THE PATH OF MUSIC
The Sensitive Ear of Musical Identity
and the All-Devouring R'abiz

The Path of Unheard Music
The music a people sings or plays can definitely tell us something about a people's history and identity, much as language does. Although I am not sure whether it is possible to construct musicological trees as accurately as linguistic trees to trace the original and forking paths of *Homo musicus*. In any case, we will have, evidently, much more endemic, locally grown, as well as exotically grafted trees along the musicological paths, which in their turn may present a more tangled picture: music seems to be more "contagious" than language; it may please the ear and not necessarily the mind, so people don’t need to "understand" it in order to appropriate it.

In a broad ethnomusicological sense, music is a much more penetrating and omnipresent phenomenon than just a melody or song. It is present in the intonations of speech, rhythms of everyday life and work, as well as in the musical sphere itself. Even in the latter case it exists beyond the borders we usually think of. For example, a lullaby is originally an "endless" song sung by a mother until her child falls asleep; only a part of this song, or rather pre-song, is fixed by the musicologists (and sometimes by the performers) to become well-known folksongs. Many songs of other folk genres, such as baby-nursing songs, songs sung while milking a cow, feeding the poultry, etc., are analogously "cut" from their pre-song "endless" flow.†

† Hrï'pï'tme Pikich'lin (2005) dedicated a special chapter to these genres.
Although, as we have already mentioned, music seems to have less restrictions in penetrating the ear of a neighboring nation, in some cases such restrictions do exist and may divide neighboring peoples with precisely visible or rather audible boundaries. One such case is the intrinsic difference between monodic and polyphonic modes of musical performance. Some peoples, for example the Georgians, are natural polyphonists, while Armenians are a typical monodic people: participants of a Georgian feast would usually form a nearly professional chorus, singing their choral parts in harmonious polyphonic order, even if this were their first “concert”; while participants of an Armenian feast would prefer to enjoy listening to a solo singer or at best would form a chorus singing in unison. Why is there such a profound difference in the musical thinking of these peoples? I don’t know whether there is a perspicuous answer to this question. Another question is whether this difference in musical styles is reflected in the national character of the performers. One is tempted to speculate that polyphony is an ideal metaphor for the “consolidated” and “harmonic” Georgian society, while the mode of their performance known as decov词el “to say in voice” (see Abeghian 1970: 476). Singling out an artificial fragment (a song) from the natural pre-song continuum is actually the audio version of a more general method of framing – cf. framing in carpets, which enables the viewer to “catch” (visualize) a small section of the endless space of the carpet design (see Maclagan 1977: 32-33; L. Abrahamic 2002: 22). Cf. also landscapes and still-lives “fixed” by the artist. In the latter case the frame reorganizes the original nature a little (or considerably) – no wonder it becomes a “dead” nature – nature morte, still life. One may compare this latter phenomenon with an analogous problem in microphysics: the instrument used for fixing a micro-world reality, inevitably effects (“kills”) this reality.

2 See Zhordania 1988 for the geography of ethnic polyphony and other aspects of this phenomenon.

3 Such is the stereotyped characteristic of the Georgians in Armenian self-criticizing jokes. For example, the big cauldron, where Georgians are being boiled in hell, is said to need a vigilant guard: if a single Georgian managed to get out of the cauldron, he would help all his compatriots escape. While the cauldron where Armenians are being boiled, does not need a guard: even if somebody managed to get out of the cauldron, the rest of the people would pull him back in. (In reality during the post-Soviet years, Georgians manifested quite a different picture of national consolidation, which was very far from this ideal characteristic.) To follow the four models of the Path of Ancestors, let us also mention the Russian cauldron, which, like the Armenian one, is said to not need a guard: the escaper could put some new logs into the fire and crawl back into the cauldron. Azerbaijanis are not presented in this national hell.

4 A joke on the beginning of Georgian polyphony, invented, obviously, by a jealous monodic Armenian, tells that once upon a time a group of Georgians gathered for some feast occasion and began to sing a well-known song; but since they were tone-deaf, each singer sang in his own manner. Later this diverse tone-deaf singing was canonized to become polyphony.

