CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: PERFORMING GREEKNESS THROUGH REBETIKO SONG

"The Greeks gained their freedom from the Ottomans only to become slaves of Europe."

"Rebetika is traditional Greek music. It is the truest expression of the Greek people."
-Pavlos Vassiliou, 2007

Introduction and Chapter Summaries

The first decade of the twenty-first century marks a powerful moment in modern Greek history. Economic, political and cultural dilemmas that have shaped Greek modernity since the founding of the Greek nation in 1832 are finally coming to a head. As Greece enters what international press characterize as "a time of crisis," a marked instability permeates the public and private sector:[1] economic corruption and political favor-trading fuel general mistrust in government practices; reduced wages and inflated prices stunt Greek market growth; and austerity measures imposed by the European Commission drastically alter economic and cultural realities. As Greeks scramble to

[1] BBC: "Greece Crisis: Fears Grow That It Could Spread" [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8648029.stm] Visited April 28, 2010; "The Washington Post": "Greece's Debt Crisis Could Spread Across Europe" [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/07/AR2010050700642.html] Visited May 11, 2010; "The Independent": "As Tourists Stay Away, Greece Suffers an Identity Crisis" [http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/Europe/as-tourists-stay-away-greece-suffers-an-identity-crisis-is-there-too-much-concrete-and-too-many-bawdy-clubs-639194.html] Visited May 11, 2010.

account for a staggering national economic debt, ideological concerns about control of contemporary Greek culture and *topos* (Leontis 1995) rise to the fore: Should Greeks engage in the sale of their land and cultural artefacts in order to account for economic troubles? How should Greeks cope with increasing global interdependence in the political, economic and cultural realm? And how can Greeks create a national identity, a contemporary Hellenism that takes into account the realities of globalization, world market politics and national myths of Greekness?

While Greek modernity has always entailed a struggle for control over Hellenism, today the conflict seems less philosophical and more practical in nature than ever before. The "social, cultural and environmental bankruptcy that evolved [in postwar Greece] as Greece opened its doors to foreign investors and tourists, and commodified its ancient monuments" (Leontis 1995, 170) now plays a decisive role in the handling of objects of Greek culture. One no longer questions whether Greeks are willing to commodify national culture, but which and how many objects they sell and at what price. Rebetiko musician and leftist intellectual, Pavlos Vassiliou who comprises the focus of this study, characterized the negative effects of the pervasive commodification trend in the following manner: "The question is not whether Greeks are willing to sell themselves for monetary profit. It is now a matter of just how far they are willing to go, even to sell their souls in that insatiable Greek desire to become European just to be like everyone else" (Vassiliou 2010). The commodification of objects and ideologies of Hellenism along with the effects of powerful transnational forces have transformed perceptions of contemporary Greek culture and Greek national identity.

Just how far are Greeks willing to go? A German senator crossed an invisible boundary during recent loan negotiations with the European Union when he suggested that Greeks account for the national debt by selling the Acropolis to the Germans. Greeks were so outraged by the suggested sale of their national cultural symbol that Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou made an immediate television appearance assuring the people that the sale of the Acropolis would not take place. But a chord deep in the heart of Greek sensibility had been struck. Was Greek poet Giorgos Seferis's once outrageous nightmare in which Americans had won the Acropolis in an auction and turned its columns into giant tubes of toothpaste, not so far-fetched after all (Leontis 1995)? While an auction of the Acropolis never did take place, in 2010 Greece did accept high interest-rate loans from Germany and from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and implemented a series of mandatory austerity measures. Given Greece's economic dependence on Germany and on the IMF, the national symbol may already have been sold without most Greeks realizing it.

In this thesis, I discuss the complex characteristics that shape Greek modernity through the prism of music. I focus on contemporary performance of the urban popular song genre rebetika, a musical form that has been used time and again to support varying notions of Greek national identity. For as with ancient artefacts, Greeks disagree over the proper way to incorporate rebetika into contemporary society. Over years of extensive debate, Greeks questioned whether rebetika was fundamental to the Greek national community imagined or lived and how the music should be incorporated into contemporary life. In this work, I challenge the reader to view rebetika as a Greek "musical ruin," thus normalizing the questions I address about the music. For like the

discussion of the proper handling of ancient ruins, Greeks question how to incorporate rebetiko culture into their everyday lives. Should they change the sound and style of the music in order to cope with contemporary needs in live performances? Or should they preserve early rebetika recordings as sacred cultural treasures never rerecording the songs? Answering these questions about rebetika touches on questions fundamental to Greek modernity.

In order to examine Greek modernity through rebetiko performance, I discuss well-known Greek rebetiko musician Pavlos Vassiliou (1952 -). Vassiliou is known throughout Greece for his exceptional vocal abilities and for an almost religious devotion to early-style rebetika. He is perhaps best known as the owner of Rebetiki Istoria [Rebetika History], the oldest *rebetadiko* [night-time establishment devoted to live rebetika performance that offers drinks, appetizers and a space for dancing for its customers] in Athens. Vassiliou maintains strong ideas about contemporary Greek culture. He believes that the forces of Europeanization and capitalization dominate and hybridize the Greek soundscape and contribute to a general cultural amnesia of the Greek people. Believing that rebetika songs are fundamental to Greek national consciousness, he works hard to preserve and promote the music in its early style of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. By promoting a particular style of rebetiko performance and enjoyment, Vassiliou strives to counteract the ills of Greek modernity. His rebetiko performance is a type of defensive musical nationalism in which he tries to protect traditional Greek culture from corruptive influences such as commodification and Europeanization.

In this thesis, I propose that Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture is simultaneously a product of Greek modernity and a rejection of it; while designed to counteract the downfalls of Greek modernity, its very existence depends upon it. For Rebetiki Istoria is a culture of authenticity (Guignon 2004), a product of modernity that responds to and rejects its central ideological issues. These issues include the incorporation of past and present, the tension between preservation and change, the commodification of culture and the creation of a contemporary Greek national identity. This thesis is part biography and part ethnography. It introduces Vassiliou as a musician and public intellectual with strong beliefs about Greece and Greek culture. In addition, it presents his rebetiko culture within the larger fabric of contemporary Greek modernity as a musical representative of his desired alternative Greekness and as a commentary on the times.

The dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter One serves as an introduction in which I lay out the central themes of this dissertation. Central topics include Greek national identity discussions, characteristics of Greek modernity, the place of rebetika in contemporary Greece, Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture and my place in this culture. In addition, it places this dissertation in dialogue with scholarship on Greece, on national identity issues and on ethnomusicology.

In Chapter Two, I present the theoretical paradigms I will use throughout the dissertation. In order to arrive at my theoretical discussion of musical nationalism, I begin with an examination of the nation and the nation state as distinctly modern ideological constructs. Then, I discuss the national identity concept as a social glue that helps hold nations together. I emphasize the notion that national identity is not only an idea but an action that is performed over and over again in infinite ways by all members of society.

With the rise of nation states, music came to be a central factor in the performing of the nation—music helped unify national communities by emphasizing shared beliefs and by defining aural boundaries between national cultures. I close the first part of this chapter with a discussion of musical nationalism in newly-founded European nations.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the issues of musical nationalism as they apply to the Greek case. First, I outline the metanarratives that shaped the ideological construction of the Greek nation in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent search for a contemporary Greek national identity. Early Greek national identity debates were dominated by two central themes: defining the relationship of Greece and Europe and defining the relationship of Greece with its own ancient past. The fundamental question was how Greeks were to create a national identity that was at once uniquely Greek and yet European. Examining these issues, I discuss how they shaped and reflected musical output in the burgeoning Greek nation.

Chapter Three consists of a short biography of Pavlos Vassiliou. I begin with a brief summary of his life and character but spend a majority of time presenting his thoughts on contemporary Greece and on rebetika. In the hopes of giving the reader greater insight into Vassiliou's personality I enrich my discussion with numerous interview transcriptions. In addition, in order to discuss Vassiliou's rebetiko performance as it shapes and reflects Greek modernity, it is important to establish him as a modern intellectual and as a musician. As ethnomusicologist John Blacking stated in his well-known monograph, "How Musical Is Man?," "The sound may be the object, but man is the subject; and the key to understanding music is in the relationships existing between subject and object, the activating principle of organization" (1978, 26). Since Vassiliou is

the central force that shapes the Rebetiki Istoria music and culture, this study would be incomplete without a biographical discussion of Pavlos Vassiliou.

Chapter Four consists of an introduction to the music of rebetika. I begin by presenting my definition of rebetika and contrasting it with a selection of the many current definitions of the music. Then, I present the musical attributes of rebetika—these include instrumentation, modes, ornamentation styles and basic rhythms. I conclude with a discussion of musical style and explain the musical attributes of early-style rebetika. I illustrate these musical elements through transcriptions of Vassiliou's performance of the song "*San Magemeno to Mualo Mou*" [There is a Spell on my Mind] (1940) by Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas." This introduces the reader to early-style rebetika in practice and illustrates Vassiliou's implementation of early-style rebetika vocal techniques and ornamentation.

I complete my introduction to rebetika in Chapter Five, where I present the socio-political history and development of the music. I being with a survey of the ways in which rebetika has been used as a pawn in national identity debates throughout the twentieth century: at times, the music was presented as emblematic of an ideal Greekness while at other times it was considered a corruptive force. These debates had great effect on the sound and function of rebetika as musicians catered to various censorship committees and changing tastes. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the way in which rebetika changed form and style in the mid-twentieth century when many claimed that the music had strayed so far from its early style that it "died" or at least ceased to exist as a creative form. This leads to a discussion of the well-known Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis where I question whether his rebetiko-based classical compositions

helped put an end to rebetika as a creative form or helped revive the music. I close the chapter with an introduction to contemporary rebetiko revival culture in Greece (Tragaki 2007). This culture, which emerged in the late 1970s consists of the Greek youth who collect rebetika memorabilia such as early 48 and 78 discs, learn and perform early-style rebetika and open *rebetadika* devoted to live rebetika performance. Pavlos Vassiliou was the first musician to open a *rebetadiko* in the capital city of Athens in 1981.

In Chapter Six, I contextualize my discussion of Rebetiki Istoria through an ethnographic account of contemporary Athens. I present Athens as a physical embodiment of central issues in Greece today. These include the positive or negative effects of European Union membership, the struggle to define a contemporary Greek national identity and the realities of pervasive financial corruption and political unrest. These factors contribute to a general instability and cultural pessimism that have overcome the nation's capital. Since attempts to create national stability are often efforts to define a national identity, questions of Europeanization, globalization and preservation are embedded in the physical and ideological landscape of Athens.

In this dissertation, I propose that powerful transnational forces reinforce the nation as a primary fundamental metanarrative that informs the way Greeks imagine themselves in the globalizing world. This is evident in various expressions of cultural defensiveness by Greeks who work to preserve various perceptions of Greekness. According to Vassiliou, capitalist mechanisms of mass culture like radio and the Internet are largely to blame for the rise of cultural defensiveness. As such, the capital city is shaped by bold attempts to keep Greece up to date in the "shrinking planet" (Synott 2004) and fervent attempts to resist and preserve various perceptions of Greekness.

Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture in large part is a response to the rise and domination of mass culture.

Chapter Seven is an ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria. In this chapter, I present the *rebetadiko* as a musical site of Vassiliou's alternative Greekness. Christopher Small's notion of "*musicking*" (Small 1998), which encompasses all music-related activities including composing, performing, dancing, and listening that shape a particular music act, is a useful framework for understanding my discussion. I analyze how Vassiliou works to shape every aspect of rebetika performance and enjoyment in order to promote a particular Greekness. Rebetiki Istoria functions through a network of shared understandings about Greek music and culture between musicians and audience. In fact, most regular Rebetiki Istoria patrons seem to share with Vassiliou similar views about Greek society and rebetika and his rejection of many aspects of Greek modernity.

In the second part of this chapter, I analyze the culture that Vassiliou promotes and examine how musical meaning is created and conveyed to audiences. In Rebetiki Istoria, there is an assumed direct connection between one's political views and ones knowledge about how to enjoy rebetika. The music culture seems to serve as an outlet for those who question the contemporary trends of Europeanization and globalization and their effects on Greek culture. Audiences are mostly politically-active citizens who engage often in strikes and demonstrations against the political and cultural Europeanization of Greece. Many Rebetiki Istoria patrons who lead such demonstrations are university students and members of active political groups. I conclude the chapter by situating Rebetiki Istoria within the larger fabric of Greek modernity.

Chapter Eight serves as a conclusion to this thesis. In this chapter, I present some pressing concerns about rebetika performance in contemporary Greece. For after completing my final year of fieldwork and returning to the States in 2010, I worried about the future of Rebetiki Istoria. Greece had entered a period of staggering financial crisis and social unrest that has greatly affected the rebetiko culture. While Rebetiki Istoria is still the most popular and successful *rebetadiko* in Athens, its audiences are dwindling. And those who continue to attend purchase fewer drinks. In addition, mass media culture dominates and musical trends change constantly with the rapid influx of foreign musical forms. Rebetika made available by mass media rarely represent the early music culture and style. As such, audiences receive mixed messages about the shape and content of contemporary Greek culture and fail to recognize the value of the musical offering in Rebetiki Istoria. I conclude the chapter with the idea that the very issues that threaten well-being of the *rebetadiko* are issues that are fundamental to Greek modernity.

Pavlos Vassiliou and Greek Modernity: A Brief Note

This dissertation is an essay on Greek modernity and on the fundamental metanarratives that shape contemporary Greek culture. It is unique in that it refracts these issues through contemporary rebetiko performance. Modernity has been associated with cultural and intellectual movements from the mid-fifteenth century through the present day. It refers to industrialization, to secularization, to a shift from feudalism towards capitalization and to the rise of the nation-state as a central-organizing principle. Fundamental characteristics of modernity include the increased movement of information, people and capital across diverse populations and the creation of a world

market. In spite of the benefits of technological advancements, numerous modern thinkers including Karl Marx, Max Weber and Theodor Adorno characterized modernity as a profoundly negative force largely responsible for the ills of contemporary society. Pavlos Vassiliou echoes this sentiment, characterizing Greek modernity as the downfall of Hellenism: to Vassiliou, capitalism and the free market economy corrupt Greekness and cause the widespread denigration of contemporary culture. Rebetika is a victim of this downfall of Greek society.

Once regarded as a universal phenomenon, modernity is now considered to exist in infinite variations around the world (Eisenstadt 2003). Much scholarly discussion focuses on the central characteristics of Greek modernity (see Chapter Two). Since the founding of the Greek nation in 1832, its most fundamental metanarrative has been defining a Greek national identity with respect to Europe and the political, economic and cultural world market. Greece's claim to ancient Greek culture raises questions about its relationship with Europe as well as about the legitimacy and value of Modern Greek culture. With Greece's 1982 entry into the European Union and adaptation of the Euro currency in 2001, questions about contemporary Hellenism emerged with renewed force. How should Greeks "dream their national topos" (Hamilakis 2009) in the twenty-first century? In addition, the emergence of a global neighbourhood is affecting Greek modernity in drastic ways. What kinds of hybridizations and commodifications of Greek culture are desirable?

A Greek patriot and leftist intellectual, Vassiliou has contradictory feelings about the Modern Greek nation. While intensely proud of his Greekness, he views contemporary Greek culture and society with marked discontent; he critiques the

widespread economic corruption and favor-trading that form the foundations of an inefficient capitalist free market economy that distresses the working class; he laments the dominance of mass media culture that is driven by the pursuit of monetary profit and that promotes foreign pop culture; he believes that state and localized attempts to Europeanize and modernize the Greek nation corrupt Greekness and transform conventional national identity perceptions in undesirable ways.

As is often true with great critics of the modern period, Vassiliou is a product of the very modernity he rejects. Vassiliou's disappointment in the contemporary Greek nation dominates most of his speech about Greece and about Greek music. One might describe his feelings as paranoid nationalism, a condition in which perceived threats to national culture have become so overwhelming that interactions with the nation are dominated by defensiveness and fear (Hage 2003). Yet Vassiliou is twice disappointed; the perceived threats come not only from outside the borders of the Greek nation but also come out of the fundamental national rhetoric of Europeanization and globalization of the Greek nation. As such, Vassiliou also engages in avoidant nationalism, in which the nation itself disappoints him, though he maintains the image of and hopes for a different Greece (Hage 2003).

Pavlos Vassiliou and his rebetika performance provide an interesting case study in the discussion of national identity within the broader transnational region of the European Union. While many suspected that rapid hybridization of local cultures in the twenty-first century would diminish the prevalence of local nationalisms (Albrow 1996; Van Creveld 1999), the reverse is often true. As global forces infringe upon national cultures, localized resistant nationalisms often gain strength as defensive acts of cultural preservation.

Smaller member nations like Greece readily evidence extreme acts of nationalism in reaction to perceived threats to national culture, stability and identity. Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture is a prime example of local-level resistance to cultural hybridization through musical performance. In addition, his rebetika nationalism is particularly complex as it complicates the standard Self/Other paradigm in Europe: whereas dominant European narrative identifies the Other as non-Western Europe (Said 1978), Vassiliou defines the Other as the European Union and does so from within its geographical boundaries. This not only Others the European Union of which Greece is a member but counters the political and national culture promoted by the State thus Othering the political foundations of the Greek nation. In order to contextualize national identity issues in contemporary Greece, in the next section I introduce the central issues that have shaped Greek modernity since the founding of the nation in 1832.

I. INTRODUCING THE GREEK NATIONAL IDENTITY AND REBETIKA DEBATES

Greek National Identity Issues

Greece is a geographical and cultural crossroads. Positioned on the southern end of the Balkan Peninsula, Greece is part of South-eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the European Union, the European Economic Community and the Balkans; it lies between Asia to the East, the Balkans to the North, Africa to the South and Europe to the West; it claims ancient Greek culture as its own but also that this past has been co-opted by the rest of the Western world. In addition, 1200 Greek islands scattered in the Aegean, Mediterranean and Ionian Seas comprise most of the Greek land mass. The 15,000 kilometres of coastline have long been the cause and symbol of Greece's exposure to

occupation, immigration and cultural hybridity. Add to this Greece's still tense relations with Turkey as the nations seek to settle differences over the future of the island-country of Cyprus and over issues of sovereignty in the Aegean Sea.

Figure 1.1: Map of Greece and neighbouring countries.[2]



Ever since a portion of the Greek nation was carved out of the shrinking Ottoman Empire in 1832, attempts to define a Greek national identity have been numerous, complex and contradictory. What parameters would separate non-Greeks from Greeks? Would religion be the defining factor thus classifying all members of the Greek Orthodox Church as Greeks? Or if knowledge of the Greek language would be used as a tool to define Greeks—such a move would exclude non-Greek speaking members of the Greek Orthodox Church. And what language should Greeks speak: a standardized demotic Greek filled with foreign words and various dialects or a cleansed form of the language called "Katharevousa" invented by Adamantios Koraes, a Greek intellectual who wanted

[2] The University of Texas at Austin Perry Castaneda Library Map Collection. "Greece Maps." [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/greece.html] Visited on October 10, 2010.

to bring Greek closer to its ancient form?[3] In addition, geographical realities complicated matters further: At the founding of the Modern Greek nation, seventy-five percent of the Greek Orthodox population lived outside of the borders of Greece: The Heptanesian Islands remained under English rule until 1863, Thessaly until 1881, Crete, Eipirus, Macedonia and the islands of the Aegean such as Samos, Chios, Mytilene, and Limnos and others were acquired in 1912 and the Dodecanese islands became part of Greece only in the 1940s. Eventually, religion was given great priority in determining Greekness, but it was the nation as a culturally homogeneous group sharing language and history that created and sustained the imagined community.

The need to determine who was and was not Greek was just one of a series of fundamental questions that shaped the newly-formed nation. Other concerns included how the ancient past should be incorporated into the identity of the modern nation. Should the long history of various empires that controlled the region from the end of classical Greece through the founding of the Modern Greek nation (the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire) be included in or excluded from official discourses of Modern Greek national identity and history? Were these corruptions of ancient Greek culture, improvements upon it, or did Greek culture simply stagnate during the Ottoman Empire, a period of a great hibernation as some propose?

Foreign European powers played a major role in shaping the ideological and physical layout of the new nation. For example, the boundaries of the fledgling nation

[3] The notion that language has great power in shaping a culture has become known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that, "language doesn't simply reflect the different ways in which different cultures see the world, but actually determines how they do so" (Whorf as quoted by Cook 1998, 76). Furthermore, it suggests that it is the idioms of language that provide it with its special character, and that help distinguish it from other languages. According to this theory, cleansing the Demotic Greek language of foreign words and syntax would also reshape the way Greeks view the world around them.

were set by the Three Great Powers of Great Britain, France and Russia, each of which fought to establish hegemony in Greece. The 1832 Conference of London declared a foreigner, Otto von Wittelsbach, the son of King Ludwig of Bavaria, King of Greece. Antagonism arose over control over ancient and contemporary Greek culture and *topos*. King Otto had his own ideas for the modern Greek nation: he hoped most of all to resurrect the glories of the ancient past and free Modern Greek culture from centuries of corruption by foreign occupations. Ancient Greece became the heart of the national myth of the Modern Greek nation and the "Greekness" of contemporary Greek culture became heavily debated.

The fundamental ideological concern that informed the dominant discourse of the new nation was the search for a Greek national identity that would highlight a cultural continuity with the ancient past but also serve as a viable contemporary European identity. How would the memory of the ancient Greek past be incorporated into current ideology and what criteria would define the relationship of Greece and Europe? Since Ancient Greece was the central model for nation building in Europe, the modeling of Modern Greece on the image of its ancient past was also a means of Europeanizing the country. Another basic metanarrative that emerged was the *Megali Idea* [the Great Idea], the term used to described the popular desire to acquire for the Modern Greek nation the vast lands historically occupied by Greeks from ancient times to the present and thus establish a Greek nation that would contain most ethnic Greeks.[4] This sentiment

[4] Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis first used the term "*Megali Idea*" in a Greek parliamentary debate in 1844, in order to describe the aspirations of post-Independence Greeks to reacquire the territories of ancient Greece. Since over three-quarters of Greeks at the time lived outside the borders of the Hellenic kingdom, it became the policy of most governments to unite and incorporate all territories, which were home to unredeemed Greeks. In 1864 the Ionian Islands became part of the Greek state. Thessaly and a section of Epirus followed in 1881. During the Balkan Wars and the First World War, Greece reached its present size,

dominated international and domestic politics of the Greek state for much of the first century of its existence.

This European fixation with the ancient past did not ring true for many Greeks who sought to hold onto their traditional culture and did not consider themselves Europeans at all. For example, historian Thomas Gallant describes the early capital city of Athens as culturally and economically divided: "On the city streets, then, one would see side-by-side vestiges of the legacy of Ottoman rule along with the self-consciously crafted displays of Europeanness. Alongside bourgeois Athens, another city developed. This other place was home to the lower classes of society" (Gallant 2001, 109). In urban Greece, as industrialization brought large numbers of peasants to work in the city, there grew a marked class divide that was often a cultural divide. For example, it was amongst the urban lower classes that rebetika emerged in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, a music that stood in contrast to the dominant Western urban music culture.

Greek National Identity Discussions Today

Similar national identity issues dominate contemporary Greece. Especially prominent are attempts to define the Greek national identity in relation to Europe and the European Union. Greece joined the European Union in 1981, became a full member in 1991 and joined the European Economic Community in 2001. Many believe that EU membership is detrimental to contemporary Greekness and corrupts traditional Greek culture. Opinions are divided largely amongst political lines: the most prominent

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with the exception of the Dodecanese Islands ceded to it under the 1947 Paris treaty. The Great Idea expired in 1922 after the unsuccessful attempt of the Greek army to obtain lands in Asia Minor for Greece. Much of the city of Smyrna was burned, an event that has now come to be known as the "Asia Minor Disaster" or the "Great Catastrophe" (Koliopoulos 2002, 231).

oppositional voice to mainstream national identity politics continues to be that of KKE (*Kommounistiko Komma Elladas*) [Communist Party of Greece], the party that relentlessly questions the effects of EU membership on Greek culture, economy and autonomy.

The recent austerity measures imposed upon Greece by the European Union have caused widespread discontent amongst members of all political parties as increased taxes, wage cuts and attempts to eradicate widespread corruption have left many Greeks financially strapped. EU membership has altered the pace of Greek government business as well—politicians must maintain national social, environmental, legal and economic standards set by the European Union. In addition, EU membership has encouraged increased legal and illegal immigration from neighbouring countries especially from Albania and Turkey but also from Africa, Pakistan, and China. This fuels debates about who is and who is not Greek and often causes resentment of foreigners for taking jobs away from Greek people.

The incorporation of the ancient and modern past into a contemporary Greekness is still a central concern. In his book *Modern Greek Lessons: A Primer in Historical Constructivism* (1993), Faubion cites a "significant primacy of the past" in contemporary Greece. Indeed, the ancient and modern past prevail. But just what role they should play in the present is a matter of contestation. For example, who should write the nation's history and how often should it be rewritten? Which events should be emphasized and turned into national holidays and which should be erased and forgotten? It is the way in which the past is "remembered" in the present that shapes the ideological foundations of a nation. It speaks to fundamental perceptions of the Greek self and the non-Greek Other

and speaks to temporal ideologies in the Greek nation. The overarching question that guides contemporary rebetiko performance is the same question that fuels the debate over the contemporary Greek national identity: What is the appropriate means of incorporating the past into the present and what is Greece's relationship to Europe? Before discussing these issues in the context of rebetiko performance in contemporary Athens, I must first present a brief overview of the history and development of rebetika.

Rebetika Then and Now: A Brief Overview

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a new type of song developed on the streets of major Greek cities including Piraeus (the port of Athens) and Thessaloniki in the North of Greece. At the turn of the century, urban centers of mainland Greece experienced a rapid population influx of rural Greeks who moved to cities in search of work. As a result, a new urban social class formed, a proletariat sector of society, comprised of the independent worker as well as declining small business owners and independent producers. *Piraeotiko* rebetiko designates the rebetiko song style that formed on mainland Greece amongst the urban poor. This song would express the new and often trying conditions of everyday life in the city. The folk songs the urban poor already knew no longer seemed relevant.

Rebetika songs were an expression of everyday life: lyrics centered on such topics as unemployment, being a refugee, life in jail, love and loss, and poverty. The lyrics were simple and direct, filled with vivid imagery and powerful emotion—usually sadness and pain: Slang words and popular expressions were common. Basic rebetiko instrumentation included the *bouzouki* (a plucked lute with three courses of double steel strings), the

baglama (a small-sized bouzouki), the guitar, and voice. The music was based on modes, scale-like series of notes with proscribed rules of movement and certain notes of emphasis. Most rebetika songs were written using certain standard rhythmic formulae. The two most popular rhythmic formulae were the dance rhythms *zeïbekiko* (9/8 pattern of beats) and *hasapiko* (2/4 pattern of beats). The *zeïbekiko*, the most common dance associated with rebetika, is an improvisatory dance, performed by a solo male.[5] Through the *zeïbekiko*, the dancer soothes his pain and performs his masculinity in a series of characteristic movements. The *hasapiko* dance has a proscribed series of steps and is intended for two or three male dancers.

As I examine more closely in Chapter Five, rebetika was used as a pawn in Greek national identity debates throughout the twentieth century. Various dictators and strict governmental regimes censored and banned the music for presenting a non-Westernized image of Greece. In the late 1930s what was to become a forty-year debate arose in the Greek leftist press about the value and Greekness of the music. The music was banned again during the military Junta of 1967-74. During the last four decades of the twentieth century, there emerged renewed interest in early-style rebetiko music and culture. Old rebetika recordings were rereleased on LPs, beginning with the well-known collection Rebetiki Istoria [Rebetiko History] compiled by Kostas Hatzidoulis in 1974. Young musicians learned to play rebetika and opened *rebetadika*, establishments devoted to live performance of early-style rebetika.

Athenian *rebetadika* were very successful during the 1980s and 90s. But since the change of the millennium, they have experienced a marked decline in popularity. Some blame this downfall on the introduction of the Euro and on the subsequent inflation that

[5] Today women dance the *zeïbekiko* as well.

rattled the state of the Greek economy. Others blame Europeanization and capitalization for influencing Greek taste towards foreign musical forms. Rebetika musicians have dealt with this decline in various ways. Most alter the musical entertainment in some way in an effort to attract customers. For example, they expand the repertoire to include *laïka* [postwar popular songs] or they play rebetika songs at faster tempi, with different instrumentation and in a manner that calls for a different style of musical enjoyment. Already in 1975, rebetiko scholar Gail Holst described the changes to rebetika culture that continue to shape the contemporary rebetiko scene:

> I'm now convinced that it is impossible to hear *rembetika* in a modern bouzouki club.[6] They are now even worse than they were in the late '60s. Vulgarity is something Greeks have quite a talent for, and if you're for a kitsch night out and have a large cheque book with you, you may get some enjoyment from a night at the bouzoukis. You can pop balloons at 100 drachmas[7] a pop, smash plates brought in special piles to the table for the purpose and costing anything from 50 to 100 drachmas each, drink any imported liquor you like (if you can afford it) but not find a drop of good barrel *retsina* [alcoholic beverage] in the place, watch young drunken boys and their girl friends pay to dance badly, or groups of professional dancers perform balletic travesties of rembetika dances, and have your ear drums permanently damaged by over-amplified bouzoukis. Worse still, you can watch a great rembetika singer like Sotiria Bellou sitting tiredly in the midst of the circus, beefing out the songs which made her famous. (Holst 1975, 14)

Vassiliou is unique in his strict devotion to early-style rebetika and in his refusal to alter the music culture in any way. Rebetiki Istoria is well known for its early-style rebetiko music culture.

[6] Gail-Holst transliterated rebetika as "rembetika" in this early book. In later articles she switches to "rebetika", the more common contemporary transliteration.
[7] The drachma was the Greek currency before the adoption of the Euro currency in 2001.

Rebetika Today: A Varied Contemporary Athenian Rebetika Scene

Rebetika continues to flourish in contemporary Athens in its myriad of forms and styles: amateur musicians gather in private houses to sing and play rebetika songs on a weekend afternoon or late into the night; professional musicians (*mousikoi*) perform rebetika on television shows devoted to musical performance such as Spiros Papadopoulos's "*Stin Ygeia Mas*" [Cheers], and well-known musicians such as George Dalaras present evenings of rebetiko history and songs in major concert halls and stadiums. However, the *rebetadiko* is the most popular setting for contemporary rebetika performance. The best-known contemporary establishments in Athens include Rebetiki Istoria [Rebetiko History], *To Taximi* [The Improvisation], *To Tzivaeri* [the title of a *Smyrneiko* song], *I Athinaïssa* [The Athenian Girl][8] and *Stoa Athanaton* [The Stoa of Immortality].[9]

It is the space of the *rebetadiko* that provides the focus of my discussion of contemporary rebetika performance in Athens, for it is here that I witnessed musicians and audiences alike come to terms with the place of rebetika in contemporary Greek culture on a regular basis. Each *magazi* bears a different atmosphere, a different rebetiko philosophy.[10] These change from year to year as musicians transfer between *magazia*, as ownership changes and as monetary profits change fluctuate. The physical structure of the *rebetadiko* consists of a moderate-sized room, that seats around one-hundred people. It has a restaurant-like setting with tables and chairs for customers, a menu of appetizers

[8] Until 2008, the *rebetadiko* was named *Aptaliko*, which is a rebetiko dance rhythm and song style.
[9] Many claim that *Stoa ton Athanaton* should not be classified as a *rebetadiko* since its music culture varies so much from the conventional understanding of the *rebetadiko*.
[10] *Magazi* (*magazia* pl.) can be roughly translated into English as "commercial establishment". The term refers to a wide variety of such establishments including super markets, taverns, clothing stores and *rebetadika*.

and drinks, a bar area, and a space for dancing in the center of the room right in front of the stage. Depending upon the *rebetadiko*, the program starts between 10:30 p.m. and 12 a.m. and ends at some point between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. Rebetika bands generally consist of three to six members though sometimes there can be eight or even twelve. *Rebetadika* generally offer drinks (wine, whiskey and beer) and hors d'oeuvres. Some establishments, like Stoa Athanaton have well-staffed kitchens and offer a full-dinner menu. Patrons generally reserve tables over the phone, though they can show up without a reservation and hope to find an available table.

In contemporary Greece, rebetiko history is contested history. Are rebetika songs relevant in contemporary Greek culture and if so, how should they be remembered? Should musicians update and modernize the songs as architects do with so many old buildings in order fit them into a particular image of contemporary Greece? Or should they cordon off the songs and safeguard them like ancient ruins, performing them only in the original style but never rerecording them? Pavlos Vassiliou believes that one should only perform rebetika in the early twentieth century style, that one should never rerecord a rebetika song, and that certain settings such as major concert halls and television shows are entirely inappropriate for rebetika performances: the proper venue for rebetika is the tavern and the *rebetadiko.* Others disagree, freely changing the song style and performance venue. As Greeks continuously reinterpret their aural landscape, accepting or rejecting various songs and categorizing them as rebetika or not, Greek or foreign and new or old, they reveal underlying ideological perceptions about Greek modernity and about the proper incorporation of the past into everyday life.

Figure 1.2: Bouzoukia, baglamades and other instruments for sale in a tourist shop in Plaka, Athens.



Contemporary Athens: A Modern City of Contrasts

To experience the vibrancy and urgency of Vassiliou's rebetika negotiation of Greek modernity, one has to feel Athens as a contested and divided site. First, imagine yourself in the Athens a tourist might readily see! You may be standing in the central Plaka district staring up at the Acropolis and marveling its grandeur as the birthplace of democracy. Your escape into the ancient Greek past does not last long. A faint rumble from the brand new underground metro system below brings you back into the twenty-first century: you descend the stairs and admire how seamlessly the metro's ancient artifact exhibits and brand new subway cars combine ancient and modern. After you have disembarked and surfaced, you see localized Athens, perhaps stopping in at a small tavern where you enjoy a *tsipouro* [a popular alcoholic drink made from distilled grapes] and appetizers and watch tourists navigate the narrow shop-filled streets. The street is quiet and free from traffic, part of a newly pedestrianized zone meant to unify and

promote the ancient sites of the city center. As you sip your *tsipouro*, a Eurovision compilation compact disc serenades you from the tavern radio. France and Portugal battle in a silent soccer game on the giant plasma screen in the far corner of the room. The bright afternoon sun streams in through the window bouncing off of the eight-string bouzouki hanging on the wall. The air is crisp and fresh: patrons obediently smoke their cigarettes outdoors in compliance with the new EU smoking regulations. Above your table hangs a poster of the Greek National Tourist Organization: "Live Your Myth in Greece, Starring You."

Now imagine yourself in my Athens. It is one o'clock in the morning and Hippocrates Street that runs through the city center is nearly deserted. The street is an architectural jumble: It is lined with dirty blocks of cement flats with stained awnings and balconies overflowing with messy potted plants. Amongst these stand dilapidated abandoned neoclassical houses and the occasional modern steel and glass building. Half-torn posters decorate the buildings, double-parked cars block the sidewalks, and the odor emanating from overflowing trash bins sours the air. The ground floor of most buildings houses a small business: a gyro shop, a post office, a funeral home, a music supply store, a *psilikatzidiko*.[11] Policemen carrying semi-automatic weapons have cordoned off various side streets with police tape and cement blockades. Smoke pours out of a smoldering dumpster that stands near the PASOK offices, remnants of the day's anarchist activity.

At the end of the road, two small lights illuminate the quaint wooden sign "Rebetiki Istoria" that hangs outside the oldest *rebetadiko* in Athens. This is my nightly destination, my escape from the delirium of daytime Athens. That Athens is expensive,

[11] A *psilikatzidiko* is a small store that sells basic items such as milk, eggs, candy, phone cards, newspapers and cigarettes. Such establishments are very common in Greece.

polluted and overcrowded, a city decorated with old treasures that have fallen into ruin. Lately, posters cover most public wall space in support of one of the three major political parties: PASOK (Pan-Hellenic Socialist Party) the party currently in power, *Nea Dimokratia* (New Democracy Party), currently the next most popular party, and KKE. In fact, political alliances seem to shape most aspects of urban life. They guide casual conversation, divide university students and professors and often determine the success of a business that may receive or reject support from the governing party.

Political and cultural extremes shape the physical and ideological *topos* of the capital city. In fact, visual contrasts dominate the physical landscape: the juxtaposition of past and present is a constant as ancient ruins safeguarded by metal fencing or Plexiglas casing break up the jumble of the urban landscape. Like archeological ruins the *yiapia*, namely the numerous empty shells of half-built buildings that permeate the city, are cordoned off from the bustle of Athens, registering a strange pause in the rapid pace of Greek modernity. And sections of the city devoted to tourists such as Monastiraki and Plaka often abut depressed neighborhoods such as areas of nearby Psyri. Another marked visual contrast lies between the brand new large state-funded Greek Orthodox churches in the middle of poverty-stricken neighborhoods. And very often, rallies, strikes and demonstrations in the streets of Athens emphasize disjuncture between the rich and the poor, preservation and change, and state-organized efforts to Europeanize Greece and local-level resistances to these efforts.

Rebetiki Istoria is simultaneously my escape from Athens and my entry into the city. The *rebetadiko* is located in the quiet Neapolis neighborhood at the end of Ippokratous Street that connects the thoroughfare Alexandras with the Athens city center.

But the adjacent Exarcheia neighborhood is such a center of political and cultural activity that people generally describe Rebetiki Istoria as located in that vibrant neighborhood. Exarcheia has a rich cultural history. Between 1870 and 1880, it formed as a quiet residential neighborhood on the then boundaries of Athens, taking its name from the neighborhood grocer. Exarcheia has been home to Greece's best-known artists and musicians including songwriter/anarchist Nikolas Asimos, rock musician Pavlos Sideropoulos and painter Yiannis Tsarouchis. Exarcheia is often at the center of major political occurrences: EAM, the National Resistance Movement in World War II- formed in a small house at the end of the road Mavromixali on September 27, 1941 in Exarcheia (Kairofilas 2002, 251). The neighborhood adjoins the Polytechnic Institute, where the tragic events of November 17, 1973, took place.[12] Ever since, the Greek youth have continued to partake in many demonstrations and episodes in this neighborhood. Like other areas of Athens, during the 1960s and 70s most of the neoclassical houses of Exarcheia were torn down and replaced by modern apartment buildings. Many of the remaining neoclassical structures are now in near ruin.

Exarcheia remains a center of cultural and political activity. Today, even the name Exarcheia signals a red flag for any resident of Athens: the popular neighborhood for students, artists and intellectuals, has now become the center of anarchist activities. The destruction of public property is a common occurrence as groups of disgruntled youth break windows, burn trash receptacles and cars and dump trash into the streets. The headquarters of various political parties and major newspapers are located in Exarcheia,

[12] Greece had been under military dictatorial rule since 1967. On November 14, 1973, students at the Athens Polytechnic Institute went on strike and protested the military regime by barricading themselves inside the University. During the early-morning hours of November 17, 1973, the transitional government sent an army tank through the gates of the Institute killing at least twenty-four people. November 17 is currently observed as a Greek national holiday.

which also helps locate protests and other acts of resistance in the neighborhood. On a daily basis, police create mobile zones of opposition throughout Exarcheia setting up barricades and sporting shields and bullet-proof vests. It was here that policemen shot 14-year old Alexis Grigoropoulos to death in 2008, an occurrence that set off the worst rioting in Greece in decades. While daytime Exarcheia is generally a safe neighborhood, I was slow to get accustomed to walking right past policemen armed with semi-automatic weapons.

Figure 1.3: Armed police officers on a busy street corner in the center of Athens, 2010.



In recent years, the population of Exarcheia has changed as many Greeks have left the neighborhood and many immigrants from Albania, Bulgaria and Russia have moved in.

II. REBETIKI ISTORIA

Introduction and Sample Scene

In 1981, Pavlos Vassiliou opened his *rebetadiko* on Ippokratous Street that runs adjacent to this vibrant student neighbourhood. At the time, he was performing rebetika in taverns on his native island of Skopelos and in Athens. But Vassiliou could not perform rebetika just anywhere. He needed a particular environment removed from the

decadent downfall of Greek modernity in which he could pay homage to the rebetika culture of the early twentieth century in particular ways. On a cold winter night he came across the dilapidated neoclassical structure at 181 Ippokratous Street with a "For Rent" sign hung across the door. The structure housed a *frontistirio*, an after-school program for Greek students. In spite of the classroom setup with chairs and desks and dividing walls and doors, Vassiliou envisioned creating a *rebetadiko* out of this inopportune space. While signing the rental agreement the *frontistirio* teacher asked Vassiliou how he planned to use the space. "I want to open a school of my own," he replied somewhat slyly.

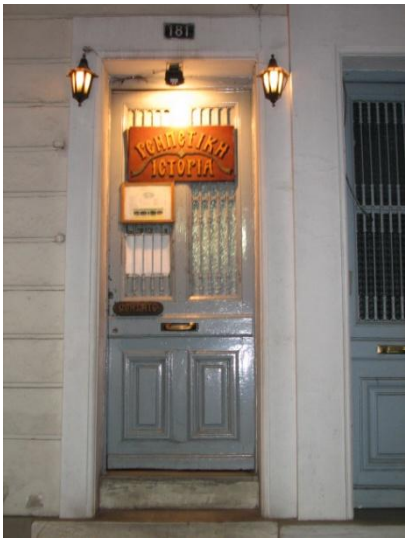
Indeed, he has fulfilled this prophecy. In Rebetiki Istoria he has taught Greeks about traditional Greek culture for over thirty years. Rebetiki Istoria would be Vassiliou's own space. He would shape every aspect of the performance and enjoyment of the music, gently nudging musicians and patrons alike to play, dance, drink and understand rebetika in specific ways. In fact, Vassiliou's rebetika performance depends upon the physical environment of his rebetadiko—to this day, Vassiliou refuses to perform rebetika in any other public setting in Greece. Perhaps he sought to create a type of rebetika utopia by constructing this musical authenticity culture within the delirium of Athens. Its hermetic enclosure from the outside world and night-time hours certainly reinforce its symbolic separation from the rest of Athens.

Figure 1.4: Rebetiki Istoria, 181 Ippokratous Street.



Now, in 2007, I make my way to Rebetiki Istoria every evening. Sandwiched between a gas station and a small convenience store and dwarfed by the surrounding apartment buildings, the *rebetadiko* barely draws any attention to itself. The shutters are closed at all times and no sound emanates from the building. One has few hints about what lies inside. Three uneven marble stairs lead to the closed door—a handwritten sign stuck behind the bars of the door reads "*EIMASTE ANOIXTA"* [WE ARE OPEN] and another "*KLEISTA DEFTERA*" [CLOSED MONDAYS]. The menu is posted on the door as well: It offers a small selection of alcoholic beverages and appetizers. Wine is 20 Euro a bottle and a bottle of whiskey costs 90 Euro. There is a 6 Euro minimum.

Figure 1.5: Front entrance of Rebetiki Istoria.



Inside Rebetiki Istoria, old chandeliers and candlelight lend a warm glow to the room and it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust to the dim lighting. Wooden chairs surround small round tables lit by candles and covered with white tablecloths. The thick cigarette smoke clings to my clothes and hair and settles into the nooks and corners of the dark wood paneling and cream-colored walls. Giorgos Batis, Giorgos Katsaros, Vassilis Tsitsanis and hundreds of other rebetika icons look down from faded photographs on the walls.

Figure 1.6: The Interior of Rebetiki Istoria.



As usual, the musicians are sitting around the table in the corner of the room holding their instruments. I unpack my violin and take a seat at their table. They are welcoming but their spirits are low. With an energy that never ceases to surprise me, they launch into their usual discussion of contemporary Greece: the political system, the economic recession and the excessive corruption that has brought Greece to the forefront of discussions by the European Commission and the global media. They remember how in the 1990s Rebetiki Istoria was filled to capacity every night of the week and wonder why this has changed. They offer many explanations, which include changing tastes that have led the Greek youth to other musical styles, the difficult economic situation that has curbed Athenian nightlife, and the national obsession with televised soccer matches that keeps people at home in the evenings. Foreign (meaning American) mass media culture is blamed for corrupting contemporary Greek culture and diminishing interest in rebetika.

Listening to these discussions, I mostly keep silent, refraining from revealing my personal thoughts about contemporary political issues or about the positive or negative effects of America on Greek culture. At times, the musicians try to pull me into the discussion, as the following conversation attests. The musicians are hypothesizing about the changes in Greek culture:

> VASSILIOU: Yianna,[13] in the 1990s, people waited in a line outside to get in, every night of the week! Not just on Friday and Saturday nights. It's the Euro. It has destroyed the Greek economy. And corruption. Wherever you turn people take advantage of each other and there is nothing to stop it.
>
> HARIS: And besides, there's soccer tonight. Everyone is at home watching soccer. There are three games in a row tonight.
>
> VASSILIOU: It's soccer that has destroyed us. Suddenly everyone has become an athlete. People think that wrapping themselves in Greek flags and jumping and

[13] The name Yona is often translated into Greek as Yianna.

> shouting at soccer games in chauvinistic national pride is taking part in Greek culture. Not just Greek culture, European Greek culture!
>
> HARIS: You know what I think? Young people don't listen to rebetika any more. It's the fault of globalization.
>
> VASSILIOU: They do too listen to rebetika. It's a specific type of young person that listens to it, but they exist. The problem is that the young people today don't have money. No one can afford to go out any more. With all of the "basic" expenses that people have today: cars, cell phones, Internet, television. They buy all of that with loans from the bank. What money do they have left over to spend on going out?

In these discussions, Vassiliou shows his disappointment: he worries that his fellow Greeks are forgetting their traditions and are pursuing immediate and superficial gratification in the form of villas and big cars and mass media culture. And all this as a result of their harboring desires to become European and thus forsaking their Greek national identity. Vassiliou wonders too why the media is engaging in such exaggerated coverage of the economic crisis which only further cripples the Greek market and Greek nightlife. He claims that Greece could never emerge from its debt and questions why the working classes are forced to bear the brunt of the new taxes. The government cannot possibly account for a 300-billion Euro deficit by raising taxes on products such as gasoline, cigarettes and alcohol and a number of food staples such as milk, eggs, salt and oil. A better idea would be to take money from those who have excessive amounts and who acquired it by dishonest means.

While a shortage of money is cited the fundamental reason for the decline in contemporary rebetiko nightlife, the musicians offer other explanations as well:

> HARIS: I still think the young kids are listening to other music. And they have everything at home on their computers. Why should they even go out? They can hear Markos (referring to Markos Vamvakaris, the most well-known rebetika musician of all time) on their computers.

VASSILIOU: Eh, it's not that. Well it's that too… What can I say... Everyone is running now, always running, working around the clock. And in the morning they are stuck in traffic so they have to leave to hours early just to get to work. We have become Europeans, running and running. And we're not getting anywhere… When I was growing up… we went out every night. Not to nightclubs to dance. We went out to drink wine, to eat our *bakaliaro* [codfish] and to listen to rebetika. And in the morning we went to work. I worked in construction, building houses and hotels, hard work. But I went out every night. That's what it means to be a Greek... What can I say: they're making Europeans out of us. They even passed laws that forced us to close at 2am, at 3am, to get us all in our houses. I left here the other night at 2am and the city was dead! Completely still. Everyone was sleeping like chickens in their houses… Forget it… Just forget it…

By 10:30pm, young rebetiko fans have gathered around Vassiliou's table and are absorbing his every word. The conversation flows seamlessly into a discussion about rebetika. Someone asks Vassiliou where he sells his recordings.

VASSILIOU: My recordings? No, my friend. You won't find any. Countless numbers of producers and musicians have asked me to record but I don't want to, I don't like the idea, I can't. I… after all these years that I have worked with rebetiko, I don't think that I can interpret the song better than its creator. The works are not mine. They are not mine to record. To record a rebetiko song today is to record for the wrong reasons, it is to seek personal profit or fame. Why would I record? So that one day our sons and daughters will buy my recording and not the original? No one can rerecord a rebetika song better than its creator who lived it.

Some patrons seem surprised with his reaction while others hold up their glasses in support of his words. Stubbing out his cigarette, Vassiliou continues his thought:

Rebetika is an authentic expression of the Greek people, of people who lived in another time. They wrote about their lives in expressions of the time. The early musicians were poets, and rebetika is popular poetry, in the greatest sense of the term. One could say that it is the greatest Greek music… the Acropolis, *the Acropolis* of Greek music! And if you rerecord rebetika songs, it means you don't respect the Acropolis. It is defacement. It is like entering a church, approaching an icon of Mother Mary and putting your autograph on it. Respect rebetika my friend, and you respect Greece, a country that has kept music prominent from Homeric times until today.

There is a pause in the conversation and Vassiliou begins to play a well-known song by Markos,[14] the most famous rebetiko musician of all time. The other musicians play along: Vangelis on guitar, Haris on bouzouki and I play the violin. Petros, a young regular patron jumps up to dance the solo *zeïbekiko*, his friends clapping to the rhythm. Vassiliou's voice carries clearly through the noise:

> In today's world, everyone knows
> That man's power lies in his wallet.
> If people learn that you have
> A wallet in your pocket
> They tell you that you are a gentlemen
> That you are just as you should be.
> The wallet–what can I say?
> It has great advantages:
> In every difficult moment
> It makes you out to be a great man.

The audience responds with energetic applause. "Hello Maestro with your beautiful playing!" One patron shouts out this characteristic praise. Vassiliou acknowledges the crowd with a nod, and takes a sip of his drink, a whiskey and water.

> VASSILIOU: I play rebetika for myself. And for those who want to listen to me play. There are no flowers to throw, there is no great financial profit to be made and I don't care about becoming famous. No one has become famous performing in Rebetiki Istoria. Rebetika is something else. It expresses the soul of the Greek people. In order to play rebetika you have to believe in it, you have to feel it. It has nothing in common with contemporary pop music in Greece, with the singers that get up on stage half-naked in front of thousands of people and shake and dance and sing lyrics with no meaning and sing songs that are out of tune… Today, we… not you and I, but all of us… we Greeks have become so concerned with becoming just like everybody else, with becoming European and keeping up to date with the latest trends that we have forgotten what it means to be Greek.

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou shapes every aspect of the performance and enjoyment of rebetika to promote his perceived historically-correct version of Greekness. There are specific criteria for knowing how to perform and enjoy rebetika. First and

[14] Contemporary rebetika musicians refer to the well-known rebetiko musician Markos Vamvakaris (1905 – 1972) as "Markos."

foremost, musicians must play rebetika in its early style as it was played by the working class of burgeoning late-19th and early-20th century Greek cities. Any alterations to the music represent an acceptance of foreign or hybridized Greek culture. In addition, patrons and fellow musicians must treat the music with utmost respect. This consists of keeping the music at the center of enjoyment at all times, making appropriate song choices and requests and humbling oneself to rebetika songs and to the early musicians. Alterations to the music, ostentatious displays of wealth or showy dancing are scorned as evidence of corruptive influences to contemporary Greek culture.

To Vassiliou, rebetika is a tool with which he tries to fix that which ails the Greek nation. At the same time, it is a decadent escape from a Greek reality that has no hope for change. What results does Vassiliou's discourse create? Does he have aesthetic, cultural or social impact on anyone except for those who come into Rebetiki Istoria? Perhaps this decadent underdog mindset, this reality of an endless search to change the situation reflects the Greek's search for a contemporary identity, a continuous, personal but futile search. In this case, Vassiliou represents a general *zeitgeist*, a pessimism that permeates Greek society. Perhaps this is partly the cause of Rebetiki Istoria's great popularity.

Rebetiki Istoria is now the most-popular *rebetadiko* in Athens. Known for its unique rebetika culture, its strict devotion to early-style rebetika and its low prices, it is the only establishment that opens and attracts customers six nights a week. Vassiliou has developed friendships with his patrons many of whom share his musical and political beliefs. While his patrons are rarely as extreme in their beliefs, what they do share with Vassiliou is a perceived natural relationship between leftist politics and rebetika as expressions of the underdog of Greek society. But when discussing Greek music and

politics, Rebetiki Istoria customers rarely match Vassiliou's eloquence. While at times he may speak harshly and even offend his audiences, Vassiliou has a way of befriending those who disagree with his musical or political views and thus has established a large fan base. Vassiliou's use of rebetika resonates with a general trend of critique of contemporary Greek society.

Vassiliou is often characterized as having extreme views. His speech is filled with broad statements about contemporary Greek culture, politics and society that generalize and may even insult. In fact, he often incites defensive reactions in listeners who might otherwise agree with him. I wonder why he speaks in such a strong and defensive manner. Why does Vassiliou feel the need to preserve a traditional Greek music form from a perceived increasing naïveté of the Greek people? Why does he try to protect rebetika from an influx of European forces, when others believe that these very same forces are fundamental to Greekness? What does this tell us about his experiences as a rebetika musician and about the ideologies that shape contemporary Greek modernity?

His response? "First ideology and then bread, not the other way around. That is Greece's fundamental problem. The Greek people forsake ideology. And most always just to make money" (Vassiliou 2008). He scorns restaurant owners who speak to their patrons in English, which he believes is a means of selling out their own culture in order to make money.

> If a tourist approaches me on the street and he is holding a Greek language dictionary, I will help him. Why should I have to learn English to speak to him when he comes to my country, when the Greek language has offered so many thousands and thousands of words to so many languages around the world? If he wants to talk to me, he should make the effort to learn my language. (Vassiliou 2007)

Accordingly, the Rebetiki Istoria menu is only in Greek language (see Appendix 1, which includes my English translation). However, Vassiliou is most welcoming of foreigners who come to Rebetiki Istoria and who show an interest in learning about rebetika. It is his strength of character and decisiveness of opinion that shape the Rebetiki Istoria culture.

