are many different occasions for which one would create such a poem for someone. Most often, the poems take the form of a love and courting poem or of a poem of critique and mockery.

A particular characteristic of this genre is its form of transmission, which always involves a third party. This transmission guarantees the recognition of the poet and his/her lyrical talents. As a purely oral form, this genre is a member of a dying breed. Today, poems of mockery and courting are most often conveyed in the form of a letter. The author gives his witty attack to a messenger who then reads it coram publico to the addressee. In earlier times, the mediator had to bear the orally given text in mind and publicly recite the poem to the addressee. Today's "open letters" are now read aloud and represent an interesting mixture of oral and written text. The messenger is an artist, too. She or he puts

the written word on stage. Leksi are only given to messengers who are known as talented performers.

The attacked person follows the same procedure. It is possible to create a *galekseba*-relationship which lasts for years. In a village, for instance, the elderly people are able to report quite a bit about famous *galekseba* from years gone by. They create an important foundation for the regional social knowledge.

I received the following *galekseba* from Elguža Dadunašvili. The text was recited to him by the mediator, the mother of a certain Temur who was a soldier in the army. Temur had given his mother the following letter addressed to his uncle Xvtiso during her visit. Once memorized or written down, the text is also shared with other persons, for whom the text was not originally intended.

- 1 I will not wait for an answer²⁴
- 1 Pəsuxs ar davelodebi,
- 2 I have written a new poem.
- 2¹ leksi davçere axali
- 3 Like you, as the first poem-maker from Pšavi,
- 3 Pšavis xevs pürvel moleksem
- 4 have thrown off shield and sword.
- 4 rogor dahqare par-xmali.
- 5 I know you have it in your blood
- 5 vici rom žisad čamogdevs
- 6 to lay down the law
- 6 siqva mogidis magari
- 7 and are famous for your hunting.
- 7 nadirobaši gantkmulsa.
- 8 Such a man we have never had,
- 8 kaci ara gvqavs sadari,
- 9 you spend your nights in the forests
- 9 yames tqeebši ateneb
- 10 there you have your shelter.
- 10 ika gakvs bina sapari.
- 11 You see it already in a dream,
- 11 činasçar sizmarši xedav,
- 12 you know where the game are.
- 12 ici nadiri sad ari.

The letter seems to be Temur's second attempt to contact his uncle. Until line 12, the nephew compliments the uncle. He is a great oral performer and a good hunter. He is obedient to the law. His living in the forest indicates that he is never at home; but in this form, it is also to be understood as a compliment that he is a great hunter.

The poem rhymes with eight-syllable lines in an ABCB rhythm ending in "ali" and "ari". In the following text, the main point of criticism for the uncle unfolds from the fact that he has two families (thus involving two sets of women and children). Such a situation is very unusual in Georgia and is rather frowned upon.

²⁴ We have tried to keep the translation as nearly word-for-word as possible; however, it is not always interlinear.

- 13 You provide for two families,
- 13 ori colšvilis šemnaxavs,
- 14 you do not have a real home,
- 14 ar gagačnia saxl-ḳari,
- 15 you build houses for the sister-children,
- 15 diščulebs saxlebs ušeneb,
- 16 no one is there for you.
- 16 šentvis aravin ar ari.
- 17 What has got into you?
- 17 neṭa ram gadagiara?
- 18 Has a bad wind got into you?
- 18 daḳrul xo ar gaxvs avkari
- 19 You say devils are chasing me,
- 19 izḳaxi ešmakeb damdevs
- 20 sometimes he approaches me as a man, sometimes as a woman.
- 20 xan ḳac šemxvdebḳ xan kali.
- 21 You have not encountered goodness anywhere.
- 21 ḳargs versaḳ gadaeqare
- 22 man, who goes here or there.
- 22 ḳaci, aka ik mavali.
- 23 You let them live anywhere
- 23 cis napirs gadagiḳria
- 24 woman and child, who have left God for your sake,
- 24 col-švili šentvis tavmḳvdari,
- 25 like you run around, mother's brother,
- 25 šen rom dadixar dedizḳav,
- 26 I shit on such a life.
- 26 eget cxovrebas gavḳari.

Starting with line 13, the nephew's criticism becomes very visible. He blames his uncle mainly for his incompetence in caring for his legal wife and children. The nephew asks for reasons. He cites his uncle in line 19/20. Addressing someone as "dedizḳav/mother's brother" is not atypical in Georgia. In addressing someone, every imaginable relationship can be made relevant. The last line expresses a very strong insult. Meanwhile, the rhyme structure is maintained.