5 For example, the polyphonic chords of J. S. Bach were transformed into “monodic mini-solos,” when the bow with loosely fixed hair transformed into the modern fiddlestick with rigidly fixed hair, so that violinists were doomed to score all the strings of their violins in quick sequence by running over them with their modernized fiddlesticks (“bow” to “stick” transformation is preserved in the English names of this violin constituent).
The Path of Komitas

Every culture has its key figures whose images focus many intrinsic characteristics of the culture in question. In a sense these figures approach the First Man whom we will meet again on the Royal Path. But while the king could be "another" from the outside – somebody standing above or outside the society, even an outsider – let us recall the oft repeated foreboding of kings, – the key figure personality is "another" from within. He is sensitive to any structural changes in the society but at the same time bears all the archaic structures of the past and anticipates those of the future.

Indeed Komitas (1869-1935), the great composer and collector of folk music, is such a figure in contemporary Armenian culture – in a broader sense than just the musicological. Going back to the aforementioned monody/polyphony opposition, it could be said that Komitas embodied the best of the monodic style – let us only mention his unique performances preserved on old phonographs and his voluminous collection of folk songs – while at the same time he introduced polyphony into Armenian musical culture. Komitas dealt with this same opposition, which we discussed in the ethnomusicological context, in the context of Oriental/European music, that is, he was embodying a wider opposition between East and West. An analysis of his attitude toward folk music shows that he was also enacting a deeper opposition between the pagan ("devilish") and the Christian than is evident from the image of a monk collecting and singing folk (pagan) melodies. This last opposition is also related to the opposition of secular/religious (in a broader than musical sense) and of folk/elitist. There are also other, minor oppositions embodied in this key figure, which are not so significant from an ethnocultural perspective but demonstrate that Komitas is a true key figure, since he seems to embody all the possible semiotic oppositions that make up Armenian culture. One such opposition is sane/insane – Komitas spent the last 20 years of his life in a mental hospital in Paris, a result of his traumatic experience in 1915 in the first days of the Genocide. No wonder Komitas became a symbol of the victims of the Genocide – the most paradigmatic theme in contemporary Armenian culture. During these long years of seclusion, Komitas kept silent, thus adding another opposition, of speaking/being silent, to the list of oppositions embodied by his dramatic life. This seemingly insignificant opposition gives a sudden clue to the theme of articulating ("speaking out") the topic of the Genocide – cf. the title of Paruyr Sevak's poem Anh'el zangokatan meaning 'never-ceasing belfry' – literally 'never-silenced' in Armenian, with a telling relation between the unstoppable "speech" of the bell and Komitas' muteness. Compare also the possible opposition of hearing/not hearing that can be derived from his "non-hearing" attitude toward specific pagan music. The last opposition gives us a further clue to an interesting phenomenon from the present: one can find the portrait of Komitas as a symbol of Armenian culture in many homes in Yerevan, while the inhabitants would generally prefer to listen to r'abiz music rather than Komitas' works. But to understand what r'abiz means in contemporary Armenian culture, we should examine this phenomenon a little deeper, especially as it goes beyond the musical sphere to embrace a much broader sphere of urban realities in Armenia.

The Path of R'abiz

R'abiz is an armenization (the voicing of the last consonant and

8 On different aspects of "another" see Airapetian 2001: Index, s.v. inaj.
7 Cf. his negative attitude toward the zor'na, a strident wind instrument of the family of oboes with a sharp and loud voice (see Komitas 1941: 17-27; Pikichian 2001: 244). Judging from his collections, one may guess that he seemed to pay less attention to the samples of folk music that were obviously of magical pagan origin. This does not mean, of course, that he was not collecting such samples – the Church disapproved of his ethnomusical activities for just this reason, – he simply focused his attention primarily on those samples of folk music that were structurally close to the "classical," post-Mushots period of Armenian music. In 1912-13, Komitas seemed to shift his professional interest toward this type of folk music previously neglected by him, which demonstrates that Komitas presented a more complex and vibrat-
“hardening” of the initial r) of the word Rabis, the acronym of the all-union professional organization of “arts workers” (Rabotniki iskusstva – in Russian), created in the Soviet Union in the early 1920s which brought together a broad range of cultural workers (musicians, artists, performers, etc.) to create a trade union of cultural workers, state orchestras, and creative unions. Whereas in Russia this word, like similar acronyms of other organizations – the product of their time – says little in the present context, in Armenia the fate of Rabis was quite different. Here, the word proved unusually tenacious. Prior to the forties, Rabis meant the republic trade union committee, yet even after the forties, when one of the offshoots of the Rabis – the Bureau of Orchestra Musicians (BOM) – came under the aegis of the city soviets, right down to our time, the musicians making up the BOM continue to consider themselves members of the Rabis and draw no distinction between the two organizations (see Abrahamian and Pikitchian 1990: 38).