Through rebetika performance, Vassiliou promotes his utopian Greek nationalism that exists somewhere between an imagined past and unlikely future and above all that resists the failures of contemporary Greek society. One might argue that through the promotion of his rebetika authenticity culture in Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou attempts to slow the changes of Greek modernity; or in the words of Baudelaire, he works to maintain the half of art that is stable.[15] For Vassiliou's use of rebetika is an instance of "musical nationalism," a type of cultural nationalism that "aims to regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate or threatened" (Yoshino 1995, [1992], 1). In this particular expression of musical nationalism, Vassiliou is not creating a new music form or even using a music form that was composed with the intention of musical nationalism. Rather, he is using an older musical form, rebetika, to illustrate the problems in contemporary Greek society and to suggest an alternative Greek national identity. To Vassiliou, rebetika emphasizes the necessity of restructuring Greek society and suggests a historically-correct alternative. In the current atmosphere of economic, social and political unrest in Greece, Vassiliou's use of rebetika as a type of musical nationalism is a refreshingly well-formed and constructive critique of Greek modernity; while commenting on perceived shortcomings, it presents an alternative contemporary Greekness.

[15] See Charles Baudelaire "The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays" (1964).

Why Rebetika to Represent Greece?

Why rebetika? Rebetika is not national music nor is it music promoted by the state. In addition, it has a complex history in Greece. It is therefore seemingly an unlikely candidate to embody nationalism of any kind and its promotion as Greek national music may seem counterintuitive. And yet, Vassiliou's use of rebetika resonates with many of his audience members who share similar beliefs about contemporary Greekness. In his study of musical nationalism in Europe, ethnomusicologist Phil Bohlman suggests that music is not inherently national or anti-national but that any music can be used in order to promote national identity perceptions (2004). What is significant here is not whether the nationalism ideals are intrinsic to the musical sound and expressed meanings of the music or that they resonate but how particular groups imagine the music and draw lines connecting it to Greekness.

To Vassiliou, rebetika is the perfect vehicle to promote his desired alternative Greekness. Firstly, rebetika is art of the highest quality that by the inherent value of its music and lyrics embodies the best of Greek culture. Second, he believes the music to be representative of Greekness—it is based on ancient Greek and Byzantine modes; its lyrics were written by and represent the lives of the urban working class Greek, the uneducated urban folk; the music differs from the mainstream hybridized Europeanized music. Finally, rebetika song lyrics resist injustices in Greek society and in the Greek political system. The song lyrics tell about Greek history and urban life. Its association with the urban working class makes the music representative of a little-celebrated image of Greece. Since the early rebetika musicians struggled economically, to Vassiliou they represent the result of an unjust capitalist system at fault for the deteriorating Greek

culture and national identity. By elevating the early rebetika musicians to near-iconic status, Vassiliou resists the capitalist system, as well as political and cultural trends in contemporary Greece.

In addition, Vassiliou believes that rebetika is a useful tool with which to point out and resist the extensive corruption that permeates contemporary society. First, rebetika was formed under difficult social and economic conditions in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Its lyrics are still relevant and perhaps even more pertinent to contemporary Greek society. Second, rebetika is a form of traditional Greek music and therefore promotes a historically-correct version of Greekness. Vassiliou states: "Rebetika is traditional Greek music. Along with folk music rebetika is the truest musical expression of the Greek nation" (Vassiliou 2007). Third, Vassiliou values rebetika for the beauty of its music and lyrics and for its accurate expression of the everyday life of the urban working class. "Rebetika is music of the Greek people. It is the most perfect expression of the hardship and injustice of the simple Greek and does so in a fashion so beautiful that it would make even the greatest poets jealous" (Vassiliou 2007). Fourth, as a spontaneous expression of the uneducated urban class, rebetika is a type of urban folk song and thus is truly representative of Greek culture. Fifth, rebetika musicians created a distinctive music style that is nevertheless strongly influenced in form and style by the Byzantine music of the Greek Orthodox Church, a source of Greekness.[16]

According to Vassiliou, another significant proof of the Greekness of rebetika lies in the fact that its early proponents played music and instruments that differed from those who sought to shape a European musical and national identity for the Greek nation.

[16] This speaks to the acceptance of the Greek Orthodox religion by many modern Greeks as an inherently Greek aspect of Greek culture, though it was brought to the Greek people only during the Byzantine Empire.

Indeed, aside from the folk songs that were played at festive occasions such as weddings, baptisms and high holidays, Greek urban music had been an imitation of Western art music. To Vassiliou, rebetika is the only true Greek urban music. As such, it represents a resistance to these unwanted hybrid elements of Greek culture. Today, hybridization continues to define Greek music culture and the destruction of traditional Greek culture occurs at an even more rapid pace than at the start of the twentieth century. As such, Vassiliou's use of rebetika remains relevant in contemporary Greek society.

The Role of Authenticity in Rebetiki Istoria

> "Authenticity is…not a property *of*, but something we ascribe *to* a performance"
> –Sarah Rubidge, 1996

Vassiliou and other Rebetiki Istoria musicians and patrons regularly use the term authentic to describe the rebetika they perform suggesting that it remains strictly within the early style. In addition, many characterize Rebetiki Istoria as the only authentic *rebetadiko* in Athens—By this they mean that it is the oldest such establishment, the only one to offer its anachronistic café-like culture and the only one that offers rebetiko strictly in its early style.[17] In addition, Vassiliou is widely regarded as one of the last living "authentic" rebetika musicians: he plays rebetika only in its early style, and he knew and played with some of the greatest early rebetika musicians. As such, many patrons respect him as the authority on Greek music and culture—they often visit Rebetiki Istoria with the intention of speaking with him about contemporary Greek music and politics in addition to listening to him perform. A typical Rebetiki Istoria visit consists of musical performance accompanied by extensive discussions about Greek history, politics and

[17] Three different patrons described the authentic Rebetiki Istoria culture in this way.

music and culture. Within the varied soundscape of contemporary Greek music, Vassiliou is considered an authentic purveyor of traditional Greek culture.

The use of the term authenticity is strategic and serves as a nexus for a number of related issues, a fact that becomes clear when contrasted with conventional definitions and uses of the term. The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* sites at least five definitions for the term "authenticity." all of which refer to a supposed true essence: for example, "a. worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact; b. conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features."[18] Ethnomusicologists have often criticized the term authenticity for its vagueness and subjectivity (Peterson 1997). Yet musicians and patrons alike continue to use the term time and again to describe the musical performance and culture in Rebetiki Istoria. I echo Allan Moore, who, in his essay "Authenticity as Authentication", suggests that in popular music discourse, the dismissal of any notion of authenticity is premature: "'Authenticity' is a matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed not inscribed" (2002, 132). H.G. Widdowson questioned the concept of authentic text, stating that authenticity is no longer viewed as existing in a text but rather in the way people make use of the text:

> It is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker. (Widdowson 1979, 166)

In Rebetiki Istoria, the overarching descriptor "authentic" is used by the musicians in two basic ways. First, it refers to the original text, in other words to the

[18] An Encyclopedia Britannica Company: Merriam Webster. "Authentic." [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authenticity] Visited on September 13, 2009.

original recording of a song. Should an argument arise between the musicians about a particular note or phrase, it is usually resolved by listening to the "authentic" recording. Second, the term authentic bears implications about the musical style of the rebetika performance. In Rebetiki Istoria, performing authentic rebetika means performing songs in the style of their original recordings. Vassiliou believes that alterations to the music render it inauthentic as they suggest the succumbing of the music, musicians and all of Greece to outside influences of Europeanization and capitalization.

Vassiliou maintains strong feelings about how rebetika should and should not be enjoyed and cites certain basic criteria for an authentic rebetika culture. For example, one should only buy the original recordings that are cultural treasures and great works of art. He admits that it is an unfortunate consequence that royalties from these original recordings go to the recording companies. In addition, rebetika should only be performed live and in its early style and should be enjoyed in a particular manner that places the music at the center of enjoyment. Most important of all, contemporary musicians should not rerecord rebetika songs. Vassiliou states:

> There are one million ways for a musician today to make a recording that sounds better than an original rebetika recording. Even just the clarity of digital recording gives the musician a hand up in appealing to contemporary audiences. All this accomplishes is it that it draws audiences away from the original recording, which is the only version anyone should ever listen to. Rebetiko musicians should be satisfied that they are making a living off of the masterwork of the early musicians performing live. But they should not plaster their face on the recording of someone else's song. If someone has the opportunity to listen to a recording he should listen to the original, not someone else's take on the original. (Vassiliou 2008)

It is a given that a song cannot be reproduced by other musicians as it was performed on its original recording.

> No one can play the *taximi* [improvisation][19] of Markos the way he played it. Sure they may be able to play all the notes, but to play it the way that he did, they won't be able to. Emotionally. Know that if you try to play a someone else's composition, play yourself. So that you will be heard. If you try to play something that is identical with the original you will be making a mistake. Before you start you will have made a mistake. The mistake will be emotional. (Vassiliou 2007)

Within this paradigm of authenticity, Vassiliou builds a complex relationship with the music industry. While relying upon original recordings for guidance and inspiration, he rejects outright the commercialization of rebetika. As Redhead (1990) argues, today constructions of 'authenticity' are no longer made by denial of commercial processes, but consciously, within them. Vassiliou's denial of contemporary commercial processes but simultaneous dependence upon them questions the conventional authentic/commercial paradigm.

Interestingly, the oral aspect of the contemporary rebetiko tradition does not bring into question the authenticity of the original recording or of the live performance. According to Vassiliou, this is because the live performance serves a different purpose from any recording. It spreads knowledge about and sparks interest in the original rebetika culture; it allows people to listen to and celebrate rebetika performed live and it inspires patrons to buy and listen to early-style rebetika recordings. This brings to mind Timothy Taylor's discussion on the "authenticity of positionality" (1997), the authenticity acquired by performers who refuse to 'sell out' to commercial interests. Such musicians must play in the early style with a particular understanding of the relationship of live rebetika performance and original recordings. And while enjoying the advantages of a live performance, this live performance constantly pays respectful homage to the early "authentic" rebetika musicians.

[19] The *Taximi Zeïbekiko* by Markos Vamvakaris is so popular amongst contemporary musicians that they refer to it as "the improvisation."

As I examine more closely in Chapter Seven, the notion of authenticity plays a final significant role in Rebetiki Istoria. Musicians and audiences alike judged a performer by the perceived authenticity of feeling and understanding of the music and culture. This particular rebetika authenticity culture requires particular knowledge about the music and its contemporary enjoyment. This knowledge is crucial to ones entry and acceptance into the Rebetiki Istoria culture. As Widdowson describes, "authenticity depends on a congruence of the language producer's intentions and language receiver's interpretation, this congruence being affected through a shared knowledge of conventions" (Widdowson 1979, 166). In Rebetiki Istoria, musicians and patrons alike share knowledge of musical intention and thus contribute to a unique rebetika authenticity culture.

In Defense of Culture

In recent years, the concept of culture has become a contested notion. Rebetiki Istoria musicians often use the term culture [*koultoura*] in their discussions of contemporary Greece and Greek music. I use the term as well, as adapting their vocabulary gives a more accurate picture of their understanding of the music. In fact, this thesis has emerged into a sweeping defense of the now highly-questioned notion of culture. As defined by John Storey, culture is "how we live nature… it is the shared meanings we make and encounter in our everyday lives…. To share a culture, therefore, is to interpret the world – make it meaningful – in recognizably similar ways" (Storey 2006, 3). This does not imply that cultures are harmonious, organic wholes. On the

contrary, the 'texts' from which cultures are made are 'multiaccentual' (Volosinov 1973). Stuart Hall suggests that culture is,

> *Both* the meanings and values which arise among distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they 'handle' and respond to the conditions of existence; *and* as the lived traditions and practices through which those 'understandings' are expressed and in which they are embodied. (1986, 39)

As such, culture is both the meanings and their expression in practice, what Hall calls a site of convergent interests (1986, 35). Geertz suggested that culture signifies a fabricated web of significance:

> The concept of culture I espouse...is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973, 5)

Many have come to question the feasibility of Geertz's notion of culture and his emphasis of the subjectivity of all ethnographic accounts. Significant attack came from positivists of various disciplines who accused Geertz of discrediting the field of anthropology: if there are as many understandings of a culture as there are people who think about it, then anthropology becomes an experiment in subjective psychology of the author rather than of a particular subject. Others argued that culture cannot be regarded as a contained entity especially in the rapidly globalizing world. In her essay "The Interpretation of Culture(s) after Television," (1999) Abu-Lughod discusses the role of television in altering the notion of culture as a contained entity.

> Television is most interesting because of the way it provides material inserted into, interpreted with, and mixing up with local but themselves socially differentiated knowledges, discourses, and meaning systems. Television…renders more and more problematic a concept of cultures as localized communities of people suspended in shared webs of meaning. (Abu-Lughod 1999, 123)

Abu-Lughod suggests that culture can no longer be attached to a particular place or people, thus questioning the very notion of culture itself.

While acknowledging these oppositional ideas to the notion of culture, throughout this thesis I continue to use the term culture for the following reasons. First, as mentioned earlier, Rebetiki Istoria musicians use the term. Second, culture serves as a useful means of differentiating a group of people who interpret the world according to shared criteria. I view the musicians and patrons of Rebetiki Istoria as members of a particular rebetiko culture, for they enjoy and interpret the music in similar ways. Third, the culture is intimately connected to one particular location and in that way might be characterized as "contained."

Finally, my use of the term culture comes as a result of my own personal passage from an outsider to this rebetika culture to a regular performer in it. Upon my arrival in Rebetiki Istoria, I had to pass a test of my knowledge about rebetika and capacity as a musician in order to be accepted by the musicians. I had to prove that I existed within their shared web of significance. In Rebetiki Istoria, the notion of culture not only continues to exist but shapes and defines the entertainment.

It is important to note that I separate the notion of the Rebetiki Istoria culture from the notion of "the field." In anthropology and ethnomusicology, the field has traditionally been viewed as,

> The place where data are collected to test theories. It is a bounded place filled with insiders who share views about music, musical practices, and a host of other things. It is the place where we outsiders must go to encounter these insiders and their culture, and explain to other outsiders the relationship between music and culture posited by our theories. (Rice in Barz and Cooley 1997, 105)

A primary method of ethnomusicology is fieldwork, the long-term submersion in the culture where the music of interest is performed. As such, the notions of the field and of culture are necessarily intertwined. But they are not necessarily the same. For example, I brought the musicians "out of their culture," to play rebetika at the University of Michigan, a place where their rebetiko web of significance was not shared. This American concert appearance of Rebetiki Istoria broadened the scope of my research field, but did not significantly alter the contained nature of the Rebetiki Istoria culture. In the following section, I describe my transition into the Rebetiki Istoria culture and my experience writing about it.

III. THIS THESIS

Experiencing and Writing about Rebetika and Vassiliou's Alternative Greekness

This dissertation is the result of three years of ethnographic research in Athens. It documents the many nights I spent in Rebetiki Istoria playing violin and bouzouki and observing rebetiko culture. It includes a discussion of my own personal journey of becoming a rebetiko musician, one that was shaped profoundly by my interaction with Vassiliou. I spent hours interviewing him, asking questions about contemporary Greek culture, about Greek national identity and about rebetika. Vassiliou would answer each question with enthusiasm combined with patient thoroughness. With time I filled out the schema of his belief in rebetika as a superior Greek music. I came to understand his conviction that rebetika is not only the greatest Greek music but also a sonic embodiment of a Greekness that is more desirable than anything contemporary Greek culture has to offer. I learned that rebetika served a more complex role in contemporary Greece than I

had ever imagined, and that to many rebetiko fans the music even represents an alternative national identity.

It was Vassiliou's initial surprise at my knowledge of rebetiko culture that served as my first hint that the music culture in Greece was not as I had imagined it would be. But after performing violin in Rebetiki Istoria for one year and learning the ways of a rebetiko musician, I began to understand Vassiliou's initial surprise about my knowledge and about my interest in rebetiko. Indeed, rebetika appeals to a specific type of person. Most Greeks I spoke to simply categorized rebetika as *hasiklidika* [songs about hashish] or characterized the *laïka* songs of Kazantzidis as rebetika in the stereotypical misunderstanding of the music. They did not seem have much knowledge about the early rebetiko culture and seemed largely uninterested in learning about it. In the following section, I describe my initial encounter with the Rebetiki Istoria culture.

Gaining Acceptance in Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria Culture/Learning Alternative Greekness

On a warm night in mid-September, I decide to visit Rebetiki Istoria for the first time. I can barely contain my excitement. Unsure of whether it is appropriate to go to a nighttime *rebetadiko* on my own, I ask two musician friends to accompany me. After searching Ippokratous Street for some time in vain, we finally realize that the unassuming blue and white neoclassical structure that stands before us houses Rebetiki Istoria. As I push open the double set of doors and peer into the dimly lit room, I can barely contain my joy. Photos of my rebetika heroes cover the walls. The décor is simple and tasteful. Small round tables and wooden chairs are tucked into every corner. Three male musicians are seated at a table in the corner of the room. They stop their conversation when we

enter and look our way. The atmosphere is a strange combination of formality and ease. We are the only customers. We sit down at the table closest to the musicians settling awkwardly into our chairs and not knowing quite what to say. The musicians acknowledge us with a nod and a "Good evening" and then continue their conversation without paying us any more attention. Are we intruding? Have we arrived too early? We order wine and fruit and take in our surroundings.

I pick up bits and pieces of the conversation: "…the instability of the economy… they expect us to pay to fix the situation… how are we supposed to sit and worry now whether a song is minor or major." I notice the antique light fixtures, the thick wooden trims, the dark floors. The clock on the wall of the bar blends in with the scenery. It is constructed out of an old record disc. Above our table is a large autographed photo of my rebetiko idol, singer Sotiria Bellou: "To Pavlos, with Love." Arguably the greatest rebetiko singer of all time, Bellou died in 1997, a few years before I had discovered rebetika. Sensing my joy, my friend Mariza leans across the table and pointing at one of the musicians says, "That must be Pavlos." I have now far surpassed my dreams of finding rebetiko culture in Athens. I realize that this is my first time in an environment where my knowledge about rebetika and love for the music are shared. Somehow I feel as if I have visited this *rebetadiko* before.

Without warning, the musicians begin to play. Had they been playing before we had arrived, or were they playing for our benefit? The bouzouki player begins with a short improvisation and that leads into the introduction of a song. The singer smiles, seemingly indicating his approval of the selected song and plays a slight variation of the introduction on his *miso-bouzouki* [half-bouzouki]. The guitar outlines the mode of the

song in the steady cyclic 9/8 *zeïbekiko* rhythm. Vassiliou is clearly the leader of the group. With a powerful voice, he begins to sing:

> Who has not put sadness in the fire of his mind
> And who has not put medicine into his poor heart?

The bouzouki player repeats the introduction only this time with slightly different ornamentation.

> Who has not undergone hardships and shame in life?
> Who has not known a woman and who has not gone to jail?

The bouzouki presents a third version of the introduction.

> With women, don't get mixed up, you will always be alone
> And like a bohemian you should drink, and enjoy your life.

The bouzouki plays the introduction one final time and the song ends.

I am floored by the performance. Vassiliou sings with passion and subtlety, his voice tracing with ease the ornamentation heard only in old rebetika recordings. It is as if the song was his own, as if he truly feels its sad irony. The bouzouki playing is sparse and straightforward. I whisper to my friends: "This is it. I am never leaving this place." They look at me strangely with a seemingly limited understanding of my joy. But inside I am also filled with angst. How can I make the transition from paying customer to ethnomusicologist and researcher? How can I explain my intentions of writing an ethnomusicology dissertation about contemporary rebetika performance in Athens? Might I write my dissertation about Rebetiki Istoria? My joy overcomes my inhibitions and I ask the singer,

> "Who wrote that song?"
>
> Vassiliou looks over in a manner that I am unable to read.

He replies, “Tsitsanis. It was sung by Stratos, who is that man you see there in the photograph of four musicians. He is the one on the bottom left.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” I respond.

Vassiliou looks at me quizzically.

YONA: “I have that photograph on my wall,” I say. I am aware of my accent and I feel as if I am speaking too loudly.

VASSILIOU: “Oh?”

YONA: “Yes, that very one.”

VASSILIOU: “Nah, get lost, I don’t believe you.”

YONA: “I do!”

VASSILIOU: “Do you know who they are? Do you know all of them?”

YONA: “Yes of course. That’s the Piraeus Quartet.”

VASSILIOU: “Who are they? Tell me their names.”

YONA: “Vamvakaris, Delias, Batis and Stratos.”

VASSILIOU: “Bravo.”

Vassiliou seems quite impressed and I am a bit confused. After all, the members of this quartet were the original proponents of rebetika and Markos Vamvakaris is the best-known rebetiko musician of all time. Pavlos begins to tell me a bit of rebetiko history:

> VASSILIOU: They first began, they first began rebetiko, the… the classical rebetiko. Right? And in addition to them there existed the Asia Minor style, *Smyrneiko* as they call it, and many musicians played in that style. But they didn’t have one specific group such as this Piraeus Quartet. … But they were people with incredible musical ability and training. Roza Eskenazi… Semsis… Rita Abatzi.
>
> YONA: “Yes yes, of course.” I nod to her photo on the wall.

Figure 1.7: Wall with photographs in Rebetiki Istoria. The photograph on the bottom left shows Rita Abatzi. The photograph on the bottom center features the Piraeus Quartet: Stratos Pagioumtzis, Markos Vamvakaris, Giorgos Batis and Anestis Delias, from left to right.



"Ah, she is unbelievable," says Vassiliou.

I nod my head in agreement. But he is talking about me and not about Rita Abatzi. The musicians look at me with wonder.

> VASSILIOU: Yianna, there are 5 million people in Athens. If you find me one young Greek person that can point out Rita's photograph on the wall, I'll… I'll hang an earring from my ear to the floor, no from both my ears, and go dancing on Ippokratous!"

This was my initial entry into the Rebetiki Istoria culture and into becoming a rebetika musician. While I was as outside of this particular rebetiko culture as one could be, according to Vassiliou, I was the perfect rebetiko candidate. I had the most important necessary element, "*apopsi*," or point of view. My lack of knowledge about contemporary Greek music was considered a positive attribute. My ears were "pure," not ruined by the sounds of contemporary music. I had musical skill and the time and willingness to learn. As fellow rebetika musician Kostas Kalafatis would later tell me:

> Your ears have to be pure in order to play rebetika. You cannot listen to other types of music and then play rebetika correctly. You must enter into the sound world completely. You should walk down the street and not hear any other music around you. You should hear rebetika songs with its modes and its style in your ears. (2007)

Indeed, after a few months in Rebetiki Istoria, being a rebetika musician became a way of life for me: the strange balance between performance and behavior in Rebetiki Istoria tilted towards behavior. I began to forget that I was only visiting the culture. Little did I know at this point that I would remain in Greece for another two years to continue my rebetika studies. On October 18 2007, I wrote the following in my field journal:

> October 18: Rebetika is a way of life and it has become impossible not to get sucked in. I idle away any daytime hours, trying to pass the time: I wander, go to exhibits, research various archives, doing whatever I can to pass the time, to make the night come more quickly. It is almost an addiction. A few nights ago I somewhat shyly admitted my wanderings, my impatience to go to Rebetiki Istoria, my intolerance for other music to Vassiliou. His surprising and quite comforting reaction was, "Yes of course, that's exactly it."

But Vassiliou was conflicted about my presence there. In my field notes of November 5, 2007, I recorded the following exchange.

> November 5: Today Vassiliou told me I should remove myself from rebetika. I was so devastated I nearly burst into tears.
>
> YONA: "Are you serious?" I asked. "I… I can't. It's too late for that."
>
> VASSILIOU: "Yes, I'm serious. It's not good for you." He paused. "If I had known how deeply you were going to get into rebetika, I wouldn't have let you. This isn't the life for you. You need to go to America, become a professor, live that life. This nightlife isn't for you. And these songs are full of misery and pain. Why rebetika?"

I told him how deeply the songs touch me, that they express the very feelings inside of me.

> VASSILIOU: "But why, Yianna?" he asked. "It's not good. You shouldn't."

I did not know what to say. I worried that he would ask me not to come back. Suddenly, with a complete change in sentiment Vassiliou said, "Look, if that's how you feel, then I have to explain everything to you. Everything." And in a haphazard manner he began to tell me about various songs and musicians, lyrics and so on. Vassiliou had decided that I was in Rebetiki Istoria for the right reasons. He was not suggesting that I relate to the songs as he does or as other rebetiko musicians do. Rather, he acknowledged the sincerity of my feelings and my viewpoint about rebetika. Vassiliou claims that over the next few months he began to understand that I was not here only for my academic research or to learn the music or to enjoy the rebetiko nightlife (Vassiliou 2008).

Despite the perceived sincerity of intention, I did still have to juggle the roles of ethnomusicologist and musician. In their book *Shadows in the Field* (1997), Barz and Cooley suggest that the fieldworker bears the burden of those in her field that came before her and that remain in her own memory as well as in the memory of her consultants. As I would learn later, rebetika scholars do not have the best reputation amongst rebetika musicians. They are criticized for writing about a music they do not know how to play. I was eager to learn to play rebetika, but I did have other burdens to bear. As an American I was somehow partly responsible for the international policies of the Bush administration; as a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology I must have superior musical knowledge than rebetika musicians; as a female, I am expected to act and dress a certain way. Entering the field, I was somewhat aware of these preconceptions from my previous experiences in Greece, but I did not know if and how they would apply in the unknown setting of the *rebetadiko*. I did know that rebetika was largely the realm of men and that rebetiko violinists were certainly always men. Female performers were singers

and sometimes played the *kanonaki* (plucked zither) or *santouri* (hammered dulcimer). I did not know if my pursuits would be taken seriously, but I did know that the way that I presented myself was crucial. I was unsure if it was appropriate for me go to a nighttime *rebetadiko* by myself and as a result, for the first month, I always went with a friend or two.

After the initial encounter with Vassiliou, I went to Rebetiki Istoria six nights a week. I always arrived early and stayed until the very end of the program, sitting amongst the musicians with my violin in hand. I listened to original rebetika recordings and to much conversation about music and Greek politics. I played rebetiko songs and learned a large number of the vast rebetiko repertoire. I worked hard to master the musical style. Rebetiko recordings helped me figure out the role of the violin, and I adapted this role into songs whose original recordings did not feature the violin. My Mp3 Digital Audio recorder became my handiest tool, and I spent hours at home transcribing the songs and conversations I had recorded in Rebetiki Istoria.

The one year I spent in Rebetiki Istoria turned into three when I accepted a Fulbright scholarship and a Tsangadas Fellowship so that I could return to Athens to continue my studies. My initial attraction to rebetika never faded, though my understanding of the music and its role in contemporary Greek society changed drastically. Rebetika is simultaneously a utopia and a dystopia, a way of dwelling on and healing ones sorrows. It is "a music that what it wants from people is to sit and to listen and to heal their pain. Rebetiko is not a music for crazy entertainment" (Vassiliou 2007). I certainly agreed and marveled at the fact that the experiences the songs express still apply to Greece today.

Spending time in Rebetiki Istoria was a musical and emotional journey. In addition, it was an unexpected foray into Greek politics. Most conversations between musicians and patrons centered on the economic and political issues prevalent in Greece today. I came face to face with political viewpoints not emphasized in the U.S. At one point, Vassiliou half-jokingly asked the waitress to bring out a large KKE flag he had been given that day at a Communist rally. In addition, in Rebetiki Istoria, many people spoke about American politics and imperialism. Yet in spite of the discomfort with American politics, Vassiliou and the rest of the musicians did go to the American consulate to obtain visas so that they could come perform a concert at the University of Michigan. "Just think, 45 years ago I was standing in front of the American Embassy shouting 'Out America' and now I am asking them to give me a Visa!" Vassiliou once observed.

My time in Rebetiki Istoria as ethnomusicologist writing about the *rebetadiko* and as classical musician with a passionate desire to learn rebetika had a profound effect upon me. Central to my experience was the negotiation of my insider/outsider status. I was a Greek and an American, a musician and scholar, a classical violinist and a rebetika musician. I juggled these identities constantly, and at many times I was labeled as one or the other irrespective of my viewpoint. In addition, I worried about how my relationship to rebetika would change as a result of my time in Rebetiki Istoria. Before I traveled to Athens to conduct fieldwork, rebetika somehow had been my music, the music with which I identified myself. I was scared to lose possession of it, to learn that it was something entirely different to Greek instrumentalists. Vassiliou's reassurance that my

relationship to the music closely resembled his own was a relief and gave me the courage to devote myself to Rebetiki Istoria.

Performing in Rebetiki Istoria was a demanding commitment and tested my position as an ethnomusicologist in the field. The *rebetadiko* is open six nights a week from 10:30 until 3 a.m. or 4 a.m. on weekdays and from 11:30 p.m. until after 5 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights. Often we played songs all night long without a break. Many times we lost track of time. Though tiring, performing in Rebetiki Istoria somehow takes on a time and space of its own. Time seems to slow down and the space of the *magazi* defines the limits of my consciousness. As I play, my mind traverses the various modes, my heart falls during a song with pained lyrics, I allow myself to float along with the beautiful singing. As the evening winds down I force myself to awaken from my stupor and to emerge into the outside world. Stepping out of Rebetiki Istoria at 5 a.m., the streets are deserted. Athens at night has become my city. I almost feel like a stranger during the daytime idling away the hours to return again to Ippokratous, 181. At some point in mid-winter, the lifestyle I was trying out in Rebetiki Istoria became my own, and Rebetiki Istoria became my life.

Pavlos Vassiliou as Teacher

Throughout my tenure in Greece, Vassiliou and I developed a perhaps unlikely friendship. I was a young Greek-American graduate student passionate for rebetika who had stumbled across Rebetiki Istoria in the early days of my ethnomusicology dissertation research; he was a Greek leftist intellectual who had spent much of his life performing in his night-time *rebetadiko*. But our enthusiasm for rebetika and similar beliefs about the

music led to hours of conversations about rebetika and about Greece, many of which he graciously allowed me to record. As do most people who strike up a conversation with Vassiliou, I generally assumed the role of a student, asking questions and then listening to his long and detailed explanations. With never-ending patience, he answered my questions in a manner so convincing, that despite my previous beliefs, I was often left unable to disagree.

Vassiliou is one of the most powerful minds I have encountered, able to analyze and break down and logically explain the most complex political situation. Highly-opinionated, he often expresses his opinion as if it were fact and readily delves into drawn-out discussions about topics of interest to him: the state of the Greek economy, the shortcomings of the capitalist system, the value of rebetika. Vassiliou is firmly set in his own beliefs and constantly questions how the Greek people are "duped so easily and are so willing to believe whatever people tell them" (Vassiliou 2007). Our conversations were rich and intriguing and opened up new ways of viewing the world.

Figure 1.8: Pavlos Vassiliou and Yona Stamatis in Rebetiki Istoria, 2008.



Vassiliou seemed confused by my initial wish to begin formal rebetika lessons and instead invited me to Rebetiki Istoria to play along with the musicians. A master of

rebetika vocal style, he proposed that I learn rebetika music and culture by sitting by his side, by listening and by playing. "You have the musical background. And the right point of view. Now, all you need is the devotion to rebetika, which it seems you have" (Vassiliou 2007). I accepted his offer and never missed an opportunity to play with the Rebetiki Istoria musicians. As a result of his generosity, I returned to the States with a much-expanded repertoire of rebetika songs, hours of recorded conversations and performances at Rebetiki Istoria and a very different understanding of rebetiko music and culture.

This Thesis Within the Field of Ethnomusicology and the Study of Popular Song

This thesis contributes to the discipline of ethnomusicology which, as defined by Alan Merriam, is "the study of music as culture" (1977 202, 204). My general aim is to examine the cultural implications of contemporary rebetiko performance, while incorporating ethnomusicological theory and musical analysis. I must take into account the history of the discipline, a history that has cast a shadow over the contemporary field. Indeed, from its inception, ethnomusicology has been self-conscious and self-reflexive: In his book *The Anthropology of Music*, Alan Merriam states that

> Ethnomusicology carries within itself the seeds of its own division, for it has always been compounded of two distinct parts, the musicological and the ethnological, and its major problem is the blending of the two in a unique fashion which emphasizes neither but takes into account both. (1964, 3)

In the field, I worked hard to perfect my understanding of the music of rebetika as well as of the particular Rebetiki Istoria culture.

While in the field, I was also distinctly aware of ethnomusicology's colonial past, which it bears as a sister discipline of anthropology. A brief outline of the development of

ethnomusicology explains the cause for sensitivity by contemporary scholars. The roots of ethnomusicology can be traced back to the late-nineteenth century, when scholars of various disciplines including physics, ethnology and acoustics began to study various musics from around the world: some researched with the aim of defining attributes of music and sound and others with the hopes of situating music in its sociological context.

As the field took shape, it came to be called "comparative musicology" and maintained an inherent understanding that the music studied was "exotic music," which implied the music of non-Western cultures. In 1957, Marius Schneider stated that the primary aim of the field was "the comparative study of all the characteristics, normal or otherwise, of non-European [music]" (1957, 1). And in 1956, Bruno Nettl defined the field as "the science that deals with the music of peoples outside of Western civilization" (1956, 1). During this time, ethnomusicology was largely the domain of the study of non-Western music, mostly so-called traditional and folk music. As Jaap Kunst stated, the study-object of ethnomusicology, or, as it was originally called, comparative musicology, was

> the *traditional* music and musical instruments of all cultural strata of mankind, from the so-called primitive peoples to the civilized nations. Our science, therefore, investigates all tribal and folk music and every kind of non-Western art music...Western art- and popular (entertainment) music do not belong to its field. (Kunst 1950, 1)

During the mid-twentieth century, comparative musicologists (and anthropologists alike) began to question the ethical backbone of the field. In 1950, Jaap Kunst called for the obliteration of the term comparative musicology in favour of the term ethnomusicology. Ethno-musicology, drawn from the Greek roots "*ethnos*" (people) and "*musikologia*" (the study of music), designated the study of music and its

performance context. Kunst argued that the field was no more comparative than other fields. In addition, the term comparative was misleading. If scholars were comparing foreign musical traditions to their own then they were comparing unlike things. In addition, presenting one's own musical tradition as a basis for comparison automatically implies a musical hierarchy where there is none.

The term "ethnomusicology" continues to be a source of concern as scholars question the use of the term ethnic that maintains inherent value judgements in the implication that some musics are somehow more ethnic than others. In 1976, nearly thirty years after the establishment of the field of Ethnomusicology, Fredric Liberman wrote an article entitled "Should Ethnomusicology Be Abolished?" And at the turn of the millennium, the Society for Ethnomusicology held a vote whether or not to abolish the society's logo of a small figurine of a male pre-Colombian flute player. Numerous scholars were worried about the implications of the logo that suggested that the discipline is concerned with studying the non-Western Other with all of its complex implications.

Indeed, in order to produce an ethnomusicological account, one must acknowledge and somehow overcome the many questions of ethical concern, which can have an otherwise paralyzing effect. In this work, I take account of the many ethical concerns by engaging in a continuously self-reflexive approach. I continuously positioned and repositioned myself in "the field" and in my writing and do not pretend to offer an objective account of my findings. As Barz and Cooley write, "Ethnographic fieldwork requires meaningful face-to-face interaction with other individuals" (2008, 4). While the researcher now has a host of primary sources, her responsibility to do justice to her informants becomes obvious.

As is often the case, the goal of my fieldwork in Rebetiki Istoria was the creation of an ethnography, a particularized case study of a specific culture. As Geertz suggests, the ethnographer is an author and as such, her account will always be part fiction. The goal is to compose a text that gives the reader the greatest insight into her fieldwork experience while being as faithful as possible to her consultants and to her own ethics. For a while, I was fraught with ethical concerns about numerous aspects of my research. Writing an academic paper about rebetika seemed to miss the point entirely: one is supposed to live the rebetiko culture, not solidify it in writing and in my own voice. Yet I was inspired by various creative ethnographies such as Lila Abu-Lughod's *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories* (1993), an ethnographic account written in the form of short stories. Aaron Fox's *Real Country* (2004) also provided inspiration for this work with its creative approach to transcribing narratives from ethnographic fieldwork with country musicians in Texas.

As an ethnographer writing about my fieldwork experience, I engaged in multiple acts of translation: In the field I conversed with my consultants by translating my thoughts from English into Greek and now I translate these conversations into English. In her introduction to *A Century of Modern Greek Poetry: 1900-2000* (2008), Karen Van Dyck states, "Translation is a lesson in compromise. It is about the give and take of the foreign and the familiar in which the familiar usually wins out" (xv). Greek is an especially difficult language to translate. Not only are there numerous ways of stating one idea in Greek, but the spoken language is filled with thousands of proverbial phrases that bear cultural, literary, and historical meaning. I learned this on my very first day in Rebetiki Istoria when Vassiliou told me a story whose punch line was "*Erihne karekles*

kai egine papi!" ["It was throwing chairs, and she became a duck!"], which, as I later found out meant, "it was pouring rain and she was soaked!" At the time I smiled politely pretending to understand. In addition, body language is a significant communication mechanism that resists translation. Greeks tend to gesture with their hands while speaking and this physical enrichment of meaning and emotion is lost or changed when recorded on paper.

Perhaps the most difficult process of translation is that of translating my experiences in the field into the written form of ethnography. "Written texts […] are privative; they deprive the reader of the sights, sounds, smells, gestures—in short, all the paralinguistic details that round out the meaning of anything we seek to understand" (Freccero 1999, 5). The most challenging translation was organizing a concert at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, MI. I translated rebetika in lecture format for an American audience and translated the new concert setting for the musicians. For example, I told the musicians that at the University of Michigan auditorium, there would be no alcoholic beverages for the musicians and audience, a staple in rebetiko performance in Greece. In addition, I prepared the musicians that no audience member would get up to dance to the music. While allowing me to engage in multiple acts of translation, bringing the musicians to the United States also caused me to question the boundaries of the field, which I had solidified in my mind as limited to Rebetiki Istoria and to Athens. Suddenly the field came to include the University of Michigan and American audiences and new ways of listening to and appreciating rebetika.

Translation and Transcription: Issues of Representation

In this thesis, I supplement my discussion of musical style with transcriptions of rebetika songs. In these transcriptions, I grapple with numerous issues of representation. Rebetika is an oral tradition and musicians do not use any form of transcription to learn or to rehearse a song. Western notation, with which my readers and I are most familiar, lacks the necessary symbols for rebetiko ornamentation. On paper, rebetika songs would be best represented as a combination of Byzantine and Western classical notation, though I have yet to see this in practice. Rebetika songs are often transcribed today either with just its melodic line or scored for piano with accompanimental chords, as evidenced by the many rebetiko anthologies. These skeleton scores are hardly sufficient for scholarly analysis of rebetika: they lack many notes and ornamentations and encourage a different style of playing.

The scores of the songs are problematic in other ways. For example, when transcribed, the songs are usually simplified or altered to the liking of the editor, and then supplemented with Western chordal harmonies. This notational representation is misleading. I recall my frustration trying to play rebetika songs on the *tzoura* (6-stringed plucked instrument that it is smaller than a bouzouki and larger than a baglama) accompanied by a Greek pianist who, though classically trained and extremely talented had minimal knowledge of rebetika. As he sight-read "*H Arhontissa*" ["The Aristocratic Woman"] by Vassilis Tsitsanis, the notated version of the song was so different from its original version that we could not possibly play it together. Aside from the changes in notes and accompaniment, stylistic factors in the anthologized scores were often inaccurately presented. When playing the music from the score, the spirit of rebetika was

lost. I too will transcribe rebetika songs into Western notation in order to keep this work accessible to a wide readership. However, in order to account for my inability to express various elements of rebetika style using the Western notation system, I will incorporate my own symbols that better represent rebetika expressions.

This Thesis in Response to Contemporary Rebetiko Study

In this thesis, I seek to tell a new story about rebetika. Most scholarly literature on rebetika focuses on the social circumstances of rebetika performance during the first half of the twentieth century. Their authors either ignore contemporary rebetika culture entirely or briefly mention it as a revival of an extinct music culture. But rebetika is a thriving music culture in many parts of Greece. In this dissertation, I propose that contemporary rebetiko culture intersects with a host of prominent metanarratives that shape the Greek nation: most pertinent to this study is the negotiation of national identity ideals through musical performance. Therefore, rather than producing a historical account, this study discusses contemporary rebetiko performance within the fabric of contemporary Greek modernity.

I titled the thesis "Rebetiko Nation" for two reasons. First, it signifies Vassiliou's use of rebetika as an emblem of a more-desirable Greek national identity. Through rebetika, he argues for a different Greece, one that resists the effects of globalization, capitalization and Europeanization and that takes pride in its traditional culture. Since Vassiliou's argument is musical and musically presented I critically examine his music, identifying how various national identity perceptions are communicated through the actual musical notes. I echo the work of Bohlman who, in his discussion of musical

nationalism in the European Union, illustrates the potential of any musical form to represent a nation: "Music is malleable in the service of the nation not because it is a product of national and nationalist ideologies, but rather because musics of all forms and genres can articulate the processes that shape the state" (Bohlman 2004, 12). This brings into question the location of the national in music as it exists in a strange dialectical dance between the intentions of its composer, its performer, and audience.

Second, this title challenges the common stereotyping of the genre as music of a particular sector of urban Greece or as music of some mystical urban underworld. Instead, it urges the reader to regard rebetika as *laiko tragoudi* [popular song], a popular song genre of major Greek cities. This popular song genre continues to shape national identity perceptions and plays a central role in contemporary perceptions of Greekness. As such, this thesis marks the first foray in rebetika research to examine contemporary rebetika performance as a vehicle for portraying national identity perceptions. In addition, Vassiliou's use of rebetika realigns stereotypes of the national and of the Other, of centers and peripheries of Greek society and culture.

Primary and Secondary Sources Used in This Thesis

My printed and audio-visual resources for this thesis include primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include:

a) interviews with musicians and rebetika scholars

b) photographs, articles, concert programs and other rebetiko-related materials

c) sound recordings

I conducted interviews with the following rebetika musicians: Pavlos Vassiliou (voice, tzoura), Vangelis Nikolaidis (guitar), Nikolaos Menegas (bouzouki, voice) Haris Hrisinis (voice, bouzouki), Eleni Lazarou (voice, baglama), Giorgos Xintaris (voice, bouzouki) and Kostas Kalafatis (voice, guitar). To elicit ethnographic and musical data from the musicians, I asked them questions about their musical experiences, about their understanding of rebetika genre, and about the place and future of rebetika in contemporary Greece. I spoke with the following rebetika scholars: Sofia Adamidou, Panayiotis Kounadis and Ilias Voliotis-Kapetanakis. I asked them about the place and future of rebetika in Greece and about the rebetika bibliography and about ethnomusicology as it is studied in Greece.

Other primary sources included documents, newspaper articles and photographs relating to rebetika. Many such items were available through the Ilias Petropoulos archive housed at the Gennadius Library of the American School of Classical Studies in Athens. The archive contains the personal collection of rebetiko scholar Ilias Petropoulos, which includes concert programs, announcements and reports about concerts, his personal writings, and newspaper and magazine clippings relevant to rebetika performance in Greece and in Paris where Petropoulos lived for many years. A significant number of texts, mostly in the form of newspaper articles, examine the cultural value of rebetika. They illustrate the continuous role the genre played in the discussion about Greek national and musical identity since the 1880s, when it first became a subject of contention in Athenian newspapers.

Rebetika recordings were another useful primary source. A large number of early-rebetika recordings have been transferred onto compact disc and made available in mp3

format. The Greek music-sharing website music-bazaar.gr was a particularly useful resource. Recordings that proved especially relevant to this thesis included:

a) Bayiaderas, Dimitris Gongos. 1996. "*San Magemeno to Mialo Mou*" (There is a Spell on my Mind). *Oi Teleutaioi Rebetes* (The Last Rebetes). Athens: LYRA.

b) Papazoglou, Evangelos. 1936. "*H Foni tou Argile*" (The Voice of the Waterpipe). *I Istoria tou Rebetikou kai tou Laïkou Tragoudiou 2* (The History of Rebetiko and *Laïko* Song 2) *CD 2*. Athens: MINOS EMI 2007.

c) Papazoglou, Evangelos. 1936. "*Oi Lahanades*" (The Wallet Snatchers). *Sinthetes Rebetikou 47. Papazoglou Evangelos II* (Rebetiko Composers. 47. Evangelos Papazoglou II). Athens: MINOS EMI 2000.

d) Vamvakaris, Markos. 1936. "*Mavra Matia, Mavra Fridia*" (Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows). *Megali Sinthetes: Markos Vamvakaris*. (Great Composers: Markos Vamvakaris) Athens: MINOS EMI 2006.

The Rebetiki Istoria musicians granted me the opportunity to record their nightly performances and discussions about rebetika and about contemporary Greece. As such, I amassed a large archive of field recordings. These were crucial to the development of my understanding of rebetiko repertoire as well. In addition, they allowed me the opportunity to listen to the performances and conversations numerous times.

Secondary sources I used while researching this thesis included:

a) Greek-language bibliography on rebetika.

b) English-language bibliography on rebetika.

c) Literature on nationalism, musical nationalism.

d) Literature on modernity and on Greek modernity.

The large Greek-language bibliography on the social and political history of rebetika was particularly useful. As outlined in Kostas Vlisidis's *Toward a Bibliography of Rebetiko* (2002), scholarly publications on rebetika began to appear in the early 1900s. In recent years, rebetiko scholarship has mushroomed and most recent publications consist of historical discussions of rebetiko music and culture. The books of Nearchos Georgiadis are particularly well-researched including *Rebetiko and Politics* (1993), *From Byzantium to Markos Vamvakaris* (1996), and *The Acritic Who Became a Rebetis* (1999). Also of particular interest is *A Reading on the Word Rebetika… and More* (2006) by Panos Savvopoulos.

English-language scholarly sources on rebetika are still somewhat scarce. Publications worthy of mention here are: Gail Holst's *Road to Rembetika: Music from a Greek sub-culture, songs of Love, Sorrow and Hashish* (1977), the first English-language introductory text to rebetika; numerous articles by Stathis Gauntlett including "Orpheus in the Criminal Underworld. Myth in and About Rebetika" (1989) and "Folklore and populism: the Greening of the Greek Blues" (1991). Also worth mentioning are: Ed Emery's translation of Ilias Petropoulos's *Songs of the Greek Underworld: The Rebetika Tradition* (2000) a small introductory book to rebetiko music and culture and Gail Holst-Warhaft's articles "The Female Dervish and Other Shady Ladies of the Rebetika" (2003) and "Amanes. The Legacy of the Oriental Mother" (2000), in which she examines gender roles and gender stereotypes in rebetika song and performance.

This thesis is in conversation with a vast ethnomusicology literature on the relationship of music and national identity. I echo the position of Biddle and Knights who, in their introduction to the book *Music, National Identity and the Politics of*

Location: Between the Global and the Local (2007) state that conceptualizations of the national continue to be relevant means of understanding the world around us during the contemporary era of globalization the nation. They state that at the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, conceptualizations of the national (of nationalisms, nation-states, national mythologizing narratives and other manifestations of national or nationalist ideologies) have been somewhat sidelined or second-leagued in a world increasingly dominated by the processes of globalization, deterritorialization, transmigration and forms of cultural hybridity (Biddle and Knights 2007, 1). They argue that the nation remains a crucial category for understanding how cultural texts and practices function in the construction of personal and collective identities. Pavlos Vassiliou's use of rebetika is a telling example of the continued significance of the national in Greece, a nation marked by numerous transnational forces.

This interpretation echoes arguments by a number of ethnomusicologists. In his book *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (1997), Taylor characterizes the relationship between the local and the global through a discussion of acceptable cultural borrowings in certain directions. Phil Bohlman's work on music and European nationalism is also particularly useful to this study. Bohlman suggests that nationalism does not exist in some musics and not in others, but rather, that any music can be used to present any image of national identity (2004). In *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Culture Politics in Tanzania* (2002), Kelly Askew focuses on performance as a means of understanding interpersonal power dynamics as related to processes of nation building. She proposes that national identity is not imposed from the top down but rather is shaped by all members of society. Michel Foucault suggests that power does not have a

purely repressive effect but rather that power is productive, a necessity in the creation of meaning. In his *Music Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (2000), Peter Wade analyzes how and why certain musical styles became the most successful commercially in Colombia and the best known internationally, despite this seeming incompatibility with the dominant understanding of national identity.

Finally, this thesis speaks to the broad literature on Greek modernity and national identity formation. Five of these works are briefly discussed here. In his *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (1986), Michael Herzfeld discusses the Western origins of much of the discourse about the Modern Greek nation, examining why ancient Greece became the defining ideological influence in the shaping of the Modern Greek nation. In his book, *Dream Nation* (1998), Stathis Gourgouris analyzes how Europe invested in the Hellenic world during the Enlightenment, eloquently claiming that Modern Greece was built on the ruins of its modernity. In *Modern Greece: A Cultural Poetics* (2003), Vangelis Calotychos examines the "interplay of cultural classicism and historical constructivism, on which the Greek threshold of modernity derives." Calotychos emphasizes the continued dominance of history in dialectics about the Greek nation from the founding of the Greek nation to the present. He also identifies a lack of self-confidence in the present and a reliance on the ancient Greek past. In her book *Topographies of Hellenism. Mapping the Homeland* (1995), Artemis Leontis examines tensions between Western Hellenism and Neohellenism. She does this by analyzing how the physical space of Greece has been incorporated into discussions about shared heritage. Finally, in his book *Modern Greek Lessons: A Primer in Historical Constructivism* (1993), James Faubion emphasizes the primacy of the past in Modern

Greece, stating that in no other country has the incorporation of the past into the present been such an ethical concern.

Perhaps most directly relevant to my examination of Greek music nationalism is Gregory Jusdanis's book, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature* (1991), in which the author discusses the evolution of a national Greek literature. He places the seventeenth and eighteenth-century emergence of national culture as a reaction to the various transformations taking place in European societies at the time. He proposes that with the nation-state as "the dominant mode of socio-political organization in modernity," the rise of national culture was inevitable (Jusdanis 1991, xi). and subsequently analyzes the rise of a national literature in Greece. Music is a part of this national culture. Echoing Jusdanis' thesis, I propose in this thesis that the contemporary popular music scene shapes and reflects contemporary Greek modernity, and that Rebetiki Istoria serves as a microcosm of Greek modernity. Modernities are unique. Greek modernity features a unique temporality combining past and present. Vassiliou's performed rebetika music and culture is a discourse of Greek modernity, Greek national identity in the past and present.

Lastly, this dissertation is one of a few scholarly works that examines contemporary rebetiko performance. Notable examples are: Daphne Tragaki's *Rebetiko Worlds: Ethnomusicology and Ethnography in the City* (2007); a selection of articles by Stathis Gauntlett including "Orpheus in the Criminal Underworld: Myth in and About Rebetika" (1989); "Folklore and Populism: the Greening of the Greek Blues" (1991). In addition it expands the rapidly-growing English-language rebetiko literature, which

began with Gail Holst's well-known *Road to Rembetika* (1975) and Butterworth and Schneider's *Rebetika: Songs from the Old Greek Underworld* (1975).

IV. CONCLUSION

In this Chapter I outlined the main topics that I will discuss in this thesis. Briefly summarized, these topics included: discussions of Greek national identity as a fundamental aspect of Greek modernity; Rebetiki Istoria as an expression of Pavlos Vassiliou's defensive nationalism and alternative contemporary Greekness; the Rebetiki Istoria authenticity culture as simultaneously a product and rejection of Greek modernity; emic understandings of the music culture and my experience learning its rules. This thesis aims to position Vassiliou and his rebetiko culture within the fabric of Greek modernity. It presents Rebetiki Istoria as a defensive authenticity culture that rejects powerful transnational forces such as Europeanization, capitalization and globalization. It emphasizes musical style as a key factor in the rejection of these forces and in the promotion of an alternative Greekness.

CHAPTER TWO

MUSICAL NATIONALISM AND GREEK MODERNITY: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the theoretical background necessary for my discussion of Pavlos Vassiliou and his rebetika culture as an alternative national identity for Greece. In the first section, I present the concepts of the nation and of national identity, and propose that these are distinctly modern ideologies that shape and reflect contemporary understandings of self. Then I discuss issues and types of nationalism that appeared in Greece. For while Pavlos Vassiliou's strong feelings about the Greek nation may be described as patriotism, they more accurately resemble nationalism, a combined love for ones nation and defensiveness against external threats to its wellbeing. Furthermore, his is a paranoid nationalism (Hage 2003) in which sentiments of fear and defensiveness characterize his dominant emotional attachment to the nation. Through his rebetika performance, Vassiliou not only resists perceived threats to Greek musical and cultural identity but he promotes his perception of a true Greek national identity.

Vassiliou's nationalism is a product of the unique Greek modernity, which idiosyncratically merges past and present, old and new to create a contemporary and

distinctive Greekness. The Ancient Greek past dominates contemporary Greek conscious as Greeks wonder how to make their ancient past a resource for a unique Modern Greek national identity. Could Modern Greek culture, "built on the ruins of its own modernity" (Calotychos 1, 2003) ever achieve the greatness of Ancient Greece or must it always exist in its shadow? This constant looking to the past is a product of modernity, a result of forces of rapid change such as urbanization that demand a new way of experiencing time. Modern time is fleeting, promising excitement and fast changes but also generating devastating destruction. As such, in Greece, the creation of a modern national identity must somehow compensate for the fleeting and unstable present and a glorious but fading past. Selecting elements of past and present becomes fundamental to the creation of a contemporary national identity.