After several months, the mother brought the son the answer from Uncle Xvtiso:

- 1 geṭqoba daeperebi
- 1 It seems that you compare yourself to
- 2 mama bizḳasa papasa.
- 2 your father, uncle, grandfather.
- 3 ničier gamogiqvana
- 3 Are talented, have made something of yourself,
- 4 madlobt šen naḳdom paṭasa.
- 4 Thank you that you have finished school.
- 5 mand xalxi čagabaresa,
- 5 Where you are, people confided in you,
- 6 ak ar gandobdnen ḳatasa.
- 6 With us, no one would have trusted you even with a cat.
- 7 gegona šḳamze dagsvamdnen,
- 7 You have thought that one would set you on a pedestal,
- 8 gatamašebdnen damḳasa,

- 8 one would let you play draughts,
- 9 egre ram dagabečava?
- 9 what has brought you so low?
- 10 xalxs tavs ačveneb lačarsa,
- 10 You show yourself to people as a coward,
- 11 saķutar cremliť asveleb.
- 11 With your tears you make yourself wet.
- 12 ķošķis picrebs da vaxťasa,
- 12 The planks of the tower and the guards,
- 13 tavis saxls rad ar amočmēb?
- 13 why do you not scrutinize your own house?
- 14 rad gađaxēdav sxvataťa?
- 14 Why do you look only to other houses?
- 15 emagas saxls tu eķaxi,
- 15 If you call that a house,
- 16 čamongreulsa dampalsa,
- 16 everything is broken and rotten,
- 17 čamouberavs niavi
- 17 when a breeze blows
- 18 ķeri daičķēbs zanzarsa.
- 18 the roof begins to shake.
- 19 mťasvlelebivit adixart,
- 19 You go inside like mountaineers,
- 20 ro daapirebs avdarsa,
- 20 when a violent storm is imminent,
- 21 imđanas udgamť kobebsa,
- 21 you install so many pots,
- 22 ert dķes ver ķevķleb datvľasa.
- 22 that one day no one will be able to count them all.
- 23 usaxľķaroba ķobia
- 23 Better to have no home
- 24 eģeta bečav saxľķarsa.
- 24 than to have such a dreadful one.

The uncle Xvtiso begins in the very first line with the devaluation of his nephew. It only “seems” to be so, as if he stood in the positive tradition of gentlemanly family line. The nephew’s education is referred to as the origin of his arrogance and cowardice. The “madlobť/thank you” sounds ironical. The uncle counters the strong attack of the nephew. He uses concrete images to illustrate the nephew’s pampered habits (7,8). In line 11 Temurs criticism is defined as “tears”. Crying is considered to be childish and not serious behaviour for a man. The uncle expands on the idea that the nephew should first tend to his own business. From line 15 onwards he starts to attack details of the nephew’s house which can be totally products of his phantasy. There is a tension between truth and exaggeration. Uncle Xvtiso rejects the nephews critique in a poetical way. Playful exaggeration is allowed. Binding together truth value and play, the danger of destroying social bonds can be reduced.

The ABCB rhyme of “asa” and “arsa” is kept up virtually throughout the entire twenty-four line sequence. The already noticeable dominance of the “a” vowel in the first leksi is also continued throughout this galekseba text. The use of vocabulary is strongly metaphorical. The metaphor of the house defines not

only the house itself for both the nephew and the uncle, but also their entire way of life.

The maintaining of a moral order seems to be pursued here, too. The *galekseba* allows people to find suitable forms to express aggression. The relationship between uncle and nephew is really touched by the interchange. The accusations must not totally remain in the realm of imagination. Everybody knows that the assaults are exaggerated and that the responses have to be biting, acid and satirical. But besides entertainment, they often point to value conflicts and socially undesirable forms of behaviour. By looking closely at the insults which are offered it is possible to formulate a clear picture of community ideals.