An important function of the Rabis (and the only one for its successor, the BOM) was to provide the public with ordinary musical services, including festive celebrations and solemn occasions. At first, both the music and instruments were entirely national: the aforementioned zur’na (a strident sharp-sounding oboe), the dadsh (a less shrill oboe),9 sring (reed pipe) among the winds; dhol (double-sided drum), dapi (tambourine), and nagara (drum) among the percussion; the kamancheh (a three-stringed bowed fiddle), tar (long-necked, finger-plucked instrument with double resonators), and kaman (a kind of zither) among the strings. This pertains only to the Armenian Rabis, not the all-union organization that gave birth to it and passed rather quickly from the scene of Soviet cultural life.

Today, few know of the existence of the BOM in Yerevan; many do not even suspect the existence of the formerly vital and today ephemeral Rabis. But almost everyone knows the word r’abis, which has an entirely different connotation. The following is a brief history of the metamorphoses of this word.

In the twenties and the thirties, the Rabis included the best musicians performing Armenian national and Oriental music.10

9 In the mid-1980s, 70 of the 130 musicians in the Yerevan BOM played the dholak.
10 This repertory is eloquently attested, for example, by the membership

But starting in the late thirties and forties, they began to leave for more prestigious state ensembles and philharmonic societies that were created at this time, bringing about an influx of nonprofessional musicians into the Rabis. It was through these new musicians that a narrow strata of musical culture that had been previously denied viability or made peripheral now began to filter into a much broader musical sphere. The new musical style brought to life by these musicians began to be known as r’abis, after the Rabis organization that united the performers of this music. Once having penetrated the official musical culture and even having received a kind of official status, these strata gave rise to entire schools of original music. The very fact that the clarinet, the accordion, and the guitar were adopted as instruments of r’abis after the war, presaged changes in its musical style. Only with respect to the music of the fifties and sixties, though, may one speak of an independent r’abis style.

In the sixties, two main groupings were formed in the Rabis: one specializing in a “joyous” genre and performing at restaurants, weddings, and banquets, the other specializing in “sad” music and playing at funerals. Incidentally, the same musicians might play at both weddings and funerals. This recalls the famous New Orleans funeral musical processions, which turned into joyous musical parades on their way back – a comparison to be used in a moment. It should be pointed out that the word r’abis among the population at large was connected with the funeral rites proper and designated a special mournful music, since before the war funeral melodies were played exclusively in the traditional manner.

The singers and performers of the new r’abis style, among whom were outstanding, brilliant musicians, would search out particulars about the life of the departed and the cause of his/her death and on each occasion (or at least for each type of event) would improvise, creating a new song. These songs are very

IDs of the Leninakan musicians of the Rabis. In the twenties and thirties, beneath the signature stamp of the “Republic Committee of Art Workers of Armenia” there was also an inscription, “The Collective of Oriental Musicians of Leninakan.” (In the late forties, in their place appears the inscription “Administration of the Collective of Oriental Music of Leninakan,” while today there is a reference to the local department of the BOM.)
close to the Blues in mood and practically didn’t change throughout the history of the genre—unlike the other genres of r’abiz. In a similar way, the authentic Blues is one of the most conservative musical styles in America, which moves independently and parallel to jazz, which is constantly changing. The musical language of r’abiz, being a blend of several musical traditions (primarily Armenian national, gusun bard-style, and maqam-type style11), is marked by delicate Oriental harmony and an abundance of melismas, short improvised musical ornamentations, which allow the musician to achieve the desired psychological effect through purely musical means.