Perhaps one can say that with his rebetiko culture, Vassiliou is engaged in his own personal Battle of the Books. His dilemma is not how to incorporate the artifacts of ancient Greece into the Modern Greek *topos* and ideology, but rather how to incorporate the rebetiko culture of the early twentieth century into the floundering and decadent culture of modern Greece. Reacting to this complex modernity, Vassiliou creates his Rebetika Istoria culture, his attempt to balance production of new with destruction of the old. In order to contextualize Vassiliou's ideas about Greek national identity in its musical and modern contexts, this chapter discusses the fundamental concepts of nation, nation-state, nationalism, modernity, and music as a social practice/discourse of national imaginations.

I. A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Defining The Nation

The "nation" is a distinctly modern notion and phenomenon that arose in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century. The decline of monarchical rule and the rise of Enlightenment thought allowed for new means to unify people and create joint identities; in such intellectual and social contexts, the nation and national identity concepts emerged to serve the need to unify people. The emergence is, of course, driven by a new awareness of the self, which fueled major uprisings such as the French Revolution that signified a transfer of power from the hands of the monarchy to the people. To redefine such power relationships, the creation and promotion of the concept of the nation appeared as a practical solution.

In this dissertation, I borrow Anthony Smith's definition of the modern nation as "a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (Smith 2001, 19). To build such a nation, inventive and social engineering is needed to delineate who belongs to it and what comprises its national ideology. In his 1882 speech entitled "What is a Nation?" French theorist Ernest Renan emphasized two factors in the creation of a nation: the maintenance of a shared past and a desire to live together in the present:

> The nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present- day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. (Renan 1882 [1996], 52)

The shared past, one notes, has to be "created," an inventive act that can be contentious. For example, are modern nations transmutations of earlier social organizational models or are they purely a modern phenomenon? Responses to this question vacillate between two basic beliefs. Some suggest that nations have strong roots in earlier structural models (Smith 1986; Armstrong 1982) and others that the nation is an entirely modern phenomenon (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1990; Guibernau and Hutchinson 2001). I adopt Stuart Hall's proposed middle ground between the two extremes, accepting the hypothesis that national cultures are "a distinctly modern form" but the allegiance and identification given to tribe, people, religion, and region, came gradually, and were effectively transferred to the *national* culture (Hall 1996, 612). Guibernau and Hutchinson echo this hypothesis. They believe that the modern nation is a transformation of previous ethnic communities, and therefore it must be perceived as such: "Nations are constituted by (usually pre-modern) ethnic myths, memories, symbols, and cultures, and national formation must be understood in *la longue durée*" (Guibernau and Hutchinson 2001, 2). While nations are understood as "real entities, as communities, as substantial, enduring collectivities" (Brubaker 1996, 13), they have a history, and how they came to exist is debatable.

In 1983, Benedict Anderson famously suggested that the nation is a large "imagined community" whose members imagine their unity with each other in similar ways. The use of the term "imagined" does not necessarily imply "invented" or unreal, but rather emphasizes the fact that members of a nation "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991 [1983], 6). Anderson cited the arrival of

print languages as the factor that permitted the notion of a national consciousness to develop, suddenly allowing people to imagine themselves as members of a giant community.

Along with the nation arose the notion of the "nation state," its physical embodiment. As characterized by John Breuilly, the nation "developed in close conjunction with the emergence of the modern, territorial, sovereign and participatory state" (Breuilly in Guibernau and Hutchinson 2001, 32). How can one characterize the difference between the nation and the nation state? Can one exist without the other, or must the nation be physically and geographically embodied? Thomas Eriksen suggests the necessity of physical embodiment of the nation as a nation state. He defines the nation state as "a state dominated by an ethnic group, whose markers of identity (such as language or religion) are frequently embedded in its official symbolism and legislation" (Eriksen 2002 [1993], 98). In other words, the nation state serves as the physical realization of the nation that bears evidence of its shared national identity. This does not, however, mean that the nation and the state cannot be conceptually differentiated. Musicologist Richard Taruskin's differentiates the two in the following statement:

> A nation, unlike a state, is not necessarily a political entity. It is primarily defined not by dynasties or by territorial boundaries but by some negotiation of the relationship between the political status of communities and the basis of their self-description, whether linguistic, ethnic (genetic/biological), religious, cultural or historical (Taruskin, 2010).

Taruskin proposes that the nation is different from the state in that the state suggests but does not embody its physical existence.

National Citizens and National Culture

If we characterize the nation as an ideological conception of collective identity maintained by people within an existing state, and if a nation exists in a physical space marked by state institutions, it can only operate with a body of citizens. Citizens of the same nation must maintain some shared characteristics that bond them together in certain ways. As illustrated by Ernest Gellner (1983), the nation state can only survive by encouraging some forms of cultural homogeneity. These manifest themselves as concepts of national culture and national identity thus bonding its citizens and distinguishing the national cultures.

What constitutes a valid imagined national culture and national identity and who has the power to define such entities? Is a nation's identity defined by objective factors such as geographical placement, language and religion, or is it constituted by subjective factors, namely the belief that a group of people maintain a shared identity shaped by certain criteria? Hall argues that a nation's identity is a combination of the above, that national cultures are composed of both symbols and representations: "A national culture is a *discourse* – a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves" (Hall 1996, 613). He continues on to emphasize the constructed nature of national identities:

> National identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to *representation*... national cultures construct identities by producing meanings about "the nation" with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it. (Hall 1996, 613)

Such discourses are tied to power relations. Numerous scholars (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Handler 1988) have presented the formation of national identity as a

project undertaken by the elite or by the bureaucracy. In this view, the cultured elite are seemingly the only members of society with the ability to imagine communities and then impose them upon passive people. Recent scholars of cultural studies have suggested that all members of a nation play a role in defining the national culture. It is a view that Foucault's theory of power corroborates (Foucault 1992). Foucault suggests that power is not a negative force oppressing freedom but rather is a positive one, necessary for the creation of meaning and shared identities. Power is not only imposed from the top down but also is enforced by those subjugated by this power. It is clear that in order for power constructs to exist, those under their force must accept them. Thus, national identity formation is something that has to involve all members of a social matrix. As described by Askew in her book *Performing the Nation: Swahili Music and Cultural politics in Tanzania* (2002), national identities must evoke some element of mutuality, of sharedness, of common participation; it must also admit the possibility of dissension from those excluded from state activities (Askew 2002, 12). In other words, citizens mould proposed identities by accepting or rejecting them, thus creating a shared mediated perception of national cultural and identity.

Numerous scholars emphasize the socially-constructed nature of identity perceptions. Psychologists have partly attributed the contemporary emphasis on national identity to an innate human desire to belong to a group. As stated by psychologist John Mack (1983) there exist three essential human needs that can find their fulfillment only in group membership: a need for belonging, a concern for survival, and a desire for a sense of personal worth. He argues that during the twentieth century, the nation has most often

satisfied these innate human desires. Belonging to a nation has become a fundamental element of contemporary personal identities. As noted by Ernest Gellner,

> The idea of a man [*sic*] without a nation seems to impose a strain on the modern imagination. A man must have a nation as he must have a nose and two ears. All this seems obvious, though, alas, it is not true. But that it should have come to seem so very obviously true is indeed an aspect, perhaps the very core, of the problem of nationalism. Having a nation is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such. (Gellner 1983, 6)

Nationalism Creating the Nation

The fact that people are willing to die for the nation illustrates the extraordinary bond to the concept of nation and nation-state that can arise in the form of nationalism. Gellner defines "nationalism" as "primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 2006, 1). He cites the rise of nationalism as an inevitable result of the seemingly natural desire to belong to a group, which became, in this case, the nation. Elie Kedourie cites a host of assumptions that accompany the ideology of nationalism:

> Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the fight organization of a society of states. Briefly, the doctrine holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is self-government. (Kedourie 1993, 1)

Driven by these assumptions, nationalism can take many forms and as such, eludes clear definition. Anthony D. Smith (2004 [2001], 5) outlines five useful general definitions of the term:

(1) A process of formation, or growth, of nations
(2) A sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation
(3) A language and symbolism of the nation
(4) A social and political movement on behalf of the nation

(5) A doctrine and/or ideology of the nation, both general and particular

There are various types of nationalism. Bohlman (2004) outlines two basic types: civic and cultural. Civic nationalism grew from the ideals of the French and U.S. Revolutions and consists of the notion that one's national affiliation is conferred by virtue of citizenship in a particular state. Cultural nationalism (or romantic nationalism) was articulated by the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder who stated that the essence or "genius" of each nation or ethnicity is expressed in its language and arts. I discuss musical nationalism in Greece as a type of cultural nationalism as many composers tried to capture the essence of Hellenism in music. Musical nationalism in Greece exists both as state-imposed nationalisms and as bottom-up resistances to them. Pavlos Vassiliou's musical nationalism is a bottom-up resistance to dominant ideology in Greek society. Furthermore, it is a defensive nationalism concerned with protecting Greekness from external threats. I discuss the notion of defensive nationalism in the next section.

Pavlos Vassiliou and Defensive Nationalism

A central feature that unites all nationalisms is the sentiment of defensiveness against perceived threats to national borders and cultural practices. As described by Kamenka, nationalism develops in particular circumstances:

> Nationalism is a reaction of peoples who feel culturally at a disadvantage… Where there are several peoples in close contact with one another and yet conscious of their separateness, and these peoples share the same ideals and the same conception of progress, and some of them are, or feel themselves to be, less well placed than others to achieve these ideals and make progress, nationalism is apt to flourish. (Kamenka 1962, 27)

It is this defensive sentiment that forms the backbone of Vassiliou's musical nationalism through rebetika performance through which he rejects threats to his understanding of a historically-correct Greekness.

If this defensiveness becomes very intense it can constitute what Gussman Hage defines as paranoid nationalism. This occurs "when the aggressive politics of the border take over the very interior it is supposed to be protecting… [and] where the nation imagines the very existence of its national will as being under threat" (Hage 2003, 32; 40). Hage explains that paranoid nationalism results when worrying becomes the dominant mode of expressing one's attachment to the nation. He states that paranoid nationalism is "primarily the product of 'the decline of hope' in an era where the dynamics of capital accumulation no longer produces mere inequalities within society, but endangers the very idea of a national society" (Hage 2003, 47). In this thesis, I present Pavlos Vassiliou as engaged in paranoid nationalism in which he reacts to perceived overwhelming threats to the integrity of Greek national identity. Vassiliou believes that Greece exists on the losing end of the transnational free market economy. The country is too small, corrupt and does not have enough resources to compete successfully on a global scale. While Vassiliou hopes for a more democratic relationship between nations, he fears that corruption is inherent to a free market economy and as such will not end without the implementation of a new system.

Vassiliou's paranoid nationalism is also caused by internal conflicts. While intensely proud of Greek culture, he believes that Greeks are even willing to sell their own national identity in order to gain economic profit. As such, in conjunction with his love of the Greek nation, he believes that the Greek people are instrumental in the

betrayal of their nation. Vassiliou also engages in what may be called avoidant nationalism:

> Avoidant nationalists have been hurt by their national motherland but cannot bring themselves to stop believing that the motherland is there for them. They fear that their motherland can no longer nurture them, cuddle them and give them hope, but they cannot see any possibility of a substitute provider… Against the reality of a non-nurturing motherland the avoidant nationalist develops an attachment to an ideal motherland s/he hopes will eventuate in the future… The national subject develops a pathological narcissism as s/he becomes unable to cope with the view of the other, as it risks puncturing his or her increasingly hollow 'hoped-for-motherland'. (Hage 2003, 43)

To the avoidant nationalist, the national interior becomes a threat and everything and everywhere inside the nation becomes a threat and a border (Hage 2003, 45). As Hage's main thesis suggests, "societies are mechanisms for the distribution of hope, and that the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope" (Hage 2003, 3). Greece no longer provides a mechanism of hope for Vassiliou. As such, he has created his own mechanism of hope in his Rebetiki Istoria culture.

Modernity and the Self: A Brief Introduction

Pavlos Vassiliou's paranoid avoidant nationalism is a product of modernity and of the rise of the modern notion of the self. As first discussed by Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1859-60), modernity characterizes a particular mode of experience, an awareness of the present condition maintained by members of modern societies. It is this awareness that allows for the formation of national identities and for the development of resistances to perceived threats to national identity perceptions. Baudelaire characterized modernity as "the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the

half of art of which the other half is eternal and immutable" (Baudelaire 1859-60). With such words, Baudelaire emphasized the transience of the modern experience, characterized by endless possibilities and excitement rushing by at an ungraspable speed. In *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* Hans Blumenberg illustrated the sense of the awareness of one's transient condition that helps define modernity: "Modernity is founded from self-assertion: It is an existential program, according to which one posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him" (1983, 131).

Marshall Berman characterizes this general and self-generated comprehension of modernity as "a mode of vital experience." However, it is one that is riddled with insecurity and threatened by its ephemeral nature in which the desire for the new is accompanied by the pending possibility of destruction.[20] As such, modernity is fraught with paradox: along with the vitality, hope and optimism in the abilities of new technologies comes a sense of overwhelming destruction: destruction of what came before and of what could be. It was the destructive realities of modernity that caused the erosion of the incredible optimism of early modern writers such as Condorcet, who believed "that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces, but also the understanding of the world and of the self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings" (Habermas 1981, 13). As David Harvey states in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into Origins of Cultural Change*, during the twentieth century, "with its death camps and death squads, its militarism and two world wars, its threat of nuclear annihilation and its experience of

[20] His portrayal of modernity as a shared universal experience has since been debated (see Appadurai, 1996).

Hiroshima and Nagasaki" (Harvey 1990, 13), this optimism has certainly been shattered. Indeed, most modern writers agree that, "the only secure thing about modernity is its insecurity, its penchant, even, for 'totalizing chaos'" (Harvey 1990, 11). And Max Weber explained modernity as a condition of loss, of a loss of faith in an "ethically ordered" life world, in what anciently would have been called the cosmos (Weber, 2003).

Jürgen Habermas (1990) characterizes the situation in a manner even more extreme. He identifies a "crisis of modernity," the sense that modernity is a problem, that traditional ways of life have been replaced with uncontrollable change and unmanageable alternatives. The crisis itself is the sense that the present is a transitional point not focused on a clear goal in the future but simply changing through forces outside of human control. An interesting paradox fundamental to the notion of the "crisis of modernity" is the idea of "creative destruction," extant in the most fundamental and practical elements of projects of modernity: How can one advance and create a new world without destroying the current world? And how should one address the redundant new? The Greek poet Constantine Cavafy expressed the redundancy of the new in the well-known poem "*Monotonia*" [Monotony].[21]

> Την μια μονότονην ημέραν άλλη
> μονότονη, απαράλλακτη ακολουθεί. Θα γίνουν
> τα ίδια πράγματα, θα ξαναγίνουν πάλι –
> η όμοιες στιγμές μας βρίσκουνε και μας αφίνουν.
>
> One monotonous day after another
> monotony, identical it follows. The same things
> will happen, they will happen again once more-
> the same moments find us and leave us.

[21] C.P. Cavafy Archive Manuscripts: "*Monotonia*" (Monotony). [http://www.cavafy.com/archive/manuscripts/content.asp?image=monotonia.jpg] Visited January 02, 2011.

The constant presence of the new and destruction of the old is accompanied by a second major feature of the modern experience—a specific time-awareness, described by modern philosophers as "a distinctive experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting, and fortuitous and arbitrary" (Frisby 1992, 67). According to Calinescu, "The idea of modernity can only be conceived with the framework of a specific time-awareness, namely that of *historical time*, linear and irreversible, flowing irresistibly onwards…its main constitutive element is simply a sense of *unrepeatable* time" (Calinescu 1987, 13). This transitory, fleeting time of modernity is inherently destructive. As noted by David Harvey, the destructiveness of modernity even renders difficult the notion of historical continuity. Since "modernity can have no respect even for its own past, let alone that of any premodern social order, the transitoriness of things makes it difficult to preserve any sense of historical continuity" (Harvey 1990, 11).

This destructive horizontal sense of time is fundamentally decadent in character: This decadence is partially a result of the gradual transferring of Christian time into secular life in the development of modernity. Christian time is eschatological, based on the perpetual wait for the last judgment. As a result, time in this sense is linear and irreversible, based on the wait for the Day of Doom, "announced by the unmistakable sign of profound decay—untold corruption—and, according to apocalyptic prophet, by the satanic power of Antichrist. Decadence thus becomes the anguishing prelude to the end of the world" (Calinescu 1987, 152-53). In modernity, people increasingly experience the results of progress with an anguished sense of loss and alienation. Calinescu characterizes this as a fundamental link between modernity and decadence, suggesting that the two terms are not mutually exclusive, as they initially seem, but that

they actually imply each other. Along with the advantages of technological developments come necessary destruction and an increasing alienation of the individual.

Different Modernities

Modernity and decadence permeate contemporary societies in different ways and at different speeds. In his well-known book on modernity *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982), Marshall Berman describes how modernity is built differently into the fabric of various major cities around the world such as New York and St. Petersburg. He suggests that modernity is not an undifferentiated global experience but rather that it exists in infinite variations. Similarly, in his book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), Appadurai explains the existence of multiple modernities through a discussion of the effects of media and imagination on modern societies. He suggests that the increasing ease of travel and communication through advancements in media have caused modern societies to change rapidly. This allows people from various societies to imagine and often actualize many new and different lives influenced by the lives of others living across the globe. Yet Appadurai's argument is not that media are making modern societies more similar, but that different societies adapt global elements from the media in culturally specific ways. In her book, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), Aiwa Ong echoes this opinion. Through a discussion of the effects of globalization on perceptions of the Chinese self, she suggests that personal and national identities have become fluid and adaptable in the contemporary global capitalist system.

II. NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE UNIQUE GREEK MODERNITY

Greek Nation and National Identity Formation

Since the founding of the Greek nation, Greek modernity has been a breeding ground for defensive nationalisms. Near consecutive ideological and military domination by various European nations during the first 150 years of the modern Greek state played a major role. In fact, Europe dominated the ideological landscape of modern Greece since the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Even moulding modern Greece according to the European model of the nation-state was an early sign of the ideological subjugation to come. As stated by Breuilly,

> The decay of state power [in the Ottoman Empire] induced such groups to look to European states to help them form alternative arrangements. Given the acceptance of the national argument in Western public opinion and the 'national' subdivisions of the Greek Orthodox church, it was natural to justify their power-bids in national terms. In this way the 'nation states' of Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia were established. (Breuilly in Guibernau and Hutchinson 2001, 41)

More importantly, European and Greek intellectuals living in Europe played a central role in imagining the modern Greek nation. Governments from Bavaria to Britain sought to Hellenize Greece, and return it to its ancient glory. They regarded many of the contemporary cultural expressions in the new Greek state as foreign corruptions of ancient Greek culture. The changes that had occurred during the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires had to be swept away.

Europeans were excited by the idea of the rebirth of ancient Greece. In his *Note sur la Grèce* (1825), Chateaubriand expressed the romantic sentiments attached to the Greek cause:

> Will our century watch hordes of savages extinguish civilization at its rebirth on the tomb of a people who civilized the world? Will Christendom calmly allow

> Turks to strangel Christians? And will the legitimate Monarchs of Europe shamelessly permit their sacred name to be given to a tyranny which could have redder the Tiber? (Chateaubriand as quoted by Tsigakou 1991, 14)

Since European nations had been built on a Hellenic model, basing the Modern Greek nation on the same model would simultaneously create a unique Greek national identity and Europeanize the nation. As characterized by Michael Herzfeld, Greece was simultaneously Europe's oldest state and its youngest nation (Herzfeld 1982, 11-21). Contemporary Greece was to be shaped in the image of its ancient past. As articulated by Stathis Gourgouris in his book *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece*, "In the language of the West, Greece's modernity was never articulated independently of its antiquity" (Gourgouris 1996, 73).

Yet the cultural continuity of the ancient and Modern Greeks was not obvious or even desired by everyone. In 1830, Austrian historian Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790-1861) boldly questioned whether the Modern Greeks were truly descendants of the ancient Greeks. This sparked numerous heated reactions including that of historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos who fought for cultural continuity by theorizing a unity between ancient and Byzantine Greece: he compared the Parthenon, as the representative of classical antiquity, with St. Sofia, the Christian church of Constantinople, as the representative of Byzantium, by calling them 'half-brothers' (Dimaras as quoted by Yalouri 2001, 37).

Jusdanis suggests that such issues that divided the Greek nation were solved not through military force but through cultural imaginings of a Greek nation that united Hellenic Greece with the modern nation:

> The antinomies in Greek culture were resolved not militarily but aesthetically; they were projected into the utopian space of Greekness, which permitted Greeks to be both Hellenic and Romeic, to christen their children Pericles as well as

> Maria, to waltz with pleasure but not to be ashamed of the *kalamatiano*. (Jusdanis 1991, 116)

Language, geography, history and music were some of the cultural expressions used to create a perception of Greekness that proved cultural continuity from ancient Greece through modern times and thus created a viable modern national identity. A combination of historical erasure and skillful imagining created a new, Greek identity that was unique and respectable. Even the neoclassical architecture that dominated much of the capital Athens was largely a foreign reinterpretation of classical Greek architecture. In addition, archeologists were recruited with the purpose of excavating ancient ruins, and Albanian, Turkish and Slav place-names were often replaced by Hellenic names. Vostitsa became Aigion, Leontari became Megalopolis and Koulouri became Salamis (Koliopoulos and Veremes 2002, 243). Indeed, Fyodr Dostoyevsky's description of 19th-century Paris as the disappointing symbol of Western decadence can easily be applied to the idolizing nature of the founders of the Modern Greek nation towards ancient Greece:

> It is a kind of Biblical scene, something about Babylon, a kind of prophecy from the Apocalypse fulfilled before your very eyes. You feel that it would require a great deal of eternal spiritual resistance not to succumb, not to surrender to the impression, not to bow down to the fact, and not to idolize Baal, not to accept it as your ideal. (Dostoyevsky 1997, 37)

And in his fictional autobiography describing extensive travels through Greece, Nikos Kazantzakis comments upon the dominating presence of the past in the Greek nation:

> How pleasant if the Greek could stroll through his country and not hear stern, angry voices beneath the soil! For the Greek, however, a journey through Greece degenerates into a fascinating and exhausting torture. You stand on a spot of Greek land and find yourself overcome with anguish. It is a deep tomb with layer upon layer of corpses whose varied voices rise and call you – for the voice is the one part of the corpse which remains immortal. Which among all these voices should you choose? (Kazantzakis 1965, 174)

He also emphasizes an element of choice in constructing national history and identity, but characterizes the task as fascinating and exhausting torture.

The great interest of foreigners in the Greek cause and in the ancient Greek past had a mixed effect. Foreigners, especially the Germans and the British, took charge of excavating certain ancient sites. Systematic digs took place under the auspices of various foreign-run archeological schools as well as the substantial excavations by Heinrich Schleiemann at Myceneae and Tiryns during the 1870s and 1880s. While foreigners advanced archeological study in Greece, many removed ancient stones and brought them to their respective countries for personal enjoyment. The 1794 writings of Englishman, John Bacon Sawry Morritt, illustrate the common attitude of aristocratic antiquities collectors of the time:

> It is very pleasant to walk the streets here. Over almost every door is an antique statue or *bassorelievo*, more or less good though all much broken, so that you are in a perfect gallery of marbles in these lands. Some we steal, some we buy, and our court is much adorned with them. (Morritt as quoted by Tomkinson 2006, 217-218)

This free sentiment with the ruins of ancient Greece was not unanimous. Many travelers to Greece including Lord Byron and Edward Dodwell expressed their disdain at the destruction of the ancient ruins. Dodwell wrote:

> During my first tour to Greece I had the inexpressible mortification of being present when the Parthenon was despoiled of its finest sculpture, and instead of the picturesque beauty and high state of preservation in which I first saw it, it is now comparatively reduced to a state of shattered desolation…The Constantinopolitan patriarch has been induced by the Greeks, who are fondly anticipating the regeneration of their country, to issue circular orders to all the Greeks not to disturb any ancient remains; and neither to assist nor connive at their destruction nor removal, under pain of excommunication. (Dodwell as quoted by Tomkinson 2006, 223)

Some foreign Europeans who were invested in the construction of the Modern Greek nation believed that unlike the ancients, Modern Greeks were incapable of self-

rule and therefore needed a foreign government. This sentiment is characterized by David Lowenthal's notion of heritage blindness. He suggested that for the eighteenth-century West, the colonized peoples of the rest of the world were considered condemned to permanent inferiority and 'heritage blindness' (Lowenthal 1998, 243), and requiring guidance and help in safeguarding their legacies (Yalouri 2001, 8). This very sentiment is exemplified by the speech made by the classicist architect Leo von Klenze in 1834 at the ceremonial opening of the restoration works on the Acropolis. After placing one of the fallen columns back in its place, he addressed the new Bavarian King Otto, citing the indebtedness to foreign help:

> Everything was against our operations. The levers broke, the workers fell ill, the masons believed that the works ought to be suspended. But O!, the blue flag of hope appeared on the distant horizon: the king was coming with his councilors in order to undertake the work of rescue… and, as if by a miracle, those gigantic marbles began to obey the masons and harmonize under the sound of the hymns that saluted the king. (von Klenze as quoted by Tsigakou 1981, 63)

This sentiment still prevails today in the debate over the ownership of the Parthenon (Elgin) marbles between England and Greece.

Past and Present in Modern Greece: Creating a Balanced National Discourse

As suggested by Giannis Koliopoulos, while identifying Modern Greeks as descendants of the ancient Hellenes may have been unavoidable, turning this identification into the core of the national myth was not:

> Identifying Modern Greeks as descendants of the ancient Hellenes was unavoidable: the Greek language spoken by most of the country's inhabitants, and the physical remains of ancient hellas, as well as the intellectual requirements of the age, made this identification irresistible. What was not unavoidable was turning this assumption of identity into one of the principal features of the national myth on which the Modern Greek nation was founded. In the formative years of the Modern Greek nation-state, ancient hellas was only one of the

> ingredients available for the building of a new nation: Byzantium, Orthodoxy, the Ottoman empire and Europe were some others. (Koliopoulos 2002, 242)

It was the work of scholars like Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos and Spyridon Zambelios during the 1850s and 1860s that established the cultural continuity of the Greek nation and "the convincing promotion of the Modern Greek nation as a cultural community consisting of all linguistic groups and peoples that it has incorporated in its long history from antiquity to modern times" (Koliopoulos 2004, 233). These scholars searched for what Ernest Gellner defines as a "will," the social glue that helps hold societies together. As illustrated by historian Michael Herzfeld, the Greek constitution barely served its purpose in creating a social glue:

> Unlike, for example, the United States Declaration of Independence (see Wills 1979, 38), the stilted Greek constitutions had hardly served as a focus for allegiance, enthusiasm, and a new mythology. What was needed was a body of patriotic writing which could juxtapose grand ideals with cultural experience. Such a text was collectively created through the development of a national discipline of folklore. (Herzfeld 1986, 13)

For example, in 1822, European intellectuals constructed the Constitution of Epidaurus, which was written in a language that was so archaic, that few Greeks could fully understand it.[22]

The Hellas that many Greek and other mostly-foreign European intellectuals sought to construct on Greek soil was very different from the extant Greek culture. Fermor defined two overarching metanarratives that shaped the formation of the Greek nation:[23] that of *Ellinismos*, the desire to return Greece to its ancient glory, and

[22] See (Herzfeld 1984, 6) for a discussion of the new Greek constitution. He states, "[the charter] promised a statist democracy in accordance with the principles that were thought to have guided a very different sort of polity, the Athenian city-state of the fifth century B.C. Although this impracticable blueprint was soon superseded by other constitutions, it expresses nicely the paradoxical situation in which the new Hellas found itself."

[23] See (Lyotard, 1984) for further discussion of metanarratives.

Romiossini, the wish to accept the changes that society had undergone since the fall of the Byzantine Empire (Herzfeld, 1982). As stated by Herzfeld in his preface to *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece*,

> There are, after all, two competing views of Greece. One, built from the accumulated materials of European Classical scholarship, looks out beyond the national borders and appeals to those who have championed the Greek cause abroad or yoked it to the service of elitist interests. The other involves reflexive knowledge—a self-portrait that does not always flatter, a Greek's understanding of what it means in practice to be Greek. (Herzfeld 1984, iii)

Ellinismos characterized the spirit that guided much of the urban construction of Greece, especially of its new capital city, Athens. King Otto chose Athens as the nation's capital for its visible connection with the Ancient past: the area was scattered with ancient ruins and was dominated by the country's most impressive ruin, the Acropolis.[24] Archeologist Fani Mallouchou-Tufano states:

> The aura of the ancient Athenian world, with all of its cultural and symbolic implications as well as what remained of its magnificent physical presence, [that] was the underlying reason for designating Athens, then in ruins after the War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire – as the capital of the newly independent Greek state in 1833. (Mallouchou-Tufano 2006, 1)

From the first city plans, the role that the ancient ruins would play in the modern city was a central concern. In the early 1830s, city planners, most of whom were foreign, employed a series of architects to construct a city that would both pay homage to its glorious ancient past and reinforce its connection to the West. Greek Stamatios Kleanthis and German Eduard Schaubert outlined a potential capital city just north of the Acropolis that would not be superimposed on areas with visible ruins. The early architects of the Modern Greek nation adhered to Western perceptions of nationalism. Greeks and

[24] The visible connection to the ancient past in Athens is a major reason why it was designated as the capital city rather than Nafplion, which had served as the original Greek capital from the founding of the Greek nation until 1834.

philhellenes dedicated to the Greek cause aimed to form a contemporary national identity and thereby claim its right to exist as a modern nation and claim a part of European modernity. What better source for a modern national identity than ancient Greece, a perfectly valid shared past for the Greek nation, which had served as a model for other European nations? In fact, Greece's relationship with Europe has dominated the formation of a Modern Greek national identity: Greeks living in Europe were the first to imagine the existence of a Modern Greek nation; Europeans played a major role in the formation and governing of Greece, shaping the nation and the self-image of the Greek people according to the way that Europe looked to Greece's ancient past.[25]

Unique Greek Modernity: A Breeding Ground for Defensive Nationalisms

The fundamental metanarratives of Greek modernity render it a breeding ground for defensive nationalisms. Since the founding of the Modern Greek nation, Greeks contended with numerous threats to national sovereignty. As discussed in Chapter One, these included 150 near-consecutive years of foreign occupations, the usurping of the ancient Greek past by Europe and the rest of the Western world and the dominant role of foreign European nations in shaping the Modern Greek physical and ideological *topos*. It is in the context of creative and destructive modernities in Greece and of paranoid and avoidant nationalism that Pavlos Vassiliou creates his Rebetika Istoria culture. Here he

[25]A great interest in ancient Greek music by foreign philhellenes arose in the aftermath of the Greek Revolution. Well-known studies of ancient Greek music from the time include Charles Burney's *A General History of Music, from the earliest ages to the present period, to which is prefixed a Dissertation of the Music of the Ancients* (1789). Chapter 10 of the dissertation bears the title "Of the effects attributed to the Music of the Ancients."

merges Greek past and present in his own personal and idiosyncratic ways. But it is a merging or juxtaposition that finds many echoes in modern Greece.

For example, remnants of the ancient past are a constant presence in contemporary Greece. Both a source of pride and a source of contention, they symbolize the complexity of Greek modernity. In his attempt to explain the greatness of rebetika to a young rebetiko enthusiast, Pavlos Vassiliou characterized rebetika as "the Acropolis of Greek music." Similarly, in his April 1998 inaugural lecture, the new archbishop of Greece, Christodoulos, called Mount Athos 'the Acropolis of our Orthodox Faith' (Yalouri 2001, 141).

Greeks find it critical to embrace the old. However they also question its significance in the modern world. In his manifesto addressed to the Greek youth, Italian poet Fillipo Tomasso Marinetti (1876-1944) questioned the greatness of the Acropolis with relation to modernity: "If the Parthenon looks nice as it stands on the top of the Acropolis, will it, however, retain its grandeur in the eyes of a Greek pilot who flies at a height of 300 feet?" (Lidakis 1994, 245). Theotokas, a representative of the Generation of the 30s (see below) responded: "An aeroplane flying in the Greek sky, over the Parthenon, gives off a new harmony which has not yet been conceived by anyone…An aesthetics is being formed genuinely in the air we breathe" (Vitti in Yalouri 2001, 39). And as eloquently summarized by Kontaratos, "In Greece the acquaintance with these new trends does not result in the renunciation of antiquity, but in its reconciliation with modernity" (Kontaratos 1994, 47-8). Such an aesthetic is vividly realized by the ancient ruin display cases built into the brand new Athens subway system. This constant referencing of the past, even by those who believe that Greeks can top its greatness,

keeps the ancient Greek accomplishments in the foreground of Greek modernity and ensures their experience of multiple perceptions of time in a shared space.

The Modern Greek is pulled toward a multiplicity of times by the very *topos* of the nation, practicing both vertical and horizontal times. "Vertical time" characterizes the experience of time in the ancient Greek world; it is a non-teleological perception of time in which gods loomed above and were present in everyday life. "Horizontal time" is the eschatological notion of time, which is decadent, because is each passing day leads to the end of the world. Modern Greeks experience "vertical time" when they subscribe to the ancient's belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, one that is epitomized by great works of classical art. The greatest example of this is the ancient structure of the Acropolis that overlooks the capital city of Athens. However, Modern Greeks must work with "horizontal time" because modern societies value the aesthetic of transitoriness, marked by the emphasis on novelty and change. As they grapple with both types of times and beliefs, they confront their glorious past and their Europeanized modernity.

Defensive nationalisms permeated artistic and intellectual efforts since the founding of the Greek nation. Many Greeks sought to define a native Hellenism that rejected dominant Western understandings through music, art, and literary texts in creative ways. A general leitmotif was the resistance of elements associated with the West and a promotion of Byzantium and elements of contemporary folk culture. These efforts were often a purposeful if artificial mixture of selections from different periods of Greek history. Noteworthy examples include: Eva and Angelos Sikelianos and their Delphic festivals based on a unique desire to recapture ancient Greek forms while highlighting elements of Byzantine and traditional folk forms; the Generation of the

1930s, a group of artists and intellectuals who promoted a "Myth of Hellenicity" in a variety of newly-conceived "traditional" Greek artistic forms; artist Fotis Kontoglou, primarily a hagiographer, who rejected Western schools of art and opted for a unique Greek approach that combined the Byzantine and the Cretan school; and the renowned Greek poet Odysseus Elytis who embraced elements of folk and Byzantine language in his work, most famously in his poem "Axion Esti" [Worthy to Be]. Pavlos Vassiliou and his Rebetiki Istoria culture can be viewed as part of this trend of expressing an alternative Greekness through art that captures an earlier moment in time.

III. MUSIC AS A DISCOURSE OF THE MODERN GREEK NATION

Musical Nationalism and National Identity Constructions

Throughout Modern Greek history, a variety of musics has been used to promote various ideals for the Greek national identity. The great diversity of these musics suggests that music is not inherently national or anti-national but that any music can be used in order to promote national identity perceptions (Bohlman 2004). This is particularly true when music is conducted as a social performance, a practice in which meanings are generated, manipulated, even ironised, within certain limitations. As social performance, music exerts great symbolic power to shape and reflect national identity perceptions, a fact that Daniel Barenboim's recent controversial performance of Wagner's music in Israel attests.

Music is symbolically powerful for many reasons. Five are discussed here: First, music is a communal activity, one that brings people together with a shared motive. Simon Frith says that part of the ability of music to cement identities lies in the fact that

"it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective" (Frith 2007, 295). Second, music delivers semantically specific messages to its performers and audience through its lyrics and through a series of culturally-defined codes that shape and reflect the identities of its listeners. Third, music reorganizes and manipulates everyday experiences of social reality, and blurs, elides, ironises and sometimes subverts commonsense categories and markers. Fourth, music allows performers to engage in socially-acknowledged games of prestige and power (Stokes 1994, 97). Fifth, music appeals to the senses through pleasure and can thus undermine audience resistance. Foucault has characterized pleasure as arenas of political experience through which people learn what enjoyable activities are and are not permitted and why. This suggests that music can overtly or covertly influence national identity perceptions. This was clearly demonstrated by the theatrical performance of a *daouli* (cylindrical drum) and *zournas* (traditional wind instrument) from ancient Greece at the 2004 Olympic Games; the performance reinforced the role that ancient Greece plays in the Modern Greek consciousness and identity formation. It did not give time for the audience to question the validity of its message.

I suggest that the performative aspect of music also makes it an ideal tool in the creation and instigation of national identity perceptions. On the one hand, music helps stabilize identity perceptions by being performed again and again. On the other hand, music changes every time it is performed, thus giving a sense of simultaneous continuity and change. The power of music to stabilize and destabilize is fundamental to the solidification and acceptance of national identities. Some scholars claim that song

expressed proto-nationalist identities, before the concept of the nation even existed. As explained by Bohlman,

> Song expressed national aspirations even before the rise of the modern nation-state. The performers of 'proto-nationalist' genres of music sang tales of great leaders and the people they rallied into collective action. Such genres chronicled the conflicts of power and battles with mighty enemies, and they charted the landscape of struggles and great events that would inscribe the fate of the nation on its history. It is in these genres, moreover, that national bards invent and then play upon musical instruments, unfettering myth from nature and affixing it to the tales of the nation. (Bohlman 2010, 253)

In Greece much of national identity construction was part of efforts to differentiate Greeks from the Oriental Other. Throughout the twentieth century, many viewed rebetika as an emblem of this Other causing various leaders to ban and censor the music while journalists decried it as a damaging to the mental and physical health of Greeks. Interestingly, the contemporary use of rebetika by musicians such as Pavlos Vassiliou serves to differentiate Greeks from the European "Other" instead.

Musical representations of a nation are learned and ideological and do not necessarily maintain connections to other aural phenomena. As such, state-chosen musics to represent the nation are often met with resistance. Indeed, the promotion of national identities through music constitutes interplays of power. In modern times, such interplays are best revealed by folksong phenomena in various nations, the earliest and perhaps best-known example of which Johann Gottfried von Herder has documented. Herder, traveled throughout the German-speaking regions of Europe collecting folk song texts in an effort to find what made Germans culturally distinct from other peoples. Herder abided by the notion that the purest version of national expression can be found in rural areas and villages far from the corrupting forces of urban life.

The notion that greater cultural purity can be found in rural areas and villages is still held by many folksong practitioners, even though it has since been questioned by anthropologists and ethnomusicologists alike (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In his extensive musical analyses, Hungarian composer Bela Bartok aimed to "scientifically demonstrate which [tunes] are pure Hungarian folk song types, and which are borrowed melodies or reflect foreign influence" (Suppan 1976, 157). Music became an object to be collected and studied, a source from which one could learn about one's culture:

> Musical folklore, practiced most famously by Zoltan Kodaly, Bela Bartok and Constantin Brailoiu in Eastern Europe, maintains a paradigm that "conceives of music as a collectable, comparable, and ultimately explainable object with an observable cosmos. (Cooley in Cooley and Barz 1997, 9)

Folksong collecting with nationalist ideals sustained the ideology that folk music serves as the purest source of a nation's culture, and that the imagined communities exist through sound.

Musical folklore played a key role in the formation of Greek national identity, since foreigners usually from France or England who were devoted to the Greek cause began collecting folksongs at the end of the nineteenth century. They hoped to define the Modern Greek nation and connect it with its glorious ancient past. As stated by Koliopoulos, "Folklore came to the assistance of archeology and history in the grand effort to silence foreign doubts about the hellenization of the nation. The sources of popular customs, ballads and popular artifacts were 'traced' to the distant Hellenic or not so distant Byzantine past" (Koliopoulos 2002, 245). Folklore collection was a method of defining true Greekness in acceptable European terms. The first transcriptions of folk songs began to appear during the Ottoman Empire. Folk music collecting progressed significantly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when French and

English travelers visited the Greek-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire. Many of these travelers were philhellenes who, drawn to Greece by ideals of a glorious ancient past, hoped to illustrate cultural continuity with contemporary Greek-speaking peoples. Their desire to portray cultural continuity often led to far-fetched depictions: "the diligent reader of travelers' texts will see paintings of peasants dancing, not in the village square, but among ruined marble columns, set amid verdant hills" (Tsigakou 1981). Starting in 1824, philhellenes Claude Fauriel (1824, 1825), Theodor Kind (1861 [1827], and Arnold Passow (1860)—none of whom had set foot on Greek soil—published the earliest collections of Greek folk songs.[26]

Greek scholars were influenced by European contemporaries in their approach to the collection of folksongs. As stated by Roderick Beaton, "It is impossible to separate the study of Greek folk poetry either from the widespread European interest in such matters which dates from the mid-eighteenth century, or from the movement, in Greece and abroad, towards the establishment and consolidation of the Modern Greek nation" (Beaton 2004, 3). For example, Nikolaos Politis, the founder of the Greek discipline of folklore (*laografia*, literally "description of the people") among others, adopted the ideal of creating the *urtext* version of the songs.[27] As a result, collectors consistently "corrected" folk songs that had been "corrupted" in the process of oral transmission. These cultural constructions were far from objective, but rather served to support various

[26] Claude Fauriel published a two-volume compendium in France in 1824 and 1825 and German historian Theodor Kind published another shorter collection in 1827.
[27] See Herzfeld (1982) and his discussion of *laografia*.

ideals for the Greek national identity. Many times, corrected folksongs were a means to illustrate the cultural continuity from the past to the present.[28]

Since the founding of the Greek nation, European and European-style Greek music prevailed. The musical superculture proposed by the Greek and foreign elite class in Athens consisted predominantly of European compositions or of works written in imitation of European styles. However, at the time of the founding of the Greek nation in 1832, Western music had been almost unknown to mainland Greeks. As such, the constructed nature of the proposed dominant music superculture was marked, and the music was criticized by members of all sectors of Greek society. In his "History of Greek Song", Mylonas states that in the newly-founded capital city, imitations and borrowings of foreign musical styles dominated so heavily that there existed no trace of any type of unique artistic expression (Mylonas 1984, 21). And in 1929, music historian Thodoros Synadinos wrote:

> Immediately following the liberation of Greece, the Greek people followed also in its musical path a completely foreign one in terms of its idiosyncrasies…The foreigners that came carrying their knowledge and their culture into Greece, brought their music with them as well. Tired as they were in the aftermath of their liberation, the Greeks, after so many years of psychological and physical trial and struggle, were left weak to the influence of "shared demons" that the European culture brought with it. (Synadinos as quoted by Mylonas, 1984, 21)

European music became the standard form of musical expression in Greece. Even songs that were written about the victories of the Greek fight for independence were set to foreign melodies.

[28] The idea that a folk song has a historically identifiable origin is common Greece though recently this idea has been challenged. For example, Roderick Beaton (1980b) proposed that Greek folk singers do not simply memorize and perform songs. Rather, they alter the songs in performance through the use of conventional formulae and thus keep folk song a live tradition (Cowan 2000).

Western music permeated the soundscape of Athens with the rise of an outdoor music culture in which various music groups including foreign wind bands and choirs offered free concerts in the city squares. The first Athenian wind band "Musical Troupe" was created in 1825. Comprised of foreign musicians and directed by Michael Mangel, a musician of German descent, the band belonged to the Greek army.[29] With a repertoire that consisted of Western marches and excerpts from Italian operas, the outdoor concerts were quite a new and striking spectacle for the Greek population, impressed both by "the image of the maestro with his feathered cap and by their first introductions to the rich sound of polyphonic music" (Leousi 2003, 189). After a successful performance of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* in Greece in 1837, the Greek state began to regularly import itinerant opera companies to entertain foreigners living in Greece and upper class Athenians. Western music became (and continues to be) a standard in musical instruction. This trend began with Ioannis Capodistrias (1776-1831) the first governor of Greece, who appointed the musician Athanassios Avramiadis to teach Western music at an orphanage on the island of Aegina.

The popular song collections that circulated during late-19th century in Athens clearly illustrate the European direction of contemporary musical education in Greece. The songs were written in Western notation and most were settings of Greek lyrics on melodies of songs by Schubert and Beethoven and of traditional German songs. An early example was the publication by the Friends of Education Company's "Pedagogical Songs for Use in Preschool and Lower School" (1869) (Siopsi 2003, 115). In the early 1900s, members of the wealthy urban classes bought pianos for their home. Upper class taverns and beer halls appeared in various Athenian neighborhoods such as Plaka, Kolonaki and

[29]The Greek army was led by a foreigner, French soldier Charles-Nicolas Fabvier.

Exarcheia that featured the performance of *cantades*. Alexandros Katakouzinos introduced harmonic tetraphony into the otherwise homophonic Greek Orthodox Church liturgy. Greeks began to attend shows at the Review Theater, the *Epitheorisi Technis*, whose musical output consisted almost entirely of Western art music compositions with Greek lyrics.[30]

Art music composition in Greece followed a similar trend. At the time of Greek liberation, the Ionian Islands to the West, not officially part of the Greek state until 1864, were the center of art music composition. Unlike much of the rest of Greece, the Ionian Islands had long been under Italian rather than Ottoman control. As a result, musical influences in the region were largely from Western classical composition and were dominated by Italian opera, mostly *opera buffe*. These styles greatly influenced Greek classical composition and Byzantine hymnody and liturgy on the Ionian Islands. Other compositional forms such as the Athenian song, the *cantada*, the review song and the operettas were greatly influenced by the Ionian School of Composition as well.

Numerous composers resisted the Ionian School as corruptive to Greekness and sought to create a different art music style for Greece. Composer Manolis Kalomiris (1883-1962) is one such composer who devoted his career to resisting the Ionian school of composition by working to create a proper national art music for Greece. Kalomiris believed that Italian compositions were superficial and commercial and that they did not represent true Greekness:

> They should learn, those who say that Italian music is comparable to Greek music, they should learn that our folk music with its unique tones lies outside of the tonic circle of Italian, French, German and Danish music, as does Norwegian

[30] Each show consisted of around twenty to twenty five songs, which usually became widely popular outside of the theater. They were broadly circulated in the form of lyrics, booklets and scores (Mylonas 1984, 63).

> and Russian folk music. […] Imagine the nerve, the lack of education needed for someone to say that our music is comparable to Italian music just because we are neighbors! For me at least, our ethnic music reminds me much more of a Norwegian song than of ten Italian operas. (Kalomiris as quoted by Siopsi 2003, 136)

In contrast to these supposedly superficial compositions of the Ionian School, the compositions of Kalomiris were based on the ideas of the Russian national composers, German compositional models, Modern Greek folk music and poetry and ancient Greek myth.[31] Kalomiris identified with the demoticist ideal for contemporary Greek culture: "I dream for our music something analogous with that which shaped Modern Greek poetry. Something that has as much connection to the people as do the lyrics of Palamas, Solomos, Valariotis, Sikelianos, in their popular poetry" (Kalomiris as quoted by Siopsi 2003, 28).[32] Kalomiris hoped to write music that was easily accessible to the Greek people.

The Greek Hymn to Freedom

This dominant European sonic and imagined existence of the nation even manifested itself in the form of the Greek national anthem. The "Hymn to Freedom" is a product of Europeanization. Its lyrics come from a poem written in 1823 by Dionysios

[31] There was some internal resistance to the propensity towards Italian musical styles within the Ionian School and various composers attempted to incorporate elements of Greek music into their compositions. For example, in 1901, George Lambelet published his study entitled *Ethnic Music* in which he called upon Greek composers to draw their inspiration from demotic songs. Lambelet promoted the ideas of Russian composer Mikhail Glinka in his statement that "The people write music, we composers simply put them together" (Glinka as quoted by Leousi 2003, 194). Composer Mikis Theodorakis would echo these sentiments in the late 1950s with the composition of his popular art song *Epitaphios*, a high art song cycle based upon rebetika. However, the greatest resistance came from Manolis Kalomiris and other composers of the Greek National School of Music, who resisted outright this music that they characterized as a superficial Italianate music tradition.

[32] The Greek language debate was a highly controversial subject in the 19th and early-20th century. The dispute centered on the question of whether Greeks should speak the vernacular demotic form of the Greek language or a highly-stylized imitation of Ancient Greek.

Solomos (1798-1858) telling of numerous events in Greek history: it praises the heroic deeds of the fighters for freedom from the Ottoman Empire, rejoices over the end of the patriarch Grigorios in Constantinople and praises the Greek defence of Missolonghi.[33] It was King George I, the British king of Greece who in 1863, who declared the first two stanzas of the 158-stanza poem as the national anthem of Greece. Nikolaos Mantzaros (1795-1873), a member of the Ionian School of music composed the music for the anthem. The tune obviously lacks references to Greek folk tradition. Paul Nettl comments that the anthem sounds as if it was drawn directly from an Italian opera (Nettl 1952, 117). Greeks had doubts about its music characteristics. Thus, under the suggestion of King Otto, it was sent to musical experts in Bavaria for their opinion. No objections were made, and song became the official national anthem in 1864 (Nettl 1952, 117).[34]

As I discuss in Chapter Five, rebetika arose under different socio-political and musical circumstances from those of mainstream Westernized art and popular music in Greece. Rebetika was music of the urban poor; musical sounds and instruments were perceived as Eastern in character; lyrics concerned everyday life of the poorest classes. Whereas Westernized music was performed in theaters, concert halls and public squares, rebetika arose in the tavern, the *teke* [hashish den] and the *kapilio* [small tavern offering barrel wine and hors d'oeuvres]. These factors contribute to Vassiliou's promotion of the music as representative of Greekness.

[33] The poem was written in Demotic Greek.
[34] This Corfu Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840 in reaction the rule passed by British authorities in 1839 who forbade the participation of their military bands in foreign religious ceremonies.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the major themes that dominate Greek modernity. These include the incorporation of past and present and defining the relationship of Greece and Europe. I examined the notions of the nation, national identity, nationalism and musical nationalism. As stated by Carabott, Greece is particularly ripe for such a discussion. In his book *Greece and Europe in the Modern Period: Aspects of a Troubled Relationship* (1995), he characterizes Greece as maintaining a singular geographic and cultural position as the link between the East and the West. As a result, its national identity lies in an ambiguous area:

> amongst the conflicting ideologies that define the national culture as both belonging to and excluded from Europe…No longer Orientals, but not yet Europeans, neither do we pursue the fulfillment of the imagined *Megali Idea* [the Great Idea] nor do we follow the trend of contemporary progress.[35] (Carabott 1995, 70; 78)

Contemporary Greece continues to serve as a poignant example of the relevance and power of the ideology of the nation in the contemporary world. While major forces such as globalization, Europeanization and Westernization do alter fundamental perceptions of self and other in Greece, the quest to define the Greek national identity continues to dominate the Greek imaginary. This is largely a result of the contested Greek national topos and imagination that are shaped by an amalgam of often contradictory identities that contribute to varying understandings of Greekness: Greece is a part of the

[35] The term *Megali Idea* was first used in a Greek parliamentary debate in 1844, in order to describe the aspirations of post-Independence Greeks to reacquire the territories of ancient Greece. Since over three-quarters of Greeks at the time lived outside the borders of the Hellenic kingdom, it became the policy of most Greek governments to unite and incorporate all territories, which were home to unredeemed Greeks. In 1864 the Ionian Islands became part of the Greek state. Thessaly and a section of Epirus followed in 1881. During the Balkan Wars and the First World War Greece reached its present size, with the exception of the Dodecanese ceded to it under the 1947 Paris treaty. The Great Idea expired in 1922 after the Asia Minor disaster.

Balkans, the Mediterranean and the European Union; Greeks must keep trying to unite the "memory" of a glorious ancient past with a modern present and account for the dichotomies between the tourist paradise of vibrant sunny beaches with often-harsh everyday realities of living in Greece. In addition, as a geographical and cultural crossroads, Greece must continually re-determine its relation to the "East" and to the "West," to America, to Europe and to the European Union.

CHAPTER THREE

PAVLOS VASSILIOU: HIS LIFE AND WORDS

> You have seen Greek culture today. You cannot find a Greek who knows whether a building is the work of Schiller or Hansen. You are lucky if he can identify it as a neoclassical building. The same with rebetika. People don't know how to recognize a rebetika song. The music that you hear today that people call rebetika has no relation to rebetika. Those songs you hear over and over again, thousands of them- like *Pino kai Metho* [I Drink and Get Drunk], someone hears this one song and says, "Today I heard rebetiko." He gets up to dance to it, dances incorrectly and says, "Today I became a *rebetis*."
>
> -Pavlos Vassiliou, 2007

> The world- and even the world of artists – is full of people who can go to the Louvre, walk rapidly, without so much as a glance, past rows of very interesting, though secondary, pictures, to come to a rapturous halt in front of a Titian or a Raphael – one of those that have been most popularized by the engraver's art; then they will go home happy, not a few saying to themselves, 'I know my Museum.' Just as there are people who, having once read Bossuet and Racine, fancy that they have mastered the history of Literature.
>
> -Charles Baudelaire, 1864

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce Pavlos Vassiliou, the charismatic leftist public intellectual and rebetika musician. Vassiliou is a distinctly modern figure. Pronounced similarities join him with French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire, the archetypal modernist. Baudelaire lamented the perceived decline in modern society and the superficial understanding of culture, rejected "progress" and equated the modern with the

artificial. Vassiliou is similarly preoccupied with the deterioration of the contemporary Greek nation. He laments the loss of traditional Greek culture and the overwhelming cultural amnesia of the Greek people; he critiques the rapid incorporation of elements of foreign culture in the hopes of imagined progress; he rejects the contemporary Greek ersatz culture where all of value is forsaken in the name of economic profit. While Baudelaire commented on the ignorance of the common man through poetry and criticism, Vassiliou does so through rebetika performance. Through the creation of an authentic rebetika culture, he promotes an alternative national identity, one that is free of the decadent attributes of Modern Greek society.