5. Conclusion

Individual and societal norms are often antithetic. What Tolosana writes about the Galician poetic genres *loias*, *regueifas*, and *desafos* also holds true for the poetic contests in Georgia:

In his verses, the singer affirms the separation of those levels, of division and rupture, of his individuality; he does this in a concrete situation and according to specific interests. Within minutes, he also exclaims poetically the claims and demands to which he is entitled as a member of a group or category (in which he has just placed himself in order to intone its obliged rhymed words.) (Tolosana 1978: 296)

Because all of these oral genres deal with dissent, often in the form of an attack and counterattack, the *galekseba*, the *kapia*, and the *gašaireba* can all be understood as dispute genres. The poetic structure and formalized framework point to their high standard of cultivation. The dissent transactions make use of formal rhetorical-poetic procedures such as rhyme, sound orientation, and the use of metaphors, thereby combining the opposition of content with formal closeness. The inherent face threat of the dissent negotiations can be mitigated in this way of poetic and humorous playfulness. Aggressiveness is held back so that it may be expended publicly rather than privately, and it is subject to rules and conditions. From these genres the thesis can also be supported that oral literature develops a specific technique and procedure of formulation which make memorization easier (Ong 1982).

The ancient sense of aesthetics has been kept alive within the oral genres of Georgia in which the beauty of expression is tied to its truth. Likewise, the relational orientation has also been maintained.

Ong (1982) indicates that the indirect situational placement of the oral genres goes along with the use of the genres for competition and praise. Commendation is a primary function of the death laments, which also still play an important role in Georgian village life (Kotthoff 1993a). Self-praise is more common within the duellings than praising others. Since everybody knows about the dominant game character of boasting and of insults, they are not taken literally. All genres base themselves on empathy and guaranteed forms of direct participa-

tion. The verses poeticize experience in its moral aspects, as Tolosana (1978: 297) put it; they present facts in their moral form.

We also come across praise during the habitual toasts which shall only be mentioned here²⁵. Also, the communicative drinking customs in Georgia are formalized.

Out of all of the genres mentioned above, the toasts constitute the only genre that is still current and unchanged in all of Georgia. The other forms no longer exist in Tbilisi. Laments and *galkseba* in letter-form are still practised throughout rural Georgia. *Šairoba* and *kapia* are only performed in the highland regions. The farther away the region is from the modern civilized world of the cities, the stronger the poetic genres have been kept intact. All of the genres, however, are still alive in the memories of the elderly people.

For a long time, the genres were considered old-fashioned and a sign of backwardness. Soviet ethnology has barely concerned itself with this type of folklore. I asked one of the most famous folklore researchers in Georgia, Vaxtang Kotetišvili, why he has not written a single article about the *gašaireba* and the *kapioba* in Russian, in order to make the genres he had worked with, more accessible to larger circles. He told me that such information would not have interested the Soviet academia outside of Georgia. The Tbilisi ethnologists tried to preserve the genres by writing down the narrations of elderly people. The series "kartuli xalxuri poezia" was established by an editorial staff of the Rustaveli-Institute. (See Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer, this volume, for the problems in preserving oral literature).

At one time or another, one asks oneself how these oral genres and traditions could have preserved themselves up to today. The Caucasian cultures have a written language which is well-rooted in the society. But the written word was always controlled. Georgia has been independent for only a short time during the last two centuries. With its all-encompassing control of the press, the Soviet system has produced a presumably important reason for the preservation of the oral genres in the Caucasian mountains. Before something went to print, it had to go through many stages of approval. For the explanation of the maintenance of oral genres, the type of relationship this culture has to the written word should be considered. Goody (1987) mentions a tension between oral and literature traditions in West Africa, where a literate Islamic culture has flourished for centuries alongside unwritten traditions of Sunjata. The print culture also remained in the Georgian mountain village a controlled culture. But spontaneous performances by people on the streetcorner were much more difficult to control.

The villages have only just recently come into relatively continuous contact with cities. The seclusion and the closeknit structure of the small communities secure the transmission and the social function of the genres.

²⁵ See, for the discussion of the Georgian table- and toast semiotics, Kotthoff 1991, forthcoming a and b.

Even today, the dispute genres are both avenues for real conflict settlement and public art events. The active observer listens attentively to the person who finds good points to attack and who attacks with the best and most creative formulations. In the end, the formulations were and are as transient or as entrenched in the minds of the people as the event itself.

The fact that no other genres are alive today in Tbilisi, with the exception of the toasts, shows, on the one hand, the small amount of attention given to such genres in the cities concerning the artistic character of these genres. On the other hand, it shows the loss of function of the genres in the media-oriented communities.

In the countryside, the creations of oral art were often carried over into the second and third generations. With its censoring and control of the printed word, the Soviet Union completely created a cultural framework for the preservation and maintenance of oral performances as a culture of resistance.

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