Besides the conservative funeral style, these qualities are widely used in the different genres of r’abiz, which may even be classified in terms of national color: Azerbaijani, Greek, Moldovan, Gypsy, Indian (movie music), Argentinean (tango), Russian (modern urban folklore). Of course, it is music performed by local r’abiz musicians who “think” in Armenian. All these variants are characterized by an Armenian national motif and text, but with special hues of style from the particular national musical culture (melody, rhythms, nuances, individual elements, phrases, and finally the manner of presentation of the musical performance and its general color). Some of these (e.g., the Moldovan) are highly instrumental, others (e.g., the Russian) are predominantly sung. Often these variants form a contrast not only in their musical aspects, but also in regard to social prestige.12 Thus, the “Greek” r’abiz is characteristic of the milieu of Armenian repatriates, predominantly craftsmen who originated from Istanbul, or those who found refuge in Greece and Bulgaria after the Genocide of 1915.13 The “Indian” r’abiz was popular in the working class districts of Yerevan, where Indian movies were often shown in the 1970s. The “Azerbaijani” r’abiz was popular primarily in the rural areas bordering Azerbaijan. In these regions, prior to the war with Azerbaijan over Mountainous Karabakh, the Azerbaijani mugham was also popular; many truck drivers were said to have welded their radio dials to the spot where they picked up the Baku radio programs. During the conflict, however, they had to “free” their radio dials, since this genre became less popular—or at least was considered politically incorrect. The “Russian” r’abiz is performed most often to diversify or enliven the program and usually forms an interlude: the performance begins with the rhythms and few lines of some well-known Russian song (usually belonging to the prison folklore sub-genre), which soon transforms into an Armenian song; both songs are performed, of course, in r’abiz style. Finally, the “Moldovan” r’abiz enjoys deserved respect among the admirers of the various national “genres” of r’abiz for the technical virtuosity of its performers.

But what is more important to us here is that the word r’abiz gradually came to denote not only a type of music, but also everything pertaining to the representative and consumer of this musical culture. It came to be used in evaluating the person as a whole, in terms of habits, tastes, clothing, vocabulary, and so forth, and inevitably with a certain shade of scorn. Those ascribed to the r’abiz sub-culture would be described as persons wearing r’abiz shoes, doing r’abiz deeds and even using r’abiz pens. Such labeling, obviously, would be given by somebody with expressed anti-r’abiz feelings. The r’abiz themselves, of course, do not perceive or call themselves as such; only musicians legitimately and painlessly designate themselves by this term. And not always painlessly: many notable musicians are justified in not understanding and feeling offence at the new value judgment the word r’abiz has taken on. In particular, they contrast themselves with the musicians of the “vulgar,” “street” r’abiz. Yet even without a special musicological analysis, even in the best specimens of modern professional r’abiz, one may hear that lowly, at times “street” stratum, without which this musical phenomenon could not emerge.

It is extremely curious that r’abiz music exhibits unusual vitality and flexibility. It is not antagonistic to but rather incorporates everything that willfully opposes it, thereby creating its own new variants. Thus, in response to the folkloric, ethnomusicological music that has been widely popularized in the 1970s and

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11 Maqam, the main musical genre in the Arabic music, which is also widespread in Iranian and Turkish music, is related to the Uzbek/Tajik mugham, Azerbaijani mugham, and Indian raga.
12 For more details on these varieties of r’abiz see Pikichyan 1982.
13 Greek musical culture produced its own r’abiz-type phenomenon—renbetika. A visually and musically well-illustrated history of this genre is presented in the documentary “Renbetika: The Blues of Greece” directed by Philippe de Montignie in 1983 (based on the book “Road to Renbetika” by Gail Host Warhaft).
80s, a new variety of r'abiz appeared that may be called folklore. As a matter of fact, r'abiz immediately answers every new hit in whatever genre with a new song or even a new specific modification of one or another genre of its own. One such modification that played a crucial role in the history of r'abiz was the musical arrangement of r'abiz in the jazz/pop mode. This was first done by professional musicians with conservatory educations but unsuccessful careers in "serious" music, who were playing for the r'abiz consumers only to make a living. Actually they despised r'abiz and used their professional skill to raise this "low" genre, which they were doomed to perform. The appearance of this new type of musician in restaurants reflects the change in the scale of pretentiousness among the social group of the r'abiz. This new trend actually gives r'abiz a more "civilized" form, one that is no longer offensive even to former critics, who in fact seem to be secret admirers of classical r'abiz. Many of the old-timers r'abiz (referring to the social aspect of the term) who usually listen to music in their automobiles have in their collection of tapes at least one cassette of authentic, now exotic r'abiz music. As a matter of fact, for the population at large this new, arranged, r'abiz has become the national music.