Although representative of his small generation of rebetika musicians, Vassiliou is the only musician who has maintained a successful *rebetadiko* for thirty years and whose performance and entertainment-style have remained strictly devoted to early-style rebetika. Today, musicians who play rebetika in a historically-correct way are a rarity. Also rare are audiences who recognize the difficulty and value of the music in its early style. Vassiliou's lifelong devotion to promoting rebetika reflects his respect and admiration for the music but also his beliefs about the Greek nation. His sentiments towards the Greek nation are complex. While Vassiliou feels betrayed by his people, he remains intensely loyal to his country—no matter how problematic the political system might be or how severely the economic instability effects the quality of life, he would never consider moving to another country. "When the situation gets difficult in one's homeland, one does not get up and abandon it. One does just the opposite. One stays and tries to help fix the problem" (Vassiliou 2008).

In many ways Pavlos Vassiliou is a man trapped in a corrupt free market economy, in a nation obsessed with monetary profit, in a society dominated by mass media culture that asserts American and European values. For Vassiliou, rebetika songs constitute an outlet where he can resist those negative aspects of Greek society. In these songs, he finds truth, comfort, freedom and hope for the future of historically-correct Greekness. Yet at the same time, he does not believe that he can effect any substantial change on Greek culture. Thus his rebetiko performance becomes a decadent masochistic ritual of utopian proportions. I examine this theoretical position more thoroughly in Chapter Seven, the ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria.

Vassiliou is vocal about his rebetika culture, and he was very willing to speak with me about rebetika and about Greece: However, interviewing Vassiliou about his life was difficult. We rarely had formal productive interviews. As a result, I pieced together his story from snippets of our conversations during my three years of fieldwork in Rebetiki Istoria. When I asked him to tell me a bit about his life he retorted,

> Of what importance is my life? Who would want to read about what I ate for lunch or who I talked to yesterday? Write about Rebetiki Istoria. That will be much more interesting to people. And of much more significance. If you are going to write a book about the Acropolis you don't write about what its builders did in their everyday life. Who cares? You write about the structure and its significance. (Vassiliou 2007)

To reflect Vassiliou's emphasis on his musical work, and not his biographical details, this discussion includes sparse biographical detail. Instead it focuses on Vassiliou's words about rebetika and about contemporary Greece. However, some biographical discussion is necessary to clearly position Vassiliou and his Rebetiki Istoria culture within the fabric of Greek modernity.

I. BEGINNINGS

A Biographical Note

"I am not a European, I am a Greek. An Easterner. Greeks will never be Europeans."
–Pavlos Vassiliou, 2008

Pavlos Vassiliou was born on June 29, 1952, in the small town of Skopelos on Skopelos Island. He was named after his parents' beloved Paul the Apostle. News of his birth traveled fast in Skopelos Town. Before long, the midwife had held the newborn baby swaddled in a white blanket up to the window where the fruit seller was passing through the narrow streets, his donkey loaded with fruit. "Look at this *leventi* [brave young man] that was just born!" she called out to him. The neighboring townspeople soon gathered to greet the baby and made a special trip to one of the 365 churches on the island to say a prayer for his good health.

Skopelos is the second largest of the Sporades Islands in the Northern Aegean. Its hilly terrain is dense with foliage, the thick pine forests giving it its reputation as the greenest island of Greece. Skopelos islanders used to make their profits by producing peaches, olives, and olive oil and island fishermen brought in large catches on their fishing boats. Only in recent years have these productions decreased as Skopelos emerged as a popular tourist destination. Recently, the island had a surge in popularity as a film site for the 2008 Hollywood feature film *Mamma Mia!*. Ferryboats connect the island with mainland Greece through the ports of Volos and Agios Constantinos, and tourists flock to Skopelos in order to get married in the beautiful church featured in the movie. Today, the islanders rely financially on the tourist industry.

Figure 3.1: Skopelos Town, Skopelos Island.



Skopelos has remained prominent in Vassiliou's mind throughout his life. Though he has lived and worked in Athens for the past fifty years, he considers Skopelos his home. He returned to Skopelos during the summer to build a large traditional-style house overlooking the old town and the ocean. His pride and joy is his eight-meter fishing boat, Saint George, named in honor of his father's patron saint, which awaits him in Skopelos harbor. Vassiliou has extensive knowledge of sea life and of Greek history and of geography, especially of the Northwest Aegean, and he knows all of the best places to fish with *paragadi* (paternoster). His love of fishing is so great that he has been known to stop the music in Rebetiki Istoria for a lengthy discussion with a patron who is a fellow fisherman.

"*Skopelites*" as the residents of the island call themselves, maintain a warm and close-knit culture; everyone seems to know everyone else. *Skopelites* speak a unique Greek dialect and have their own sense of humor. They give everyone a nickname or two. "On Skopelos, gossip spreads quickly" Vassiliou told me once. "When you visit Skopelos, the whole island knows about your visit before you set foot on the island. It has

always been like that. But it is a warm feeling too. To this day, whenever I visit home, my mother has a warm plate of food ready for me upon my arrival" (Vassiliou 2008).

Listening to Vassiliou speak of his childhood brings to mind images of an idyllic paradise. Indeed, the town of Skopelos is still inaccessible by car so villagers travel by foot, often leading a donkey or a mule down the narrow rocky paths that separate the small traditional houses. Vassiliou remembers running through the narrow winding paths with friends, dragging tin cans across the stones and making a terrible racket during midday naptime; he recalls playing soccer in the town square and accompanying his father to church on Sundays. Weekends and summers were spent at the "*potami*" [river] where the family had a country house. Vassiliou remembers the many hours he spent playing by the river and the nights the family slept outdoors under the starry sky; he also recalls walking miles to deliver a home-cooked lunch to his father at work only to return home leading a donkey loaded with fresh-picked fruit, olives and grain. He speaks of his childhood this way:

> We did not have much, but we lived well. It was a different way of life, a simpler life. We did not need to buy fruit that was out of season from the supermarket. Fruit was expensive anyway. We waited for the *coromilla* [plums] to ripen. I still remember how we waited. Would it be this month or next… Life was more real. We did not need cell phones and expensive cars and swimming pools and villas. Nobody did. And the few who had such things, well they were much less visible than they are today. No one felt that those things were lacking from their lives.

Despite the hardships of everyday life, he recalls his childhood with much nostalgia:

> It was a different time. My family house was not as it is today; we have since renovated it. It was much smaller and we all lived very close together. My parents worked terribly hard. My mother has the great talent of making a meal out of nothing. During the war, my mother kept her siblings alive, grinding flour by hand in the mill and cooking pitas and anything you can imagine with that flour. My father used to say that a house must have three things: flour, salt and oil, and you will never go hungry. But Skopelos wasn't affected by the war [World War

> II] so much. They [the Germans] only sent two or three soldiers here who became friends with the townspeople.

When he remembers his father, tears spring to his eyes. Giorgos had a beautiful voice. He sang as a *psaltis* [chanter] in various churches every Sunday. At home, he played the mandolin. He was well respected and reputed as a man with strong morals. Even on Sundays when he did not attend church, he would don his best attire of a suit and tie.

When Vassiliou turned seven years old, he and his family moved to Athens to the Plaka district at the foot of the Acropolis. Giorgos found better work there in construction and was able to continue chanting in various churches throughout Plaka. From a young age, Pavlos was hardworking. He excelled in his studies and after school he worked in a bookstore delivering books to various clients. It was this job that opened the world of literature to him and he became very well read from a young age. While in elementary school he got involved in music, playing guitar and singing. He credits his father for teaching him to sing as he often asked Pavlos to chant with him in church. This turned out to be his most beneficial training for his future rebetiko career. Vassiliou believes that knowledge in Byzantine chant is fundamental for any rebetika singer.

In 1966, when Vassiliou was fourteen years old, his family returned to Skopelos. Vassiliou remained in Athens and began to work in construction. His tone changes dramatically when he speaks of his life in Athens. In contrast to the years he spent on Skopelos, his time in Athens has been filled with hardship and injustice:

> I have been working for 42 years [in construction and then as a rebetika musician and *rebetadiko* owner] without a break and I still am not allowed to retire. And, I served in the army twice. From April 24, 1972 to 1974 and July 20, 1974 to September 25, 1974. I remember the exact dates. They had me assigned as a driving instructor. I was one of the few who had a license in those days. I have paid 42 years of TEVE [life insurance] and of ENSYMA [taxes] and now I don't even know when, no if, I will be able to retire.

And after 51 years, he still feels as if he is a foreigner in Athens. "I am no more at home here than if I lived in America. Skopelos is my home. In Athens, I am in exile" (Vassiliou 2007). His negative sentiments towards Athens would play a crucial role in shaping his rebetiko culture.

As a young boy living in Athens, Vassiliou's greatest joy was playing rebetika with friends in various taverns where he became quite popular. "At *Bouris* they filled the whole wall length of tables next to us with drinks that people had bought for us" (Vassiliou 2007).[36] He and his friends brought the urban popular song genre rebetika to Skopelos Island during the summers and began a vibrant island rebetiko tradition that continues today. By the time he was a teenager, Vassiliou began to listen to rock as well. "We listened to all of the greatest rock music: Led Zeppelin, Santana, Pink Floyd, the music that the Greek youth had to listen to because contemporary Greek music had nothing to offer except for *skiladika* [literally dog-den music]" (Vassiliou 2008). He was equally disappointed in the contemporary rebetika culture that bore little resemblance to that of the early proponents of the music. One day, a friend of a well-known rebetika musician heard Vassiliou singing while he was working in construction. "Let me take you to see my friend," he urged. Vassiliou refused: "Rebetika is for small spaces, not for *skiladiko* where your friend performs," he replied. Even before Vassiliou opened Rebetiki Istoria, he maintained a strict ideology about rebetika: the music should not be altered in style or performance venue and contemporary musicians should not seek to achieve personal fame by performing this great art form that is not theirs.

[36] A tavern in the Petralona neighborhood that opened in 1909.

Rebetiki Istoria: Beginnings

In January 1981, 28-year old Pavlos Vassiliou opened Rebetiki Istoria, the first *rebetadiko* in Athens. He was inspired by a rock club that once existed on Kallirois Street in the Metz neighborhood of Athens. A jukebox in the corner sometimes played rebetika songs, and this always induced great enthusiasm from the crowd. Vassiliou wondered why there existed no equivalent establishment in Athens devoted to rebetika, a Greek music form that was as deserving as rock music. Along with a fellow musician from Skopelos, Vassiliou opened Rebetiki Istoria. Here the musicians would play rebetika in its early style and proper setting. Vassiliou modeled the *rebetadiko* after a tavern of the early-twentieth century. In his own words:

> Rebetiki Istoria would present a music culture of the greatest value in its proper setting, and its prices would be low. Greek people could learn about rebetika culture and they could learn to live more simply too. They do not need all of these fancy things they think are necessities. Through rebetika, they can learn about the things in life that have actual value. (Vassiliou 2007)

Directed largely toward the Greek youth, Rebetiki Istoria would provide a space for them to enjoy live rebetika performance in its early style (1900-1955) and context. It would also teach them valuable lessons about Greekness. Rebetiki Istoria would be a modest venue. It would offer a friendly and somewhat informal atmosphere and inexpensive drinks and appetizers; there would be no flowers to throw at the musicians, no plates to break in a show of high spirits, and no opportunities for ostentatious displays of wealth. Early-style rebetiko music would be the central attraction.

The neoclassical building in Neapolis that once housed an afterschool program slowly morphed into Vassiliou's vision. He covered the walls with photographs, posters and records of the great rebetiko musicians. He installed a dimmer on the old light

fixtures, built a small stage on one side of the room and mounted speakers onto the wall. He gathered his musician friends, and they played whatever songs they fancied for themselves and for the first few interested patrons. Vassiliou did not advertize his business to the general public; Rebetiki Istoria would only promote a particular way of enjoying rebetika to those who sought out the music "in its authentic style" (Vassiliou 2007) and who wanted the music to serve as the center of the entertainment.

After a slow but steady beginning, the *rebetadiko* became extraordinarily successful. In the 1990s, five or six musicians crowded onto the tiny stage to present a six-hour rebetiko program to a full *magazi* every night of the week. A staff of ten waiters and waitresses was needed to take care of the packed *rebetadiko*. Each night, Rebetiki Istoria refilled to its capacity. A line of patrons, hoping to get inside, stretched far down the block late into the night.

Yet in spite of all his of successes evidenced by his large fan base, today Vassiliou regrets his decision to offer rebetika performance as a commodity. To sell rebetika, even at his very low prices, is detrimental to the music. Whether a realist or a pessimist, Vassiliou is a demanding host. While he is usually surrounded by fans who speak positively about his work, he rarely shares their sentiments. In fact, Vassiliou is openly disappointed with his career as a *magazi* owner and as a rebetika musician; he barely acknowledges the astounding success he has had at both. He stated:

> One should never play rebetika as a job. It detracts from the music. One should play for oneself. When you perform rebetika as a profession, you have to entertain people, to play the songs that they want. Rebetika is not that kind of music. One should play songs for oneself, songs that one likes. You play songs that give you *kefi*. It is rare that a musician will be in just the right mood to play a song requested by someone else. No, rebetika should have nothing to do with making money. It is music you should play for yourself. (Vassiliou 2008)

His clarity of thought, ability to command a room with his presence and his musical talent have rendered him influential to scores of Greek youth who have spent evenings in Rebetiki Istoria. But the thirty years of working at night in Rebetika Istoria have been difficult. Vassiliou declares:

> Life as a rebetika musician is difficult. First of all, you work at night so you live on a different schedule from your family. And working at night, you see everything. All of the negativities that Athens has to offer. Don't forget that most people who come to Rebetiki Istoria come with the intention of listening to good music but also of drinking. That puts a lot of stress on me as the owner, making sure everything runs smoothly. It is not a pretty life and I would not wish it on anyone. (Vassiliou 2008)

Vassiliou has married and divorced twice. His two young children study musical instruments but Vassiliou does not want them to work towards a career as rebetika musicians.

II. INTRODUCING PAVLOS VASSILIOU'S REBETIKO IDEOLOGY

Vassiliou's Words on Rebetika Culture

During the many hours I spent listening to Vassiliou speak, I realized that recurring themes shaped his speech, his rebetika performance and his life. Vassiliou is marked by a disappointment in contemporary Greek society. He detests social injustice, rejects unfair distribution of power, and does not tolerate the uneven and arbitrary distribution of wealth that permeates Greek society. He expressed these sentiments in the following way:

> People with no more skills than you or I make three, four, five and ten times more money. Why? Because when it was needed, daddy had the money to pay the right people. This isn't America here. You don't get a job here because you deserve it. No one is concerned with what is or is not fair here… You tell me, *you* tell me! Is it fair that one person goes to the supermarket and buys organic tomatoes that cost one Euro each while someone else has to take the bus across town just to find

> tomatoes he can afford? And I am not talking about people who haven't worked. I am talking about those who have worked hard all of their lives, harder than everyone else and yet they still struggle to put food on the table.

Vassiliou has shaped his Rebetiki Istoria culture according to these beliefs. He consistently maintains the lowest prices of any Athens *rebetadiko* and gears the entertainment towards the Greek youth and the working class. He has been known to buy drinks for customers who cannot afford them and he is always more than generous with his staff. No matter the business on a particular night, no staff member or musician ever leaves without payment, a rare exception for Greek musicians. In addition, he does not distinguish between his customers. On occasion, well-known politicians and television personnel have asked Vassiliou to have a table ready at their disposal whenever they should show up to Rebetiki Istoria. Vassiliou always responds in the same way: "Call me a few days in advance and reserve a table. I do not distinguish between my patrons."

Whether discussing rebetika or about contemporary Greek culture, Vassiliou is passionate in his speech. He often raises his voice or sets his glass down on the table with vigour in order to emphasize a point. He is known to engage in vehement arguments with his patrons over Greek politics and never tires of political debates. In addition, he is never shy to contradict an opinion about Greek music or society that he finds offensive and will always take the time to explain thoroughly the mistake the other has made. His adamant personality has led many to label him as "old-school" and to afford him laudatory respect as one of a handful of "authentic" rebetika musicians.

Whereas one might describe Vassiliou's words as overly dramatic, another might praise the acuteness of his perceptions. Certain fundamental beliefs guide his speech: Vassiliou believes that Greece is an experimental pawn in the European Union, a system

that works for the interests of an elite few. He believes that the world economy is determined by the American dollar. And he believes that the corrupt free market economy in Greece is based on crooked practices and extensive favor-trading. He commented upon the extensive economic corruption in Greece:

> The farmer that has three villas… it just does not add up. We are a country of corruption and favor-trading. Just take a look at an aerial photograph of Athens in the 1940s compared to an aerial photograph today. You won't recognize the country. High up into the mountains and into the forests you will find illegal villas. How did these people pay for such great villas on their wages? How can a thirty-year old civil servant own two villas and a Mercedes? Why does the maid for a major corporation receive an 80,000 Euro wage? Why does the driver from DEKO receive an annual salary of 100,000 Euro? How come the man next to you who has less ability, less knowledge and less talent than you gets a high-paying job because he has connections?

To Counter Misrepresentations of Rebetika

To a Greek, the term rebetika is hardly innocent because it carries a controversial history and musical value that few have agreed upon. The music has been characterized both as Greek urban folk song and as inherently destructive of Greekness. It has been scorned by the Right wing for inhibiting the Westernization of Greece and scorned by the Left wing for its references to drugs and decadent nature; it was celebrated in the 1980s by the socialist government as representative of Greece but also persecuted in the 1930s for its supposed harmful psychological effects on the Greek people. It has been exaggeratedly associated with drug use, with early-twentieth century street life and culture, with the *teke* and with jail. Vassiliou rejects all such exaggerated associations. A basic platform in Rebetiki Istoria is to tell the history of rebetika correctly and in a manner that Vassiliou believes does justice to the music and musicians.

Pavlos Vassiliou's promotion of rebetika is necessary and purposeful in contemporary Greece, a nation undergoing major structural reforms. Vassiliou tells the history of rebetika as music of an innocent people: the musicians like the music were persecuted unfairly. They struggled economically and were harassed for their way of life and for the music they played. "A rebetiko song that represents this sentiment? There are any number of them. How about the one we just sang, '*Kato ap'to Svisto Fanari*' [Under the Burned-out Streetlight] by Mitsakis?"

Under, the blown-out lamplight
There sleeps a young man
With no money in his pocket
What dream could he be having?

A stranger wherever he goes
At whatever door he knocks
He doesn't even have a mother to go to
At least to wash his clothes.

For a house he has the blown-out lamplight
And for a lamp, for a lamp he has the moon
And you passersby, passersby that go by
His rest, his rest,
Be sure not to disrupt it.

Greek government reforms profoundly affect the everyday lives of the Greek people. As such, rebetika songs that sing out social injustice and difficult economic times resonate with a Greek audience.

The term "Rebetiki Istoria" also has special associations for the Greek people, and Vassiliou works with and against these in order to shape his rebetiko culture. For example, the word "*istoria*" [history] bears great significance in Greece. Indeed, the contemporary Greek nation as well as the rest of the Western world highlights Greek history perhaps more than any other. Even the word history in numerous languages

(English, French, Spanish etc.) finds its origins in the ancient Greek word "*istoria*" which meant "learning by inquiry." In Modern Greek, "*istoria*" is used both to refer to the notion of "history" as a chronological series of significant events, and as a "story," a tale about something that happened in the past. Yet whichever meaning one chooses, "*H istoria tis Elladas*" [the history of Greece] or "*na sou po mia istoria*" [Let me tell you a story], the term history maintains the connotation of being true. Indeed, the name Rebetiki Istoria suggests that one will learn the history of rebetika but also witness the making of rebetika history. As stated in the exodus magazine,

> The name Rebetiki Istoria [Rebetika History] surely was not given to this establishment by chance. And if it was indeed given by chance, it was truly the most appropriate, as inside its walls, history was written with rebetiko song as its protagonist: A history whose chapters were autographed by the authentic representatives of the genre, by the greatest *rebetes* of all time who have passed through here, giving its stage its significance and its fame. And its history continues to be written in the renovated neoclassical building on Ippokratous Street, high up near Leoforos Alexandras.[37]

Presenting rebetika history correctly has been the focus of Vassiliou's lifelong career. For example, when a patron boldly characterized rebetika as "music of the underworld," Vassiliou became immediately outraged:

> The underworld? What underworld? Those musicians weren't from any underworld. Not with the meaning people have given it. Bayiaderas,[38] when he wrote "I Lived Alone Without Love" he was of the underworld? When Markos wrote "A Small Married Girl of the scent of May," and in another strophe he wrote, "A Small married girl of a beautiful dream," what could that person be? What else could he have been other than a pure little soul? An angel. He couldn't have hurt an ant. An ant!

[37] "*Exodos* Magazine" (Exit Magazine). Rempetiki Istoria. [www.exodos.gr/nightlife/rempetiki-istoria/] Visited November 15, 2007.
[38] Rebetiko musician Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas" (1903-1985). He composed a number of popular rebetika songs including "*San Magemeno to Mualo Mou*" (There is a Spell on my Mind). See Chapter Four of this dissertation for a musical analysis of this song.

With the name Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou suggests that patrons will learn about the true history of the music and witness the making of rebetika history. In addition, it suggests that the rebetiko knowledge acquired in the *rebetadiko* is historically accurate and therefore negates different understandings of rebetiko history and culture. As he often did, Vassiliou revealed this fundamental metanarrative that shapes his Rebetiki Istoria culture in a casual conversation. This conversation serves as a characteristic example of Vassiliou's idiosyncratic telling of his ideas about rebetika, and also illustrates my learning of his arguments. The following narrative presents this conversation.

***

One evening in mid-November, 2008, Vassiliou ended our evening musical discussion early. "Let's go change a light bulb," he said abruptly. The bulb that illuminated the wooden sign high up outside the *rebetadiko* had blown out. As I steadied the tall rickety ladder, I stared up at the Rebetiki Istoria sign noting its Byzantine-style lettering. Vassiliou glanced down at me over his glasses and said, "this little sign it doesn't show up so much, isn't that so. Ah well, never mind." Indeed, the first time I visited Rebetiki Istoria, I walked past the building quite a number of times before realizing that this modest neoclassical structure with its tiny wooden sign housed the *rebetadiko*. "Where did you find the idea for the name Rebetiki Istoria?" I asked. Vassiliou did not respond right away but I was accustomed to waiting for him to answer my questions. He climbed down the ladder, folded it up and returned it to the owner of the gas station next door. "Hey, Thodore, I'm leaving it here, ok? Thank you friend!"[39] Thodoris popped his head out from under the car hood and waved.

[39] Thodore is the imperative form of the name Thodoris.

Back inside the *rebetadiko* I helped lay out the tablecloths and light the candles. The other musicians had gathered around the table and were tuning their instruments. Haris and Vangelis were discussing a particular song and Niko was sitting quietly listening to their conversation. Vangelis took long drags of his cigarette. The waitress brought their drinks: A vodka and orange juice for Vangelis and a whiskey and water for Haris and Niko. We joined them and began our usual conversations. Vassiliou turned to me suddenly and said, "As we were saying…" He then offered an explanation to my question and as usual challenged me to think more deeply about rebetika and its history and about the writing of national history. I will quote him at length:

> The name Rebetiki Istoria came from an LP of that name. In the mid-1970s, a man by the name of Costas Hatzidoulis edited original rebetika recordings and converted them to LP. This was the first release of original rebetiko recordings of the time. You couldn't buy rebetika recordings anywhere at the time. And I opened Rebetiki Istoria in order to pay homage to this music, to these musicians. I wanted to teach young people about this traditional Greek music that had never received its proper recognition… a music to which people have done whatever they want, they have degraded it, misrepresented it, cheapened it in order to make money. Few people took the time to learn about the music, about its history, about its social implications. People had taken rebetika to the *skiladiko* and people threw flowers and broke plates and danced on the tables. That is not what rebetika is. So I wanted to provide a place for people, mostly for young people to learn about rebetika as it should be played and enjoyed. And of course history was written here as well. Thirty years of history. Some of the greatest names of rebetika have passed through here: Sotiria Bellou, Takis Binis, Stelios Soulyioultzis. (Vassiliou 2007)

In his reply, Vassiliou revealed an underlying network of ideologies about the music and its history. He not only affirmed his earnest devotion to rebetika but also his fundamental beliefs about the music: rebetika is traditional Greek music; it has not received its deserved recognition; few people are well-informed about the music and its history; contemporary understanding and enjoyment of rebetika do injustice to the music and to Greekness.

***

Vassiliou works hard to protect rebetika from corruption in contemporary performance. For example, Rebetiki Istoria patrons often ask to sing a song along with the musicians; this almost always results negatively, as few patrons want or know how to sing in the early rebetika style. Usually, the patron will choose one of the most famous and overplayed songs and sing it in the style of a recent recording made by a contemporary singer. Thus the request only prompts Vassiliou to lash out pessimistic and harsh words about the state of Greek music and culture. On one occasion, a long-time patron and well-known musician proudly handed Vassiliou a recording he had just released. The following conversation ensued.

VASSILIOU: "What is this?"

PATRON: "It is my recording. We just released it and I wanted you to have a copy.

VASSILIOU: "Your recording?"

PATRON: "Yeah, you know it's a mix of songs. But we have a rebetika song on there that we've jazzed up."

VASSILIOU: "What have you done to it? Jazzed it up? I don't know what that means."

(*awkward silence*)

"My friend, why do that to the traditional music? Just leave it alone. Play any other kind of music you like and record until you are blue in the face."

Before the patron could utter another word, Vassiliou handed the compact disc to me with a look of utter annoyance and the conversation ended.

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou is as much a musician as he is a teacher about Greek music, history and culture. To him, rebetika songs are a product of modernity, a response to life in burgeoning Greek cities. Yet, at the same time, they criticize this modernity by expressing the problems of the modern world. By echoing the voices of the early rebetika musicians, Vassiliou teaches his audiences to resist the negative aspects of contemporary Greek modernity that he believes are even more prominent today. He believes that performing rebetika in any other way delivers the opposite message.

Pavlos Vassiliou's Beliefs About Music and About the Greek Nation

That music represents the nation is a truth amongst Rebetiki Istoria musicians. As a matter of fact, Vassiliou believes that Greek music is proof of the strength of national Greek culture, a fact that the following conversation attests. It began with Vassiliou saying:

> Since the founding of the Greek nation, if not to say beforehand, Greeks have been slaves to Europe. Ever since ancient times Greeks have struggled against foreign occupations. Struggled to obtain their freedom. And struggled to maintain their culture. The fact that they were able to preserve so much of their customs and of their culture and tradition is proof of the incredible strength of the Greek people and their traditions. And proves the strength of the Greek language. The continued use of the Greek language from ancient times to today is proof of its inherent strength. It is not important that it has changed form that we do not speak exactly as we spoke in ancient times. It is still the same language. (Vassiliou 2007)

To further understand him, I delicately proposed that the idea of the nation was a purely modern phenomenon that arose with the ideals of the French revolution. This triggered a prolonged discussion about the nation in which Vassiliou adamantly stated that it does not matter that ancient Greeks, or Greeks in Roman times did not use the word nation to characterize their unity:

> The idea that Greeks were a united people with shared language religion and customs and a geographical territory is the same thing. The Greek nation was always the Greek nation even if it did not have clearly defined borders. When ancient Greeks came under attack, they all joined together to defend and fight. You should think of ancient Greece as you think of modern Greece, how each island has its own governor and people of the law.

Vassiliou implies cultural continuity from ancient to Modern Greece tracing a common tradition of music.

> From mythological times, Greeks had song and instruments in all of their activities. Music was present in the most tragic moments and in the most mundane. Just look at all the instruments they had: the lyre, the *avlos* [wind instrument], the guitar, *krotala* [wooden spoons]… In all of the ancient tragedies, Gods and demigods are depicted with instruments in their hands- for example Apollo and Sappho- and poetry always had musical accompaniment- think of the work of Pindavros, Anakreontas and Homer. The phenomenon of the Greek worship of music continued in the following centuries as Greeks sang and set to music their joy as well as their pain. In music they described the events that they lived—wars, slavery, indigence, persecution, bring a refugee, uprooting of populations, civil wars etc. They always used their inherent talent to articulate the most burning issues (from political to social)- at times through satire and at times not. And then we have many images of the leaders of the revolution of 1821 in which they are depicted in moments of pause after a battle playing an instrument, mainly *tambourades* [a variety of plucked stringed instruments], an instrument closely related to the contemporary bouzouki, as well as *flogeres*, *daoulia* and *gaides* [various wind instruments], santouri, guitars, *klarina* [variation on the clarinet]. And by singing improvised words, they glorified the different events during the hours of battle- sometimes satirizing and sometimes mourning their lost comrades.

To Vassiliou, Greek music has always been an expression of the experiences of the Greek people.

Vassiliou's understanding of rebetika is intertwined with his leftist ideals for the nation and with defining an alternative Greek national identity. This national identity would foreground the people and not the state, Greek culture as opposed to foreign culture and life values other than that of obtaining monetary profit. Of primary importance in his choice of rebetika is the fact that early rebetika performances had little

to do with making money. According to Vassiliou, this gave them a more genuine character. Keeping these complex ideals about rebetika in mind, I asked Vassiliou to select a representative rebetiko song.

> YONA: Is there one song that characterizes rebetika for you?
>
> VASSILIOU: It is difficult to choose one song to characterize rebetika because rebetika songs are from real life. They cover the gamut of experiences and emotions of the urban working class. If I had to choose… well… there are two songs by Markos: the first is "*To Portofoli*"(The Wallet) and the second is "*Pseftikos Einai o Dounias*" (The World is Fake). These are the essence of rebetika. And they are still popular today, and do you know why? Because they are diachronic. And they apply to today's society even better than they did then.

Here are the song lyrics:

> "The Wallet" (1935) by Markos Vamvakaris
>
> In today's world this everybody knows
> The strength of a man lies in his wallet.
> If they learn that you have a wallet in your pocket
> They tell you that you are a gentlemen, that you are just as you should be
> Your friends want you and everyone comes near you
> As soon as they learn that you have a wallet
> The wallet, what do you want, it has great happiness
> In every difficult time, it makes you a brave young man.
>
> "The World is Fake" (1949) by Markos Vamvakaris
>
> The World is fake and our life is fake
> Since one day our bodies will go into the black earth
> Whoever has money his door is not left alone
> There will come one sudden moment, like the candle he will extinguish
> We must enjoy this fake life
> We must have a good time however we can
> Charon will wilt money and beauty
> In this fake world only evil remains.

Vassiliou reiterates once more the fact that rebetika musicians did not perform with monetary profit as a goal. In this way, rebetika performance differed greatly from its contemporary place in Greece.

VASSILIOU: Rebetika did not have money as an element. When those people began [Piraeus quartet] eh, they all had other jobs. They didn't expect to make a living off of rebetika. In other words, to make enough money to live off of. Do you understand? Simply they liked rebetika, they went to *tekedes*, they went to small taverns and they played. Most of them played for their own *meraki* [passion, enjoyment].

YONA: How do you know that?

VASSILIOU: I know because there simply was no access, no easy access. We are talking about in the beginning. In the beginning it is always that way, there is no easy access for those people to reach, for their work to be recorded. Eh, when, when they started to go to the studios, to those rooms in hotels and they recorded some songs, eh, before they had to go through a lot, a very big path, it made them into more professionals, more correct in their playing and in their songs and in the rest. In other words, Frankosyriani may have been recorded in 1935-36, but most likely, Markos had written it five years earlier. And it was not easy to disseminate songs via the radio, the radio that existed, the state radio. The state radio, never played rebetika. So. Eh, and the technological means did not exist, neither recording, nor pickup or anything else. There was the phonograph that was owned by specific *magazia* and specific people. There did not exist the same ability as we have today to listen to a song that came out yesterday. A song could be recorded today and it could be heard one year later. Most songs were produced in the factories in England or in America. But the common person did not have a phonograph. They were really expensive. And that is why instead of sitting at home listening to music, the musicians went to *tavernakia* [little taverns] with their instruments.

As I will discuss in Chapter Five, during the early-twentieth century, rebetika contrasted with state-supported versions of Greek music in most respects. But the Greek people's understanding of rebetika was often exaggerated and inaccurate. In his rendition of the history of rebetika, Vassiliou explains that people exaggerated and misunderstood the associations of the music with drugs and with low life. It is against these associations that Vassiliou shapes his contemporary rebetiko culture.

> The classical period of rebetiko beginning in the 1930s would cause great divides in the superficial showy society of Athens… In contrast with the rich in Athens, were people experiencing poverty, hunger, unemployment… There was great suffering. Great suffering and a great indifference by the rich and by the Greek state about this misfortune. This difficult situation drove some people to petty crime and even to drugs (hashish) in an effort to forget their sorrows. And it was

> this injustice, indifference and suffering that the *rebetes* sang about: it is what drove them to sing. And this is why the state during the Metaxas period started to outlaw the music and to ban the songs. The bouzouki too came to be outlawed, stigmatized as an instrument of hashish dens, descents into sin and so on. Many years passed to restore the value of the instrument in the conscious of the people.

Vassiliou believes that life in contemporary Greece is similar to that of the early-twentieth century. Greeks remain overly concerned with showing that they are European and that they are up to date with the latest trends, even if this entails denying their own traditions. And social and economic injustice prevail. In the next section, I discuss Vassiliou's disappointment in contemporary Greece and examine why he believes early rebetika songs maintain continued and even increased relevance in Greece today.

The Disappointing Present in Pavlos Vassiliou's Modern Greece

Vassiliou's use of rebetika as the source of an alternative Greekness comes in response to broader ideological concerns about contemporary Greek society and about understandings of the Greek national identity. Vassiliou worries that Greeks are losing sense of their national traditions and national identity; To Vassiliou, contemporary Greek culture is about mimesis and showing off. It is about taking out loans to buy a fancy villa or to buy a big fancy car with no concern about one's future inability to pay back this loan.

> In Greece, there is extreme wealth and extreme poverty. And not much in between. And many people who are wealthy became wealthy through dishonest ways. Or their parents did. And then they sit around in villas they did not build, drive cars with money they did not earn and so on. All we can do is hope for justice. Though the problem is larger, and not just a Greek problem. It has just become more visible in Greece. In a world governed by large companies, by Bill Gates, by the Bilderberg group. The problem is much larger. (Vassiliou 2008)

The uneven distribution of wealth has reached an extreme, he says:

VASSILIOU: It is those people who exploit the whole situation. And unfortunately there are enough of them who make money, on the shoulders of other people. In other words, money that isn't, how should we say, justified. It is not ethically earned, let's put it like that. And they justify their prices by citing the rise in gasoline or some other product in the market, if it has no connection with that which they sell. I buy whiskey for Rebetiki Istoria. Do you know that compared to before we switched to the Euro, it is six times the price? Six times the price!

YONA: Well, isn't the freedom to determine one's prices the essence of free economy?

VASSILIOU: That is what free economy is. That's the "good" of free economy. But there should be limits. And one needs to take the situation in Greece into context. When the price of lettuce is raised from one Euro to two. One Euro today represents 350 drachmas. When we had the drachma currency, lettuce was 30 drachmas. In other words, you bought ten lettuces for the price of one lettuce today! When we switched to the Euro, our wages did not increase but prices rose exorbitantly…

The seller's justification is the rise in gas prices. When he loads lettuce lets say from Marathon which is thirty or forty kilometers away and drives them to the open fruit market, how much gas does he burn? Does he burn 3 Euros? With the crazy expense of gas will he burn 2 Euros? Or 3? Coming and going, does he burn six Euros worth of gas? So, his entire trip is paid for with three lettuces. How much profit does he make with his increased prices. Do you know? This man is a thief. He is a robber.

To Vassiliou, Greek modernity is synonymous with the decline of the Greek nation. As he is a member of this modernity and of the Greek nation, the decline is also personal.

As holds true for so many modern figures, Vassiliou is a product of the very modernity he tries to reject. His focus on the past, and on improving the present by incorporating a particular imagined past has been the metanarrative that has defined Greek modernity since the beginning of the Modern Greek nation. As discussed in Chapter Two, the most prominent evidence of this metanarrative is the incorporation of ancient ruins into the Modern Greek *topos*. I propose that this national joining of past and present fundamentally shapes the way Greeks deal with the more immediate past as well. Vassiliou is a poignant example. Quite often he attempts to illustrate the greatness of

rebetika through its comparison with ancient Greek ruins, urging others to respect the musicians and their music like they respect the Acropolis.

Yet Vassiliou's words are tinged with despair about the present condition. For Vassiliou and for many other Greeks, the 13th-century Quarrel of the ancients and moderns has not yet been resolved. While many 13th-century intellectuals doubted whether modern society could ever reach the greatness of ancient society, Vassiliou doubts whether modern musicians could ever meet the greatness of the original rebetika musicians. He believes that with the exception of certain *laïka*, after rebetika, Greek music has offered nothing of value to the Greek people. Vassiliou asserts:

> Rebetiko is loved by those who have gotten to know it and who feel it. I, my friend, I do not listen to anything else. Ok, if you give me rock to listen to, I'll listen to it. Because I grew up in the time of rock. When the Greek youth became disgusted with all that cheesy music of the time and turned instead to the greats of rock: we listened to Pink Floyd and to Santana and I don't remember to what else. And we were right to. And we listened to Savvopoulos, Hatzis, Arleta. I grew up I tell you in 1967, 1968, Lambrakis youth, ok? If you didn't listen to this, you listened to Zankinthinos or Kokkotas. I'm not saying that it was ugly music. It was good if you wanted to go out on a date. But *rebetiko* has a different culture. We can compare it to blues, to that type of music, yes. But not with that.

For Vassiliou, those who understand rebetika and who live the music do not listen to any other style of music. No other music could express them as well. As such, Vassiliou often "preaches to the choir" in Rebetiki Istoria, as many of his patrons already share his viewpoints. But Vassiliou has no hope for the present or for the future. As much as Rebetiki Istoria is an attempt to spread rebetiko music and culture in a historically responsible way, it is also a decadent reminder of the downfall of contemporary Greece.

Another key element shaping Vassiliou's beliefs is the idea that one cannot write a rebetiko song today. Despite the fact that the content of rebetiko songs resonate with life in contemporary Greece, too much has changed in musical and verbal expression for

one to be able to compose a genuine rebetiko song. Vassiliou claims that the distinctive sound of early rebetika songs and performance style was the result of the relevance of the lyrics to the musicians' lives. For example, Vassiliou characterizes Sotiria Bellou (1921-1997) as the epitome of rebetika singing for her great vocal abilities but also for her personal connection to the songs:

> VASSILIOU: Bellou couldn't sing without feeling what she was singing. Without crying what she was singing. She sang about certain topics that spoke to her. Poverty, society, mothers *et cetera*. Even though she didn't write a lot of the songs she sang, people knew what songs to write for her, they knew what topics would speak to her. She did not sing the songs, she "cried" them. She felt what she was singing. She did not sing happy songs... She had a nice family, especially for the times, she had a proper family… Then later she left, and never went back… She lived a life that was harder than what a man could live. At age sixteen she threw vitriol in her husband's face and left.

Being unsure about what classifies a song as rebetika or not, I asked Vassiliou to clarify.

> YONA: So, if I write a song today and if I could give it to Sotiria Bellou to sing, will it be rebetika?
>
> VASSILIOU: It won't be rebetika because it would have to touch certain social themes, themes that were directly related to a certain time. And you would have to use certain words that those early musicians used that would be foreign to your speech. So it would be somewhat fake and put on. Look, it depends upon when a song was written. If it is written now no matter whom you give it to sing it, it won't be rebetika. It wouldn't be rebetika.... It would just be *laïka*. However, if Bellou were to sing it, it would have the color, the color… it would be helped by Bellou's voice and it would become, we could say, a little rebetika, a little bit rebetika. But not rebetika. Above all, rebetika is so valuable because it is art. A great art form. It is also because of the truth of the lyrics, the quality. The reference to one specific period in Greece that was real. It does not refer to anything for the sake of making a rhyme- it speaks about what was going on at that time in Greece in Athens, Syros, Thessaloniki, Patra. Rebetika songs speak the truth.

This is why Vassiliou adamantly believes that one cannot write a rebetika song today. Vassiliou's argument is idiosyncratic and many other musicians such as Vangelis Korakakis and Agathonas Iakovidis disagree, citing some of their own compositions as

belonging to the rebetiko genre. When I asked rebetiko musician Agathonas Iakovidis whether one can compose a rebetiko song today he told me that he was in the midst of producing a recording of his own rebetika songs. "Of course one can write rebetika songs today. Why not? I write songs that are the way Markos Vamvakaris would write if he were alive today. Of course the words I use might be a bit different, but the idea is the same and the music is rebetika" (Iakovidis 2007).

For Vassiliou, the most pressing concern is not whether or not some musicians believe they can or cannot write rebetika songs. He is more worried about the difficulties he faces maintaining his *rebetadiko* and the floundering live rebetiko scene. Vassiliou believes that the Greek people and the Greek state have only obstructed and not helped his cause. He blames this on a lack of knowledge about traditional Greek culture, a desire to "become just like everyone else," and an indifference towards the working class. In the following statement, Vassiliou expresses his frustration with the perceived lack of support from the Greek state:

> For all these years, every time they told me to dance, I danced. Every hoop they gave me to jump through, I jumped through. Every new tax they asked me to pay, I paid. Where is the state support for this traditional Greek music form, for me and for all that I have done to preserve it? Every time the state decides to increase the FPA [tax], why do I have to pay the fee to update the cash register? And imagine if I had installed the 20,000 Euro ventilation system and the Plexiglas walls the state required in order to allow patrons to smoke inside Rebetiki Istoria, and now six months later the government decided to ban smoking indoors all together. The hoops that I as a small business owner have to jump through are enormous and often ridiculous. But because Rebetiki Istoria is officially a *kentro diaskedasis* (entertainment center), everyone assumes that I am pulling in enormous amounts of money. No one takes the time to notice that the *rebetadiko* only seats sixty people and that my prices are so low… You tell me: Where is the plaque on the wall protecting Rebetiki Istoria as a national heritage institution? Why does the Greek state not thank me for all that I have done for Greek culture? I will tell you why. State funding goes to the Eurovision Song Contest, that is why. Because Greeks need to show that they are in fashion with everyone else,

> that they are European. All of that is a show… Rebetiki Istoria is a school of traditional Greek music and should be recognized as such.

A Glimpse Into the Decadent Rebetiki Istoria Culture

Vassiliou deals with the difficult realities of contemporary Greece perhaps in the only way he knows how: by looking to an imagined past, to a time when life may have been different. Rebetika songs bring him closer to that time:

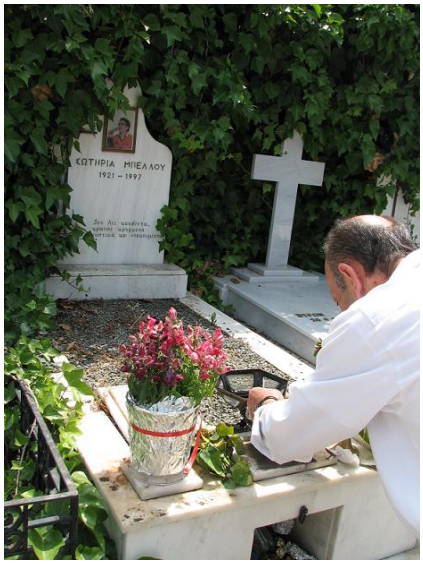
> Let us take things from longer ago, from a time that was different, a time when our ethics and our customs were surely more genuine and human. The populations of different urban centers such as (Athens, Piraeus, Volos, Ermoupoli (Syros), Patra etc.) began to grow from the time of industrialization around the end of the nineteenth to the start of the twentieth century. A new musical current began to emerge with many elements from Byzantine musical tradition and with strong presence of island songs and of the music of the Greek-dominated Asia Minor- for example, the music Greeks performed in Smyrna, Aidini, Prousa and Efesos.

Vassiliou is profoundly nostalgic and even self-pitying about his present condition. While looking to the past, he emphasizes the hopeless but inevitable downfall of contemporary Greece: he recalls greater financial stability before the incorporation of the Euro; he remembers Rebetiki Istoria in the 1990s at the height of its success and the hours he spent listening to the original rebetika musicians perform. Spending time with rebetiko great Vassilis Tsitsanis and attending his performances at the *Harama* are amongst his fondest memories.[40] Vassiliou remembers the evenings he spent with Sotiria Bellou and Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas" who was then old and blind, sitting together at a neighborhood tavern where they ate "traditional Greek foods" like fish and garlic sauce, and drank half-kilos of wine. He remembers farther back in time to the many hours he spent as a young man in the tiny basement tavern in Monastiraki (now closed and blocked off by a tourist

[40] The *Harama* is a well-known nightclub for rebetika and *laïka* performance. Rebetiko greats Vassilis Tsitsanis and Sotiria Bellou were regular performers. It is still popular today though it offers a much broader range of musical entertainment.

shop) drinking wine and listening to a selection of songs on the gramophone. He recalls his idealized childhood years on Skopelos Island, his speech slipping in and out of island dialect. And then he remembers the early-twentieth century, a time that he can only imagine, the classical period of rebetika and he is humbled and awed by the greatness of the musicians.

Figure 3.2: Pavlos Vassiliou lights a candle at the grave of Sotiria Bellou, 2007.



In spite of his nostalgia for "a time more genuine and human" (Vassiliou 2007), Vassiliou is realistic about the past and does not pretend that conditions were any better for the urban working class of the early twentieth century. He tells the early history of rebetika in the following way. I will quote him at length:

> Let us return to the start of the century to look at Athens, a city under creation. A city that keeps its local habits and traditions that begin to change with the arrival of refugees of the Asia Minor catastrophe (1920 and after). Athens therefore, a small city that resembles a village was in all ways underdeveloped. The houses were structured poorly, the roads were nonexistent, the different neighborhoods did not have basic essential needs for its residences. There was no public transportation system. There were neighborhoods outside of the center (near the Acropolis, Omonia, Syntagma etc.) that had not yet been named. The rest of Athens in its majority consisted of wild pastures. It was basically still in the state in which the Turks had abandoned it. There was no infrastructure of any kind. The

supply of water was nonexistent as was every reason of ease indispensible to the survival of the population.

The entertainment of the Athenians remained mostly within the family and was for very specific reasons (weddings, baptisms, name days etc.). Their music was demotic song with demotic instruments (*klarina*, violin, *santouri* etc.). Their dances were the *tsamiko*, *kalamatiano* and *syrto*. And there were holidays like Christmas, Easter and different Saints days where again Athenians partook in team dances and played instruments of Ipeirotic Greece such as the *klarino*.

With the coming of the refugees, of people from Smyrna in 1922, a different way of life began to emerge for the native population… The Smyrnians were more progressive and maintained habits that were more Bohemian. As a commercial center, Smyrna had more contacts with the East and with Europe as well. The Smyrnians were also used to greater comforts and were more accustomed to having a good time. So, the Smyrnians brought their ways and their habits, which were new for the Athenians. They brought their spirit of commerce and their cosmopolitan behavior that would make some Athenians hate them, some jealous of them and some mimic them.

They created the first *magazia*, mainly outdoor beer halls that offered food, music, and beer, and indoor Café Aman. The Smyrnian women with unique taste in their appearance made the native Greeks look at them with some circumspection as they watched the immigrants walk around in public and have a good time with men in the different *stekia* [hangouts]. In contrast, Athenian women could never appear before in those different public spaces even with their husbands.

The Smyrnians also brought new musical sounds and instruments such as *kanonakia*, *santouria*, violins, mandolins, etc. that emphasized a Byzantine sound. There began then the artistic mixing of the different artists who came from Asia Minor such as Dalgas, Nouros, Atraidis, Papazoglou, Asikis and other important creators. They brought new dances as well such as the *zeïbekiko*, karsilamas, tsifteteli, *hasapiko* and others. Along with the musicians and singers who were already in Athens, they created a new form of music that would give us many of the rebetiko masterpieces we know today.

But during this period of great growth and change, most Greeks of the urban centers endured an ugly economic situation and great political and social turmoil. During this time, new musical groups and sounds emerged from *bouzoukobaglamades* [bouzoukia and baglamades], instruments that never before had been lauded by society in any way. They were instruments of closed spaces with a sound that was *mourmouriko* and full of complaint.[41] Talented urban Greeks sang about the difficulties of life in the cities.

[41] *Mourmouriko* refers to the style of song that is sung at low volume and without specific rhythm.

These songs later came to be known as rebetika.

Vassiliou tells the story of rebetika as the music of the innocent worker who struggled financially in the growing capitalist system of Athens and in other burgeoning cities. He describes the emergence of classical rebetika as follows.

> Let us take a cinematic look back in time when the first songs from the great *rebetes* appeared. The scenario is as follows: A small tavern, just large enough for ten or twenty tired and poor wage earners who worked with great effort and by doing a thousand and two different jobs many times on foot and illegal and sometimes chased and sometimes not by the police, just to make enough money to survive. Jobs such as trash collectors, vendors, petty thieves, porters, beggars, junk collectors, among others. All in an effort to be able to feed their children and to teach them to read if that was possible. It was a great dream and passion that almost never was realized…
>
> So, here we are in a little tavern. Underneath the barrels of Mediterranean retsina at makeshift little tables, two by two three by three to drink wine and discuss quietly. At one small table two musicians with a baglama and a bouzouki play mostly to create an atmosphere. At the other four five tables are those tired people with a half-kilo of retsina and as an appetizer sardines or *regka* (small fish) to fool their hunger they brought from their homes. Two three barrels with Spataneiko [wine from Spata] and sometimes wandering musicians that brought with them an instrument sometimes a bouzouki sometimes a baglama. And the classic tavern owner [*boufes*] with his hat who usually sold wine or wrote bills based on a system of trust on the small tavern blackboard. Sometimes in one of those basement wine cellars there could have been a gramophone keeping the patrons company…
>
> In those spaces therefore classical rebetika was born. Amongst those simple people it first spoke. It healed their worries, it made them forget their troubles. Since in its lyrics they saw their lives and were going through. Likewise, the rebetika musician and singer having exactly and going through the same problems as them identified with the people of the *magazi*.

Listening to this description and knowing Vassiliou's Leftist views, I presumed that the Greek Communist party would promote rebetika as music of the people. Research informed me that was not the case. Rebetika and the Greek Communist party have a mottled history, and KKE often scorned the music, promoting instead the music of Mikis Theodorakis, Russian leftist songs and songs about Che Guevara translated into Greek.

Rebetika and Communism: A Complex Relationship

Unable to fully grasp the causes of this, I asked Vassiliou about the relationship between rebetika and Communism. I knew that rebetika had been the subject of a thirty-year debate in the Left-wing Greek Press beginning in the late 1930s, as journalists, scholars and musicologists debated the value and Greekness of the music.

> VASSILIOU: That is a conversation, Yianna that needs a lot of time. Well, okay. Let's start with rebetika. No, let's start with Communism. So. Communism is a social system that revolves around, that has as a vision, the elimination of injustice from the world. To stop those who take the rights away from the weakest. The weakest who have no other means to resist, no other way to fight back. It is a social justice system. In other words, its intent is to reduce social exploitation of the majority of the Greek people. But most of the exploited, they do not know how to resist and thus cannot. They lack the spiritual education, the academic education, the right direction, and so they cannot resist, all that they go through, the oppression, the exploitation, what we call, injustice.
>
> Okay. Now, rebetika. The rebetika song is a song basically of urban centers. Urban centers are Athens, are Thessaloniki. They are the cities in which rebetika were written. Eh, usually, all of the industries and factories were in the urban centers. For many reasons. Because if one built a factory in the suburbs, if one went somewhere in the wild, that head of the factory would have to build accommodations and houses somewhere near there, so that the workers could live near their workplace. Here however, in the urban centers, the factory heads did not have such a problem. They went outside into the road and collected workers. If someone was missing, they went out into the road and found a replacement. Therefore, a lot of problems were resolved.
>
> So, the rebetiko song is of urban centers. It was created from a lot of oppression. People who knew how to express themselves through music resisted injustice through rebetika. They were able to separate themselves from their situation and find a means to resist. These people, though they may not have been formally educated, their level was in many ways quite high.
>
> YONA: Were the rebetika musicians Communists? It seems they would be.
>
> VASSILIOU: Very few were politically involved. Ioannis Kyriazis, Sotiria Bellou and some others were. But look: During the early twentieth century, the Communist Party was still young and could not gather all the masses. And of course many members of the proletariat did not follow the correct political line for many other reasons. For example, one person might have believed strongly in God. Communism and fearing God do not match for 1002 reasons. But they were

aware of the situation and they were aware of the injustices towards the working class, and those who had special talent would formulate their experiences, their worries, this injustice into rebetika songs.

YONA: Why was the Communist party so resistant to rebetika? As a music that tells the trials of the urban working class, I would imagine that the party would be so proud of it.

VASSILIOU: The Greek Communist Party did not accept rebetika. The songs talk about death, drugs, *tsamboukades* [acts showing ones toughness], about the decadence of human nature. And the *rebetes* left their lives in the hands of fate. They did not have their rights as workers organized in their minds. They did not have the antagonism in them that a communist needs to have about how to get those rights that he deserves. And some rebetiko songs speak about a way of life that is foreign to Communism. Wine. Hashish. Drugs. Jails. Exiles. Illegal stuff. That is why the party did not accept it. They never accepted that part of people…

Look, art, according to Communism, must serve the needs of the people, or of politics, or of a specific class. For example, Beethoven did not serve the needs of the people. He wrote his music for a class of people that was very far from the working class. So: whatever art from poetry to anything, communism believes it has to be stratified. It has to be placed analogously. A poet like Kavvadias or Cavafy cannot write poems that are meant for a certain class and be considered the poet of the aristocracy. We can't say that the songs of Markos are fit for the Greek aristocracy. They are socially and politically totally foreign to them.