R'abiz arrived in the "civilized" diaspora in this "civilized" form. This happened mainly through audio recordings, but also through musicians from Armenia who toured or emigrated to diaspora communities in the 1970s. Nowadays, with so many Armenians from Armenia (the so called Hayastani's) settled in the USA, one can also find the real r'abiz people among them, bearers of the authentic r'abiz culture. But originally, r'abiz was an exported music in the diaspora: it couldn't be created under the conditions where anything national is being preserved and cultivated with much more care than in Armenia.14 However, the acquaintance with and love of the oriental maqam-type music by diaspora Armenians living in or originating from Oriental coun-

14 By the way, in comparing national dancing styles of diaspora Armenians and the r'abiz people (both in Armenia and diaspora) we see a similar dichotomy: diaspora Armenians usually dance canonically (many of them learn to dance national dances in special schools or clubs), while the r'abiz people improvise in r'abiz style, using movements from various traditions – from Caucasian kelyinka to Oriental belly dances.

tries helped in the process of naturalizing r'abiz, which bears, as we know, such Oriental melismas. After being naturalized in the civilized West, r'abiz came back to Armenia (for example via tape recordings of Harout Pamboukjian) as a decent advanced form of the national "savage" product.

Let us also briefly look into what is not r'abiz, even though stands close to it. For example, in Grigor Aghakhanyan's first album, Top Ten of R'abiz, only the introductory verbal prelude, imitating in humoristic (or rather satirical) manner the r'abiz people's mode of speaking, could be classified as something related to r'abiz culture, while the songs themselves, representing the most popular r'abiz songs, are performed in pop arrangement, without any r'abiz features. It has to be remembered that r'abiz is a style and not a melody,15 so that releases like this, as well as other pseudo-r'abiz realities (for example, shows or bands using the "r'abiz" label in their names or agendas) exploit r'abiz culture rather than follow r'abiz music. Nune Yesayan presents another r'abiz-related confusion: many arrogant critics place her performances among the r'abiz realities. But, as a matter of fact, Nune is not a representative of r'abiz music. She is just arranging folksongs in pop style, though a strict critic may find some r'abiz elements in her show, that is, in the paramusical sphere. Although one such critic referred to some gaudy show details, which are borrowed from Western pop, rather than r'abiz culture. It is characteristic that many critics of r'abiz culture may label any foreign tacky production as r'abiz, actually globalizing this concept. Returning to the role of educated musicians in the evolution of r'abiz style, we can conclude that the creation of "civilized" r'abiz was, on the one hand, an advance in the evolution of r'abiz music, but, on the other hand, it was actually a break in the process of its natural development. This does not mean that all the educated musicians were just arrogant editors of r'abiz music. Once the doors were open for "serious" musicians, some

15 It is impossible to imitate r'abiz music without being transformed, even unwillingly, into a r'abiz performer. Interestingly, early Soviet pop musicians were intentionally including jazz parodies as part of their programs during their concerts, since, as the famous Soviet pop band leader Leonid Utesov said during his TV interviews, it was impossible to parody jazz, so that the musicians were openly playing the banned music style as its parody.
really talented performers created high-quality masterpieces and even new genres clearly within the r’abiz style. Perhaps, the best example is the late violinist Karo Hayrapetian, who not only introduced the violin into the r’abiz instrumentarium but also developed a new branch in the already existing “Moldovan” style – it is no wonder that Karo Hayrapetian had several long years of musical experience in Moldova. Musicians like Karo Hayrapetian were “going the r’abiz way” (to use a similar jazz expression) and not using r’abiz in “serious” music as George Gershwin did with jazz and Theodorakis tried to do with rembetika. As a matter of fact, educated musicians in Armenia either exploited the r’abiz style, as the aforementioned restaurant performers, or were “dissolved” into r’abiz, as seems to be the case with Karo Hayrapetian. Up to now there are no Gershwins in the circle of arrogant Armenian “serious” musicians. While r’abiz is typologically close to jazz – let us recall the peripheral and “low” origin of the two musical phenomena, each merging in the borderline of diverse musical styles, their “all-devouring” nature, the role of improvisation, and the fact that social phenomena grew from both these musical forms, as well as both using nicknames for their performers, and let us not forget the blues-like funeral r’abiz style. However, this comparison is only typological, since the disinterestedness of the professional musicians and their shallow “civilized” production – the arranged, cleaned up r’abiz did not give this phenomenon many opportunities for developing into a unique modern Armenian style.\(^{16}\)

Despite these unfavorable conditions, r’abiz nevertheless continues its all-devouring march. It should be mentioned that while in the sixties a majority of European instruments, in addition to the national ones, came to be played in the r’abiz style, in the seventies r’abiz “conquered” almost every instrument available to musicians. Although it was popular in Yerevan and other cities of Armenia to give children a preliminary and high school musical education, this does not effect the “r’abiz way.” On the contrary, this only helped it survive. For example, at a music school in one of the regional capitals close to Yerevan nearly all the pupils in the mid-1980s were able to perform classical compositions in two styles – the classical proper version (for the teachers) and the r’abiz version (for a nonacademic audience). At times families even insisted that the pupils play in the latter, familiar style. A reworking in r’abiz style can apparently be done by any disciple of r’abiz culture, and not just by professional musicians. As a friend told me, for a long time he wondered what familiar r’abiz melody a teenage neighbor of his was whistling all day long, when suddenly he realized that it was a piece by J. S. Bach – the very same piece he himself had been listening to for the past several days in his first floor apartment with his windows wide open in the summer heat. In other words, r’abiz is a kind of universal musical language, into which nearly all musical genres may easily be translated.

It is telling that the metamorphosis of r’abiz music ran parallel to the transformation of the r’abiz social group. In the 1970s, many of the r’abiz were incorporated into a new prestigious social group, the ts’ehavik (from Russian tshek meaning ‘guild,’ ‘small enterprise,’ also a constituent of a bigger enterprise specializing in concrete production), who actually represented a version of underground capitalism in the organism of the socialist economy. In the 1990s, a group of newly established nouveaux riches stepped forward to overshadow many former, now “impoveryed” ts’ehaviks whose business activities depended and fed on the now defunct soviet economic system. This new social layer has no fixed name – some call them pecati (after the Russian word meaning ‘pot-belly’), others prefer the ironic label “New Armenians” – a calque from the Russian definition “New Russians” of a similar nouveau riche layer. Generally speaking, it should be pointed out that social stratification in the modern city is extremely unstable and blurred. Parallel hierarchical systems may coexist, but usually they overlap, ultimately giving rise

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\(^{16}\) Spanish flamenco can serve as another analogue to r’abiz although in this case we are dealing with an encounter of two original foreign musical traditions – the Gypsy and a maqam-type Arabic – with the Spanish musical tradition only joining this peripheral phenomenon later – not without the authoritative support of general Franco, who seemed to play a considerable role in making flamenco an all-Spanish symbol. However, in comparing r’abiz with flamenco, Armen Petrosyan rightly notes (personal communication) that in Armenia there were no intellectuals like poet Federico García Lorca, composer Manuel de Falla or guitarist Andres Segovia, to raise r’abiz from its low status to the concert houses (Lorca and de Falla organized the famous famos concerto festin al in Granada in 1922 – see Vaisbourd 1970: 20-22). The few r’abiz festivals in Yerevan in the mid-1990s were typical mass-culture events rather than creative concerts.
to two contrasting groups. This contrast may not involve wealth or social status, but rather what could be termed an existential ideal, a system of values (which is also a reflection of social stratification). In the eyes of a non-r'abiz person, both the ts'ek-havik and the New Armenian are representatives of the r'abiz culture, which actually reflects their peripheral origin. In the late 1990s, the New Armenians began to penetrate the legislative and power structures of the Republic. Many seats in the present Parliament of Armenia are occupied by them or, rather, semi-occupied, if we follow their pejorative labeling pyczogh, literally ‘squatters’ – after the squatting pose they allegedly use – another direct indication of their low social origin. Squatting is a widespread pose of resting, for example, in Asia and Africa; its origin could be traced back to the “Asian” toilets that require this pose. For those who are accustomed to Western toilets, durable squatting is a rather uncomfortable pose, so the new opposition between the r'abiz and their successors, from the one side, and their non-squatting opponents, from the other side, reveals new nuances in life-style and East–West orientations of this urban social opposition, which for the first time also began to be expressed in political terms.