But at some point, the party got over this. Not that they accept rebetika songs that have as their main subject drugs. But they got over their prejudice against rebetika because this was the art that a portion of the poor people was producing. Whether they wanted it or not, they were proletariat workers. And KKE is believed to be the party that expresses the popular class, the proletariat, the poor, the workers. You can't decide to throw out a portion of the proletariat because it plays rebetika. Rebetika became an art form that one could not doubt whether one believed in capitalism, communism or socialism. And its rejection of rebetika was also due to the specific people who were leading the party. It may have been as much an ideological issue as merely a matter of personal taste.

YONA: In other words, because rebetika is an art form of such high quality it is resistant to such criticism?

VASSILIOU: Right. Rebetika is a work of art. The moment you are dealing with an art form, you cannot belittle it and decide you don't like it because part of it does not match Communism. No one can throw out something one believes has a bad spot when it is the art of the people. No Communist can deny the Picasso Guernica that refers to war. It is a work with value. It defines a specific time and a specific art. It cannot become an impediment to artists to come that the artist may

> not have voted for Communism. Art is art. The work is the work. If we take now the intentions of the Communist Party, the Party shows the people what is right and wrong according to its ideology. Now, if someone in the Party does not receive the right cultural direction. Or out of personal taste if one happens to hate rebetika and love Attik or Gounaris, well this is not good for rebetika. He will find ways to put down the art that he does not like and to find fault in it. But art is art, no matter how you view it. Its value is not defined by ideology. When a person is an artist, the art comes to him from elsewhere. One cannot paint a picture while having a picture of Stalin above him. He has to separate himself from Stalin's moustache to be able to make a work of art. If someone tells you that when you write your book you have to think this and write that, suddenly your book will become lame.

As a rebetiko musician, Vassiliou also had a complex personal relationship with KKE. He told me about an occasion during the early 1970s when he was invited to perform rebetika for a KKE gathering. When asked not to play certain songs that referenced undesirable themes, Vassiliou refused to comply. He was asked to leave the gathering. In spite of this occurrence, Vassiliou owes much of his intellectual and spiritual education to his interactions with the Communist party at a young age. In addition, he believes that implementing the Communist system in Greece would be an effective means of putting a cap on the extensive political and economic corruption that has greatly weakened the Greek economy.

III. REBETIKA AS THE MEANS FOR A BETTER GREECE

Resisting Mass Culture and a New Music for the Greek Masses

> Greeks have a lethal combination of over-confidence and a lack of knowledge. No one has respect for anything any more. Just look at the Greek music scene. Everyone is a singer.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou 2008

Vassiliou's rebetiko culture of authenticity can be viewed as a product of the forces of capitalization, globalization and Europeanization that he believes threaten

contemporary Greek national culture. With his rebetiko culture, Vassiliou rejects the corruption of Greek music and the popular music scene. He resists mass media culture and its necessary dependence on the free market economy, which turns musical performance into a means of achieving exaggerated monetary profit.

> Contemporary Greek music is shaped by a spirit of hypocritical rivalry and antagonism between major music corporations. It is guided by various politicians who in the name of personal profit promote a kind of Greek culture that has no connection to Greekness. And unfortunately it is these people who play a major role in orienting the younger generations, in making sure that this *topos* has no identity that reminds us of Greece. And they accomplish this with ease. They bombard the youth day and night through the radio and television with its various private channels that play music that bears no relation to Greek reality. It is not the fault of the Greek people that they think that rebetika is the debased music they hear on television, that rebetika culture means throwing flowers, breaking plates and dancing belly-dances on the table. (Vassiliou 2007)

Vassiliou detests contemporary popular music because it is foreign and hybrid, because it is American and homogenizing, and because its musicians are unfairly well paid, robbing resources otherwise available for other genres.

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou promotes rebetika, a particular popular culture, as a national culture, and therefore as a culture of the masses. Yet he does so without the help of the mass media. To clarify Vassiliou's position, Stuart Hall's five broadly-delineated characteristics of popular culture can be applied. According to Hall, popular culture is a) culture that is liked by many people; b) culture that is not high culture; c) culture produced for mass consumption; d) culture that originates from "the people"; e) a neo-Gramscian terrain of ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate classes and cultures (Hall 1996, 8). As such, popular culture draws upon core social beliefs, myths, fears, and imaginings in order to affirm particular extant cultural values. According to these definitions, rebetika is popular culture.

To Vassiliou, rebetika is a high art form; it is meaningful and not a commodity that can be mechanically reproduced unlike much of contemporary Greek culture. As an art form, rebetika has no place on the commercial market. Rather, it needs to be protected from the threat posed by foreign music and the commercial market, which entail pronounced decline in musical standards and authenticity. To Vassiliou, popular media and music are characterized by standardization and perceived individualization (minor differences make them appear to be distinctive when they actually are not). Social theorist Theodor Adorno argued that capitalism fed people with the products of a "culture industry" in order to keep them passively satisfied and politically apathetic. Like Adorno, Vassiliou equates the commercial culture to a factory that produces standardized cultural goods in order to generate profit and to control the masses and manipulate them into passivity.

> Today, those who make a song, they write a song, they give it to me, to you to someone else, who they believe has a good voice. In those times, they rarely did that. Usually the songs were written and the composers, Markos [Vamvakaris], Tsitsanis, they sang too, together. They had their own color, in other words, the singer who would go sing, many times would work with the creator. And the singer then, of those times, whichever singer, Stratos Bellou, Xaskil, lived that thing, they lived the song, and it was in their color. Today what they do is they have a computer that creates lyrics, and a singer or male singer who dances and shakes about. She moves, and only her wings are missing. They don't have any depth or they don't feel that which they are saying. It's that I'm not well my love I'm going to die and don't leave me and I'm not good and I don't know... To listen to a song today you need a dictionary and a degree in psychology just to understand what the composer is trying to say.

Mass popular culture, Vassiliou argues, is the reason for the people's passive satisfaction and lack of interest in overthrowing the capitalist system. In addition, Vassiliou believes that mass culture that is produced through the culture industry causes people to lose sense of the Greek national identity. As such, in Rebetiki Istoria, he promotes rebetika as a

mass culture through non-mass media channels of distribution. His rebetiko performance must be performed live and at a low price. As such Vassiliou hopes to avoid and even overturn the evils of the "culture industry": Vassiliou aims to make rebetika music of the masses but not music for mass consumption.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented Pavlos Vassiliou within the broader fabric of Greek modernity. I positioned him as a leftist intellectual and musician and a distinctly modern figure. I discussed how Vassiliou laments the perceived decline in Greek modernity reflected in the loss of traditional Greek culture and the influx of transnational forces. He rejects this cultural decline through rebetika performance. By creating an authenticity culture that recalls the rebetiko culture of the early-twentieth century, Vassiliou promotes his understanding of historically-correct Greekness. Yet his culture is simultaneously a rejection of and a product of Greek modernity, for it is structured on a unique Greek temporality that combines past and present in creative ways.

CHAPTER FOUR

EARLY REBETIKA AND ITS STYLISTIC AND STRUCTURAL FEATURES

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the musical elements of early rebetika and propose that musical style is a fundamental feature in the classification of a song as rebetika. Musical characteristics have received relatively little scholarly attention in the large rebetiko bibliography: academic discussions generally center on the lyric content and socio-political history of the music. However, musical style is a central factor in defining "authentic" and early rebetika. It is a central tool in Vassiliou's resistance of capitalization and Europeanization. It will form a centerpiece in my ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

I begin my musical discussion with a survey of the wide-ranging definitions that characterize the rebetiko genre historically, socially, and culturally, but not musically. Then, I then present my own definition of rebetika that emphasizes its musical characteristics. Next, I elaborate upon my definition by illustrating the fundamental musical aspects of rebetika—I discuss musical modes, song forms, improvisation, instrumentation and rhythmic structure. I use two representative rebetika songs to illustrate basic musical features: "*Frankosyriani*" (Frankosyrian Girl) (1936) by Markos

Vamvakaris and "*San Magemeno to Mualo Mou*" (There is a Spell on my Mind) (1940) by Dimitris Gongos Bayiaderas. A detailed musical description of these songs as sung by Vassiliou illustrates his "authentic" rebetiko style.

I. AN INTRODUCTION TO REBETIKA

The Term "Rebetika" and a Commodified Music

How and why the term rebetika came to be used to designate this particular body of songs is unclear. Greek and foreign scholars have traced numerous etymological origins of the term rebetika: the old Turkish word "*rebet*" that means outlaw;[42] the Turkish pronunciation of the word "*rou-beit*" that means four-verse (in Arabic, "*roubayiat*" means "four-verse"; a derivation of the Arabic "*boem*" that means bohemian; a derivation of the verb "*rebomai*" that means to rove futilely, to wander like a bum (Savvopoulos 2006, 13-14). Tasos Vournas suggests that rebetika comes from the word *rebet*, a term that originated among the Muslims of Kosovo in Serbia and that means "rebel." Greek musicologists often trace the root of the word *ρεμβ* in the ancient Greek language, that resembles the verb *ρέμβω / ρέμβομαι* ('turn', 'roam', 'rove', 'roll about'). In ancient Greek, the verb in its many forms maintains connotations of vagrancy and idleness: *ρεμβεύω, ρέμπομαι, ρέμπς, ρεμβός, ρεμβάς, ρεμπιτός* (Gauntlett 1984, 90). Today, the etymology of rebetika remains unknown. Perhaps, as Daphne Tragaki suggests, the attempt to determine its origins is indeed a "meaningless archeology" (Tragaki 2007, 24). The constant search for its etymology suggests broader ideological concerns. For example, how do people define rebetika in diverse ways to support ideals for Greek music and Greek national identity?

[42] The word "rebet" has no correlation in contemporary Turkish (Savvopoulos 2006, 13).

Also unknown is how and why the term rebetika was first applied to songs in the early-twentieth century. In fact, the term emerged only long after the music had existed as both an oral and recorded genre. As stated by Gauntlett,

> Rebetika was neither the first nor the only name applied to the songs in question. Indeed, it was recently claimed that the term rebetika *tragoudia* was not authoritatively established for the genre until 1968 when Petropoulos' book by that title first appeared… Other names for the songs [include]: *mangika, mortika, seretika, tsachpinika* and *karipika* seem to be roughly synonymous with rebetika; the terms *vlamika, koutsavakika,* and *mourmourika* appear to be historically and geographically limited, the first two to Athens and Piraeus of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whilst the last has associations with pre-1922 Smyrna. (1984, 82)

In the early-twentieth century, the term rebetika first appeared on records containing various song styles that bore little relation to rebetika as it is understood today. For example, the first song categorized on record jackets as rebetika was *Aponia*,[43] performed by the Greek *Estudiantina* Orchestra sometime between 1910-1912. The song is reminiscent of Western-influenced *cantades* and as described by Panos Savvopoulos, is "light music with urban-popular lyrical content" (2006, 15).[44] In addition, many songs that epitomize the original rebetika style today were not classified as such on their original record jackets (Savvopoulos 2006, 9). The 1930s compositions of Markos Vamvakaris are a telling example. Finally, early rebetika musicians did not characterize their musical output as rebetika.[45]

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[43] Orfeon Record 10188. *Aponia (Rebetiko)* by the *Estudiantina Grecque* [Greek Estudiantina].

[44] The second disc jacket that bore the term rebetika was recorded in Constantinople circa 1913, by the German record company "Favorite Record". On one side of the record was the well-known song "*Tiki Tiki Tak*" interpreted by Giagko Psamathiano. This song is not classified as a rebetika by today's understanding. An entire decade passed before the term rebetika appeared again on a record jacket. According to Panos Savvopoulos, of the ninety-nine records that were published between 1920-32 that bore the term rebetika, ninety-one of the songs can clearly be characterized as "*boemika*" ["bohemian"] and their lyrical content bares no relation to rebetika. Musically, thirty-five are clearly from the genre of *epitheorisi* ["review song"] or "light song" and fifty-six are clearly "urban popular song" (Savvopoulos 2006).

[45] It is worthy of note that the Realist prose writers of the late-19th century, who aspired to portray life of the cities, did not use the word *rebetis* in their description of its novel characters. They used numerous

Vassiliou believes that the rebetiko category was originally used as a sales tactic building new cultural capital. Rebetiko scholars Nearchos Georgiadis, Panos Savvopoulos and Stathis Gauntlett echo this belief. For example, in his article "Mammon and the Greek Oriental Muse: Rebetika as a Marketing Construct," Gauntlett argues that ironically and "despite the ostensibly anti-bourgeois discourse and anti-Western colour associated with some (but not all) rebetika songs, the genre has been a marketing construct throughout its documented evolution" (2005, 180).[46] The arbitrariness of the rebetiko classification is emphasized by the existence of duplicate recordings or multiple records of one same song that categorize it differently.[47] In addition, much contemporary rebetiko packaging plays off of exaggerated stereotypes about the music further building the cultural capital of the term.

A Rebetiko Horizon of Expectations

Before presenting a survey of scholarly definitions of rebetika I discuss the "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 1982) that accompany the term rebetika in contemporary Greece. My initial query about rebetika sources to a reference librarian at the Lilian Voudouri Music Library in Athens alerted me to the fact that the music still maintains a controversial place in contemporary Greece. "Why are you studying rebetika? That is such depressing music. You are wasting your time, making a big deal out of nothing. You

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other terms including i.e. "*mangas,*" "*mortis,*" "*alanis,*" "*tramboukos*" and "*dais*" (Gauntlett 2001, 35). In addition, they also did not refer to the music with the term rebetika, using instead terms like "*koutsavakika*", "*karipika*", and "*ah-vahika*" (Gauntlett 2001, 30-31).

[46] Gauntlett writes that "by the late 1920s the USA branch of Columbia seems to have become particularly enamored of the term "*rebetiko*", using it on a whole sequence of records bearing review-theatre songs including pastiche and parody of low-life songs" (Gauntlett, 2005, 183).

[47] In 1932, Columbia Record published the song "*Tsangaraki*" written by Kostas Skarvelis and interpreted by Rita Abatzi without the term "*rebetiko*" on the disc jacket (Columbia – DG 271). In the company catalogue published in 1933, the song was classified as "*rebetiko."*

should study Athenian song. There is so much more to say about Athenian song." His words foreshadowed the many negative feelings about rebetika I would encounter. Many Greeks warned me that no one plays rebetika any more. "Rebetika no longer exists," they said. And they usually regarded me with surprise. What interest did I have in this "hashish music"? Like scholars and musicians, audiences play a major role in genre formation. Yet popular conceptions of rebetika as the songs of a mystical urban underworld and as hashish music barely resound with the rebetiko repertoire. So, while these characterizations surely increase the cultural capital of the music, they promote inaccurate understandings of rebetika.

Basic Conceptions and Definitions of Rebetika

Today, there exist three basic scholarly understandings of rebetika. In the strictest understanding, rebetika refers to the compositions from the 1930s to the mid-1940s by a certain group of urban working-class musicians. This time period has come to be known as the classical period of rebetika and the musical style as classical or *Pireotiko* rebetiko, named for its association with the port of Piraeus. Song lyrics concerned the circumstances of everyday life in Greek cities. Basic instrumentation included the bouzouki, baglama, guitar and voice. The music was based on thirteen musical modes.[48] The two most popular rebetika rhythms were the 9/8 *zeïbekiko* and the 2/4 *hasapiko*. Most rebetika singers of this period were male. Vassiliou subscribes to this understanding of rebetika in theory, calling it the period of "true rebetika" composition. But the Rebetiki Istoria repertoire is drawn from the second broader understanding of the genre.

[48] Fretted instruments did not have the ability to play microtones, which resulted in a unique body of Piraeotiko rebetiko modes. Some singers continued to sing with microtones (Sotiria Bellou is a telling example) and the disjuncture between voice and instruments added a new dimension to rebetiko songs.

In the second more-popular usage, rebetika refers to urban popular song of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century with particular musical style and instrumentation. This includes *Smyrneika*, the music that formed in the urban centers of Asia Minor and that became popular in Greece (1922-33) with the influx of 1.5 million Greek Orthodox from Asia Minor in 1922.[49] Smyrneika instrumentation included santouri, lute, oud, saz, spoons, hand drum, metal finger cymbals and violin. Smyrneika often featured female singers. Referring to Smyrneika, Piraeotika and pre-Piraeotika, this usage of the term rebetika includes a wide variety of songs with varying musical and lyrical characteristics.[50]

In the third understanding of the term, rebetika refers to a much wider scope of songs that include: songs from the mid 1880s through the present day; a wide variety of rhythmic forms from the *hasapiko* and *zeïbekiko* to the *syrto* and *kalamatiano*; various musical forms such as waltzes and popular *cantades*.[51] Instrumentation can vary as much as to include the lyre (a bowed stringed instrument held on the knee and played with the fingernails of the left hand placed against the three strings),[52] drums and electric guitar. The varying understandings of rebetika with wide-ranging musical characteristics may explain the lack of scholarly musical discussion.

Determining a time frame for the rebetiko genre is difficult. Most scholars classify the creative period of rebetiko composition as spanning from the late-nineteenth

[49] Some compact discs bear the title "rebetika" and feature rebetika and *Smyrneika* songs. Other compact discs cite Rebetika and *Smyrneika* as separate genres.
[50] In this understanding of the term, it is estimated that there exist around 7,500 rebetika songs (Savvopoulos 2006, 57).
[51] A *cantada* is a love song genre popular on the Ionian Islands in the West of Greece. It features singing in thirds and Western harmonic guitar accompaniment. In late-19th century and early-20th century, a group of men would traditionally stand in the street underneath a woman's window at night and serenade her with a *cantada*.
[52] The lyre is the main bowed string instrument of the folk music of Crete.

century to the mid-twentieth century. Pavlos Vassiliou shares this belief, though he states that the period of true rebetika composition was much shorter, lasting only from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s. Yet these dates are by no means fixed. For example, many of the rebetiko greats recorded songs after 1955 when the rebetiko genre is believed to have ceased as a creative form. Markos Vamvakaris recorded *Ta Matoklada sou Lamboun* [Your Eyelashes Shine], *Atakti* [Naughty Girl] and many other well-known songs during the early 1960s.[53] The same holds true for rebetiko musicians Argiris Vamvakaris and Michalis Genitsaris, who recorded much of their repertoire during the 1970s and 1980s (Georgiadis 2006, 9).[54] Varying instrumentation in these recordings also complicate a musical understanding of rebetika. Finally, many rebetika musicians such as Sotiria Bellou rerecorded songs after the 1960s. In these recordings, instrumentation and performance style differ considerably from earlier versions and complicate musical and chronological descriptions of rebetika.[55]

There are many academic definitions and descriptions of rebetika. The early 1961 definition by scholar Dinos Hristianopoulos defined the songs by their social milieu: "Rebetika are songs of the people. They are taken directly out of life and that is why they speak to the heart" (Hristianopoulos 1961, 1). In another definition, Vergopoulos emphasizes the Greekness of the genre, tracing its roots to ancient Greece and the Byzantine Empire. He states that rebetika "joins Dionysus from ancient Greece,

[53] Numerous other rebetika composers who began their musical careers right after the German Occupation such as Kaldaras, Petsas, Bakalis and Mitsakis also recorded the bulk of their repertoire after 1958 (Georgiadis 2006, 9).
[54] Whether the songs of Michalis Genitsaris should be characterized as rebetika or *laïka* is debated.
[55] In addition, the composer of a particular rebetiko song is often not known. Many times musicians gave away song credits to other musicians—Vaggelis Papazoglou gave songs away to his friends especially after he refused to openly write songs under censorship of the Metaxas dictatorship. For example, the *hasapiko* "H Pseftofilia" (The False Friendship) appears in 1937 under the name of Stellakis Perpiniadis and Stratos Payioumtzis. The original score was later discovered in Papazoglou's archive, written and edited by Papazoglou.

mysticism from Byzantium and '*dervisika*' in congruence with the dominant ideology in Greece, which came from Western Europe and North America" (Vergopoulos 1973, 1).[56]

While rebetika definitions vary broadly, most do share one particular element. As stated by Nearchos Georgiadis, "what is generally accepted by all…is that rebetika is song of the city, that it expresses the popular strata of the cities" (Georgiadis 2006, 13). In fact, many prefer the term "*astiko laiko tragoudi*" [urban popular song] or simply "*laiko tragoudi*" [popular song] instead of rebetika.[57] Though he named his *rebetadiko* Rebetiki Istoria, Pavlos Vassiliou shares the opinion that rebetika songs should simply be called popular song:

> The music should not even be called rebetika. But the term has come to characterize the popular songs that were written between 1922 and 1950 or we could say even more narrowly between 1932 with the appearance of Markos and the *Tetrada* [Quartet] and 1942, 1943 when the music and lyrics began to change, to take on a different color and a different character. Why did I name the *magazi* Rebetiki Istoria? Well, to give people an idea of what kind of music was played here. Rebetika has come to identify the popular songs of this time and not the European-style *cantades* but the music of the simple working-class Greek. Maybe I should have called it something else. (Vassiliou 2007)

A definition of rebetika that includes description of musical characteristics is a rare exception in rebetiko bibliography. In an article that otherwise shies away from musical discussion, Stathis Gauntlett briefly defines the genre by its musical aspects. "'Rebetika' are a type of Greek song commonly associated with the *bouzouki* (now the national instrument of Greece, but once an instrument of low social standing), with the dances *zeïbekiko*s, *hasapiko*s and *tsifteteli*, and with urban characters known as *rebetes*" (Gauntlett 1989, 1). The musical description is brief and begs for more detail. In the next

[56] The seriousness of the dervishes and the respect they received during the Turkish Occupation.
[57] In Greek musical scholarship and everyday speech, three terms are used synonymously to describe rebetika songs: "popular song", "urban popular song" and "*rebetiko*" (in its broadest sense) (Georgiadis 2006, 13). Rebetiko musicians Kostas Kalafatis and Pavlos Vassiliou stated the same idea in personal interviews.

section, I define rebetika and emphasize musical style as a fundamental characteristic of the music.[58]

Rebetika: A Stylistic Definition.

My definition of rebetika emphasizes its musical and socio-political characteristics. It adapts the understanding of rebetika that spans the time frame 1900-1940s. I treat Smyrneika as a separate musical phenomenon because these songs differ significantly in their musical characteristics and social milieu. Here is my rebetiko definition: Rebetika is an urban popular song genre that formed amongst the urban proletariat of the burgeoning cities of Greece in the first half of the twentieth century.[59] Lyrics focus on the hardships of everyday life of the economically deprived classes. Topics include love and loss, revenge, poverty, exile drug use and jail. Basic rebetiko instrumentation includes the bouzouki, baglama, guitar and voice. The songs are based on an *ostinato* rhythm—usually the 9/8 *zeïbekiko* or the 2/4 *hasapiko*. Rebetika are characterized by a direct playing style, a steady dynamic and tempo and characteristic ornamentations. Below I provide a checklist of ten stylistic elements that help define a song as rebetika.

1. Composed between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century.

[58] Since most songs performed in Rebetiki Istoria are in the Piraeus style, this style will form the focus of this musical discussion. Smyrna-style and Piraeus-style rebetika share many musical characteristics.
[59] Rebetika emerged in other cities around the world with large Greek populations including New York, Tarpon Springs Florida and Cairo, Egypt.

2. Written by a member of the urban rebetiko milieu, whose leading figures are Markos Vamvakaris, Stratos Payioumtzis, Sotiria Bellou and Ioannis Papaioannou.[60]

3. Discusses certain themes, such as the hardships of everyday life, love, loss, poverty, exile.

4. Features certain instruments, such as bouzouki, baglama, guitar and voice.

5. Based on the thirteen rebetiko modes.

6. Based on characteristic *ostinato* rhythmic formulae usually played by the guitar. These are usually the 9/8 *zeïbekiko* rhythm and the 2/4 *hasapiko* rhythm.

7. Features characteristic ornamentation style.

8. Is in strophic form with an introductory section repeated between strophes and at the end of the song.

9. Features a call and response format between voice and bouzouki.

10. Features a second vocal part doubling or singing a third away from the first in the second half of each strophe.

At the end of this chapter, I will illustrate these basic characteristics in early-style rebetika songs. However, it is important to note that while there are many standard stylistic elements of rebetika songs, early rebetika is considered a live tradition: musicians constantly make small changes to the songs, adding their own character to a performance. In fact, the best-known contemporary early-style rebetika musicians are those who improvise small changes to rebetika songs while remaining in the early style. Particular adept contemporary bouzouki players in this early style include Yiorgos

[60] Other important early rebetika musicians include Stellakis Perpiniadis, Ioanna Georgakopoulou, Stella Haskil, Vassilis Tsitsanis, Giorgos Katsaros, Anestis Adamantidis (Delias), Giorgos Batis.

Tapsakis and Nikolaos Menegas. Both have performed as regular musicians in Rebetiki Istoria.

II. STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS: THE MUSIC

I begin my musical discussion by establishing the five most-fundamental elements of the music:

1) the song structure
2) the musical mode
3) the improvisation technique
4) the role of the instruments
5) the *ostinato* rhythm

Song Structure

The most common organizational method of a rebetiko song is strophic form, sometimes with a chorus. Usually songs contain three or four stanzas, though longer songs are common. Verse and chorus are generally four lines long. Rhyme scheme generally follows an ABAB, AABB, or ABBA structure. The basic song form is as follows:

Taximi [improvisation]

Introduction

Verse

Introduction (varied slightly)

Verse

Introduction (varied slightly)

Verse

Introduction (varied slightly)

Conventionally, a rebetiko song begins with an improvised section known as *taximi*. The *taximi* serves to introduce the mode of the song. It is usually played on the bouzouki and is generally between thirty seconds and two minutes in length. The *taximi* is followed by an instrumental introduction by bouzouki and accompanied by guitar (and baglama if present). Generally, it is the same length as one song strophe. The music of the introduction is often very similar to the music of the verse. However, there are many song examples in which the introduction and verse differ significantly. One example is "*San Tis Orfanias Ton Kaïmo*" ["Like the Pain of an Orphan"] by Markos Vamvakaris. After the introduction, the singer joins the other instruments in the first verse. Each verse is separated by a varied repetition of the opening introduction. The song ends with a final repetition of the introduction. A typical rebetiko song is usually around three or four minutes in length.[61] Figure 4.1 illustrates a typical strophic form of rebetika songs.

Figure 4.1: Typical strophic form of rebetika songs.

Song Section	**Instrumentation**
Optional Improvisation (*taximi*)	Solo, usually bouzouki (may be violin, voice, baglama)
Introduction	All instruments
Verse 1	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments
Verse 2	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments
Verse 3	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments

[61] Rebetika songs and improvisations may have been longer before the advent of recording for early recording techniques limited song lengths to around three minutes.

Another basic feature of rebetika songs is the organizational structure of the lyrics. Each stanza consists of four lines. Often these are two lines that are recited and then repeated in reverse order. The song "Black Eyes Black Eyebrows by Markos Vamvakaris is a well-known example of such organization. Here is the first stanza:

> Black eyes black eyebrows, curly black hair,
> White face like a lily and a mole on your face.
> White face like a lily and a mole on your face,
> Black eyes black eyebrows, curly black hair.

While the lyrics are reversed, the music of the lyrics is usually repeated twice in the same way.[62] Figure 4.2 illustrates the typical verse/refrain form of rebetika songs.

Figure 4.2: Typical verse/refrain form of rebetika songs

Song Section	**Instrumentation**
Optional Improvisation (*taximi*)	Solo, usually bouzouki (may be violin, voice, baglama)
Introduction	All instruments
Verse 1	All instruments and voice
Refrain	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments
Verse 2	All instruments and voice
Refrain	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments
Verse 3	All instruments and voice
Refrain	All instruments and voice
Introduction (varied slightly)	All instruments

[62] Some other common song structures include repeating the last line and changing it slightly as occurs in the song *O Periklis* by Ioannis Papaioannou. Another common variation is the repetition of the first two phrases of the introduction as in the song "The Mechanic" by Giorgos Batis, 1934. A third common rebetika strong structure includes a refrain after each verse. The music of the refrain generally differs from that of the verse and of the introduction. "*Aspri Fratzolitsa Mou*" (My Little White Loaf of Bread) by Markos Vavmakaris maintains this structure.

An Introduction to Musical Modes

An understanding of musical modes is fundamental to playing early-style rebetika. To employ them properly is to play the music in the correct style. Musical modes, in Greek *dromoi* [*dromos* sing.] literally "roads," form the fundamental melodic structure of a song. A mode is generally described as a series of seven notes similar to Western scales. However, modes differ significantly as they have characteristic musical phrases and movement. Rebetika modes are believed to be derived from the seven ancient Greek *ihoi* as are the modes of the Byzantine, Arab, Persian and Ottoman traditions.[63] Musicians commonly use thirteen modes in rebetika songs: seven minor and six major modes. The minor modes are: Ousak, Sabah, Kartsigar, Kurdi, Poimeniko Minor, Niavent and Nisiotiko Minor. The major modes are: Hijaz, Hijazkiar, Peiraotikos, Rast, Houzam, and Segiah.[64]

Contemporary rebetika performers generally refer to the modes as seven-tone scales. However, individual tones maintain specific roles within the modes, and to employ the modes properly, they should be regarded as groups of notes that vary constantly in pitch and directional pull. Understanding this is crucial to the ability to improvise and apply ornamentation. In practice, many bouzouki players do not know the music theory behind the modes but maintain a non-academic knowledge of them.

[63] In his book "One life in Song," the well-known lyricist Kostas Virvos states that in Greek popular song there exist 64 modes. However, the composer Thodoros Derviotis lists twelve common modes, citing their equivalent Byzantine mode or Western scale if extant. (Moustairas 1996, 49).

[64] A basic feature of most rebetiko modes is microtones built into their very structure. This theoretical definition of the modes has a practical limitation: Except for the voice and the violin, the instruments of Pireotika rebetika are fretted and thus do not have the ability to produce microtones. Thus, they play the modes differently, generating "idiomatic" renditions characteristic of rebetika. A noteworthy exception was the saz played by Yiovan Tsaous that had moveable frets and thus allowed him to play microtones. Some Pireotika rebetika singers continue to sing microtones. Whether or not singers of Piraeus-style rebetika should use microtones continues to be a matter of contention amongst contemporary rebetiko musicians.

Rebetiko singer Hatzichristos-Tsanakos recalls performances by one of the most talented rebetiko bouzouki players of all time, Ioannis Papaioannou:

> Papaioannou knew the bouzouki very well, he played beautiful improvisations, but he didn't know their names. "I told him: This, you know, is hijaz, he played another one, this is called ousak. Papaioannou is more of a *rebetis* and he played better bouzouki than Marko. Normally one cannot play on the bouzouki that which the violin, the kanonaki and the outi play, but Papaioannou managed to play them all on the bouzouki" (Kapetanakis 2005, 194).

Yet rebetika musicians believe that an understanding of rebetiko modes is crucial to early-style rebetiko performance. A journalist once asked Markos Vamvakaris why young composers do not write worthy songs. Markos replied, "Because they do not hold onto the makami [modes]" (Moustairas 1996, 45). Roukounas echoed this notion and lamented the contemporary lack of understanding of the modes: "Every song is based on a mode. The young people today don't know the modes" (Roukounas as quoted by Moustairas 1996, 49).

Only a few musicians today play three-stringed bouzouki or baglama and know the old tunings, the "*douzenia*" (*douzeni* sing.) or "*karadouzenia*" (*karadouzeni* sing.) [alternative tunings] of the bouzouki players who played the eastern modes. The best-known *douzenia* are the following five: the *giouroukiko*, the *karantouzeni*, the *syriano*, the *arapien*, and *rast*. Depending upon the *douzeni*, the bouzouki or the baglamas player plays the corresponding mode. For example, in *arapien*, he plays *houzam*. Playing certain songs in *douzeni* renders them easier to play. Some musicians, such as guitarist and singer Yiorgos Katsaros and bouzouki player and singer Markos Vamvakaris created their own tuning systems to suit their particular vocal range:

> The *karadouzenia* of Markos are another important story. Markos knew the bouzouki like the back of his hand. The source of Markos, do you know what it was? His heart, his brain, his hands, his love for that which he did it was the

> sound of his soul, and the sound of the soul cannot be described. He changed the tuning, he lowered the bouzouki to there "where he sang"… Often when he played you heard him say: "That's where it should be said," in other words that is the tone that he likes, that is sweet, because every note has its beauty. Markos, most of the songs he tuned with his voice. He changes the natural scale of the bouzouki re- la –re. The lower string remains re, the middle sol and the upper whatever tone he sings, usually b flat. It changes the sounds of the bouzouki, it becomes richer, deeper, sadder. (Stelios Vamvakaris as quoted by Kapetanakis 2005, 25)

The bouzouki tunings are an excellent example of the way in which an instrument affects its playing style and the way the playing style affects the instrument. The transfer to tetrachord bouzouki, an instrument that became popular in Greece in the mid-twentieth century, facilitates playing different, often more complex chords and harmonies. Also, it allows for more virtuoso playing and for the execution of faster songs. Older songs are played at a faster tempo, which greatly alters their character. While the speed of the tetrachord bouzouki player may be impressive, many trichord bouzouki players argue that much of the beauty of the music lies in playing the melodies on one string, and that the space between notes adds to the beauty and character of a song. I have seen bouzouki players tune the top three strings to "re" "la" "re" and not play the lowest string or tune the lowest string to "re" or "la" as well. I have not seen them play *douzeni* though theoretically they could do this as well.

In order to playa rebetiko mode correctly, one must understand its construction. Modes can be understood as combined units of tetrachords and pentachords. They are realized in actual performances based on this understanding: The melodic line of a rebetika mode and song is created by the unification of a pentachord and a tetrachord (with a shared tone in the middle) or two tetrachords.[65] Pentachords and tetrachords are

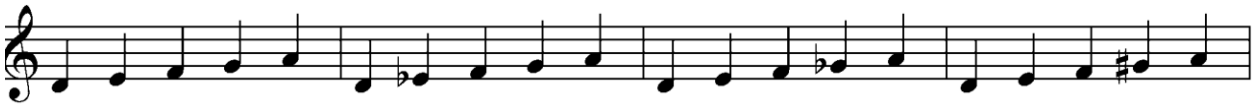
[65] There exists some disagreement over the names of tetrachords and pentachords as well as over the correct names of the modes.

divided into categories of Minor (or Kurdi) and Major (or Rast). The third tone of the first tetrachord or pentachord determines whether the mode is major or minor.

Figure 4.3: Rebetiko Pentachords and Tetrachords.

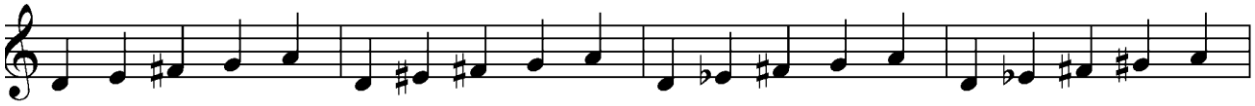
Minor or Kurd Pentachords:

KIURDI OUSAK SABAH NIGRIZ/NIAVENT



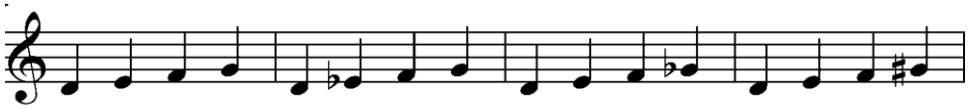
Major or Rast Pentachords:

RAST HOUZAM HIJAZ HIJAZNIAVENT/ HIJAZNIKRIZ



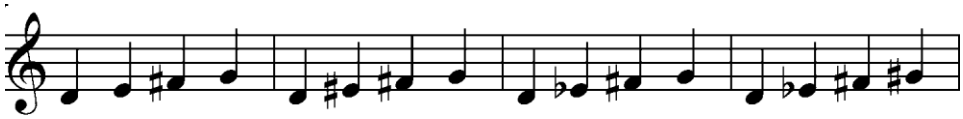
Minor or Kurd Tetrachords:

KIURDI OUSAK SABAH NIGRIZ/NIAVENT



Major or Rast Tetrachords:

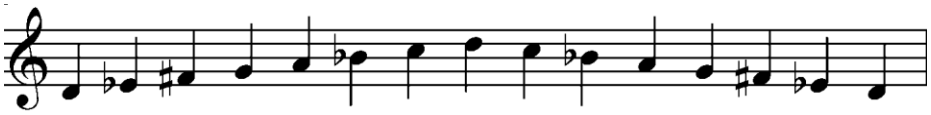
RAST HOUZAM HIJAZ HIJAZ-NIAVENT/ HIJAZ-NIKRIZ



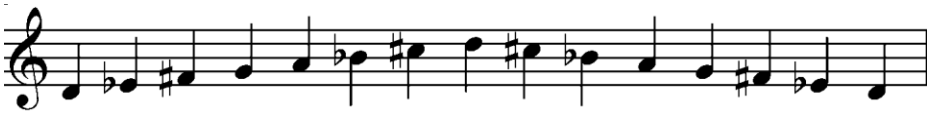
The following is a list of the rebetika modes as demonstrated by bouzouki player Haris Hrisinis.[66] I have transcribed each mode to begin from the note "re"; however, the modes can be transposed to any note in the diatonic scale.[67]

Figure 4.4: Rebetiko Modes.

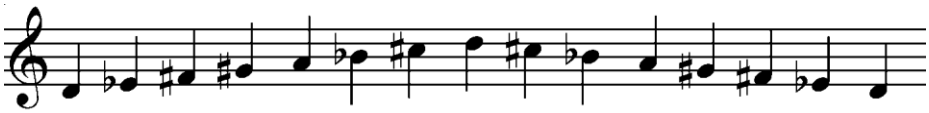
HIJAZ



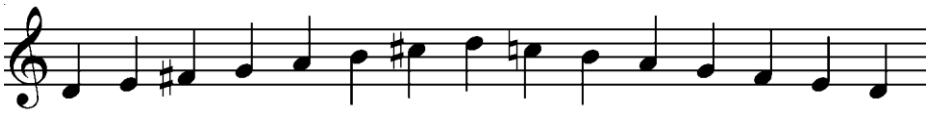
HIJAZKIAR



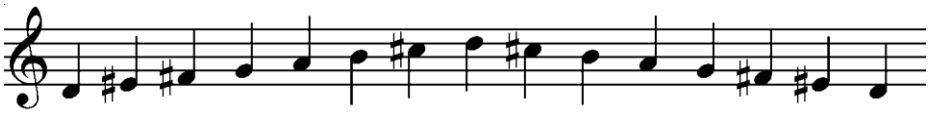
PIERAIOTIKOS



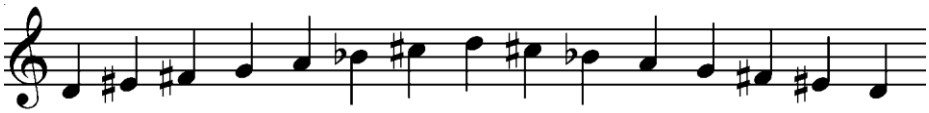
RAST



HOUZAM



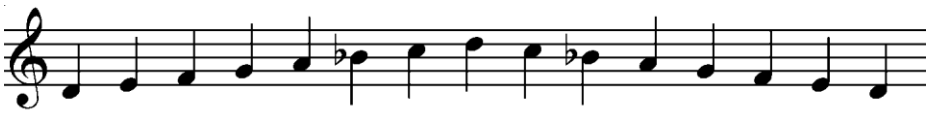
SEGIAH



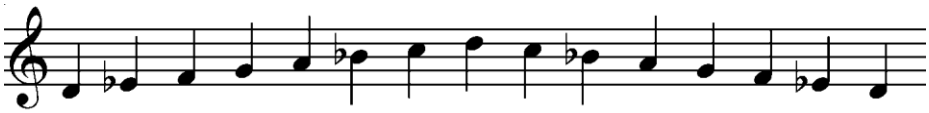
NISIOTIKO MINORE

[66] There exist many different versions and interpretations of the modes. Three well-respected bouzouki players dictated the modes to me in different ways. In addition, there exists some freedom in the way in which chromatic passing tones are included in a mode.

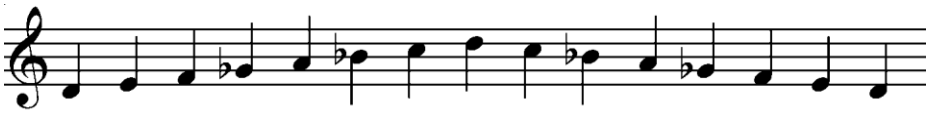
[67] Technically each mode begins from its own starting tone. See Payiatis (1987) for a discussion.



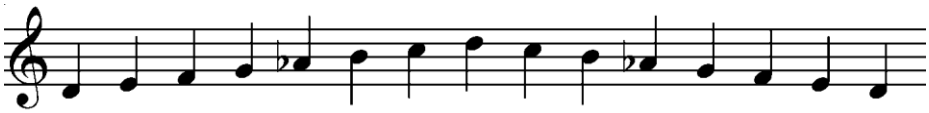
OUSAK



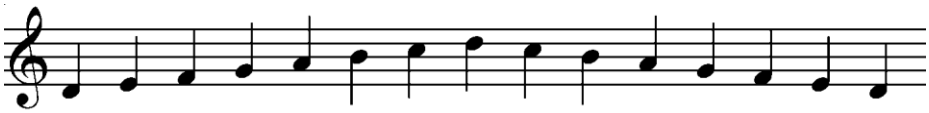
SABAH



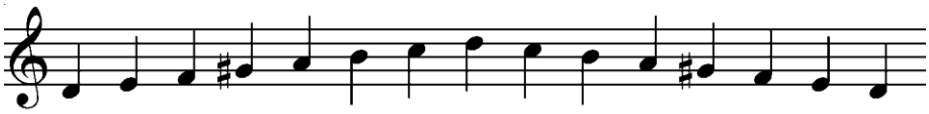
KARTSIGAR



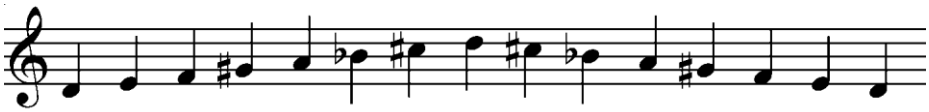
KIURDI



PIMENIKO MINORE



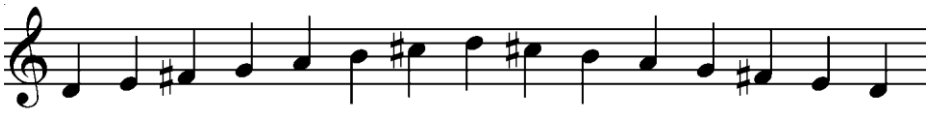
NIAVENT



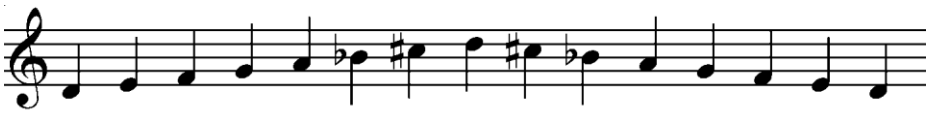
Rebetika songs are also based upon Western-European scales including, Major, Harmonic Minor, and Melodic Minor.

Figure 4.5 Western European Scales in Rebetika.

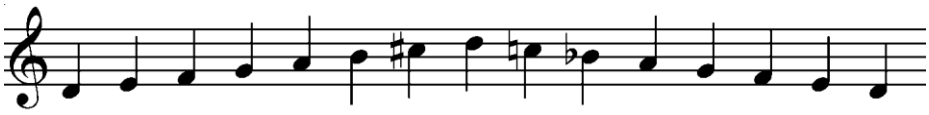
MAJOR



HARMONIC MINOR



MELODIC MINOR



These scales are executed in rebetika songs with an understanding of tetrachords and pentachords, strong tones and characteristic chromaticisms (see below).

Modes are considered to bear some connection with sentiments, though few musicians agree which sentiments they represent. As stated by rebetika musician Stelios Keroumitis,

> When you write a sad song, you cannot use the mode rast. The *dromos* must be linked with the music and the words. Of course, "*Sinnefiasmeni Kyriaki*" is in mode rast, but the words go with it, they match. Whatever other music you try and set those words to, it just doesn't work. The words would negate it. (Keroumitis in Papadopoulos, 2004)

Rebetiko musicians often characterize a major mode as happy and a minor mode as sad. When discussing the composition of a particular song, rebetiko musician Keroumitis described why he had to write the following song in a "sad" minor mode. Its lyrics begin,

> He who never lived poor
> Never got to know the world
> The rich man, the poor thing,
> Never takes notice of it.

Keroumitis states, "I put it in mode ousak. If I had put it with happy music, the result would have been bad, it wouldn't have had any meaning… The mode is chosen to be analogous with the sentiment of the lyrics" (Keroumitis as quoted by Papadopoulos 2004, 32-33). As illustrated with the Sinnefiasmeni Kyriaki discussion, there are numerous

exceptions to the idea that major modes are for "happy" music and minor modes for "sad."

Contemporary musicians consider the songs of Markos Vamvakaris the most didactic for learning modes and their characteristic chromatic passing tones. For Vamvakaris's songs highlight the typical movement and phrases identified with particular modes. In addition, they emphasize the strong tones of the mode and use characteristic directional movement. In all rebetika songs, mode structure, melodic contour and chordal accompaniment are closely interrelated and shape the movement and character of the songs. I will examine this more closely in my analysis of "A Spell Has Been Cast on my Mind" by "Bayiaderas".

The Role of Improvisation

A fundamental feature of rebetika performances is improvisation (*taximi* sing. *taximia* pl.). An improvisation is played on a solo instrument, usually the bouzouki or voice. The soloist will improvise in a particular mode, highlighting its characteristics. With a *taximi*, he also demonstrates his playing style and technical ability. A *taximi* can be free standing and not serve as a song introduction. In this case, the musician can switch between musical modes with care but also with some freedom. When the improvisation is played as an introduction to a particular song, it must obey the rules of the mode of the song. Particularly skilled musicians may briefly switch to related modes in their improvisation. However, the purpose of the *taximi* is to introduce the mode of the song to musicians and audience.

A common technique is to quote phrases from the song in the improvisation. This serves to join the improvisation to the song but also signals the other musicians which song the bouzouki player will play. In addition, a *taximi* may be composed into a song and as such serve to link two verses. The ability of the bouzouki player to improvise directly shapes his reputation as a musician. One studies the modes for years in order to learn their specific characteristics and to attain the ability to improvise in the correct style.

Contemporary musicians judge their colleagues by their ability to improvise. Ilias Petropoulos emphasizes the significance of the *taximi* in signaling an accomplished bouzouki player: "The improvisation is demarcated by the picking style, its rhythm and its fundamental value. Any bouzouki player can pluck the strings. The improvisation separates the virtuoso" (Petropoulos 1967, 16). In the following statement, bouzouki player G. Konstantinou emphasizes the artistry and knowledge a musician must have in order to play a good *taximi*. "Philosophically, a *taximi* is the attempted to show who you are - not with the technical meaning - but who you are really are, so that other people can get to know you and so you can communicate with them… Technically you have to know the modes very well" (Konstantinou as quoted by Maniatis 2001, 35).

Instrumentation: The Role of the Instruments

Each instrument maintains specific roles in rebetika songs. In this section I will analyze the role of each instrument, saving discussion of the central vocal part for later. While my discussion will not cover all roles an instrument might play, it will cover their primary roles, what I call their "base function." An overarching principle of rebetiko

performance is that instrumental roles are organized around moments of breaking away from the group with ones own musical responsibility and moments of coming together with others to share musical roles. To coordinate their playing, musicians use a combination of memorization and improvisation skills. An important rule of thumb in rebetiko performance is that one must know when to solo and when to play a secondary role. In fact, in rebetiko performance, knowing when not to play is key!

1) I begin with a discussion of the bouzouki, which plays the main instrumental role in rebetika songs. Its roles are as follows:

a) the bouzouki plays the *taximi*;

b) it plays the composed introduction to the song. Often this is the first statement of the melodic line or a variation of the melodic line;

c) when the singer enters, the bouzouki player switches between playing parts of the melody and some accompanying chords. With the original recordings as a guide, these are chosen mostly at the discretion of the player. This introduction shape the rhythm of the song, outline the melody of the song, and points out important landing moments in a particular song;

d) it plays bridges between the melodic phrases that lead from one phrase to another. One of the most important functions of the bouzouki is to play melodic bridges between the vocal phrases. These not only move the music forward but provide a key signal to the singer about when and how to enter. Often, the last note of the bridge is the first note of the entering vocal line.

The bouzouki player relies on melodic/modal formulae as he performs old songs in his own rendition. In order to play in the early rebetiko style, he uses distinctive fragments of melody and follows rules about musical progression. However, these are flexible, adapted to the particular circumstance and appear in many rebetika songs. In rebetika songs, formulae have varying functions: some appear at the beginning of a unit, some in the middle and some at the end.

2) The guitar plays the fundamental accompanimental role in rebetika songs.

a) The basic role of the guitar is outlining the modal structure of the song and holding the *ostinato* rhythm (i.e. *zeïbekiko*, *hasapiko*). The general guitar playing pattern consists of an alternation between single notes and chords that illustrate the strong and weak beats of the rhythm;

b) The guitar begins a song by holding a drone or by highlighting fundamental chord tones during a bouzouki *taximi*;

c) If the song does not contain a *taximi* at the start, the guitar may being the song as a solo playing by outlining the *ostinato* rhythm;

d) It may begin the song together with another instrumentalist or it may enter after the first line of introduction;

e) During bridges the guitar may double the melodic instrument rather than continuing the chordal accompaniment;

f) The guitar may highlight phrases in the melody.

In certain rebetika compositions, the guitar is the only instrument accompanying the voice (such as in the compositions of George Katsaros) and therefore provides both

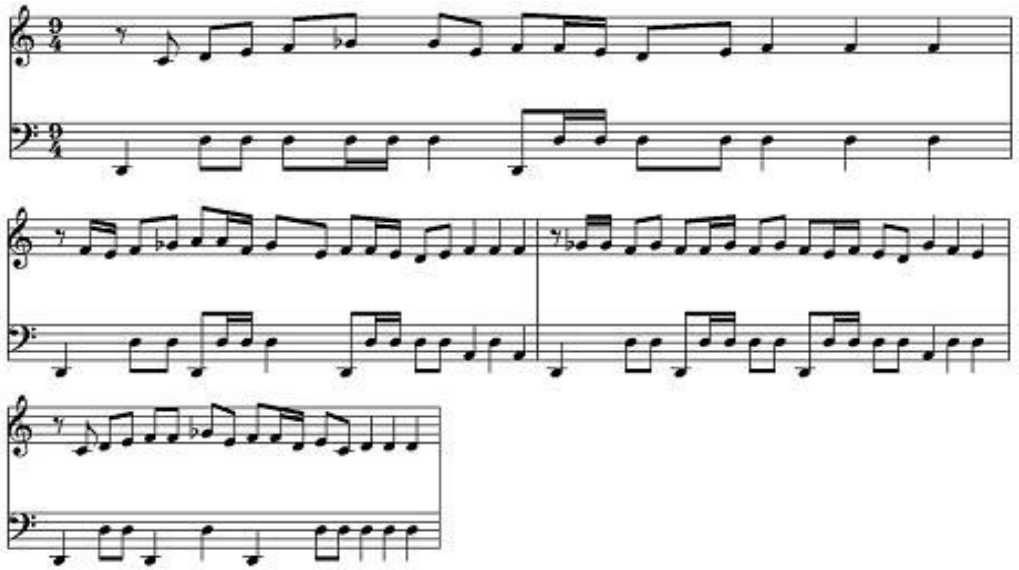
melodic responses and chordal accompaniment. Rebetiki Istoria musicians often describe Katsaros's playing with the phrase "He plays bouzouki with his guitar."

As a general rule, earlier rebetika songs feature a straightforward accompaniment in the guitar: the guitar played the base chord of a mode, and perhaps chords based on the fifth and second tone of the mode. This is typical of the many songs of rebetiko musician Giorgos Katsaros who sang and played solo guitar. "Last Night in Karipi" (1935) is a telling example. An earlier version of this song called "In the Basement" was recorded in 1930 by Kostas Bezos and illustrates this modal harmonic contour as outlined in the guitar.

'Vre' from be-, from behind the barracks
They beat a ma-, they beat a manga in the basement
A co- enters, a cop enters with a pistol
And he shoots bul- and he shoots bullets into the hashish
And kno- and knocks off the top
He puts out the na-, he puts out the narghile in the middle
And it is li-, and it is lit by Kiriakoula
Vre who has money and joints hidden
Hello vre Mi- hello vre Mitso limping one
Who is hi-, who is high from the cloud of smoke.

The instrumentation consists of guitar and voice. The guitar follows the vocal melody and plays the accompaniment. There are only two notes in the accompanimental line: the first note of the mode and the fifth note. The following transcription is of the guitar part:

Musical Example 4.1: Transcription of "In the Basement" by Kostas Bezos, 1930.



As rebetika developed, the accompaniment became more elaborate. It often followed the melody more than the mode and consisted of a greater number of chords. These chords often brought songs closer to Western harmonization. The songs of Vassilis Tsitsanis are particularly indicative of this trend.

3) If present, the baglamas usually plays a role similar to that of the guitar.

a) It may play the opening *taximi*;

b) It outlines basic chords of the song and mode but with a lesser variety of chords;

c) It plays notes that suggest chords;

d) It plays bridges;

e) It highlights parts of the melody;

f) It may have a protagonistic melodic role in songs especially in early *hasiklidika* [hashish songs].

In addition to their harmonic function, the baglamas and guitar largely play a percussive role, marking the beat and maintaining the pace throughout the song. Some rebetika

songs feature other percussive instruments that play the rhythm and ornament the song. Appropriate percussion instruments include wooden spoons, *komboloi* (worry beads) played against a glass, two glasses clicked together between the fingers of one hand, *doumbeleki* (hand drum), and finger-cymbals. Musicians often tap their feet, which visually and aurally punctuates the rhythm of a song.