We have already said that the r'abiz (not the musicians) do not perceive themselves nor call themselves as such. The word was divorced from its musical meaning in the early seventies, when one of the main oppositions in the city was between the “hippies” and the r'abiz. Naturally, this distinction was drawn by the hippies themselves and not the r'abiz, who labeled these opposing groups differently. In Yerevan, the term hippie had little in common with its well-known prototype. The r'abiz and, for that matter, most of the Armenian reading public in the city learned of the hippie movement in 1970, when it had already passed its peak, from a series of articles in a local newspaper. After this, the term hippie came to be applied to long-haired or otherwise distinctive young people. However, besides this large-scale phenomena of unintentional “hippies,” there also was a short-lived small social group of young people in Yerevan, who considered themselves hippies. The Armenian hippies never formed communes, their protest was expressed in a Western oriented lifestyle (including music) and was mainly focused against the r'abiz, the most traditionalist group in the city. The antagonism between the two groups reached such a pitch in those years that one could see young people with hand-made pins proclaiming “Death to the r'abiz!” The attitude of the r'abiz toward the hippies was no less aggressive.

Unlike the hippies, the r'abiz themselves prefer more a complex hierarchical structure, a sort of r'abiz view of the world, with the r'abiz at the top. For example, according to one such urban social classification that we recorded in the early seventies, the lowest rung was held by the dodziks. An informant eloquently described a representative of this substratum as a typical mummy’s boy with violin case in hand. The possible origin of the term for this group is the word ded (Armenian jargon, ‘dunce, fool’) and, at the same time, the diminutive Dodik (from David). Next came the kor'zhiks, those who (in the classifier’s explanation) instead of ‘eating like regular people’ prefer a kind of shortbread, or kor'zhik – evidently referring to students. Above these were the hippies, the informant’s antagonists, and on the highest rung, the classifier’s own group, the khar'oshi, this word originating from the Russian word khoroishij ‘good,’ so that this highest rung means ‘the good ones.’

The above classification is far from universal. The term khar'oshi, for example, already existed in Yerevan and still continues to function today without a considerable change in meaning, and it also has a specific meaning in prison argot signifying the second (after thieves) highest rung. The hippie has already been forgotten, and the two lowest groups in the aforementioned private hierarchy (the dodziks and the kor'zhiks) never formed real subgroups in the social structure of Yerevan, but nevertheless are informative for understanding the general picture of the city in those years. Blue jeans – at one time the obligatory hallmark of the hippie – have long been a symbol of prestige even among the khar'oshi, while the long hair and beard (in conjunction

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17 As we will see in the Path of Tradition, the ritual of eating (feasting) codifies an important social-structural information.

18 This “obligatory” attribute of the hippie culture is a good example of the peculiarities of the Armenian (and Soviet) hippie movement: for a Western hippie jeans were the cheapest and least prestigious garment, while for the Armenian hippie – they were a rather expensive, hardly accessible and highly prestigious symbol. Cf. Shchepanskaia 2004 on the anthropology of the Leningrad and Moscow juvenile subculture of mid- and late-1980s.
tion with a violin) became respectable among the r'abiz, since they create the impression of the popular and highly honored violinist, the aforementioned Karo Hayrapetian, who elevated r'abiz music to the heights of the theatrical stage. Many khar'oshi, as we already noted, have now moved to higher social layers and even to the Parliament of Armenia.

R'abiz music clearly will not win a position of honor in national and international culture through the back door as flamenco and jazz did. However, at least one of its high-quality representatives managed to leap over the wall of the local anti-r'abiz intellectuals oriented toward the West. I am referring to the famous duduk player Djivan Gasparyan whose music was welcomed in the West, although not as r'abiz but as a penetrating style fitting different musical directions like eco-jazz, meditation music or industrial gothic. Discouraged Armenian intellectuals attribute this sudden success (by 2002, Djivan Gasparyan’s duduk had already been heard in 16 foreign films, including some mainstream American movies) to the “virtues” of the duduk and Armenian national music, rather than to r'abiz. Although it is not difficult to hear many typical r'abiz nuances in Gasparyan’s music. By the way, presently (in 2004) he is still heading the Yerevan Rabis trade-union organization. In any case, if the musical style of r'abiz is doomed to stay a local “low” style, its social inheritors, the r'abiz social subgroup and its successors seem to have overgrown the initial musical meaning of this phenomenon. Whatever fate r'abiz music will have, one thing is evident: a product of the modern city, a narrowly specialized musicological phenomenon, can easily and flexibly grow into an entire subculture, even vying to replace the entire culture itself where it previously held a modest and unobtrusive place.

It is interesting that Djivan Gasparyan himself does not seem to separate his duduk playing from r'abiz music. In the 1990s he shot some TV clips and gave a number of concerts, where he appeared as an ordinary r'abiz singer – to the surprise and disappointment of his fans who admire his extraordinary duduk playing.