5) If the instrumentation includes violin, it often plays a similar role as the bouzouki. The violin,

a) may play the introduction;

b) accompanies the voice playing slightly under tempo (at the discretion of the player);

c) may serve as a second "voice" and play thirds to the voice or bouzouki line;

d) may play bridges;

e) plays accompanimental notes that emphasize characteristics of the mode.

Rebetiko Rhythm

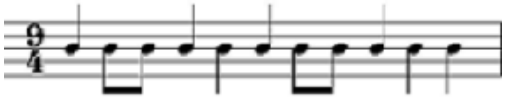
Rhythm is a fundamental feature in the stylistic shaping of a rebetiko song. Rhythm refers to the feeling of movement in time in music. As such, it is affected by numerous factors that aid in the organization of musical elements in time including tempo, meter, speed, duration, silence, melodic contour and harmonization. Most rebetika songs are written in dance rhythms which function as *ostinati*. A majority of rebetika songs maintain an *ostinato* rhythm in the guitar accompaniment. The meter of the song shapes the rhythmic *ostinato*. Meter refers to basic pulse groupings, a recurring pattern of

strong and weak beats: there are almost always subgroups at several different levels driving he music forward and holding it back simultaneously in different ways.

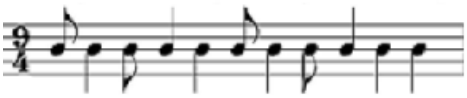
The two most common rebetika rhythms are *zeïbekikos* and *hasapiko*s. The *zeïbekiko* is a compound 9/8 meter in which the entire uneven rhythmic grouping is repeated as a unit. The *hasapiko* is a simple 2/4 meter and the *ostinato* rhythm is repeated as units of 2/4. There are various ways of dividing the compound 9/8 *zeïbekiko* rhythm. I transcribe the five most-popular ways below. The up stems designate emphasis. A doumbeleki player would alternate hands between up-stem and down-stem notes.

Figure 4.6: Various *zeïbekiko* rhythms.

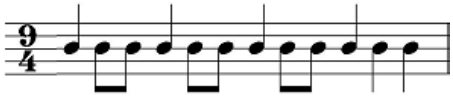
Old *Zeïbekiko*



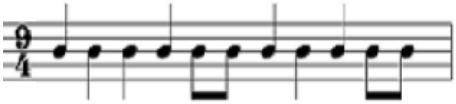
New *Zeïbekiko*



Kamilieriko Zeïbekiko



Aptaliko Singular



The 2/4 *hasapiko* also maintains some variations that depend upon the speed of a particular song and its accompanying dance steps. The two common *hasapiko* rhythms are the *Koulouriotiko hasapiko* and the *Politiko hasapiko*. I will discuss the rhythmic characteristics of the *hasapiko* in greater detail later on in this chapter.

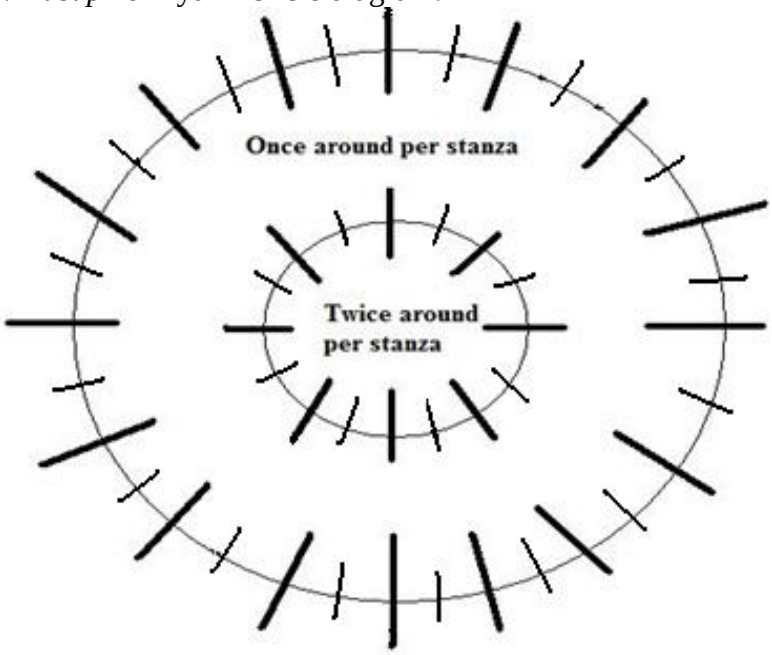
The impression that rebetika songs progress in time is dependent upon a number of factors. As Edward A. Lippman suggests in his book *Progressive Temporality in*

Music, "The feeling that music is progressing or moving forward in time is doubtless one of the most fundamental characteristics of musical experience; yet it manifests such a remarkable range of variation in its prominence and its quality that at times it seems to be absent altogether" (Lippman 1984, 121). The interaction of modal and rhythmic characteristics of rebetika songs affords musicians and audiences the impression that the music pushes forward and pulls backward at different points.

A useful framework for imagining the structure of a rebetika song is as a series of rhythmic, melodic and lyric cycles of different sizes rather than in Western notation. Firstly, nearly all rebetika songs are composed over a cyclic *ostinato* rhythm of four beats when in the *hasapiko* rhythm, and nine beats when in the *zeïbekiko* rhythm. In Figure 4.7 I have created a cycle diagram of the basic *hasapiko* rhythm. One may follow the rhythm diagram by circling once around the large outer circle per stanza or twice around the smaller inner circle per stanza. The thick black lines represent the strong beats and the thin black lines represent the weak beats.[68]

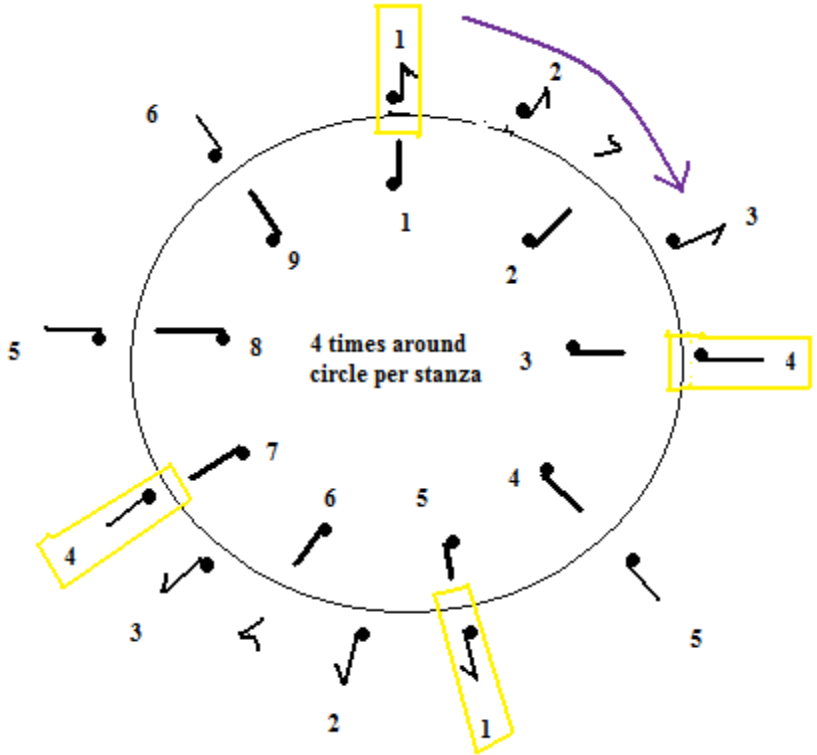
[68] I am indebted to Professor Judith Becker and her cycle diagrams in Indonesian gamelan music that provided the inspiration for my diagrams of the cyclic nature of rebetika rhythm.

Figure 4.7: *Hasapiko* rhythm circle diagram.



Zeïbekiko is an uneven meter 9/8 with various levels of organizational possibilities. It can also be counted as 18/4 or as 4+ 5.

Figure 4.8: New *zeïbekiko* rhythm circle diagram.



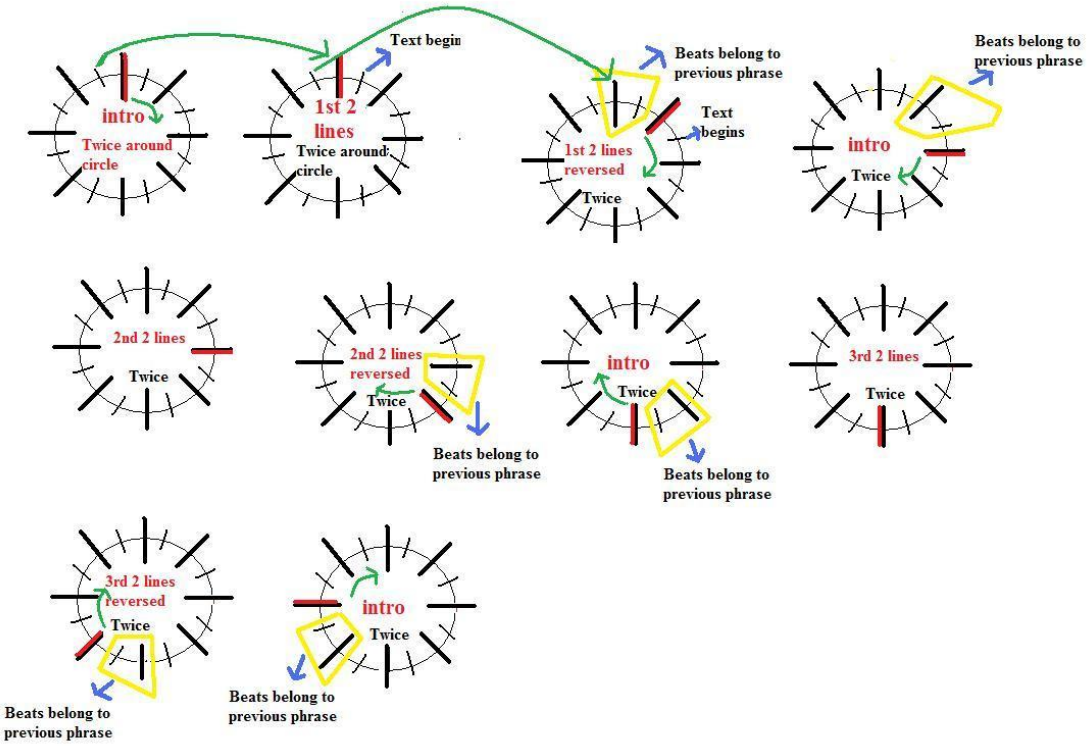
In addition to the articulation of notes and the phenomenon of musical continuity are other factors that effect the temporal progression of a rebetiko song. In this section I cite some other features that affect the rhythmic flow of rebetika songs. The repetitive *ostinato* rhythm helps shape rhythmic flow in multiple songs by creating various expectations in the listener. As characterized by Edward Lippman,

> Regularity is a particularly widespread and effective cause of the inertia of motion…It could then be the expectation that repetition may produce, or the expectation it satisfies, or the satisfaction produced by recognition, which as the immediate cause of a feeling of rightness, would also constitute the proximate basis for a feeling of necessity, whether propulsive or logical. (Lippman 1984, 125, 122)

Another means of creating variation and expectation in rebetika rhythm is the placement of the melody over the *ostinato* rhythm in various ways. In fact, it is the existence of an *ostinato* rhythm that serves as the framework against which other musical elements such as harmony and melodic contour take shape and add movement to the song. For a fundamental characteristic of rebetika songs is the feeling that the song moves forwards and pulls back, not due to performers altering the tempo but due to the way in which the melody is written into the framework of the song.

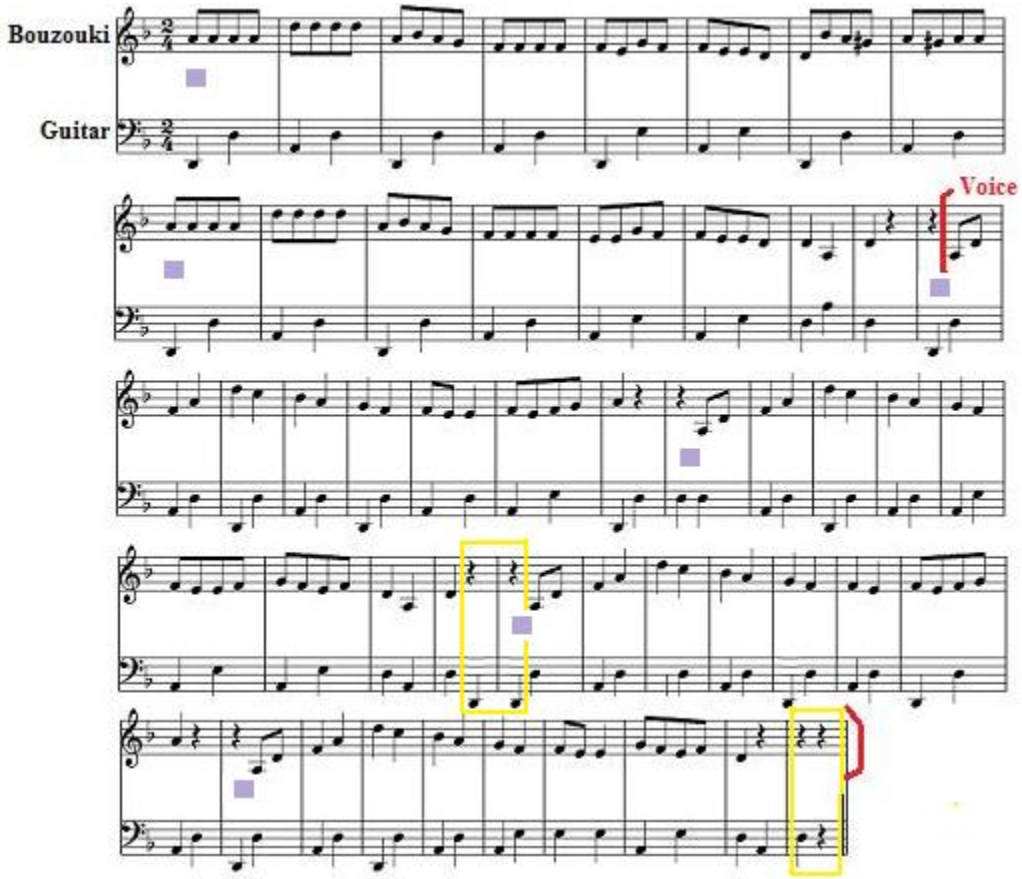
"Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows" (1936) by Markos Vamvakaris is a telling example of rhythmic displacement written into the song in a subtle manner: In the middle and at the end of each stanza of lyrics, Vamvakaris added an extra strong beat and weak beat, as illustrated in the diagram below. In order to read the diagram correctly, begin to trace the rhythm from the top center and follow the circles in a clockwise direction. Each circle should be traced two times around before moving onto the next circle. The longer darker lines indicate strong beats and the shorter lighter lines indicate weak beats. The red line indicates the first beat of the stanza.

Figure 4.9: *Hasapiko* rhythm circle diagram for "Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows" by Markos Vamvakaris.



Below is a transcription of the same song "Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows" in Western notation. Note how the melody shifts over the *ostinato* rhythm. In fact, the inclusion of an extra measure in the middle and at the end of each stanza may even infer the complex *zeïbekiko* meter, the characteristic rebetika rhythm. The small square underneath the melody marks the start of each new phrase and 12-measure *hasapiko* cycle.

Musical Example 4.2: Transcription in Western notation of "Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows" by Markos Vamvakaris.



Characteristic early-style rebetika requires a steady rhythmic pulse. In addition, it calls for playing on the backend of the beat rather than pushing the tempo forward. Playing against this are numerous factors that push the music forward. These include: the melodic bridge over the *ostinato* rhythm that connects two vocal lines;[69] the placement of the melodic bridge in such a way that it divides the *ostinato* into two parts: the first half of the melodic bridge belongs to the previous ostinato set and the second half belongs to the following ostinato set.

[69] The melodic bridge is a fundamental structural feature of most rebetika songs and will receive greater attention in my discussion of rebetika melody.

The *hasapiko*s is in simple 2/4 meter so it is often rhythmically more straightforward than the *zeïbekiko* with its compound 9/8 meter. An example of a straightforward *hasapiko* is "There is a Spell on My Mind" by Dimitris Gongos Bayiaderas (see transcription at the end of this chapter). There are numerous examples of *hasapiko* songs where the rhythm is more complex. For example, "*I Klostirou*" [The Mill Girl], a *hasapiko* by Markos Vamvakaris is an example of a complex rhythmic placement. The whole piece is rhythmically uneasy and it is unclear where the strong beats fall. In the vocal stanzas, the strong beats often fall on an accidental. And when strong beats fall on non-accidentals, there is an extra measure in the middle of first and second phrase and an extra beat between the third and fourth. Another telling example is the earliest recording of the song "*Frankosyriani*" [Frankosyrian Girl] by Markos Vamvakaris in which he adds an extra two beats between certain phrases. There is no pattern in the way in which he adds beats. One wonders if he played the song with different rhythmic groupings during every rendition.

Musical motion in rebetika songs is also slowed or stopped in various ways. This may be done by inserting a pause in the ostinato rhythm or by including a cadential figure between stanzas or phrases. Particularly interesting is the common practice of holding the rhythm back in the melody while the ostinato *zeïbekiko* rhythm continues steadily. This is often achieved by introducing subtle variations in the melodic shape or in the rhythm. This results in the melody alternately landing on strong and weak beats. Another common technique consists of using certain strong beats serve as points of rest and others to propel the music forwards. This can occur in numerous ways. First, it is built into the *zeïbekiko* rhythm in its different variations: old *zeïbekiko*, new *zeïbekiko* and *aptaliko*. Second, the

rhythm of each song interacts with its harmonization: a strong beat can occur on an unresolved chord that propels the music forward.

The fundamental compound meter of the *zeïbekiko* rhythm is emphasized by the way that the dancer interacts with the song. He might move forward suddenly and then delay arriving at the resolution of his movement—in other words, he may step quickly to one side and then maintain his balance on one foot, delaying the moment when he places his other foot back on the floor and regains his balance. When executed by a particular skilled dancer, his rhythm lines up with, or is in dialogue with, the rhythm of the music. All involved, including the dancer, musicians, and onlookers who may be clapping to the rhythm enter into one temporal space with the song.

III. MUSICAL STYLE

The Correct Playing Style: A Brief Summary According to Vassiliou

Now that I have introduced the basic musical characteristics of early rebetika, I briefly describe the early playing style as explained by Vassiliou. According to Vassiliou, in order to play in the style of the early recordings, one must obey certain musical rules. One should play clearly and simply with "sharp" "clean" notes. Though rebetika is a live tradition, one should not add in many extra notes. This may refocus the attention of the audience from the sound and content of the rebetiko song to the skill of a particular performer. In Rebetiki Istoria, it is common for very talented bouzouki players from other *magazia* to come and spend an evening playing songs with Vassiliou and the other musicians. More often than not, these musical evenings lead into prolonged musical discussions, arguments and even fights, as Vassiliou and the bouzouki players work to

find a common ground amongst their playing styles. Countless times, Vassiliou has left the group of musicians to sit on his own in the bar declaring the bouzouki player extremely talented but having no relation to rebetika. He believes that alterations to the musical style detract from the quality of a rebetiko performance and make it difficult to categorize it as a rebetiko song at all.

Keeping it Steady: Tempo and Dynamics in Early-Style Rebetika

According to Vassiliou, a key characteristic of playing correctly in the early style that contemporary bouzouki players often ignore is the tempo of the song on the original recording. He characterizes tempo, the basic pulse rate of the song, as a fundamental stylistic feature of a rebetiko song. In general, songs should be played in the tempo of their original recording, even when they are commonly performed by musicians throughout Greece at a faster tempo. A primary example is Tsitsanis's "*Pame Tsarka*" [Let's Go for a Stroll], a song usually played live at a much faster tempo than on the original recording. This enables audience members to dance more quickly.[70] Rebetika tempi are not checked on a metronome but are simply "felt" by the musicians.

In addition, in order to play in early rebetiko style, musicians should begin and end a song at the same tempo. Aside from detracting from the artistic quality of a song, changes in tempo intrude upon expectations, alter the tension and progression of the notes, produce tension between the musicians and confuse the dancer. However, during a performance, if at the very start of a song one musician is unhappy with the tempo, he

[70] On Friday and Saturday nights the Rebetiki Istoria musicians often succumb to this trend as well, since customers expect to hear some fast dance music. Otherwise they chance losing customers. It is a careful balance, a kind of temporal challenge, for the musicians to remain as true as possible to the original rebetika style while still entertaining the audience.

might quickly try to change it. The most common phrase I heard Vassiliou use in his description of musical style was "*min treheis*" [don't run], in which he asks the musicians not to play songs too quickly.

Indeed, in order to play rebetika in the proper style, musicians must have a strong sense of pulse. An aesthetic of a steady beat held throughout the song. This is so important that Vassiliou often shouts out "Heeey!" or stamps his foot and gesticulates forcefully during a song if a musician plays too fast or without a strong sense of pulse. He is hardly concerned with the fact that the audience perceives this disjuncture or lack of professionalism on the part of the musicians. More important is that they maintain the musical style. If a musician somehow disrupts a rhythm it is a much greater infraction than if he plays an incorrect note. In practice, songs may end up at a faster tempo than at the start, but the feeling of the strong steady beat and holding the music back should not change.[71] The vocal line needs an especially strong sense of rhythm. Vassiliou praises rebetika singer Sotiria Bellou for the rhythm of her voice: "She did not need the instruments to help her keep the rhythm. She showed them the rhythm."

In rebetika songs there is little dynamic change. There is a general aesthetic of singing and playing loudly. Only when the singer enters should the instruments pull back and play at a softer volume. But the overall dynamic remains relatively steady. Rebetika songs are largely heterophonic: the voice and the bouzouki (and often other instruments) play the same line with improvised ornamentation. During the introduction sections, if there is more than one melodic instrument in the group (such as bouzouki and violin), it

[71] Many early rebetika recordings songs begin at one tempo and end at a faster tempo. Contemporary musicians suspect that this was due to contemporary technical demands that limited the length of recordings. As such, musicians had to speed up the tempo of a song in order to fit all the stanzas onto the record.

is common practice for the bouzouki player to play the first half of the introduction and for the violinist to play the second half (generally a repetition of the first half).

On early recordings, there is a lack of clarity amongst the instruments. The early rebetiko musicians were hardly concerned with whether or not the instrumentalists all played the strong and weak beats at exactly the same time. There seemed to be a desired aesthetic of disarray and noise. This is a defining stylistic feature of early rebetika that is lacking from most contemporary rebetika performances. Many contemporary professional rebetika musicians, in other words many of those who make a living by playing rebetika in concert, in *rebetadika* or on recordings, perform the songs in a clean, well-rehearsed style that hardly resembles that of the original recording. In fact, on most contemporary rebetika recordings, the roles and notes of each musician are often clearly defined beforehand. Many times, one wonders if these musicians have ever listened to the original recording or if style is simply not a concern of theirs. Perhaps by playing more precisely they feel that they are improving upon the original recording. Pavlos Vassiliou and the other Rebetiki Istoria musicians maintain the early aesthetic. They perform songs as they come to mind and they do not play in a manner that is clearly defined beforehand. Rather, all musicians should be very familiar with the original recording and should play with that ideal in mind.

Shaping the Vocal Line and Using Modal Ornaments

The voice has the lead role in rebetiko songs. Not only do they provide the focal point for the audience and musicians, but they greatly influence the level of a performance. The same instrumentalists can perform the same song in two very different

ways, depending upon the abilities of the lead singer. According to Vassiliou, in order to sing rebetika in the correct style, one must have knowledge of Byzantine chant, as many ornamentation techniques belong to both traditions. This knowledge is learned traditionally by assisting the *psaltis* [chanter] or priest in church. Byzantine and rebetika ornamentations are generally performed as inflections of the voice. In this next section I list and describe some of the many vocal ornamentations used by Vassiliou. Then, I transcribe his performance of the rebetiko song "There is a Spell on my Mind" by Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas" illustrating his stylistic interpretation.

It is important to keep in mind the idea that while Vassiliou remains strictly within the early rebetika style, he sings in a style that is also uniquely his own. The timbre of his voice, while reminiscent of early rebetiko musician Antonis Dalgas, has a singular quality and sound. This is combined with the skill and subtlety with which he sings ornamentations so that they become part of the fabric of the song rather than a decoration or type of musical afterthought. These are the musical features that separate Vassiliou from other contemporary rebetika singers. While by no means complete, the following is a list of some basic ornamentations and stylistic effects that Vassiliou incorporates in his rebetiko singing:

a) Vibrato:
    a. Changes in vibrato speed;
    b. No vibrato to some vibrato or some vibrato to none;
a) Accentuating certain notes according to modal structure, melodic line and syllables of the lyrics;
b) Change in texture by restricting the size of the windpipe;

c) Strong rhythmic sense and emphasis of strong beats;

d) Subtle alteration of the melodic line and rhythm (see transcription of "There is a Spell on my Mind" by Bayiaderas, below);

e) Making ornamentation a part of the song rather than a decoration;

f) Altering the pitch of one note in a phrase;

g) Singing one note or a group of notes without any vibrato;

h) Subtle speeding up or slowing down the tempo within a phrase;

i) Ornamenting a note by "breaking" his voice one or more times;

j) Never singing a repeating musical phrase in the same way twice.

"There is a Spell on My Mind": A Transcription of Vassiliou's Early-Style Rebetiko Performance

In this next section, I engage in a close examination of the vocal line of the first stanza of the song "There is a Spell on my Mind" by Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas." Through a comparative transcription of the vocal line with Vassiliou's rendition, I illustrate how he sings in the "authentic" rebetiko style of the original recordings. The lyrics of the first stanza of the song "There is a Spell on My Mind" read:

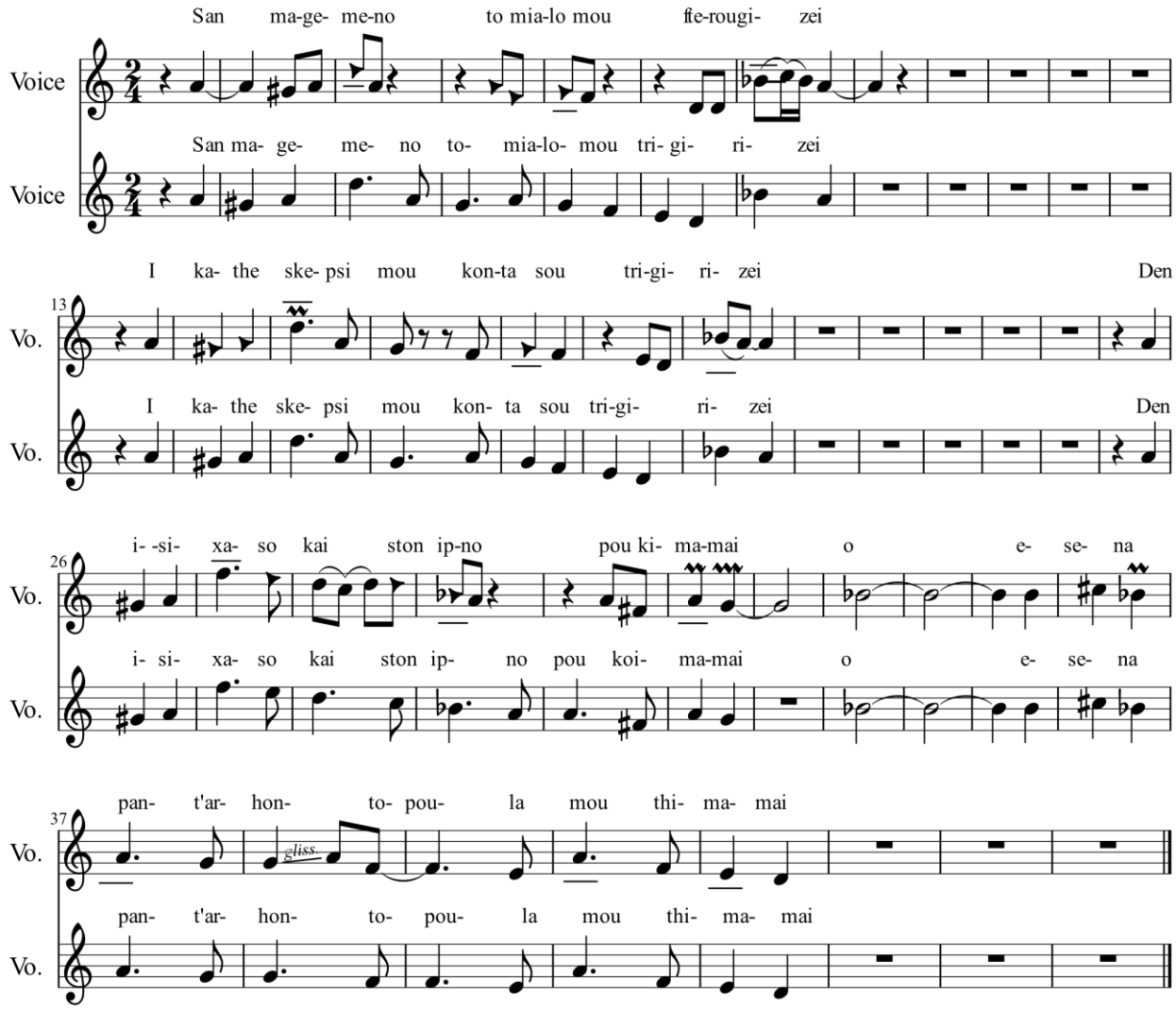
As if charmed my brain flies
My every thought revolves around you
I cannot relax and I cannot sleep
Oh, you my aristocratic lady, I remember.

In the transcription below, I indicate how Vassiliou makes the use of early-style rebetiko devices of rhythm and ornamentation. In measures one and two, he shapes the phrase by altering the rhythm of the notes. He holds the first note for a full two beats and then rushes beat four of the first measure and beat one of the second measure. This

technique can be traced throughout the entire first strophe as transcribed below. While Vassiliou does alter the rhythm of the vocal line, his singing style is very rhythmic and he emphasizes the strong beats of the phrases. The first beat of every measure is considered a strong beat in the *hasapiko* rhythm. However, when realized in song, the strong beats are also emphasized according to the melodic structure. I have indicated these strong beats with a small line under or above the note of emphasis. In the first phrase that is eight measures long, the strong beats Vassiliou emphasizes are beats one of measures 3, 5 and 7.

Other ornamentation devices that Vassiliou includes in this rendition of "There is a Spell on my Mind" include the intermittent singing of notes with no vibrato. I have indicated these notes in the transcription below with a triangular note head. Vassiliou adds glissandos between notes and various trills that he varies in speed, style and direction. In addition, Vassiliou maintains a very rhythmic quality to his voice, emphasizing the meter even through held notes by placing small accents on beats one and two of each measure.

Musical Example 4.3: “There is a Spell on my Mind”. A Transcription of the Vocal Line as interpreted by Pavlos Vassiliou.

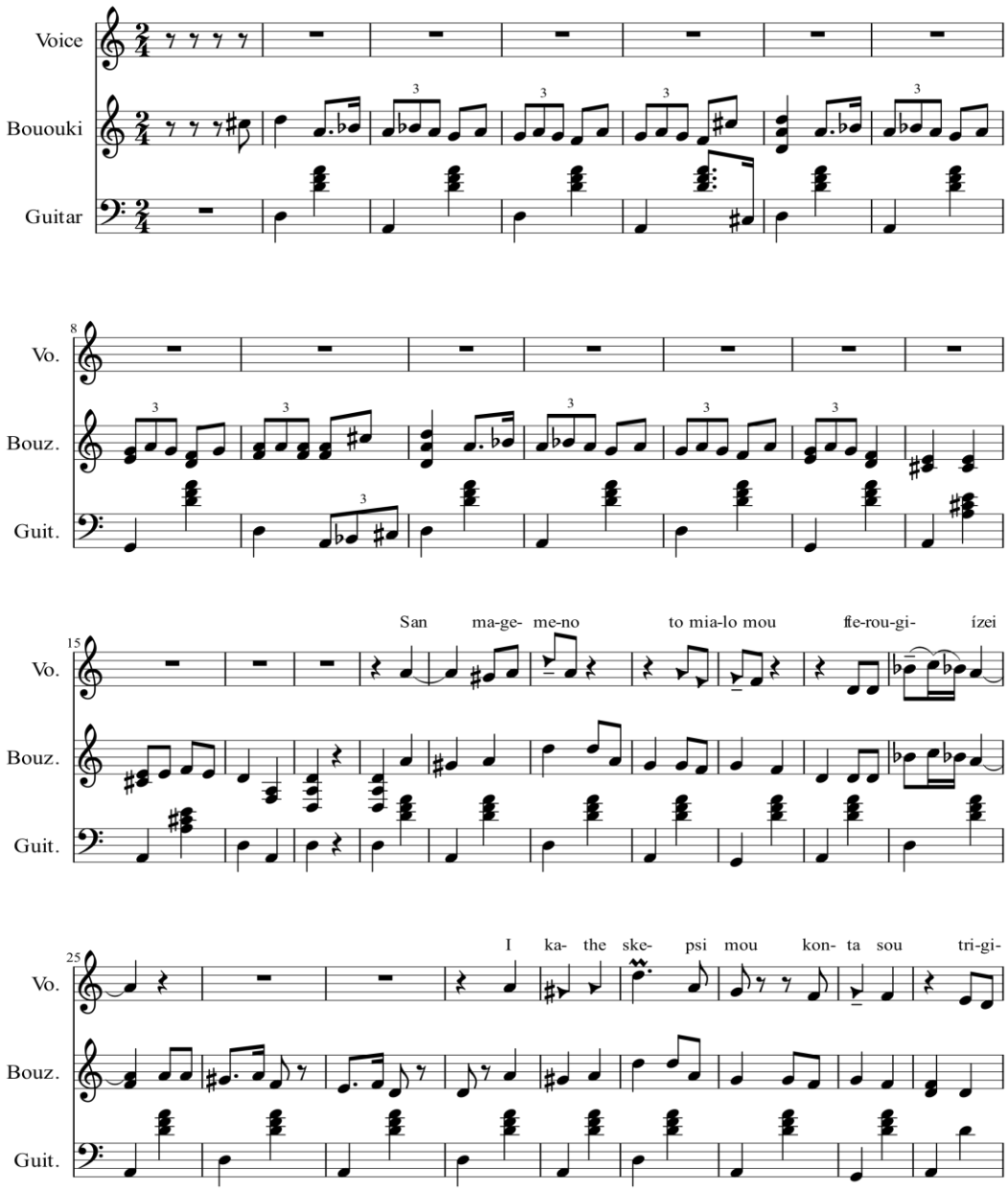


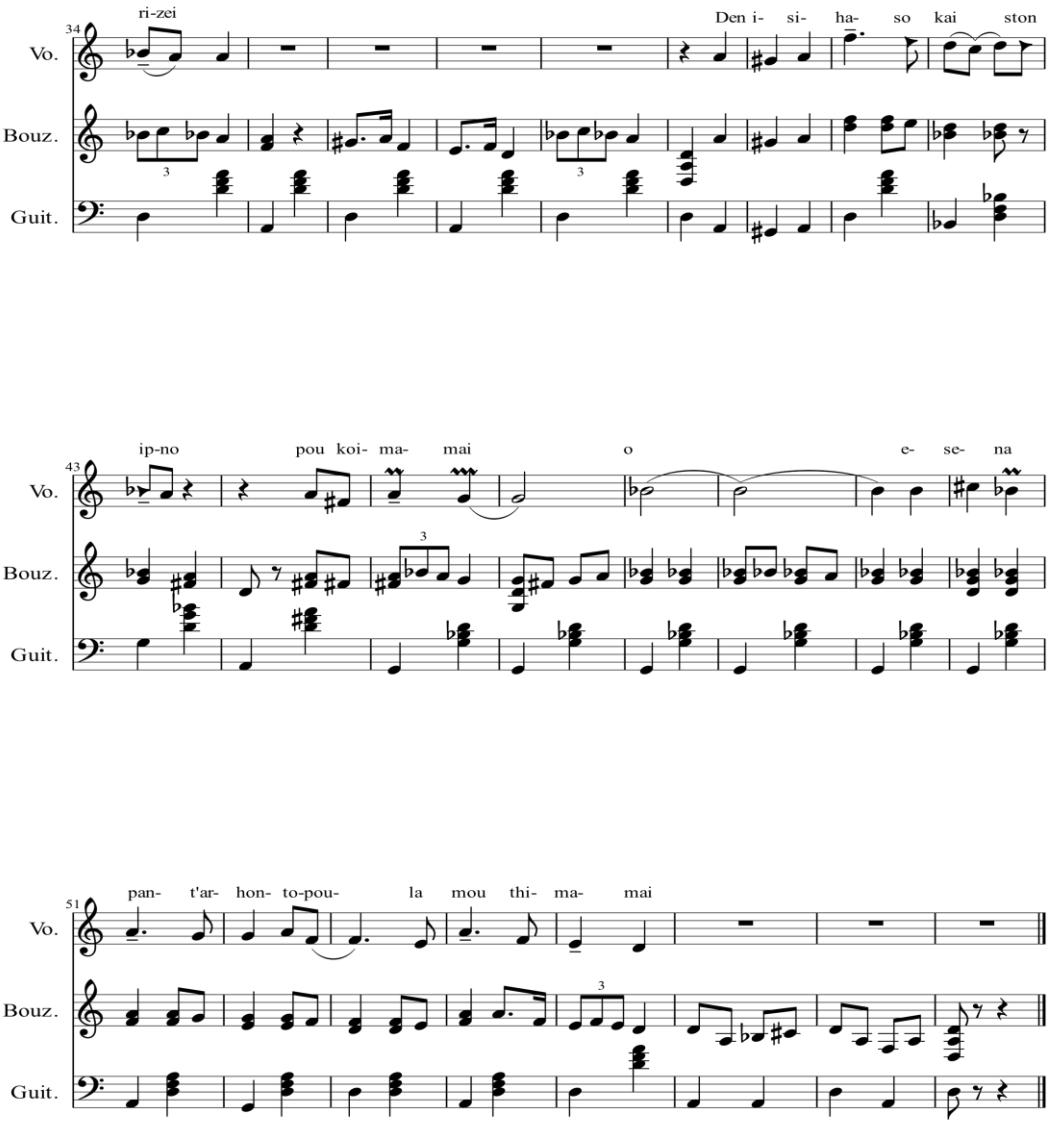
The subtleties in vocal quality are largely what characterize Vassiliou’s rebetiko singing as in the early style. In addition, this singing style represents the rejection of Europeanization and of other forces that alter Greek culture and promotes an alternative Greek national identity to Vassiliou and to many of his patrons. I will examine this idea further in Chapter Seven.

Rebetiko Style: A Musical Example

In the final section of this chapter, I analyze the first stanza of the song "There is a Spell on my Mind" as performed by the Rebetiki Istoria musicians in the early style. It is important to note that none of the parts exactly match those of the original recording. Instead, the Rebetiki Istoria musicians employ the technique of constant improvisation but remain in the early style. In this rendition of the song, there is no *taximi*. The bouzouki begins by playing the introduction of the song. The guitar enters immediately after the first pickup note with the *ostinato* 2/4 *hasapiko* rhythm. The introduction is sixteen measures long. Then the voice joins with the first stanza. In between phrases, the bouzouki and guitar play a bridge that joins the phrases together and cues the singer about his next entry. After playing the four phrases of the first stanza, the bouzouki and guitar play a second rendition of the introduction, which then leads into the second stanza.

Musical Example 4.4: “There is a Spell on my Mind.” A Transcription of the first stanza as interpreted by Pavlos Vassiliou and the Rebetiki Istoria musicians.





IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I illustrated the fundamental stylistic characteristics of early-style rebetika. These included musical modes, song forms, improvisation, instrumentation and rhythmic structure. I proposed that these are fundamental elements in the characterization of a song as rebetiko. I used two representative rebetika songs to illustrate the various stylistic attributes: “Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows” by Markos Vamvakaris and “There is

a Spell on my Mind" by Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas." In the next chapter, I provide background as to how the music has come to represent true Greekness to Vassiliou and to many of his patrons. I do this through a discussion of the social and political history and development of rebetika, highlighting the many ways in which the music has been used to support varying ideals for the Greek national identity throughout the twentieth century. For before I present my ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria, I must first outline the way in which rebetika has been used as a pawn in debates about Greek national identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

A BRIEF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF REBETIKA

> There still exists an ignorance that characterizes the way in which people regard rebetika. Music scholars tend to keep up with the trends and support various exaggerated statements about the music without even taking into consideration the social need that gave birth to it. The result is the complete misdirection of the people and mainly of the youth about rebetika.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the socio-political history of rebetika emphasizing its role in Greek national identity debates. Throughout the twentieth century, rebetika served varying ideals of Greekness on the local and national level. Various dictatorial regimes even persecuted the music for purportedly inhibiting the Westernization of Greece. These debates along with changing musical trends caused great alterations in the sound and function of the music In the late 1940s, early-style rebetika began to give way to other musical forms such as *archondorebetika* [posh rebetika] and *laïka* [post-war popular song style), popular music styles based on rebetika but that appealed to a broader sector of society. For a time, the music in its early style and its proponents were largely forgotten. In the mid-1970s, some Greek intellectuals sought out early-style rebetika music and culture as a traditional music form and the music began to reemerge in various ways. This

thesis focuses Pavlos Vassiliou as a major proponent of the contemporary revival culture that emerged in the 1980s and that the *rebetadiko* as its focal point.

In this historical overview of rebetika, I illustrate how rebetika was used to support various national identity ideals throughout the twentieth century. I begin with a survey of the central issues of these identity debates. Then I discuss national censorships of rebetika and the gradual evolution of the music into other styles. I close with a survey of the reemergence of early rebetika in the 1970s, the appearance of the *rebetadiko* in the 1980s and a discussion of contemporary rebetiko culture.[72] This chapter contextualizes Vassiliou's aestheticization of rebetika as national music in contemporary Greece. It helps explain why rebetika continues to maintain a controversial reputation.

I. REBETIKA DEBATES

Rebetika is traditional Greek music.
-Pavlos Vassiliou

Of course it isn't Greek music… Nor can it be classified within the body of Modern Greek culture, because it is essentially a product of decadence…and therefore has nothing in common with culture.
-A. Paridis

That great *rebetiko* lineage… is the only proof that we have a culture.
-Yiannis Tsarouchis

The major intellectual discussion about rebetika began in the late 1930s in the Greek leftist press. Journalists, musicians and scholars of various political persuasions argued about the Greekness of the genre and about its inherent moral value.[73] Some believed that the music was representative of true Greekness while others decried its

[72] Pavlos Vassiliou was the first musician in Athens to open a *rebetadiko*. A number of *rebetadika* opened soon after including *H Athinaiisa*, *To Tzivaeri* and *To Taximi*.
[73] Numerous books contain articles from the debate. Worthy of mention is Gail Holst's *Dromos Gia to Rembetiko* [Road to Rebetiko] (1977).

negative influences. Many rejected rebetika outright, characterizing the music as decadent and not Greek. They rejected the lyric content, musical style and associations with hashish and with marginal characters of Greek society. In the columns of the Greek Communist newspaper *Rizospastis*, rebetika was denounced as a corrupting force that would even break down the revolutionary potential of the Greek proletariat.

Rebetika debates concerned the sound and function of Greek music, understandings of Greek national identity and of the Greek international image. They were heated moral and ideological debates, often overly emotional and exaggerated. In 1947, Alekos Xenos wrote an article to *Rizospastis* calling rebetika an anti-proletarian, pornographic and decadent product, quite unlike the healthy songs of Resistance (Holst 1977, 141-143). During the 1940s, Communists exiled to Makronissos were forced to listen to rebetika songs in an effort to ruin their moral. And in the mid-1960s, a well-known Greek intellectual even suggested that rebetika was the cause of psychological orders in Greece. What features of rebetiko music and performance caused so much concern? In the next section I present a brief overview of the three elements of early rebetika often cited as cause for concern: the lyric content and style, musical style and social milieu. Then I discuss numerous rebetika controversies.

Lyric Content of Rebetika

> "Half the song says what the woman has done wrong to him. The other half says what revenge he will get on the woman. That is rebetika."
> -Pavlos Vassiliou

Rebetika lyrics were a major cause for debate and fuelled negative rebetika stereotypes. Song lyrics covered a wide range of topics. Most centered on the hardships

of the everyday lives of the urban proletariat: topics included love and loss, exile, unemployment, jail sentences and poverty. Numerous scholars have attempted to organize rebetika lyrics by content. Vassiliou proposed the following overarching five-part thematic categorization: songs about love, society, drugs, prison and exile. Contrastingly, in his well-known anthology of rebetika songs, *Rebetika Tragoudia* (*Rebetika Songs*) (1979 [1991]), Ilias Petropoulos organizes the songs thematically into more than twenty categories. While he may categorize the songs according to his own interpretations and while numerous songs may fit into more than one category, his classifications do highlight some of the major themes found in rebetika songs.[74] However, rebetika songs are so numerous and cover such a wide spectrum of topics that any categorization of this type is limited in its usefulness.

Vassiliou describes rebetika lyrics as a window into the life of the Greek urban proletariat of the early-twentieth century: "Rebetika are eyewitness accounts in music and in words of the experiences of the Greek people" (Vassiliou 2008). Many contemporary rebetika musicians and scholars share this sentiment. Musicologist Panos Savvopoulos describes rebetiko musician Markos Vamvakaris, as the one of the greatest reporters of his era. He suggests that his songs serve as vivid commentaries on his time as they describe actual events that occurred in Greece (Savvopoulos 2006, 63). A telling example is the song "The Prime Ministers" (1936), still popular in Greece today. It tells of a mysterious occurrence in Greek politics in the early 1930s: In the space of one year, the

[74] These themes are: Songs of Separation; Melancholic Songs and Songs of Complaint and Martyrdom; Songs of the Underworld; Hashish Songs; Jail Songs; Songs of Poverty; Work Songs; Songs of Sickness; Songs About Charon and Purgatory; Songs about a Mother; Songs of Exile; Dreamy Songs, Eastern Songs And Other Exotic Songs; Songs of the Tavern; Songs That Speak About Small Pains; Songs that Joke and that Show Toughness; Songs That Give Different Images of Life, Songs that Praise Different Images From Life; Songs that Praise Different Cities and Their Inhabitants; Songs of the Army and of War; Songs About Specific People.

standing and four previous prime ministers died suddenly and mysteriously of heart attacks, as the press reported—popular opinion suspects foul play.[75] The song lyrics are as follows:[76]

Whoever becomes prime minister
they will all die.
They are chased by the people
for the good that they do.
I will put down my candidacy
to become prime minister
to sit lazily and eat and drink.
And I will go up into the Parliament
I will give them orders
I will fix them a hashish-pipe
and I will get them high".
(Kondilis died
Venizelos will die too.
They got rid of Demertzis as well
Who would have brought the end.) (as quoted by Savvopoulos 2006, 63)[77]

In addition to reporting this occurrence in Greek politics, the song reflects an attitude common to rebetika; namely a lack of trust of those in power. This also bothered many Greeks who took issue with the supposed revolutionary attitude of the *rebetes*.

[75] The names and dates of death of the deceased prime ministers are: Giorgos Kondilis: Friday, January 31; Eleftherios Venizelos: Wednesday, March 18; Konstantinos Demertzis: Monday, April 13; Panagis Tsaldaris: Sunday, May 17; Alexandros Papanastasiou: Tuesday, November 17 (Kapetanakis 1999, 399).
[76] I placed parentheses around the last stanza, as it was not included in the original recording of the song.
[77] Most songs are written as independent narratives as is the song "The Prime Ministers". Other structural styles include an amalgamation of various independent two-line stanzas that appear in many different songs. A prime example of this technique is the song *Sou'hei Lahei* [*It Happened to You*] by Giorgos Batis. Unlike the lyrics of most rebetika songs, the lyrics of this song have no logical narrative. This technique was popular in pre-rebetika and some early-rebetika styles. The lack of narrative flow is clearly evident in the first stanza of the song:

Αχ, σου 'χει λάχει	Ach, it happened to you
σού 'χει λάχει	Ach, it happened to you
ε, ρε να το φας απ' το σιλάχι	To get a beating with the belt
ωχ, να το φας απ' το σελάχι	Ach, to get a beating with the belt
αχ, τιποτις για να μη λάχει	Ach, nothing should happen
ως τίποτις για να μη λάχει	Until nothing should happen
ε, ρε να σε πιάσει - αχ - το στομάχι	Eh, man your stomach should hurt
ε, ρε σου 'χει λάχει, σου 'χει λάχει	Ach man it happened to you it happened to you
αχ - να σε πιάσει το στομάχι	Eh, man your stomach should hurt

According to Vassiliou, rebetika songs simply depict the experiences of the urban proletariat. The songs relay everyday occurrences and a general life outlook. In his own words:

> Look, take as an example the first recordings by the Quartet *Xakousti* of Pireaus, with Markos, Stratos, Delias, Batis. These give us the ability to hear the main themes that concerned the *rebetes*.[78] These themes were mainly social—how and with what means the *rebetes* encountered their different everyday problems: being chased, being sent to jail for no good reason, smoking hashish etc. For example songs that discuss jail: "The Jails of Oropos", "The Jails Echo", "The Life Sentence". But there is an exaggerated emphasis on the connection between rebetika and jail. The musicians were jailed for smoking hashish… which was legal in Greece until the mid-1930s anyway. And for crimes of love. And we see this is their songs as well, in the many songs that refer to disappointments and acts of revenge that many times sent him to jail too. (Vassiliou 2008)

To Vassiliou, the rebetiko musician was an innocent victim of unjust travails.

While often based on fact, rebetika songs are also shaped by myth and imagination. This does not diminish their accurateness as cultural texts. Rather, it makes the music a window into the imaginative worlds of these rebetika musicians. For example, many songs refer to the East as a mystical far-away land filled with desirable women: The infamous "*Misirlou*" by Nikos Roubanis is a telling example, as are many songs by Vassilis Tsitsanis including "*Serah,*" "*Gioulbaxar,*" and "*Zaira*" with lyrics by Kostas Virvos.[79] These songs reflect the characteristic desire for the East and simultaneous rejection of the West that shapes rebetika music and lyrics. Tragaki suggests, "the oriental (*anatolitissa*), the gypsy (*tsigana*) and the black woman (*arapina*) thus became the exotic fantasies that nurtured *rebetis*' escapism" (Tragaki 2007, 34-35). The following song, "*H Magisa tis Arapias*" [The Witch of Arabia] (1962) a slow

[78] See definition and discussion of the *rebetis* later on in this chapter.
[79] Other popular songs include *Arapia* [Arabia], *Nihtes Magikes Oneiremenes* by Vassilis Tsitsanis and *Kaixi* by Apostolos Hadjihristos.

hasapiko by Vassilis Tsitsanis, illustrates this trend. The singer dreams of the sensual powers of the Arabian woman:

I will go there to Arabia
Because they have told me
Of a great witch
Who will cure my hex.

And I will tell her of my troubles
Of all that I have gone through
And the marks of insanity
She will throw in the fire.

So that they will catch fire and burn
As they burned me
To catch her hexes
To walk around in foreign lands.

Vassilis Tsitsanis characterized the use of fantasy in his compositions as artistic freedom. He mentioned the following in reference to his free use of his imagination in the song "Paraguay:"

> Someone came up to me one time and said 'Where did you see a shore in Paraguay?' He was referring to some prewar song in which I refer to the fine shore in Paraguay. And they told me that in Paraguay there are no shores. And so what? When I traveled there in my imagination, I saw a beautiful shore. And immediately I made it into a song...If I don't have [the artist's right] to create a shore in Paraguay, then I should cease existing. (Tsitsanis 1982, 35)

The rebetiko repertoire also included songs about hashish and the *teke* environment. In popular imagination, these songs have come to dominate understandings of the genre. Today, books, compact discs and concerts about rebetika are packaged as songs about hashish or as songs of the underworld. This is an exaggeration as only a handful of the thousands of rebetika songs discuss this aspect of life. A representative *hasiklidika* [hashish song] is "*Eimai Alaniaris*" [I am a Bum] by Markos Vamvakaris. Its lyrics are as follows:

I am a bum, I roam in the streets
And because I am so high I do not recognize anyone
And because I am so high I cannot control my mind
I am a bum, I roam in the streets

Put down some money brother so we can smoke the hash pipe
Together we will get high and I will play bouzouki

My brave *manga* make the hash pipe bubble
And with fires from the best carbon I will smoke and make it gurgle

When we get high in our hashish den
Everyone loves you our proud hashish pipe

I am a bum, I roman in the streets
And because I am so high I do not recognize anyone
And because I am so high cannot control my mind
I am a bum, I roam in the streets

Lyrical Style of Rebetika

Rebetika songs were also scorned for their lyrical style—many songs were written in a manner of speaking that was popular amongst the urban poorest classes. This style of speaking was known as *mangias*, and was easily recognized by the use of slang and by a unique intonation. Savvopoulos cites three basic characteristic of the language of *mangias*: a. the melody, in other words, the prosody of the voice. b. the specific vocabulary, in other words the slang of *mangias*. c. unique constructions, and usages of ordinary words (Savvopoulos 2006, 100). Slang played a significant role in rebetika songs.[80] The slang was specific to these classes and often was not understood by others.[81]

[80] There exists a series of academic publications that define rebetiko slang. These include *Rebetika Tragoudia* (1968) by Ilias Petropoulos that defines 550 slang words and *Rebetiki Anthologia* by Tasos Schorelis that defines 350 words.

[81] Many Greeks who listen to rebetika today do not understand the slang. This provided an extra challenge for me as I worked not only to recognize when the lyrics contained slang but to recognize which slang is understood by Greeks in general.

"*I Lahanades*" [The Wallet-Snatchers] (1934) of Vangelis Papazoglou is a well-known rebetika song that is filled with slang. The words in boldface type are examples of slang:

Κάτω στα λε-, ρε κάτω στα λε-, κάτω στα λεμονάδικα
Κάτω στα λεμονάδικα γίνηκε φασαρία
Δυο λαχανάδες πιάσανε και **κάμαν την κυρία**

Τα σίδερα, ρε τα σίδερα, τα σίδερα τους φόρεσαν
Τα σίδερα τους φόρεσαν, για τη στενή τους πάνε
Κι αν δε βρεθούν **τα λάχανα το ξύλο που θα φάνε**

Κυρ αστυνό-, ρε κυρ αστυνό-, κυρ αστυνόμε μη βαράς
Κυρ αστυνόμε μη βαράς γιατί και συ το ξέρεις
Πώς η δουλειά μας ειν'αυτή και **ρέφα** μη γυρεύεις

Εμείς τρώμε, βρε εμείς τρώμε, **εμείς τρώμε τα λάχανα**
Βρε εμείς τρώμε τα λάχανα **τσιμπούμε τις παντόφλες**
Για να μας βλέπουν τακτικά της φυλακής οι πόρτες

Metaphorical Translation:

Down in the le-, down in the le-, down in the lemonadika[82]
Down in the lemonadika there was a fuss
They caught two **pick-pockets** who **were robbing** a lady

In handcuffs, in handcuffs, they put them in handcuffs
They put them in handcuffs and took them to their cell
And if they don't find **the wallets**, **the beating that they will take**

Sir police sir police, sir policeman don't
Sir policeman don't insist
This is our work, don't wait for a **bribe**

We steal wallets
Hey we steal wallets and **snatch purses**
So that the doors of jails catch us

Literal Translation:

Down in the le-, down in the le-, down in the lemonadika
Down in the lemonadika there was a fuss
They caught two vegetables who did a lady

In steal, in steal, in steal they put them

[82] The Lemonadika is a neighborhood in the Piraeus area.

They put them in steal and took them to their cell
And if they don't find the vegetables the wood that they will eat

Sir police, sir police, sir policeman don't
Sir policeman don't insist
This is our work and don't wait for a bribe

We eat, we eat vegetables
Hey we eat vegetables and nibble at slippers
So that the doors of jails catch us

The recording "*I Foni tou Argile*" [The Voice of the Waterpipe] (1936) features a staged conversation between rebetika musicians Vangelis Papazoglou and Stellakis Perpiniadis. This is an example of the spoken rebetiko intonation and *mangias* (Savvopoulos 2006, 100).[83]

[83] Savvopoulos characterizes this recorded conversation as a true representation of rebetika intonation (Savvopoulos 2006). The use of slang may be exaggerated as it was held in a recording studio and was most likely constructed for the purposes of the recording. The conversation is as follows:
- Γειά σου φίλε μου Στελλάκη
- Γειά και χαρά σου Βαγγέλη
- Τί είναι αυτό που κρατάς;
-Αργιλές.
-Αργιλές;
-Τι ήθελες να κρατώ, κανένα υπερωκειάνιο;
-Μα αιωνίως μωρ αδερφέ μου Στελλάκη όποτε έρθω να σε βρω όλο με τον αργιλέ στα χέρια σε βρίσκω!
-Αχ! φίλε μου Βάγγο έχεις δίκο! Αλλά αν ήξερες τα ντέρτια και τα βάσανα πόχω, δεν θα μ' αδικούσες ποτέ.
-Και δεν μου τα λες, να τα μάθω και΄γω;
-Ακου τα μωρ' αδερφέ μου Βάγγο, να με παρηγορήσεις!

-Hello my friend Stellaki
-Hey there Vangeli
-What are you holding?
-A water pipe.
-A water pipe?
-What did you expect me to be holding, an ocean-liner?
-But come now my brother Stellaki whenever I come to find you I always find you with a water pipe in your hands
-Ach, my friend Vango you are right! But if you knew the troubles and the hardships that I have, you would never say I am wrong.
-And won't you tell me them, so I can learn them too?
-Listen to them my brother Vango, to comfort me!

Rebetika Scorned for its Associations with the East and for its Social Milieu and

Rebetika were scorned as a hindrance to the Westernization of Greece. As discussed earlier, numerous song lyrics referred to the East in favorable ways. For example, they spoke of longing for the sensual women of the East, living in *Anatoli* or *Arapia*—the East or the Arab Countries. Many scorned rebetika music for its Eastern associations. Rebetika songs are based on modes that are closely related to those of Arab and Turkish classical music. While these traditions are related to ancient Greek modes, their contemporary association with the East often prevailed in the popular conscious.

Rebetiko instrumentation was considered Eastern as well. The bouzouki, not only an instrument of low standing was closely related to the Turkish and Arab saz and buzuk. To many, the very sound of the bouzouki caused discomfort. When director of the Greek operetta Niko Hatziapostolou heard Markos Vamvakaris playing the bouzouki in the Odeon Parlophone studio in the 1930s, he became very angry and warned the studio director: "If you don't remove those people and their setup from this room this minute, I will never record again in your company!" (Kounadis 2008, 12). Hatziapostolou never did return. And during the Metaxas dictatorship those found carrying a bouzouki in the streets were chased or worse beaten and jailed and their instruments were smashed.

The *Rebetis* as the Greek Urban Folk? The Social Milieu of Rebetika

> The greatness of the Acropolis is not diminished by the life that Kalikrates led. No one says the Acropolis is nice but Kalikrates did this or that, lived this way or that way. The same should hold true for rebetika. What is important is this incredible body of music the musicians left us, not whether this musician used this drug or that, or slept with this woman or another one. That is their personal life. Just leave it alone.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou

The social milieu of rebetika songs was often cause for debate about the value and Greekness of the music. Who were rebetika songs written for and about? A host of terminology exists to describe the type of person towards whom the rebetiko song is directed. Most commonly, this person is described as a "*rebetis*" (*rebetes* pl.), the person by and for whom rebetika songs were supposedly written. Georgiadis describes the people that rebetika songs express:

> The *rebetiko* song is the vehicle for certain types of people to express themselves and have a good time: *Daides* [he who is ready to make trouble and who is ready to fight] *koutsavakides*, [a tough guy- a *mangas* with negative connotations] *mourmourides* [he who does not make trouble and who is low-key] κουρμπέτηες [people who gather together to hang out] *manges* [tough-guys with great self-respect and dignity and who abide strict social codes], *mortes* [the wise-guy *mangas*], *rebetes, rembeli* [wanderers], *alanides*, [bums with both an affectionate and derogatory connotation], all those people who liked to have a good time and express themselves through rebetika songs, which spoke of their loves, their bravery, their ethics, their thoughts, their troubles, their joys, their dreams, their hopes (Georgiadis 1999, 64).

In the nest section, I present the *rebetis* and the numerous complex understanding of the term.

Nearchos Georgiadis offers the following definition of the *rebetis*: "[The *rebetis* is] the musician and the singer who writes and sings these songs, with the assumption that he, to a great degree, lives the rebetiko life and has the rebetiko soul" (Georgiadis 1999, 64). According to Georgiadis, those who play and write rebetika share a certain lifestyle

and a certain way of viewing the world. Today, the perception that there is a particular rebetiko way of life is still common. Georgiadis writes the following about the life of rebetiko musician Giannis Papaioannou: "Giannis Papaioannou also lived a rebetiko life, staying up all night and celebrating, which drove him to poverty, but he made a comeback again since people ran to hear him and of course, to pay" (Georgiadis 1999, 65). And in his article "Orpheus in the Underworld, Myth in and About Rebetiko" Gauntlett describes the *rebetis* as a man who lives the aforementioned rebetiko life and has the rebetiko soul. As such, the characterization maintains spiritual undertones as well:

> A *rebetis* is someone who to some degree is somewhat irregular who cannot be forced to conform. The term *rebetis* is the opposite of the at-home person, of the responsible and rule-abiding leader of a family. The exact place of the *rebetis* on the spectrum between complete irregularity on the one hand and conformism on the other can vary considerably, but it could surely be said that there is a connection of the marginalized or the dissolute in the small and large annoyances in life (especially of the involvement with the opposite sex and with the law) and in the joys of substances (especially hashish). (Gauntlett 2001, 62)

The *rebetis* is often characterized as a wanderer, as someone is usually alone and who is troubled.[84]

Vassiliou uses the term *rebetis* simply to describe the rebetiko musician. His use of the term lauds the *rebetis* character and he often belittles his own self with relation to the *rebetis*:

> Look, there is much talk about the *rebetis*. Some say he was a wanderer, someone who lives outside of the rules of society. Someone who is not worried about societal norms about marriage, family and so on. In other words, he whom I would have liked to have been. Others define the *rebetis* incorrectly with a

[84] Michalis Genitsaris describes the *rebetis* in the following manner: "The *rebetis* is a person who cannot be saved, a lost person, the last person on earth. A loiterer, he doesn't go to work" (Genitsaris 1996, 29). The term *rebetis* has been used in various ways in Greek literature. It has been used to describe numerous types of characters from vagabonds to holy characters. For example, in a short story by Vassilis Vasilikos *H Rebetes* [The Rebetes], two *rebetes* commence preparations for "the feast of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of the greatest *rebetis* of all time", referring to the figure of Jesus Christ (Vasilikos 1977, 47).

> negative connotation of a bum. And still others say that the *rebetis* is the musician that plays rebetika. That plays and lives rebetika. It is not enough just to play…
>
> How should I explain this to you. In rebetika, most songs that are dedicated to the troubles of simple people, to worries, to the joys of love, to the pains of being in a foreign land, of death, of jail, of sickness and so on. The *rebetis* experiences love with much passion. Since by nature he is sensitive and emotional. In all of his songs he is descriptive and most of all a poet. He uses lyrics that are rich in imagination. And his different imageries and metaphors are so successful that the best poets would envy him…
>
> When, therefore these lyrics are set to music with specific instruments and specific rhythms with the bouzouki melodically bringing to life those lyrics, complaint becomes a cry of protest. Love becomes a hymn. Being in a foreign land becomes torture. Death becomes pain. Injustice becomes revenge. And so on. No one has managed to write with such vividness all that the greater part of our people has been through. It is the nature of the *rebetis*, in great disappointment to find himself and to pay attention to everything. Everything that for him is contemporary and alive. (Vassiliou 2008)

Scholars and musicians generally agree that the *rebetis* is a complex character: On the one hand, he is tough and even aggressive. He speaks slang and sometimes sports weapons. On the other hand, he is vulnerable to the basic trials of life such as deceit by women. The ever-popular song "*O Prezakias*" ["The Junkie"] by Anestis Delias, illustrates the toughness and the vulnerability of the *rebetis.* Regardless of the accuracy of the story behind the song, it illustrates the complex understanding of the *rebetis* character[85]. Delias was a member of the infamous Piraeus Quartet. In this song, he

[85] Georgiadis counters popular prejudices against the *rebetis* as a potentially dangerous and harmful character. He suggests that the *rebetis*, with the bohemian life he lives, does not harm anyone, except for his own self (Georgiadis 1999, 54). There often exits a conflation of the notion of the *rebetis* with that of the *mangas*, which adds to the plethora of rebetiko myths discussed above. Tragaki describes the *mangas* as the dominant character in rebetiko lyrics, a "legendary outlaw who embodies the ideal rebetiko 'way-of-being' in the world... [and who is] identified with a particular behavioral system, ideology, music (the rebetiko song), dress code, along with other special attributes" (Tragaki 2007, 26). There is often a highly-romanticized notion of the *mangas* as the urban outlaw and is often associated with the heroic *Antartes* [resistance fighters] who fought against the Ottomans. In her book *Rebetiko Worlds*, Daphne Tragaki characterizes the word *mangas* as "the generic term used to describe rebetiko musicians, as well as male agents of rebetiko culture in general". Yet she too places them in their own romanticized world with their own dress code and rules of behavior.[85] And in his autobiography, rebetiko composer, singer and bouzouki player Markos Vamvakaris states that people recognized the *manges* by the way that they used to dress[85]. As discussed above, while the *manges* did have their own way of dress and did cultivate their own slang,

describes the negative effects of drug use that lead him to a disastrous end. Many say the song was prophetic and reflected Delias's life. So the story goes: a woman with whom he had fallen in love gave him cocaine while he was asleep and thus he became an addict.

> From the time that I started to smoke
> The world has turned its back on me, I don't know what to do.
> Wherever I stand and wherever I find myself people bother me
> And my soul does not hold coke to call me.
> From the moment I started smoking, I also went on the needle
> And my body started to slowly melt.
> Nothing has remained for me to do in this world
> For coke has led me to die in the streets.

In 1946, eight years after he composed the song, Delias was found dead in the streets of a drug overdose. Vassiliou believes it is an overemphasis of songs like these that leads to the common misunderstanding of rebetika. He emphasizes his belief that the *rebetes* were regular and simple people. He states:

> We cannot therefore accept and define these musicians by these negative elements. They were people with sensitivity, which is why they wrote that which they wrote. Simple everyday people with whatever passion they had. Just like every person has his good sides and his bad. But what bad could someone say about Ioanni Papaioannou if he had the luck to meet him? Or about Mitso Bayiadera or about Kosta Roukouna and so many others? Rather than focusing on baseless gossip, it would be better to focus on this wonderful musical heritage, this heritage that already should have been put on the walls of museums. It should be taught as a lesson in tradition, that is, if we wanted our kids to remove themselves from this big obsession with the foreign and semi-foreign, from this nauseating baptism into the foreign and the fake. We have even reached the stage now in which we celebrate foreign European holidays.

Amongst contemporary rebetiko musicians, there still exists the belief that rebetika is not for everyone but that it is for those who have a special sensitivity. As

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they were not a separate sector of society, and they did not comprise a great number of rebetiko musicians. Today, musicians and scholars deny this exaggeration of the *mangas* character. Vassiliou states "The idea that *manges* were criminals is just completely incorrect. When we say that someone is a *manga*, we mean that he is a good person, that he dresses well, that he is respectful. And a *manga* is not necessarily a *rebetis* and vice versa. And just because some low-lives held a bouzouki in their hands, that doesn't make rebetika a low-life music[85]" (Vassiliou May, 2008). Although rebetika incorporates a variety of national and international influences it is also particular to urban space, maintaining an inherent connection to Greek urban locality. This relationship with the Greek urban space is constantly changing.

stated by Pavlos Vassiliou: "Rebetika is for a specific type of person. It is for the person who has gone through a lot in life, and who feels deeply. One cannot appreciate rebetika if one has not suffered" (Vassiliou 2007). And in his program notes for a 1967 rebetika concert organized by the Dimos Peiraios, Petropoulos wrote, "rebetika songs are songs of the heart. And only he who fills them with pure feeling feels them and enjoys them. Because the heart is measured by other hearts" (Petropoulos 1967, 1). He continued on to state that rebetika songs are songs of wounded souls, of the simple people, of the poor, of the sensitive, and those experiencing unrequited love (Petropoulos 1967, 2).

In Rebetiki Istoria, patrons often use the term *rebetis* to describe the person that understands and feels rebetika songs in the correct way. Yiorgos, a regular patron who has attended Rebetiki Istoria every weekend for nearly a decade expressed his discontent with a newly hired musician. "He is not a *rebetis*. He does not understand the music. He doesn't feel what he is singing. The *rebetis* does not make jokes about the songs he doesn't play the songs without thinking about their meaning" (Yiorgos 2009). As I discuss later, Yiorgos once emphasized his discontent about this musician's incongruous attitude with a conspicuous two-week absence from Rebetiki Istoria.

Throughout the twentieth century, a central focus of rebetika debates was the proper classification of the music. Was rebetika folk song, popular song, or something else? And how should this musical tradition be presented to the rest of the world? These discussions maintained implications about Greek national identity perceptions. In the next section, I discuss how the *rebetis* and rebetiko song conflicted with conventional understandings of the Greek folk and of Greek folk song at the height of the debates during the mid-twentieth century.

Folk or Popular Song: Rebetika Debates

In a 1947 article to the left-wing newspaper *Rizospastis*, musicologist Fivos Anoyianakis suggested that rebetika was a type of Greek popular song and that it should be characterized as such—For rebetika was the spontaneous expression of the urban masses. He compared it to demotic (folk) song that arose in a different environment and social milieu:

> Battle, nature, mountain, the wild and the festival. Different [circumstances] altogether gave birth to contemporary popular, urban song. These were the circumstances of life in the urban centers. Song topics included love and passion, miseries of life, many times feelings of exile, a coquettish mood or humor. And tragedy masked in irony, lyricism combined with oral banality—these themes were realized in wonderful melodic shapes. (Anoyianakis 1947 as quoted by Holst 1977)

According to Anoyianakis, rebetika are a natural continuation of Greek folksong and of Byzantine chant as true expressions of the Greek people. Other scholars echoed his characterization of the genre as popular song, citing its ability to speak directly to the soul of the people, its associations with the urban folk and its connections to Byzantine music. For some, this made rebetika a true representation of the Greek people:

> Our sambas are nice, as are our tangos, or rumbas and our swing, but however we play them, they don't stop being mimicries of a foreign music. They are South-American rhythms, gypsy melodies and Argentinian chords, written by Greek composers. But the poor troubled *rebetiko* is through and through Greek. I am not speaking of course about the "*Otan Simvei Sta Perix Foties Na Kaine*" [When Fires Burn in Perix] about "*Mes stis Polis to Hamam*" [In the Turkish Bath of the City] that are simply in bad taste. I am speaking of rebetika, of the popular song in other words, Greek song, that have honest sentiments, and that speak directly to the soul of the simple anonymous Greek (Sakellarios in Vlisidis 2006, 184).

Many took issue with the categorization of rebetika as Greek popular song, for they did not believe that rebetika expressed the Greek people. In 1955, Filippidis titled his polemical article against this categorization with the shocked exclamation, "Rebetika

Songs… Are Being Advertized to Other Countries as Our Ethnic Popular Music!" (Filippidis 1955 in Vlisidis 2006, 207). And in his 1952 article in the *Ethnikos Kirix* (National Herald): "*Popular Song—The Opinion of One of its Representatives*", Nestoras Matsas asked how could rebetika be popular song. Is it the task of popular song to express "the agony of the times or the psychological sickness of the people?" (Matsas 1952 in Vlisidis 2006, 176) Many believed that popular song should represent a common understanding of the Greek people. For example, the journalist Pangalis stated that by definition, rebetika could not be characterized as popular song:

> *Laiko* song is tied to the history of the place, the societal conditions of its time. With musical forms filled with health, longevity and beauty, it expresses the belief and the optimism in life… Contrary to our popular song, *rebetiko* is far from societal conflict, from the light of life, in the dark of the underworld, with tones that are full of pessimism and tiredness, with cheap music, vulgarity, it sings the morals, and the customs of a non-existent world that brings us back in time of the *koutsavakidon* [tough guys that make trouble] and of Bairaktaris.[86] (Pangalis 1953 in Vlisidis 2006, 182)

In a recent article, Holst-Warhaft summarizes why so many Greeks took issue with the characterization of rebetika as popular song:[87]

> Despite the fact that it was, in many ways, a home-grown hybrid, rebetiko was not associated with the ideal *topos* of nationalism, i.e. with the Greek countryside (especially the mainland areas first liberated from the Turks). The regional folk

[86]Bairaktaris was a police chief in Athens at the end of the 19th century. He is remembered for his bravery and single-handed ability to deal with urban outlaws.

[87] Interestingly, the Greek words that distinguish "rural" and "urban" musics are virtually synonymous. Folk songs, or *dimotika* in Greek is defined as "things associated with the people (as opposed to high culture)" (Cowan 2006, 1018). The term has come to refer to rural society and its cultural productions such as poetry and song. "*Laïka*, which refers to 'the people' or 'a people' (*laos*)" is used to describe urban popular songs. The term is also used in a more restricted sense to refer to urban popular music of the postwar era (Cowan 2000, 1018). Another confusion between the terms *dimotika* and *laïka* stems from the fact that the folksong collections by Fauriel, Passow and others that were published during the 19th century and that were instrumental in the definition of a Greek national identity, contained the term "popular song" or "songs of the Greek people" (chants populaires, *carmina popularia*, *canti poplari*, *chants du people en Grèce*, etc.) rather than folksong. Georgiadis states that one should define popular song simply by its ability to appeal to people across social strata: "Popular song as a general and diachronic appeal to all social classes, whereas the cantada and light-popular song do not" (Georgiadis 2006, 13). In general, scholars have also placed a much greater value on *dimotika* and have largely ignored urban *laïka* in their collections and studies.

> music of Greece, much of which was itself of hybrid origin, was generally defined by association with a particular landscape. The deracinated, urban rebetika, with their foreign derived slang, their shady milieu and anti-authoritarian lyrics were a thorn in the side of nationalists, but for the same reason they were attractive to modernist writers and intellectuals who opposed narrow nationalism, and to working class urban Greeks, many of whom were sympathetic to the Greek Communist Party's campaign for a more equal distribution of resources. (Holst-Warhaft 2001, 2)

A certain blurring of folk and popular song genres did exist as a fundamental characteristic of numerous rebetiko songs.[88] This was partly due to the fact that rebetika composers used the music and lyrics from folk songs as a basis for many rebetiko songs. For example, the Smyrnian Panayiotis Tountas used the melody from the folksong "*H Amersouda*" [Amersouda] to make five songs in Smyrna style rebetika[89]. Similar overlaps occur in rebetika songs lyrics. In his book *O Akritas Pou Egine Rebetis* (The Acritic Who Became a Rebetis), Georgiadis traces the development of a song that existed in Greece as an Acritic ballad and that changed form throughout the twentieth century until it was adapted as a *rebetiko* song.[90] In addition, rebetika songs or pre-rebetika existed in Greece since the mid-19th century. As such, they were recorded in various

[88] In an article published in the left-wing cultural periodical *Epitheorisi Technis* in 1961, musicologist Fivos Anoyianakis differentiates rebetiko song from folk song by the criteria that folk songs do not have a specific composer but are composed and perfected by the people. In his understanding, rebetika songs that have a specific composer cannot be classified as folk song. He states that the recording of specific works by their creators "leaves no room for them to be processed by the people. It imposes the form that its creator gave it, with all of it strengths but also with all of its weaknesses" (Anoyianakis as quoted by Holst 1982, 186). Anoyianakis promotes a rather narrow definition of folk song. He includes an interesting though problematic diagram that shows the connections between demotic and popular song through the use of a Venn diagram. Despite the fact that the diagram suggests finite boundaries that define demotic and popular song, it does serve to show the intricate connection between the two categorical constructions.

[89] These songs are "*H Barbara*" [Barbara], "*H Marika h daskala*" [Marika the Teacher], "*Manolios and Dimitroula*" [Manolios and Dimitroula], "*To Kalokairi tora*" [The Summer Now], "*Akou, Doutse mou, ta nea akou*" [Listen to My News Doutse Mou Listen]. Also the song "*Bournovalia*" [Bournovalia] is based on an ancient Heptanesian song, that is still sung today as an Athenian cantada "*As Hamilonan ta vouna*" [Let the Mountains be Lowered], which is still sung today (Kapetanakis 1999, 168). It was later turned into a rebetika song by Panayiotis Tountas.

[90] See Georgiadis, 1999.

native and foreign folk song anthologies including the well-known collection by Bourgault-Ducoudray (1876).

A blurring of genres also occurs for an additional reason. Numerous songs that have become so well known in Greece that they are categorized as *paradosiaka* (traditional) actually have known composers of the *rebetiko* genre. As stated by Kapetanakis, "many of the known songs of the first thirty years of this century that were recorded in the major cities (Smyrna, Constantinople, Athens, Alexandrea) are creations of well-known composers, even if many times they are believed to be traditional" (Kapetanakis 1999, 167-168). While Pavlos Vassiliou agrees that folk song and rebetika do share some musical characteristics including musical modes and roots in Byzantine ornamentation styles, he emphasizes the circumstantial and musical distinctions between them.

> Firstly, folk instruments are very different from those that musicians used and still use when playing rebetika. Demotic songs feature basic instruments that produce a strong and harsh sound because they belong to and are played in open spaces and for a broad public. They are used mainly in social events such as festivals for saints, church festivals and so on. For example, the gaida, the lute, the *pipiza* [blown high-pitched flute], the klarino, the *zournas* [wind instrument similar to the bagpipe] and the *daires* [large defi] have a protagonistic role. In contrast, the bouzouki, the baglamas, the violin, the guitar, the kanun are the instruments that have primary role in rebetiko. These belong to small spaces and are for a limited number of listeners. Today and over the years, many novices have tried to compare the two or to discover shared characteristics between the two. But demotic song is based on different situations that the Greek people went through over time, from before their liberation until today. Rebetiko is a song of the cities. It is lonely and proud. At times it sings complaint and pain, and at other times bravery. It has absolutely no connection to mass entertainment, wild entertainment and dance. (Vassiliou 2007)

To Vassiliou, demotic song and rebetika are clearly differentiated by circumstance, instrumentation and performance/musical style. However, he does agree that one could classify rebetika as "folk song of the cities" (Vassiliou 2008) since it was a spontaneous

expression of the Greek urban folk and thus a "true expression" (Vassiliou 2008) of the Greek people.

Performance style is almost always overlooked in scholarly discussion of rebetika. Georgiaids echoes Vassiliou's belief that performance style is an important factor in determining whether a song belongs in the popular category or not:

> That which determines the popularity of a song, in the final analysis, is the way in which it is interpreted, the popular orchestra and orchestration that prevails in every epoch, in the space of Modern Greek society. It is not by chance the phrase "popular orchestral accompaniment" that is written on records with urban popular songs, whether they are interpreted by groups of santouris and violins (as occurred before 1933) or with bouzoukia (as occurred after 1933). (Georgiadis 2006, 13)

And ethnomusicologist John Blacking argues, "labels such as "folk", "art" and "popular" tell us nothing substantive about different styles of music, that as categories of value they can be applied to any music (Blacking 1973.) More telling is the debate that arose about rebetika classification and how this speaks to varying Greek national identity perceptions.

II. THE GREEK NATION AND REBETIKA

Rejecting Rebetika as National Policy

In the mid-1930s, as the intellectual discussion about rebetika raged on, rebetika became the cause of official government concern. The first national censorship of rebetika took place in 1939 by General Ioannis Metaxas. In his rigid dictatorship, Metaxas sought to create a "Third Hellenic Civilization" (consciously inspired by Hitler's Third Reich), of a Westernized Greece that would draw its character from ancient Greece and from contemporary folk culture. Metaxas subscribed to an extreme form of the metanarrative of Ellinismos (1936-1939), and sought to cleanse Greece of its Eastern

influences. Cultural continuity with the ancient past was stressed, and non-Western elements of Greek society were suppressed. Metaxas forbade Greeks to perform certain acts. For example, they were not allowed to speak Macedonian, which he viewed as an impure form of the Greek language. Neither were they allowed to listen to, play, or record many rebetika songs.[91] To Metaxas, rebetika was not desirable contemporary folk culture.[92] The still semi-legal hashish dens were closed down. Rebetika musicians were harassed and many were exiled to Greek islands or thrown into prison. The police chased those found holding a bouzouki often smashing the instrument and jailing the musician.[93]

The official Metaxas rebetiko censorship was put in place in reaction to the song "*Barbara*" composed and recorded by Panayiotis Tountas. Based on a comical folksong "*H Amersouda*" from the island of Lesvos, "*Barbara*" angered Metaxas for a very personal reason.[94] The song spoke of a young girl with loose morals named Barbara, who traipsed around the resort town of Glyfada. The song was filled with double-entendres and unsubtle innuendos. It referred to a girl who fishes at night in Glyfada but through a series of double-entendres, it suggested that she has loose morals:

'Ενας κέφαλος βαρβάτος/ όμορφος και κοτσονάτος,
Της Βαρβάρας το τσιμπάει/ το καλάμι της κουνάει,
Μα η Βαρβάρα δεν τα χάνει/ τον αγκίστρωσε, τον πιάνει,
Τον κρατά στα δύο της χέρια/ και λιγώνεται απ'τα γέλια.

Literal Translation:
A big fish/ beautiful and lively
He bites Barbara's bait/he moves her fishing pole

[91] Katharevousa is not absent from rebetika songs and appears even in some of the best-known songs.
[92] *Amanedes* were also banned in Greece, most likely in imitation of Turkey's ruler Kemal Ataturk who had recently banned them in his attempts to Westernize Turkey.
[93] It is interesting to note that the bouzouki has come to serve as the national instrument of Greece (partly due to the work of composers Manos Hajidakis and Mikis Theodorakis, it was initially scorned as an instrument of ill-repute and eastern associations.
[94] The original song had mocking and crude lyrics: The lyrics of the first stanza are: "*H Theia mou h Amersouda tria vrakia forei/ Paei na vgalei to ena t'alla to kaourei*" ["My aunt Amersouda wears three underwear/ She goes to take off one pair and wets the other"].

But Barbara doesn't lose it/ she reels him in she catches him,
She holds it in both her hands/ and she breaks into laughter.

Metaxas's daughter was named Barbara and he regarded this song as a personal affront. Partly because of this song, Metaxas passed a law in 1939 regulating music production.[95] The law required musicians to present the music and lyrics of their songs to a special committee before recording.[96] The committee could ask the composer to change any elements of the lyrics and music that did not suit the ideals of the Metaxas regime.

It is unclear just how greatly the censorship altered the sound and content of rebetika songs. In the case of this particular song, Tountas composed a new version that referred to Marika the schoolteacher who went out with her wicker basket in order to shop at the market.

"Η Μαρίκα η δασκάλα / που'χει σπίτια δύο μεγάλα,
Το πρωί στις έξι βγαίνει / και στην αγορά πηγαίνει,
Το καλάθει της κρατάει / και με όρεξη κοιτάει,
Να 'βρει τρυφερό μοσχάρι / ή κανένα φρέσκο ψάρι"

"Marika the teacher/has two big houses
In the morning at six she leaves/and she goes to the market
She holds her basket/and with appetite she looks
To find some tender meat/or a fresh fish"

Double entendres are still present in this new version of the song.

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[95] Mandatory law No. 1619/ 1939, Art. 21:

> Before any recording activities an application for record permission is to be submitted to the Directorate for Enlightenment of the Populous in the Ministry, supported by copies of the verses and the music sheets of the song to be recorded. The application is forwarded to the relevant committee composed of the Director for Enlightenment, an official from Inland Press Department, an official from the Enlightenment Department and two artists experienced in popular and folk music. […] The committee has to produce a judgment and to this purpose it may ask for performance of the song by the artist, musical director and instruments planned to appear on the record. The committee may prohibit the recording altogether or ask for modification of either the verses or the music of the piece, in order to give the permission, in case the submitted elements are contradictory, fully or partly, to the moral of virtue or decency, corrupt the artistic sense of the People or falsify the authentic spirit of Greek tradition… (Politis 2005, 4-5).

[96] A 1937 survey recorded in the Athenian newspaper *Ethnos* from October 25, 1937, states that on the eve of the pre-emptive censorship of rebetika by Metaxas, more than 80% of successful records in Greece are either of tango or rebetika (Gauntlett 1005, 186).

Another well-known example of a typical change of lyrics was in the song *San Pethano* (unknown composer and lyricist, probably from Smyrna). The song was first recorded by Giorgos Katsaros in America around 1920. The lyrics read:

> Σαν πεθάνω, τι θα πούνε΄ «Πέθανε κι ένας μπεκρής,
> Πέθανε κι ένας ντερβίσης κι ένας νυχτογυριστής»
>
> If I die, what will they say, "A poor fellow died,
> A dervish died, one who roamed in the night"

In a later version recorded in Greece, the lyrics were changed to:

> Σαν πεθάνω, τι θα πούνε, «Πέθανε κάποιο παιδί,
> Πέθανε ένας λεβέντης που γλεντούσε τη ζωή"[97]
>
> If I die, what will they say, "Somebody died,
> A brave young man died who enjoyed life".

Greek music scholar Niko Politis admits his surprise that musicians succumbed rather easily to the law and that few musicians stopped recording rebetika songs in order to resist the new rules.[98] In his autobiography, Markos Vamvakaris stated, "I simply started writing what they wanted me to write. I modified my writing, to abide by the rules." Vassilis Tsitsanis commented to Kostas Hatzidoulis on the situation:

> Look, Costa, this Metaxas censorship was really necessary after all, it was positive for the music. My job was to help my colleagues correct their melody by rubbing off the flat sign, so as to pass from the censorship… 'Markos [referring to Vamvakaris] had submitted a song for approval, by the name of *Alaniara*. In a specific passage he was singing *Kathe Vradi Tha Se Perimenw* [Every Night I Will Wait for You]. This "re" and "si" were one half tone sharper than they should have been. So I corrected it, rubbing off the sharp sign, and the song was granted the approval. (Tsitsanis as quoted by Politis 2005, 48)[99]

Costas responded, "So, you are saying that the Metaxas regime wanted to make the songs more western-influenced, 'European' so to speak." Tsitsanis smiled and answered, "More

[97] As quoted by Baud-Bovy (1996, 70).
[98] A noteworthy exception is rebetiko musician Vangelis Papazoglou who stopped recording rebetika songs. However, he did give his songs to other musicians to record.
[99] Popular opinion suggests that Tsitsanis was telling the Press that which they wanted to hear.

Greek, I would say" (Politis 2005, 48). Interestingly, the core of the recordings that we recognize as classical rebetika was recorded under censorship.

More Rebetika Censorships and the "Elevation" of Rebetika

"The German Occupation with two words is the heart of Popular Song"
-Vassilis Tsitsanis

The German Occupation of Greece during World War II (1941-44) profoundly affected the sound and function of rebetika as well. In 1943, the government imposed renewed censorship on rebetiko music that included both recording and broadcasting activities. Rebetika was censored with particular force in Athens. As a result, some rebetika musicians moved temporarily to Thessaloniki where the police chief, Moushoundis, had a particular affiliation for the music. He even was best man for rebetiko musician Vassilis Tsitsanis. In Greece, German authorities privileged Western art and music permitting well-respected establishments such as the Athens State Theater to operate. They suspended all gramophone production in Greece from 1941- 46 and the German army used the local factory site of Columbia record industry as a reconditioning plant for military vehicles (Kapetanakis 1999, 138).

During the German dictatorship of Greece, rebetika composers again had to abide by censorship of music and lyrics in order to receive approval to record.[100] Perhaps the second most famous rebetika song after "*Synnefiasmeni Kyriaki*" ["Cloudy Sunday"] by

[100] The evolution of rebetika music and lyrics is particularly evident in the songs by composer Michalis Genitsaris. Often cited as one of the greatest reporters of the times, Genitsaris wrote songs from the realm of the *tekes* and the marginal life of the *manga* in the early twentieth century through to the experiences of the resistance of the German Occupation. One of his best-known songs is "*Saltadoros*" [The Outlaws] that tells of heroic Greeks stealing supplies from a German army vehicle. It was known and sung throughout Greece from the time of the Occupation though was recorded much later (Alexatos 2006, 52). It remains popular today.

Vassilis Tsitsanis is the song "*Nihtose Horis Fengari*" ["Night Came Without a Moon"] by Apostolos Kaldaras. Kaldaras had to change the lyrics of this song before it could be recorded. He was inspired to write this song after he peered through the windows of the Yedi-Koule jail in Thessaloniki and saw the silhouettes of the inmates. At this time, the jails of Greece held tens of thousands of young members of the resistance. In its original version, the song read:

> Night fell without a moon, the darkness is deep
> However one young man cannot sleep.
>
> What could he be waiting for all night until the morning
> In the small window that lights the cell?
>
> A door opens a door closes but the door is locked tight
> What has he done that they have thrown this kid in jail?

Kaldaras was asked to change the second line of the song, "*Sto steno to parathiri pou fotizei to keli*" [In the small window that sheds light into the cell]. In its final recorded version, the second line reads: "*Sto steno to parathiri pou fotizei to keri*" [In the small window that is lit by the candle] (Alexatos 2006, 55).[101]

Censorship continued during the ensuing civil war period. For example, many songs by composer Vassilis Tsitsanis were banned for being socially sensitive. Even songs that were allegorical and that spoke of love and loss were considered political statements that supported the Left-Wing resistance. Banned songs included "*Kane Ligaki Ypomonhi*" [Have Patience], "*Os Pote Mia Tetoia Zoi*" [Until When Such a Life] and

[101] Partly as a result of censorships, composers used much allegory in song lyrics, often discussing the love and loss of a woman rather than directly mentioning the hardships of the Occupation. It was during this time, when words were altered and the songs used much allegory to discuss contemporary Greece that the *rebetiko* song began to receive broader popular recognition and transformed into the popular song that would dominate during the following decade.

"*Kapia Mana Anastenazei*" [A Mother Sighs] all by Vassilis Tsitsanis. The lyrics of "A Mother Sighs" read:

A mother sighs, day and night she worries
She awaits her child whom she has not seen in years.

With patience she waits and longing in her heart
For her young man to return from the dark foreign land

In her despair someone tells her
That the young man is still alive and that she will see him for sure.

The song expresses allegorically the pain of the resistance fighters, of the jailed and of the exiled. But it also could express the pain of those whose children were fighting in the national army. This ambiguity was cause enough for censorship.

During this time, rebetika songs began to change significantly in sound and function. They began to appeal to a broader sector of society. In his 1964 essay on the *zeïbekiko* dance, Tachtsis offers an explanation for the emerging interest in the changing rebetiko song. He proposes that the suffering of all social classes during the German Occupation leveled class differences to some extent and people from various economic sectors of society experienced similar difficulties:

> There were no more hungry and satisfied, there were no masters and slaves, everyone was a slave, everyone was hungry, all felt the need to bewail their fate…All the houses suddenly became hashish dens, not literally of course, but in character. Everywhere the spirit of lawlessness prevailed, of constant fear, misery and death. (Tachtsis as quoted by Holst 1977, 202-211)

In the following passage, Nearchos Georgiadis describes the changes in the sound and function of rebetika. He writes that during the period of the German dictatorship, three main types of *rebetiko* song, what he simply calls popular song, took separate paths:

> The Asia Minor style with central figure Panagiotis Tountas, was chased after by the dictatorship, and was lost in the darkness of the Occupation. The *mangiko-rebetiko* [tough-rebetiko] style, with leader Markos Vamvakaris, was pushed

> aside and lost its protagonistic role. In this gap that was created by the forced extinguishing of the two previous styles, there emerged a new style with European elements, such as harmonies, two voices and so on, with central figure Vassilis Tsitsanis from Trikala. (Georgiadis as quoted by Alexatos 2006, 46)

Whether or not all three types of song should be characterized as rebetika is open to debate.

Sociologist Alexatos suggests that rebetika became popular at this time because a new song style was needed to express the experience of contemporary Greeks under the dictatorship. The light-hearted waltzes and tangos that the Germans played throughout Athens were irrelevant to the Greek masses that were suffering from starvation and disease.[102] Alexatos states that at this point the *elafro tragoudi* [light song] truly became worthy of its name as "the poor popular masses had to listen to waltzes and tangos with which the middle classes entertained themselves" (Alexatos 2006, 52). Tachtsis described the situation in similar terms:

> It was not rare to see German cars with megaphones, that went around centers and popular neighborhoods, and they woke up the people with the inimitable "*In the Morning You Wake Me Up With Kisses...*" which in actuality was a wakeup from the kiss of death, a noise that aimed to cover the explosions of weapon-fire at the shooting gallery in Kaisariani and the cries of the Greek who was dying from hunger… For the first time therefore, those songs truly lived up to their reputation as light songs. They were no longer light only as compositions, but light to the point to which they no longer had even the minutest relationship with reality, if they ever had any to begin with, and to the extent that they snubbed reality and consciously wrote about it in a fake way. No dictatorship tango ever sang about the pain, the hunger, the dictatorship. They all continued to speak of love and flowers and moons. (Tachtsis as quoted by Alexatos 2006, 52)

In World War II Greece, rebetika song lyrics became more generic and began to appeal to a broader sector of society. One of the best-known rebetika musicians and composers Vassilis Tsitsanis, who is also credited as the link between classical rebetika

[102] Many Greeks died during the Axis Occupation of Greece. This terrible time in Greek history has come to be known simply as "*H Katohi*" [The Occupation].

and *laïka*, stated, "the Dictatorship was in short, the heart of Popular Song" (Tsitsanis as quoted by Alexatos 2006, 52). During the dictatorship, Tsitsanis composed *Synnefiasmeni Kyriaki* ["Cloudy Sunday"] (1941), the most famous *rebetiko* song of all time and that has become a kind of second national anthem for Greece.[103] The lyrics speak of a cloudy Sunday when the singer lost his happiness, but allegorically refer to the hardships of the Occupation.

Cloudy Sunday
You resemble my heart,
That always has clouds
Christ and Mother of Mary.[104]

You are a day like that one
When I lost my happiness
Cloudy Sunday,
You wound my heart.

When I see you rainy
Not for one minute am I calm
You have made my life black
And I sigh heavily.[105]

Tsitsanis writes the following about the song:

> The Occupation years, this was the period whence I gave [my music] the best I had inside my soul. It was the truest music I made out of those tragic conditions…Then I wrote the *Synnefiasmeni Kyriaki* ('Cloudy Sunday') based on the tragic incidents that happened then in our country: starvation, misery, fear, depression, arrests, executions. The lyrics I wrote were inspired by this climate. The melody came out of the 'cloudy' occupation, out of the frustration we all suffered – and when everything was shadowed under terror and was crashed by slavery. (Hadjidoulis 1979, 19-20)

[103] A zeïbekiko by Vassilis Tsitsanis, first recorded in 1948. It has been rerecorded many times both in rebetika style and in other styles.
[104] An expression that is somewhat equivalent to "Oh my God."
[105] The music of this song has often been compared to a Byzantine hymn, and some believe that it was actually derived from it. In his anthology of rebetika songs *Rebetika Songs* (1979), Petropoulos cites the first line of the song and the Byzantine hymn in Western and Byzantine notation (see Petropoulos 1979, 40).

The Emergence of High-Class Rebetiko Culture

During the mid-twentieth century, two Greek composers of the Western classical music tradition played a major role in changing the negative reputation of rebetika: Manos Hadjidakis and Mikis Theodorakis. In 1948, renowned Greek classical composer Manos Hadjidakis gave a speech to a large audience at the *Theatro Technis* in the center of Athens in which he defended the integrity of rebetika. Hadjidakis argued for the Greekness of the genre and pointed out by the many musical connections between rebetika modes and singing style with Byzantine chant. He even called early-style rebetiko musician Markos Vamvakaris the "Bach of Greek music". Hadjidakis followed the lecture with a concert of rebetika songs by the two best-known rebetika musicians, Vassilis Tsitsanis and Sotiria Bellou.

Hadjidakis's speech elicited heated responses from members of both sides of the debate as people argued for and against the validity of his observations. Some were angered by his claims that the roots of rebetika were to be found in the modes of Byzantine chant. Others used polemical arguments and claimed that Hadjidakis only supported rebetika because of his own personal sexual habits. But many, like the musicologist Sakellarios, supported his viewpoint and were thankful that a well-respected composer of the classical tradition vouched for the validity of rebetika. In his promotion of the value of rebetika, Sakellarios describes the success of Hadjidakis's rebetiko-based classical compositions outside of Greece: "You might say to me that the lyrics of [*rebetis*] *Nikos o Psaras* [Nikos the Fisherman] may be good but the music is in bad taste. I respond to you that a young and worthy Greek composer, Hadjidakis, wrote an entire symphonic work with rebetika motives, a work that was played in London, and as I have

learned was liked very much" (Sakellarios, 1953). And Vassiliou partly attributes the success of these composers on their use of the bouzouki and rebetika:

> Prophetically therefore, Markos played that instrument that would come to play a fundamental role in the following years and that would become the most representative Greek instrument. Naturally here the great creators (Theodorakis, Hadjidakis and others) who recognized the great worth of the popular creators (Markos, Tsitsanis, Papaioannou, Mitsakis, Hiotis, and others). And they gave place to the bouzouki as a solo instrument in big orchestras. Probably that is why they had great popular recognition. Something that comes forth from the heart and soul of the people is forgotten with difficulty. (Vassiliou 2007)

Due to its associations with rebetika, the bouzouki had also been outlawed but through the efforts of Hadjidakis and Theodorakis its status began to change. In fact, the place of the bouzouki in Greek society changed so drastically that it is now the representative national instrument of Greece. It is included on most compact discs for tourists and was featured prominently in the 2004 Athens Olympics. In the 1960s, Mikis Theodorakis defended the bouzouki as a national Greek instrument. He stated, "the bouzouki is to Greek popular music what the guitar is to flamenco, the balalaïka to Russian songs and the accordion to Parisian waltzes. It is, from one point of view, the national popular instrument. It is what gives us a separate, national and individual stamp" (Theodorakis as quoted by Holst 1980, 61).

The new popular song culture that surrounded rebetiko performance existed in a new social milieu. Suddenly rebetika became music for the upper classes. This change is characterized by a well-known *hasaposerviko* written by Vassilis Tsitsanis with lyrics by Kostas Manesis that was first recorded in 1951. The song, "*Borei na Zeis Sto Kolonaki*"

[You Might Live in Kolonaki] refers to the people of Kolonaki, one of the fanciest Athenian neighborhoods, forgoing the fox trot and the swing to go listen to rebetika.[106]

Maybe you live in Kolonaki
But you have a longing for the bouzouki
You are the ripest fruit of the season
The *mangas* of sweet waters

You don't like the fancy bars
And you will take a good woman
She should be a flirt and a fox
And she should give you a hard time every once in a while

From the Swing and the Fox
You turned to the *zeïbekaki* [little zeïbekiko]
And you burn up the whole neighborhood
For the strumming of a *mangas*.

Numerous rebetiko song lyrics commented upon this change in rebetiko culture: Some songs were express reactions to the effects of Europeanization on Greek music and society. The song "*Kainourio Hollywood*" ["*New Hollywood*"] composed by Rovertakis and recorded by Sotiria Bellou sarcastically rejects a perceived falseness of Greek society. Other songs were much more complimentary about the West especially by composers of the Smyrna School including "*Aeroplano tha Paro*" ["*I Will Take an Airplane*"] by Antonis Dalgas, "*To Ouest*" ["*The West*"] by Markos Melkon and numerous songs by Giorgos Katsaros, a rebetiko musician who lived in the United States for much of his life.

Did this gravitation towards rebetika in its new style by the upper classes also contribute to the further suppression of early rebetiko culture? In her discussion of class and power in Africa, Louise Meintjes points out that in order "to regulate and incorporate

[106] Pavlos Vassiliou believes that the rebetika songs did not change social strata as many presume. Rather, the people of Kolonaki went to listen to different neighborhoods to listen to rebetika songs (Vassiliou, 2007).

subordinate groups, the dominant class is forced to reformulate itself constantly so that its core values are not threatened. In reformulating itself it necessarily takes on some features of the subordinate groups that it suppresses" (Meintjes 1990, 68). The new rebetiko culture that praised the compositions of the popular contemporary *rebetes*, featured ostentatious displays of wealth. The popular trends of throwing flowers and smashing piles of plates on the ground had little in common with early rebetiko culture.

Mikis Theodorakis and *Epitaphios*: Rebetika and High-Art Song

> "*Rebetiko* comprises one form of urban popular song… the only one that is still alive" -Fivos Anoyianakis
>
> "Rebetika? Die? Who told you such a thing? Rebetika have not died and will never die." -Pavlos Vassiliou
>
> "At least one decade has passed since rebetika died" -Ilias Petropoulos

Greek composers such as Nikos Skalkottas and Mikis Theodorakis began to use rebetika as the basis of Western classical and light popular song compositions in order to illustrate its musical value. In the 1950s, well-known Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis (1925 -) developed a high art song style based upon rebetika. Theodorakis received training in classical composition and in the 1950s, was studying serial composition in Paris under Olivier Messaien. Theodorakis worried that his serial compositions alienated the masses when he wanted to write directly for them. In 1959 he returned to Greece determined to write music for the Greek people; he would create a Greek national school of music. In light of the tragic events of recent Greek history (the Metaxas Dictatorship 1936-39, World War II and the German Occupation of Greece 1941-1945, a civil war

1945-49), a Greek high art music could serve as a national school of music and would help the Greek nation rebuild.

The first high-art composition Theodorakis composed was *Epitaphios*, a song cycle of eight songs for voice, bouzouki and piano. Theodorakis based the lyrics of *Epitaphios* on a poem composed by the left-wing poet Yiannis Ritsos. Ritsos, who had spent nearly a decade in exile for his leftist beliefs, wrote the poem "Epitaphios" in 1936. He had been inspired by a newspaper photo depicting a mother kneeling in the street next to the body of her son. Soldiers of the Metaxas dictatorship had killed him while he was on strike at a tobacco factory. In the late 1950s, Theodorakis felt that the unjust victimization of the masses Ritsos depicted in his poetry could apply to the traumas the Greek people had suffered more recently.

In his attempt to make the poetry accessible to the masses in its musical form, Theodorakis based the music of *Epitaphios* on rebetika. He maintained certain features of the rebetika song: the dance rhythms of the *hasapiko* and *zeïbekiko*; the call and response format between the voice and the bouzouki; the vocal timbre (by hiring rebetika singer Grigoris Bithikotsis, whose voice, according to musicologist Gail Holst-Warhaft, was as quintessentially "Piraeus" as Edith Piaf's was "Paris"); the melodies were small in scope and contained many repeated notes reminiscent of rebetiko style.[107]

However, Theodorakis altered numerous elements to make the work a high-art composition. First, the lyrics were more refined: they spoke of love and loss in a metaphorical way that had the potential to reach a broader sector of Greek society. Second, he called the work a song cycle, thus bringing it into the Western classical music

[107] His voice was not typical of early rebetiko style but rather expressed the Greek urban popular classes.

tradition.[108] In addition, the preparation for the first performances of the work brought the composition closer to those of the Western classical tradition. Fourth, Theodorakis required intensive rehearsals with the musicians in order to ensure that they perform the piece exactly as he intended. This mimics the performance of works in the Western classical tradition in which musicians often hope to perform a new work according to the liking of the composer.

Finally, Theodorakis attempted to elevate *Epitaphios* into a high-art form by performing the work on a concert-hall stage. This maneuver was met with much resistance. During the initial performance, Theodorakis added a Western orchestra to the trio of voice, bouzouki and piano. At first members of the orchestra refused to appear on stage with the bouzouki, the nightclub instrument of Eastern origin, and when they finally agreed, the rebetika singer Grigoris Bithikotsis was so overcome with stage fright (he had only performed in rebetika clubs) that he was unable to sing. Theodorakis ended up conducting the orchestra from the podium and singing the vocal line as well. The audience also seemed unused to the concert hall. As described by Bithikotsis in his autobiography *Egw, O Ser* [I, the Sir] (2004), "the audience seemed as if they had never been to a concert hall before. They threw flowers onto the stage and chanted my name… No one even knew where the bathrooms were" (Bithikotsis 56, 2004). Theodorakis was heavily criticized as well for juxtaposing the high-art poetry of Ritsos with the bouzouki and with the music of rebetika. With *Epitaphios*, Theodorakis worked to clear rebetika and the bouzouki of prejudice:

[108] *Epitaphios* did not conform to the definition of a song cycle in any way: it lacked cyclicity and maintained no sense of emotional development throughout. Theodorakis was aware of this discrepancy and as a result, he placed *Epitaphios* in a special category of his song cycle compositions that did not fully adhere to the definition of a song cycle.

> Because who can truly assert that the *rebetiko* song, born long ago in the *tekedes* brings in its blood the hashish in such a way that if one listens to it and sings it one will become an "opium addict"… If we believe in this unlikely chemical capacity of music, we are underestimating the ethical resistance of our people to a dangerous depth. (Theodorakis as quoted by Bithikotsis 2002, 54-55)

After this point, many claim that the sound and function of rebetika changed so much that it ceased to exist as a creative form. Others claim that it died altogether.

Stathis Gauntlett argues that claims that rebetika has died "are predicated on a romantically puristic perception of the genre and a platonic view of genre in general, and that the escalating commercialism of rebetika throughout the twentieth century is an evolutionary process, a matter of degree, not kind" (Gauntlett 2005, 188). And the final two sentences of the history of rebetika on the scholarly website www.rebetiko.gr read: "Some people insist that rebetika has died: Others say however, how can the genre be theorized as dead when it is still played?"[109] Pavlos Vassiliou agrees:

> Dead? Who told you such a thing? No, rebetika is not dead. And it will not die, it cannot die as long as the situation in Greece remains. It is an expression of the hardships of the people. Rebetika songs are more relevant today than they were at the start of the 20th century.

Pavlos Vassiliou agrees that rebetika ceases to exist as a creative form. But he believes that rebetika has not died and never could. Because its lyrics and its music are true expressions of the Greek people rebetika will always remain relevant to their lives. Pavlos Vassiliou praises composers Mikis Theodorakis and Manos Hadjidakis for their recognition of the value of rebetika and promotion of the music. When I asked him what affect their work had on rebetika he replied, "Absolutely none. Only that it helped clear away some of the unfounded prejudice against the music. The rebetika songs did not change" (Vassiliou 2007).

[109] "Rebetiko Online: Where Rebetika Live Online" [www.rebetiko.gr] Visited on October 12, 2008.

III. EARLY REBETIKA RESURFACES

The Rebetiko Fad

During the late 1960s, a new early rebetiko fad emerged amongst some Greek intellectual circles. Greek youth began to collect and preserve old rebetiko discography. A few years later the first teams of musicologists such as Nearchos Georgiadis and other researchers including Ilias Petropoulos, Tasos Schorelis, Kostas Xatzidoulis and Panayiotis Kounadis, began to research the origins of the genre. They interviewed some of the original proponents such as Markos Vamvakaris, Rosa Eskenazi, Giorgos Batis, Stelios Keroumitis, Sotiria Bellou. They helped bring them back into public eye by organizing series of revival concerts.[110] These took place mainly in Athens, in the *boites* (stylish music joints that arose in the 1960s featuring art songs and serving food and drink to an audience of sophisticated youth) of Plaka and in upscale hotel ballrooms. The surviving *rebetes* began to play again this time for "theater types and youths hungry for cultural expression" (Kapetanakis 1999, 517).

Old rebetika recordings were rereleased. In 1975, K. Xatzidoulis edited three discs of early rebetika recordings titled "Rebetiki Istoria" and in 1976, he published produced more discs under the same name. New rebetika recordings were made as well by the old rebetika greats. In the 1960s, Sotiria Bellou rerecorded numerous rebetika songs for the LYRA label. These discs mark the first time that the term "rebetika" reappeared on disc jackets since the designation disappeared from discs under the Metaxas dictatorship.

[110] The first tribute concert for rebetiko musician Markos Vamvakaris took place in November 1966 by the Omilo Filon of L. T. at the Hilton Hotel from April 25-May 10, 1968. Many of the great rebetika musicians performed including Markos Vamvakaris, Vassilis Tsitsanis, Stelios Keroumitis and Sotiria Bellou,

Rebetika increased in popularity during the military junta 1967-74. Students appreciated its antiestablishment character and the music provided a vehicle of resistance against the military dictatorship. Tragaki describes the situation in the following way:

> The ongoing political embrace of rebetiko song represented a reaction against the value of 'panhellenic traditional musics and dances' promoted by the Junta establishment. The Colonels felt the need to promote a homogenized profile of traditional music that would manifest the common musical heritage of the Greek nation. Their nationalist cultural aspirations deliberately overlooked and suppressed local musics, especially those of non-Greek speaking groups (such as the Arvanites, Macedonians, Vlahoi, Gypsies, Pomaks, Muslims). While rebetiko was dangerous for the Greek patriotic ethos, those local musical languages were regarded as exceptional phenomena that alienated 'our' immaculate musical tradition. (Tragaki 2007, 132)

Young musicians learned to play rebetika the style of the early recordings. And during the late 1970s, recorded rebetika began to gain commercial ascendancy over other forms of Greek music. A series of radio shows appeared that made original rebetika recordings available to the broad public for the first time.[111] In the 1980s, musicians opened *rebetadika*, establishments devoted to the performance of early-style rebetika. This soon became a thriving rebetiko culture. Vassiliou opened the first and most popular *rebetadiko* in Athens. He is largely responsible for the current popularity of rebetika in Athens.

During the 1980s, rebetika reached a surprising level of popularity that Mikis Theodorakis once described as "rebetomania" (1984, 47). Greek youth packed into the various *rebetadika* that had opened throughout Athens and around Greece. In a surprising evolution, rebetika came to officially represent Greece under the first PASOK administration (1981-1985) becoming forever associated with the Andreas Papandreou's

[111] Pavlos Vassiliou recalls recording rebetika songs from the radio with a tape recorder, as that was his only means of collecting and learning the music at the time.

socialist party.[112] Part of the Socialist Party platform was to protect Greece from Western elitist cultural interests. Papandreou's strategic promotion of rebetika represented this worldview. Rebetika, often associated with subversive activities, became mainstream, acceptable and promoted by the government. Newspapers featured photos of the Prime Minister and other top government officials dancing a *zeïbekiko* on stage. Rebetiko singer Sotiria Bellou's image became associated with the PASOK party—The infamous picture of Papandreou dancing on stage with Bellou singing in the background is still in circulation.

In 1983, Kostas Ferris produces the movie "Rebetiko", the first attempt to bring the history of urban popular music to the big screen. New rebetika songs composed by Stavros Xarhakos and old rebetika songs he rearranged. In 1983, the national television station ERT aired the television series about rebetika entitled "*Minore Tis Avgis*" ["The Minor of the Dawn"] of Filippou Mesthenaiou. Musicians wrote new compositions in rebetika style. The most famous was Stavros Xarhakos's compositions for the 1984 film Rebetiko.[113]

With the publication of *Koinoniologias tou Rebetikou* [The Sociology of Rebetika] by Stathis Damianakos in 1976, rebetika became the subject of academic attention. In 1973, *Road to Rembetika* by Gail Holst and *Songs From the Greek Underworld* by Butterworth and Schneider were published opening the academic study of rebetika to the English-speaking world. After Angeliki Vellou-Keil published the autobiography of Markos Vamvakaris entitled *Aftoviografia* [Autobiograhpy] in 1973, a

[112] Tragaki posits that the political meanings rebetika acquired under state protection signaled the loss of its political profile as an anti-establishment song (2006, 131).
[113] Other recent compositions in the rebetika-style compositions include songs on the album *Kentro Dierhomeno* (Grand Central Station) by Nikos Mamangakis, songs by *Heimerinoi Kolumvites* (Winter Swimmers), *Opisthodromiki Kompania* (Retrograde Company) and *Dinamis tou Aigaiou* (Aegean Forces).

series of biographies of rebetika musicians began to appear. Well-known singers of various musical genres included Giorgos Dalaras, Glykeria and Haris Alexiou, recorded and performed rebetika in stadiums and concert halls, bringing the genre to a wide spectrum of audiences. During the mid-1970s, the center for the Study of *Rebetiko* Song was established in Athens, that reissued numerous recordings on the Falirea Brothers label that contain extensive album notes on the songs and their composers. In the 1980s a series of academic studies, theses and articles on rebetika were published. After 1980, many new recordings of rebetika songs were released and old records were transferred into cassette tapes.

The rebetiko fad began to abate in the early 1990s, but *rebetadika* remained quite popular amongst the Greek youth until the last years of the decade. Yet even through the height of its popularity, rebetika myths and discrimination continued. Today, rebetika myths have not disappeared and rebetika continues to be stigmatized in exaggerated and misleading ways. A recent rebetiko concert at the *Megaron Mousikis* Concert Hall in Athens bore the title "Songs About Substances," overemphasizing the relationship of rebetika and drug use. The most recent publication by David Prudhomme is a comic book about early rebetika musicians that presents a highly stylized representation of their supposedly rebellious lifestyle (2011). Vassiliou is adamant in his defense of rebetika as a traditional Greek music form of the greatest artistic and historical value. He works tirelessly to help his patrons develop their understanding of rebetika.

What role does rebetika play in twenty-first century Greece? What Daphne Tragaki calls the "rebetiko revival" of the late twentieth century has faded. Rebetika has lost much of its popularity among Greeks and business in its main performance venue,

the *rebetadiko*, suffers as a result. Contemporary musicians posit a host of reasons for this decline in popularity that generally include: the Europeanization of Greece that influences musical tastes away from rebetika and towards generic pop music; a lack of interest in traditional Greek culture; the current difficult economic situation that prevents people from enjoying rebetika nightlife as much as they used to. These elements contribute to a changing rebetiko scene and add further challenges to Vassiliou's goal of educating the public about the value of rebetika.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed the socio-political history of rebetika. I examined how the music was used as a pawn in national identity debates throughout the twentieth century. This discussion contextualized Vassiliou's aestheticization of rebetika as national music in contemporary Greece. It examined why rebetika still maintains a controversial reputation. In order to understand the complexities of the place of and beliefs about rebetika in contemporary Greek society, it is necessary to discuss Greek modernity. In the next chapter I contextualize my ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria in contemporary Athens examining rebetika as a vital cultural tradition within the backdrop of Greek modernity.

CHAPTER SIX:

STRUGGLES IN CONTEMPORARY GREEK MODERNITY AND DEFENSIVE NATIONALISM

"No longer Orientals, but not yet Europeans. Neither do we pursue the fulfillment of the imagined Great Idea nor do we follow the trend of contemporary progress."
-Phillip Carabott, 1995

"Greece freed itself from the Ottomans only to become slaves of Europe. We are no freer now than we were during the Ottoman Empire. It is no coincidence that the Greeks cried 'Bring back the Turks!' during the fight for independence. But you won't find that in any school history textbook."
-Pavlos Vassiliou, 2008

Introduction

In this chapter, I contextualize my discussion of Rebetiki Istoria in contemporary Athens. I present the physical and aural landscape of the capital city as a manifestation of the ideological struggles of Greek modernity. I focus on a central metanarrative that shapes daily life in Athens, the search for a Greek national identity. Many perceive a loss of conventional national identity paradigms in the rapidly globalizing nation. They blame transnational forces such as Europeanization and capitalization for corrupting traditional understandings of Greekness. As such, Athens has become a breeding ground for defensive nationalisms, as Greeks work to defend conventional national identity paradigms. Pavlos Vassiliou and his Rebetiki Istoria culture are a primary example.

I begin my discussion by proposing a heightened significance of national identity ideologies in Athens. Exploring Athens as an unstable transnational *topos*, I discuss the multifaceted influences that shape contemporary perceptions of Greekness. These include the incorporation of the ancient Greek past into the contemporary nation, national Europeanization projects, the place of Greece in the world market and contemporary cultural expressions. I focus on the physical landscape of the city, namely on Greek architecture and how it shapes and reflects standard ideological concerns. I conclude that in an age of globalization, the twenty-first century nation continues to serve as a productive means of identity formation. I end the chapter with a survey of the contemporary Athenian rebetiko scene. This will contextualize my discussion of Vassiliou's rebetiko performance as an expression of his defensive nationalism in Chapter Seven.

I. GREEK MODERNITY

National Identity Ideologies in Contemporary Greek Modernity

The prominence of national identity ideologies in the twenty-first century is often overlooked in contemporary ethnomusicology scholarship. Recent theoretical trends like globalization, supermodernity and postmodernity dominate the rhetoric. In this chapter, I echo scholars like Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights, who propose that the nation "remains a crucial but ambivalent category for understanding how cultural texts and practices function in the construction of personal and collective identities" (Biddle and Knights 2007, 1). I argue that modern Greece is a telling contemporary example—the nation

continues to serve as a fundamental metanarrative that informs Greek identity perceptions in the contemporary globalized world.

Numerous scholars propose the continued significance of the nation. In his book *Necessary Nation* (2001), Gregory Jusdanis suggests that today, the nation is often incorrectly considered a negative force:

> The nation has been maligned today, charged with xenophobia, fascism, and genocide. Journalists and academics, conservatives and liberals, Marxist and cultural studies critics seem to hold the nation responsible for the most odious crimes… They long instead for a utopian world of scattered diasporas, open borders, and hybrid identities. (Jusdanis 2001, 3)

According to Jusdanis, an apology for the nation is long overdue. For while the nation may construct political and cultural barriers, it also functions as a productive ideology: it gives groups of people an identity in the modern world. As discussed in Chapter Two, the nation is an embodiment of modernity. Therefore, defining one's national identity is a means for a group of people to achieve self-determination in the modern world. Defining a Greek national identity thus allows Greeks to participate in European modernity while maintaining national uniqueness.

Introducing the Maelstrom of Athens

"Four things will destroy the world—syphilis, alcohol, malarial fever and life in the big cities"
-Nikos Kazantzakis

"The past is Greece's frontier."
-Patricia Storace, 1997

In this section, I present Athens as a physical manifestation of Greek modernity and illustrate the diverse influences that shape national identity perceptions. Athenian modernity as unstable and changing, and reflected in a city of contrasts: state-promoted

nationalization projects clash with local-level resistances to them; attempts to join Ancient and Modern conflict; discord between Capitalists and Communists destabilizes the socio-economic structure; varying reactions to Europeanization efforts divide the Greek people. Athens embodies these divergent forces that shape Greek modernity—an ethnographic description will illustrate this maelstrom. Also, it will serve as background for my discussion of Rebetiki Istoria as a mechanism of defensive nationalism within Greek modernity.

Athens: An Ethnographic Account

Athens is central to economic, political and cultural life in Greece: its population has reached around five million people, which is about half of the population of Greece. The city is continuously expanding. New suburbs emerge toward the East and North East of the city in the direction of the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport and along the major Attiki Odos freeway. The city proper of Athens is made up of numerous neighborhoods, each with its own history and characteristics. For example, Kolonaki is the infamous upscale neighborhood—The streets are lined with expensive shops selling name-brand items. A short fifteen-minute walk west leads to Exarcheia, the student neighborhood that lies just behind the Polytechnic Institute. It is known for its frequent student uprisings and riots but also as a thriving artistic neighborhood.

The city of Athens is a bustle of activity. Even the physical layout of the city does not maintain the clear rationality of a modern city. Neighborhoods are scattered around the hilly terrain and narrow streets zigzag and wind through them. As Spiro Kostof suggests in his book *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History*

(1999), fundamental patterns and attitudes of urban life are shaped by the physical structure of the city. One primary example of this is traffic circulation which is most informative about the urban ethos: the actual physical road with its curves, hills and speed limits coerce people to drive and act in certain ways.

Athens roads are in surprisingly bad condition. Often they are filled with litter and the city is very polluted. Motorcyclists and j-walkers weave in and out of traffic. In fact, driving in Athens calls for aggressive behavior; motorists often shout out insults and get into screaming brawls; they lose patience with traffic police who seemingly worsen the traffic buildup. Traffic jams caused by a car parked in the middle of the narrow one-way street are common as are cars double-parked on both sidewalks that jut out into the streets. While driving in Athens, one is forced to enter the hectic pace. In fact, polite unaggressive driving often thwarts other drivers' expectations and can result in a dangerous traffic situation.

The hectic street traffic intrudes boldly into home life as well. Junk collectors circle the city in pickup trucks as do people selling various items from clothing to plants to fresh fish. They break up the afternoon peace- *mesimeri* [midday] quiet time runs from 2-5 pm- shouting their advertisements into megaphones: "*Paliatzi!*" [Junk collector!], or "*Ntomates, Patates, Kremmidia!"* [Tomatoes, Potatoes, Onions!]. Immigrants usually from Africa, who sell various items from fake designer bags to burned compact discs in the streets, often run past with enormous black bags filled with wares on their backs, hoping to escape the police.

In Athens, there is little respect for public space and barely any incentive to keep the environment clean. When I glanced admonishingly at a Greek friend who threw a

candy wrapper onto the street he replied, “Hey, I pay 600 Euro a month for the state to clean up the streets. Let them pick it up.” And it seems that more often than not, workers of a major public service are on strike: In late winter 2009, the sanitation department went on strike for weeks, and large piles of litter decorated the city filling the streets with awful smells and hazardous health conditions. And a few months earlier, workers of ΔΕΗ (*Dimosia Epihirisi Ilektrismou* [Public Electric Company]) went on strike, leaving the city in sporadic bouts of darkness.

In his photo book about Athens, Brigit Hoffmeister described the Athenian urban ethos: “Athens is a delirium of vitality” (Hoffmeister 2006, 1). Athens appears nonsensical, as if it is moving too fast for itself, spiraling out of control, constantly inventing and reinventing itself with the very same criteria. The city embodies the very modernity that Marshall Berman described—one that “pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (Berman 1982, 15). Living in Athens incites emotion and raises one’s blood pressure: In order to get tasks accomplished in the public sphere, one has to become forceful and aggressive. For example, the seemingly innocent act of waiting in line at a newspaper stand may take hours out of ones day as people constantly and aggressively cut in front of the line. And while driving, waiting at a red light without pulling far out into the intersection will cause one to miss the light because so many cars will pull ahead.

Athens imposes its hectic pace on the unsuspecting visitor as well—she is forced to take part at times against her will. Numerous writers have struggled to depict the confusion and intense conflict of emotions brought to the visitor. Dimitris Angelis described the phenomenon in the following way: “[I] speak of the contradictory

sentiments inscribed on the heart of a most sensitive visitor: uneven emotions ranging from irritation to fury to worshipful admiration and longing" (Angelis 2004, 5). I experienced this very dilemma during my time in Athens. I was awed by the grandeur of the ancient ruins, by the beauty of rebetika and by the warmth of the Greek people. But I was often frustrated beyond despair. Dealing with the bureaucracy was especially maddening. For example, when applying for Greek citizenship, I waited patiently in line for two hours for the citizenship office to open, and when it finally did, all order was lost and a mad rush ensued in which the strongest and fastest got inside first. And after waiting four hopeless months, I was granted my citizenship only after my Greek father called the office and spoke in a harsh tone with the employees. My citizenship papers were suddenly ready for pickup the day after this phone call.

Yet this hectic state of confusion lends some elasticity to life as well. If one is clever, one can learn to get around the system and avoid various penalties. For example, when Vassiliou was once stopped by the police for talking on his cell phone while driving, he responded, "You are going to pull me over for driving while talking on the phone when that other driver made an illegal turn?" (Vassiliou 2008). The policeman left to chase the other car and Vassiliou was not fined. On another occasion, Vassiliou was admonished for parking on the sidewalk outside the *rebetadiko* (in the same spot he has parked for the past thirty years). He invited the policeman for drinks and the traffic fine was forgotten.[114]

[114] Another common element of business transactions is what is known simply as the *fakelo*, [the envelope]. This refers to the common practice of offering a monetary bribe.

Visual Athens: An Unstable Transnational *Topos* of Greekness

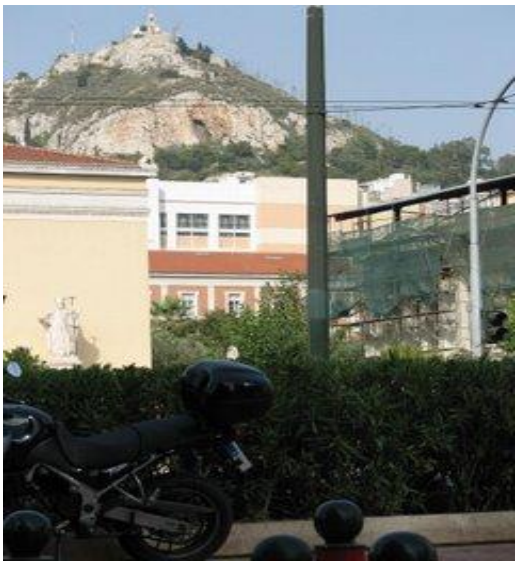
The physical *topos* of Athens reflects the confusion of city life in numerous ways. Athens architecture is a telling example: The city is an architectural jumble. Modern four and five storey apartment blocks close in on old neoclassical houses, some rebuilt and others dilapidated. New steel and glass structures abut archeological ruins cordoned off by steel bars and Plexiglas walls. As described by Angelis, "the Greek capital remains a mosaic city…the combination of ancient, Roman, Byzantine, Muslim, early twentieth-century neoclassical and modern constructions, composes a thick text" (Angelis 2004, 5). Towering over this mosaic is the Acropolis, a constant reminder of the glories of ancient Greece. It is hardly a coincidence that most structures from the 400 years of Ottoman rule have been demolished.

The architecture of contemporary Athens is dominated by a prominent visual leitmotif, namely modern four and five storey apartment blocks. During the 1960s and the 1980s Athens underwent two major expansions in which old structures were demolished and thousands of apartment blocks were erected. Today, the apartment block maintains such a prominent presence that one architect characterized the Greek city in the following way: "The contemporary Greek city is the apartment block" (Aesopos in Aesopos and Simeoforidis 1999, 38).

How does the apartment block affect Greek perceptions of self? Athens is one of the few cities in the world in which a normative modern international architecture accounts for a large part of the inner urban fabric (Aesopos and Simeoforidis 1999, 12). Aesopos and Simeoforidis state, "contemporary Greek architecture in its manifold aspects balances being inalienably 'Greek' (while keeping folklore at a distance) and

inalienably ‘modern’ (1999, 9). This wide-scale *glocalization*, the local adaptation of global culture and in this case of international architectural style, challenged the urban Greek to reimagine the capital city on a global scale but also their national identity as part of a broader Western global market.

Figure 6.1: Neoclassical architecture and statue; Agios Georgios Church; construction site; apartment blocks in the distance; motorcycle and green bushes.



The urban ethos of instability is reflected in another fashion in the physical layout of Athens—the city is continually under construction. For decades, cranes and other construction tools have decorated the Acropolis, the international Greek symbol. This reminds Greeks and tourists alike of the failing Greek bureaucratic system, of the economic crisis but also of the constructed nature of the national monument (Yalouri 2001). In addition, ghostly half-completed buildings line the streets, empty concrete shells long-abandoned by construction workers due to lack of funds or construction permits. Most streets and sidewalks are in terrible condition broken up by various obstructions and potholes. In the introduction to his photo essay on Athens, Hoffmeister states, “the sense of incomplete and unfinished forms is part of Athens’ genetic code”

(2006, 1). But architects and city builders face do critical practical challenges. For example, national provision requires inspection of plots of land before a construction project can take place. This often results in major if not endless delays, especially if ruins of archeological significance are discovered.

National Stability, National Identity: Creating the Past

> That which we remember is, more often than not, that which we would like to have been; or that which we hope to be.
> -Ralph Ellison

How should Greeks include elements of the past into everyday life? A defining metanarrative of Athenian modernity is the incorporation of elements of the ancient Greek past into a modern nation that is ready and able to compete in the contemporary global market. Joining past and present is a matter of contention and contributes to Greek perceptions of self. This issue is not new to the Greek nation or to Europe. It greatly resembles the concern of 13th-century intellectuals engaged in the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns: was modern society an improvement upon ancient society or not?

The architecture of a nation is perhaps the most visible evidence of competing ideologies about the present and the past. Examining the Greek capital city, one might ask if older buildings are readily demolished in processes of creative destruction to make room for newer, more modern structures. Or are they restored and remodeled for continued use? Perhaps they are cordoned off and placed under guarded protection as sacred national monuments, preserved and cherished for their timeless beauty. Greek architecture displays the pervasiveness of this debate, the varying ideals for the Greek

nation and their temporal ideologies. Indeed, in the battle over urban space, the incorporation of the past into the present is Greek national policy.

Athens boasts numerous creative architectural solutions to incorporating the past into the present. A primary example is the series of ancient ruin display cases that lines the walls of various subway stops throughout the city—The glass reflects the passersby, as if attempting to finally marry this ancient past with Greek modernity.

Figure 6.2: Ancient meets modern: Reflection of passengers in the ancient ruin display case in Evangelismos Metro Station, 2007.



By creating space and place for the memory of ancient Greece in the contemporary nation, Greeks engage in unique unifications of ancient and modern. For example, in 1985, Parliament passed Law 1515/85 that called for the unification of archeological sites in downtown Athens. They aimed to create a 4km-long archaeological park that would run through the center of Athens and that would include all ancient sites and monuments. This Historical Center of Athens would allow tourists to sightsee and shop on foot. Several main roads including *Iera Odos* and *Ermou* were converted into pedestrian walkways. The area became more peaceful and clean but shop owners and shoppers can no longer drive up to storefronts. This new amalgam of past and present—a joining of

cultural tourism and of capitalism exemplifies the many attempts to forge a contemporary Greekness that that unifies ancient and modern Greece. Efforts are currently underway to turn the bustling Panepistimiou Street in the center of Athens into a pedestrian zone as well.

Various attempts to incorporate past and present reflect the unique contemporary Greekness. Most starkly, they question Aldo Rossi's well-known distinction between "propelling" and "pathological" permanences. Rossi characterizes permanences as the past that we still experience because it has assumed different functions and continues to constitute an important urban focus (Rossi 1984). The "propelling permanence" is the urban layout that remains alive and functional and the "pathological permanence" is the monument, what he calls the "dead city". In Athens, the distinction between propelling and pathological permanences does not apply. Ancient ruins become a part of everyday life: For example, unsuspecting citizens seeking to build new houses unearth marble fragments, columns, tombs and other archeological finds. Federal law prohibits building on private property that has not been inspected for ancient artifacts. And excavations for the Athens metro revealed an entire city beneath the city including pipes and drains, pottery and even a dog cemetery. These ruins were surrounded by glass display cases that line the walls of the metro stations, remaining a part of, but distinctly separate from, the bustle of modern life. In Athens, all is permanent and fleeting at once.

Figure 6.3: Palia Stratona Jail and depressed neighborhood until the mid-1930s. Now the stunning archeological site of the Library of Hadrian in the central Monastiraki Square.



One might say that in Athens, ruins serve a dual function as both environments and places of memory:[115] In the center of Athens, the arch of Hadrian's Wall strangely protrudes into the air. On one side, lies a green oasis filled with ruins and the dry riverbed by which Plato once held philosophy discussions. The inscription on the arch reads, "This is the ancient city of Theseus." On the other side of the arch, the bustle of contemporary Athens, cars speed by on Amalias Avenue, a central winding four-lane road that leads to Syntagma Square. A second inscription reads, "This is the city of Hadrian, not Theseus."

[115] Pierre Nora described this phenomenon of modernity in another way. She suggested that modernity is characterized by the replacement of environments of memory, lived in and used, by places of memory—that include archives, monuments, and theme parks. These are moments of history torn away from the movement of history (Nora 1989, 12).

Figure 6.4: Cars speeding by the Arch of Hadrian on Amalias Street in the center of Athens.



The incorporation of the past into the contemporary Greek nation is not innocent and often fuels ethical debates of epic proportions. Anthropologist James D. Faubion writes that in no other country except in Greece has "history past and present been so dominant an ethical concern" (1993, 12). A primary example is the ongoing debate over the proposed demolition of a row of buildings on Dionysiou Aeropagitou that obstruct the view of the Acropolis from the New Acropolis Museum. Some argue that the buildings are fine examples of 1920s and 1930s art-deco architecture and as such are worthy elements of Modern Greek culture and should not be demolished. Others consider their cultural worth to be minimal when compared with that of the Acropolis. They call for the demolition of the buildings so that one may experience a perfect view of the Acropolis when dining in the café of the Acropolis Museum.

Another fundamental question that shapes national identity perceptions and the incorporation of past into present concerns the ownership of the ruins. Do ancient ruins belong to the Greek people, to the Greek government or to the people of the world? Currently, Greeks must pay an entrance fee to enter many archeological sites. Vassiliou is

adamant in his belief that the ruins are the cultural heritage of the Greek people and not the property of the Greek state. He is indignant that Greeks have to pay entrance fees to view the ruins that the Greek nation claims is their heritage. Vassiliou stated it this way:

> These ancient ruins are of the Greek people not the Greek state, and now the state has taken possession of them and is using them as yet another method of getting money out of us. You know, when I was young, I used to play amongst the ruins around Plaka. Now they are barricaded behind fences and every time you want to approach them you have to pay the Greek state. My daughter is nine years old. The other day she went on a class trip with her school to visit the Acropolis. You won't believe this, but she had to pay to get inside. She is 9 years old! And she was with her school! (Vassiliou 2008)

Vassiliou believes that the Greek State should encourage the Greek people to learn about its heritage. Making Greeks pay an entrance fee in order to visit ancient ruins has just the opposite effect.

Destructive Creation as the Urban Metanarrative

> To begin with, modernity can have no respect even for its own past, let alone that of any premodern social order. The transitoriness of things makes it difficult to preserve any sense of historical continuity. If there is any meaning to history, then that meaning has to be discovered and defined from within the maelstrom of change, a maelstrom that affects the terms of discussion as well as whatever it is that is being discussed. Modernity, therefore, not only entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions, but is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself.
>
> -David Harvey 1990, 11

In Athens, attempts to preserve the past ironically contribute to a general instability, for all preservation attempts entail a certain degree of destruction. Preservation thus becomes a Pandora's box working against its very goals. For example, even the most historically symbolic areas of the city such as Syntagma Square and the Acropolis have been victims of multiple reconstruction projects that drastically changed their appearances. The Acropolis, the emblem of ancient Greek accomplishments is also a

modern-day construction—The many post-classical structures built on and surrounding the Parthenon have been destroyed in an effort to present a particular image of the ruin. Another example is the nearby historic Anafiotika neighborhood in Plaka high up on the Northeast slope of the Acropolis. It was built by early settlers in Athens who worked on the first major restoration projects of the Acropolis. These houses were built illegally in this area of archeological significance but have come to represent a historic moment in Athens history. Much debate exists as to whether or not these buildings should be preserved or demolished. In fact, processes of creative destruction are so prevalent in contemporary Athens that it is perhaps more useful to call them processes of destructive creation, emphasizing extensive efforts put forth to create particular images of the past.

In a nation whose constructed past remains so prominent, it is interesting to note that Greeks are repeatedly criticized for their cultural amnesia and for lacking knowledge of Greek history and culture. On October 28, television crews interviewed various young adults who were taking part in the "*Ohi*" [No] Day march.[116] They asked the students about the holiday and about the purpose of the march. A plethora of incorrect responses ranged from celebration of Greek independence from the Ottoman Occupation to commemoration of the death of students at the Athens Polytechnic Institute in 1973. Sociologist Alexis Politis suggests that the Greek education system is partly at fault for the general lack of historical awareness:

> The difficulty of the Modern Greek to place a fact in a greater whole, to connect it with others, may be due to bad education – chronologies in school we learn like little poems, and no one explained to us what they were good for, other than to help us get to the next class. (Politis 2006, 27)

[116] "Ohi Day" is a national Greek holiday celebrated on October 28th, dedicated to the infamous refusal of General Metaxas to allow Mussolini to invade and occupy Greece during World War II.

I suggest that this also the result of living in Greek modernity, where old and new are mixed into a confused and timeless present.

Selling the Greek Past to the World

National identity constructions are often crystallized in the ways in which a nation presents itself to the rest of the world. How do Greeks package and present their national identity? Joining ancient and modern in creative ways is a fundamental metanarrative, fueled by the goal of economic profit, as many tourists view ancient ruin sites during their travels to Greece. The Greek state plays into these desires. "Live Your Myth in Greece: Starring You" urged the Greek National Tourist Organization on its website in 2006. This slogan appeared on billboards and in television advertisements around the world, urging tourists to partake in the dream of *Ellinismos*, to continue the history of philhellenes imagining Greece and to create their own myth about Greece. The GNTO poster featured a mermaid flying in the sky looking down in a ray of light on an ancient ruin.

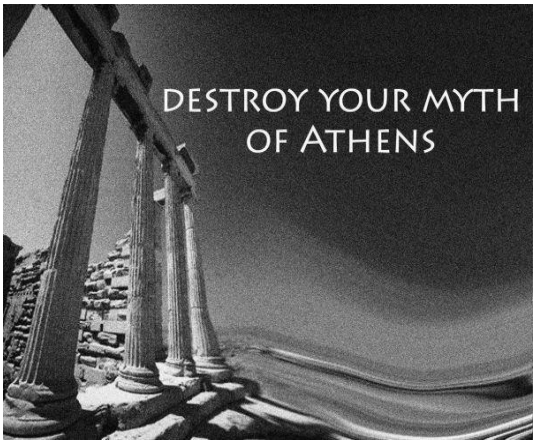
Figure 6.5: Greek National Tourist Organization poster: "Live Your Myth in Greece".[117]



[117] "Visit Greece: The Official Website of the Greek National Tourist Organization" [www.visitgreece.gr] Visited April 10, 2006.

The equivalent television advertisement showed angelic children and loving couples on Greek beaches, families perched on ledge of the Acropolis, and a mermaid diving into a pool of clear blue water.[118] The music soundtrack was Elena Paparizou's Eurovision win "You are the One".[119] Whose imagined Greece does the advertisement represent? Artists at the 1st Athens Biennale Contemporary Art Exhibition entitled "Destroy Athens" produced their own version of the poster.

Figure 6.6: "Destroy Your Myth of Athens" poster from the 1st Athens Biennial.[120]



This version of the poster challenges the viewer to reimagine Athens in a fashion that does not highlight its glorious past. In addition, it references the destruction that accompanies the advancements of modernity. Finally, it asks the viewer to accept the disillusionment of living in Athens as compared to the idyllic images of ancient and modern Greece sold abroad.

[118] The advertisement can be found on the video-sharing website www.youtube.com at the following address: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy8BJ5VwCXY].
[119] Youtube: "Elena Paparizou: You Are The One" [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRccV4V3P4] Visited June 10, 2009.
[120] Athens Bienniale. [http://www.athensbiennial.org/AB/en/ENintro.htm] Visited May 09, 2008.

II. TRANSNATIONAL FORCES HYBRIDIZING CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

Europeanization

A second metanarrative that shapes contemporary Greekness, are prominent national attempts to promote Greece as a Europeanized nation. In fact, since the founding of the modern Greek nation, Greeks have worked to create a national identity that is at once uniquely Greek and European. As stated by Carabott in his book *Greece and Europe in the Modern Period: Aspects of a Troubled Relationship* (1995), Greece maintains a singular geographic and cultural position as the link between the East and the West. As a result, its national identity lies in an ambiguous area amongst the "conflicting ideologies that define the national culture as both belonging to and excluded from Europe…No longer Orientals, but not yet Europeans, neither do we pursue the fulfillment of the imagined *Megali Idea* [the Great Idea] nor do we follow the trend of contemporary progress" (Carabott 1995, 70, 78).

Greece's 1981 entry into the European Union reignited the age-old debate over the relationship of Greece and Europe and Greekness. Few agree about the effects of Europeanization on Greek culture and identity. Is it altering Greekness beyond recognition or updating it to keep the country up to task in a rapidly globalizing world? This debate was especially pronounced during the 2009 pre-election period for European representatives. The three major political parties plastered public wall space in Athens with posters and campaign advertisements: The slogan of PASOK read, "We vote for Europe, we decide for Greece," and posters for NEA DIMOKRATIA, "With You as an Ally." KKE offered a very different approach and urged the removal of Greece from the European Union: "They Told You Lies. Now, Punish Them! KKE: Strong."

In Greece, there seems to exist a fundamental ideological divide between those who believe that the Europeanization of Greece is moving the country forward and those who believe that it is corrupting Greek culture. While many perceive an opportunity for progress and change in EU membership, others question the true advantages it offers Greece. They question whether Greece has simply become a political and economic pawn for larger more-powerful European nations and whether this is corrupting its national identity. Many Greeks, like Pavlos Vassiliou, call for national sovereignty from the European Union and question the existence of any positive effects of EU membership on Greece at all. "Europe never gave anything good to Greece," he often states (Vassiliou 2008).

EU membership does require a refocusing of the national imagined community to fit into a larger supranational European community. This questions the very feasibility of conventional national identity paradigms in the European Union. As stated by Rieff,

> The multicultural fantasy in Europe…was that, in due course, assuming that the proper resources were committed and benevolence deployed, Islamic and other immigrants would eventually become liberals. As it's said, they would come to "accept" the values of their new countries. It was never clear how this vision was supposed to coexist with multiculturalism's other main assumption, which was that group identity should be maintained. But by now that question is largely academic: the European vision of multiculturalism, in all its simultaneous good will and self-congratulation, is no longer sustainable. And most Europeans know it. What they don't know is what to do next. (Rieff 2005, 11-12)

In the European Union, a variety of interrelated global processes undermine the political sovereignty of the nation-state. They also question its place as a primary focus for social identity formation. For example, countries seeking membership in the European Union must fulfill a series of requirements that qualify them as Europeans. Governments implement various projects of Europeanization, "an incremental process reorienting the

direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making" (Ladrech 1994, 70). This attempted Europeanization of the organizational logic of the nation affects governing systems and national cultures alike. Now they must fit into an overarching European Union system and culture.

Greece, a small nation with a fundamentally complex relationship with Europe is the site of various local-level nationalist resistances to Europeanization. Many fear that Greek national identity will disappear into a pan-European one. And recent economic developments have left the European Commission (EC) unsure whether Greece is still a welcome EU member as well. In early spring of 2010, the EC threatened to expel Greece from the Union for its staggering national debt that has jeopardized the stability of the entire Union. Greeks were criticized for a lack of transparency about Greek economic affairs to other members of the Eurozone.

In an effort to meet European Union deadlines and account for a portion of the national debt, the Greek government and European Commission enforced a series of drastic economic measures. These have enraged many Greeks who ask why they should account for a national debt to which they believe they did not contribute. Demonstrators fill the streets of Athens in hopes of lightening the impact of the austerity measures. Peaceful strikes are often interrupted by acts of violence by self-proclaimed anarchist groups.

Various purposeful reactions such as Pavlos Vassiliou's rebetiko culture (see Chapter Seven) emphasize a resistance to a pan-European identity. Their prominence

illustrates how global processes of Europeanization can serve to strengthen rather than weaken nationalist sentiment within the European Union. As Hudson states,

> An imagination of a 'borderless Europe', a Europe without the old certainties of belonging and knowing one's place, might as easily produce a fractured self and defensive, intolerant and even violent reactions to difference. The contemporary resurgence of ethno-communalism, racism, religious fundamentalism and regionalist and nationalist sentiment within a 'heterophobic' Europe in which people seek to re-discover 'tradition' suggests that this may well be the case. (Hudson 2000, 421)

Smaller member nations like Greece readily evidence acts of nationalism in reaction to perceived threats to national culture and identity. These are expressed through political and cultural texts on a national and local level. As I will discuss in Chapter Seven, Pavlos Vassiliou and his Rebetiki Istoria culture are a primary example of defensive reactions to transnational forces.

III. CONTEMPORARY ATHENIAN MUSICKSCAPE

Hearing the Greek National Self

In addition to the physical Athenian landscape, aural codes shape and reflect the maelstrom of Greek modernity in Athens. The sum of these sounds, the soundscape of a city, includes all of the city noises: car horns, radios, fire engines, jackhammers all comprise the city's soundscape (Shafer 1977). From this soundscape, one can separate the musical landscape or *musikscape* (Lam 2011) that helps shape and reflect the ideologies of its listeners. What does the Athenian *musikscape* reveal about contemporary Greece? For example, what genres of music do people listen to or play, and when, how and why? What are the lyrics of the Greek national anthem and what does its music sound like? Has the government promoted or banned particular genres of music? How

often is the Greekness or legitimacy of a Greek song proved by the elements of ancient Greek music theory it supposedly incorporates?

The twenty-first century Athenian *musikscape* is composite and changing, fiercely heterogeneous and globalized. It shapes and reflects contemporary Greek modernity and shows the haphazard progress into a state of supermodernity, a heightened state of modernity in which people maintain significant control in shaping worldviews (Auge 1995). Here, truths about society are drawn from new available media and from dominant metanarratives selected from the maelstrom of transnational information. In Greece, a reality of excess and of existing in the twenty-first century "shrinking planet" questions conventional notions of progress and value. Value is shifted towards the transnational and the foreign, towards products and ideas imported from afar and that represent progress recognized on a global level. It is the prominence of defensive nationalisms in Greece that keeps the nation from slipping into a state of supermodernity completely.

What is the dominant Athenian music culture? Athens is dominated by mass music culture: nightclubs and car radios blast American pop music, Europop (often called Eurotrash due to its banal lyrics and uncomplicated musical structure) and Greek pop songs. In fact, the *musikscape* is so heavily dominated by contemporary popular music that it is difficult to remove it from one's consciousness. Much available public wall-space is plastered with posters advertizing performances by Greek and foreign pop stars. Most store radios offer the latest Greek and American pop music. In the central Monastiraki flea market for example, stores offering everything from name-brand clothing to trinkets for tourists blast disco beats at a volume that is so overwhelming that

while it impairs ones concentration, it also regulates the pace of people walking through the market.

Musicians and concerts that received widespread publicity in newspapers, on radio and television and on billboards and posters throughout the city for summer 2007, included: the Rockwave Festival featuring such groups as: Metallica, Mastodon, My Dying Bride, Dirt Spawn Disease; the Gagarin Open Air Festival (Iggy & the Stooges, Kaiser Chiefs, Rotting Christ), the Buena Vista Social Club, Placido Domingo, Snoop Dog, and George Clinton & The P-Funk All-stars. Concerts by Greek artists were few and far between. The dominance of foreign music is also reflected in song popularity and market sales. In accordance with information collected by the Greek branch of the International Federation of Phonographic Industry, as of week thirty-four of 2008, five songs by non-Greek artists reached the top twenty:

> Number one, O.S.T. "Mamma Mia!" by Universal.
> Number thirteen, Judas Priest "Nostradamus" by SONY BMG
> Number fourteen, Amy Whinehouse "Back to Black" by Universal,
> Number fifteen, Café de Los Maestros "Café de Los Maestros" by Universal
> Number nineteen, Coldplay "Vida la Vida" or "Death and All His Friends" by MINOS EMI.[121]

This culture is so dominant that it has left many questioning the very existence of contemporary Greek culture. As poignantly stated by Pavlos Vassiliou,

> Today one is unable to differentiate whether one is in Greece or somewhere else by listening to the radio, the television and the fare of different music establishments, with everyone trying to become more like everyone else and without understanding why. What's more, one would say that one is in a country that has no musical identity, no musical tradition, that it has developed no music in the thousands of years, from the time of Homer until today. (Vassiliou 2008)

[121] "Music Market Statistics" [http://www.ifpi.org/content/section_statistics/index.html] Visited September 27, 2008.

The prominent mass media music culture in Athens suggests a fundamental connection to imaginings of the contemporary Greek national identity. The sheer magnitude of posters and billboards advertising concerts by the most well-known Greek popular musicians that cover much available public wall space serves as a constant reminder of contemporary Greek music culture. In addition, store radios blast the latest hits by well-known pop stars such as Sakis Rouvas, Anna Vissi and Sarbel and televisions in numerous restaurants throughout the city feature MADTV, the Greek music video channel. The Greek state even chooses choose pop singers to officially represent Greece and the Greek national identity: A poignant example is pop singer Sakis Rouvas, the Greek contestant in the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest, who serves as the current ambassador for Greek tourism. And Elena Paparizou has been chosen to represent Greece in the Berlin Mtv competition on November 5, 2010, for the prize "Best European Act."

This popular *musikscape* has become so dominant in Athens that encountering other musical selections in public spaces can seem anachronistic or foreign. For example, in the Athens metro, a recording of the second movement of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto served as the 2007 summer soundtrack accompanying commuters on their morning ride. Other selections included orchestral works by such Greek composers as Stavros Xarhakos and Mikis Theodorakis, who incorporate elements of Greek demotic and rebetiko music in their classical orchestral compositions. This soundscape changed drastically the moment one emerged from the metro. Confining this music to the underground subway emphasized its uncharacteristic nature within Athens—a subway system that was brand new and impeccably clean and whose subway cars arrive and depart according to schedule.

Many do not view contemporary Greek popular music as Greek music at all. They claim that the banality of the music, the widespread incorporation of foreign rhythms, instruments and words clears contemporary pop music of any true form of "Greekness." When the music charts are topped by song entries for the Eurovision song contest, what commentary is being made about contemporary Greek culture? Where does the Greekness lie in the music and how can this Greekness be reconciled with that of the music performed in Rebetiki Istoria for example?

Yet, while Greek pop music may seem to be "a simple incorporation of all things foreign" (Vassiliou 2007), it does reflect the unique Greek modernity. For example, a majority of Greek pop songs maintain the characteristic complex relationship with past and present: like Greek modernity, Greek pop songs are dominated by an overwhelming prominence of the past—This past is usually a memory of a lost relationship. This is clearly illustrated by the chorus of the popular 2008 hit song "*Eho Trelathei*" ["I Have Gone Crazy"] by pop singer Sarbel. The music video for the song begins with an image of two clocks superimposed on each other.[122] Both are stuck at the hour 10:10:10 but one clock is swirling around and around in counterclockwise motion. The synthesizer mimics the ticking of a clock and the music is doggedly repetitive. The song lyrics read:

> I want to turn the clock back a bit
> To never have met you
> To live life differently
> To not ask for your name
> To not search for your kisses
> To not build dreams again…

[122] Youtube. "Sarbel: *Eho Trelathei*" (Sarbel: I have Gone Crazy) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9RX3vk7nGc]Visited October 09, 2010.

In this song, Sarbel realizes the impossibility of this dream to turn back time—slowing the fleeting horizontal path of modern time is impossible and Sarbel calls himself crazy for wanting to do so:

> But what am I saying, I am crazy for you, you are my life
> Tonight let me say whatever I want
> I have gone crazy
> But what am I saying, I am crazy for I only have you in life
> Tonight let me say whatever I want
> I have gone crazy

Another song that reflects the unique Greek modernity is "*Ola Allazoun*" ["Everything Changes"] by Evstathia. In this song, the protagonist realizes that the supposed signs of success that she once sought in her life did not lead to true happiness. Through the metaphor of an unsuccessful personal relationship, Evstathia comments upon the changing values of Modern Greek society:

> I thought I had found the recipe for success
> And I was – I confess – very proud
> I had found a home, a spouse, a good job
> And a jeep that took me up onto the sidewalks
> I had done the wedding chosen out a plot of land
> But I had not understood
> That I was the victim.
>
> Everything, everything changes
> I don't fit in a relationship that has already finished
> I'm going to look out for my own good.[123]

While the desire to rekindle a past relationship appears in many popular music traditions, the sentiment dominates the majority of Greek pop songs. It closely resembles the fundamental temporal ideology of Greek modernity.

[123] "Eustathia '*Ola Allazoun*' Lyrics" (Eustathia "Everything Changes" Lyrics) [http://www.justsomelyrics.com/1979569/11.Eustathia-Ola-Allazoun-Lyrics] Visited April 05, 2011.

Music and Technology: A Dominant Mass Music Culture in Athens

It is impossible to disconnect the contemporary Athenian popular music culture from the transnational capitalist market. Cell phones companies advertise their phones by their capacity to hold music and their sound quality. Television channels like Madtv only air popular music videos. Rated one of the most popular shows in Greek history, Fame Story is a reality television show in which young Greeks sing in front of a panel of judges. Each week, one contestant is voted off of the show, a decision made based on phone and text message votes from viewers. As if to emphasize the inextricable link between music and technology, the telephone company Vodaphone aired television commercials featuring pop sensation Sakis Rouvas.[124] The Internet is another highly popular medium for legal and illegal music trading in Greece. Internet sites such as Torrent and Rapidshare are so heavily visited that one often waits weeks or even months to download a particular song. Websites of popular singers offer free downloads, streaming video, ringtones and other technology-based perks on their official websites.

Technology affects traditional Greek music culture as well. It has impacted rebetika culture in countless ways. For example, many rebetika fans and musicians have created massive archives of original rebetika recordings by downloading songs from the Internet. Rebetika fans carry thousands of rebetika songs in mp3 format on their cell phones and download rebetika ringtones; *Rebetadika* advertize through cell phone messages that include names of current performers and prices of drinks. Fans and fellow musicians learned about the death of the well-known rebetiko singer and accordionist Lela Papadopoulou through an announcement on the friend-sharing website

[124] Youtube. "Vodaphone Commerical Sakis Rouvas." [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0xhrG2uFk] Visited October 04, 2010.

facebook.com; One can even become friends with deceased rebetiko musician Vassilis Tsitsanis on myspace.com. Even the epitaph on the grave of rebetiko singer Rita Abatzi (1914-1969) emphasizes the role of technology in shaping the contemporary *musikscape*. Its author mentions the detachment of sound from its source made possible by recording technology. This allows people to continue to enjoy the music of a deceased musician. The first two stanzas of the poem read,

Acquaintances and friends cried
For your unjust loss
And it has made us so bitter
Rita, your death.

She died? And now
The ach! She will not cry
Only her voice remains
To help us have a good time. (Attributed to: Katina Konsola)

Rebetika as a Musical Ruin: Surveying Contemporary Athenian Rebetiko Culture

> Rebetika does not appeal to everyone. It appeals to a specific type of person with a special sensitivity. It should be for everyone, but it is not. Look, the music emerged in urban centers largely as a result of injustice and oppression and it served as a means of resistance for a certain type of person. So no, in a capitalist society…in a European Union member nation, rebetika cannot appeal to everyone.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou, 2008

How should Greeks incorporate rebetika, a music that formed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century into contemporary Greek modernity? The diverse ways of performing and enjoying rebetika in contemporary Athens speak to the fundamental paradox of Greek modernity that concerns the incorporation of past and present. In the maelstrom of modern Greek culture, *rebetadika* devoted to early-style rebetika face great competition from musicians who perform rebetika in different ways

and who open avenues for people to enjoy rebetika outside of the *rebetadiko* or tavern setting. For example, rebetika songs are performed in *bouzoukia*, large nighttime dance clubs in which popular artists perform their latest hits. Famous pop stars often end their shows with a selection of rebetika songs that are performed in such a hybridized style that many question whether they can be considered rebetika songs at all.

Rebetadika update their music culture as well. They offer programs devoted to particular musicians such as Stelios Kazantzidis; they trade between them the most-popular musicians who require high wages for their services; they sell the patrons flowers to throw and plates to break; many raise their prices to exorbitant rates: Stoa Athanaton offers whiskey for 110 Euro a bottle and a side of dried nuts for 20 Euro. In Rebetiki Istoria, the same bottle of whiskey costs 80 Euro and nuts cost 8 Euro. Drink prices vary broadly amongst *rebetadika* and some do not offer single glasses of wine but require patrons to buy the entire bottle.

Does the inclusion of rebetika songs in performances by pop singers like Anna Vissi and Nikos Verdis result in the destruction, evolution or preservation of traditional Greek music? At a recent appearance of popular singer Nikos Verdis at the Poseidon nightclub in Kiffisia, he ended his performance with the announcement, "No performance would be complete without singing some traditional Greek music." He proceeded to sing a series of rebetika songs and *nisiotika* (island songs) and invited the audience onto the stage to dance. Verdis was accompanied by a large orchestra that bore little connection to a traditional Greek folk or rebetika group. The orchestra included violins, celli, synthesizers, drums, acrobatic swimmers turning summersaults in pools of water, multi-colored lights, and his own pop singing style. Verdis did not bother to sing complete

songs and sang at a rapid tempo. Audience members showered him with hundreds of Euro worth of flowers and raised their glasses filled with whiskey that costs 160 Euro a bottle. In this way, Verdis both updates Greekness for the modern global world and aids in the destruction of Greek tradition.

A very different tribute to rebetika takes place in the form of rebetika concerts in Greece's major concert halls. George Dalaras, perhaps the best-known contemporary singer in Greece, often orchestrates such events. Working with various rebetiko enthusiasts and scholars like Panayiotis Kounadis, Lefteris Papadopoulos and Kostas Ferris, Dalaras organizes musicals, concerts and other events in an effort to spread knowledge about rebetika. Recent appearances include the concert, "Songs About Substances" at the ancient Herode Atticus Theater and the musical "Like a Charmed Song: Hommage to Rebetiko" presented in the most well-respected concert hall in Athens, the *Megaro Mousikis Athinon* under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. In the concert program for this event, Dalaras included various personal statements lauding the value of the music and emphasizing its continued relevance in contemporary Greece:

> The image and voice of Bithikotsis, Grey, Akis Panou worked as a catalyst and made me "bow down" with a loyal almost religious devotion to this form, so much that every other type of music that I loved, did not compare with these "holy" musicians of rebetika. Rebetika is the most revolutionary and live form of [Greek] music. I believe that it never was and never will be of the museum or written history. It will always move and inspire the most worthy, talented and sensitive people of every generation. (Dalaras 2007)

This particular musical was focused on the dilemma of joining past and present. The script included six main acting roles. Five of these were deceased rebetika musicians; Marika Ninou, Markos Vamvakaris, Vassilis Tsitsanis, Giannis Papaioannou, Loukas Daralas, and one waitress. They sat in the afterworld, in a *teke* [hashish den] smoking

hashish. They were pondering a compact disc player that they did not know how to work. When they finally figured it out, contemporary rebetika musicians, Giorgos Dalaras and orchestra, performed a selection of rebetika songs on the stage below them. The play visually and aurally joined present and past into a unique temporality.

Though he spreads awareness of rebetika, Dalaras has been harshly criticized for taking rebetika out of its appropriate environment and for acquiring personal fame through the music. He is also criticized for promoting an exaggerated association of rebetika with hashish. Dalaras does pay homage to early style rebetika. But he also makes considerable alterations to the music. For example, in this performance, there was a large orchestra of at least twenty musicians who played a variety of instruments, many of which do not appear in early rebetika. They did not play complete songs but rather presented a medley of many rebetika songs. In addition, Dalaras has a unique singing style that straddles the old rebetiko style and newer *laïka* techniques. Finally, this show and many such productions actually present an image of rebetika as music frozen in the past: for example, the musicians wear costumes reminiscent of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century dressing styles.

The most traditional setting for contemporary rebetiko performance is the *rebetadiko*. Since it has now become quite difficult to own a *rebetadiko* in Athens, many are fighting for survival or closing their doors. Most that do remain open have limited their opening hours to Friday and Saturday nights. The ownership of *rebetadika* change often, old *rebetadika* are given new names, musicians are hired at different *rebetadika* during different seasons, and advertising has reached a frantic pace. A minimum of 8,000 Euro is required to advertise for nine months in the weekly *Athinorama* periodical that

lists current events in Athens. Musicians make endless unpaid television appearances through which they promote their *magazi* and giant posters cover the outside walls of the *rebetadiko* featuring various musicians.

Defensive Nationalism: Pavlos Vassiliou Counters Greek Modernity Through Rebetiko Song

To Vassiliou, musicians who alter rebetiko culture are selling out on Greek tradition. Yet he does not expect them to act otherwise. Rather, he believes that the pandering to international cultural influence are built into the structure of the modern Greek nation:

> We sell ourselves just so we can say we are European. Because we want to be like everybody else. We always have. And all in the name of monetary profit and greed. Who wins? Not the Greek people. Big businesses, foreign corporations and the small percentage of the Greek population that is rich. Do you realize how many shares of Greek companies are owned by foreign countries? But we have always been under foreign control and this has always been for the good of others, not for our good. Foreigners do whatever they want with us and they always have, since the founding of the nation and beforehand, when foreigners stole the Parthenon Marbles and countless other ancient artefacts, so many that we could never possibly know just what and how much they took from us. (Vassiliou 2008)

In this quotation, Vassiliou refers to three significant factors in the discussion of contemporary Greek culture: the relationship of Greece relationship and Europe, the incorporation of the ancient past into everyday life and the effects of mass culture on Greek society. For the past thirty years, Pavlos Vassiliou has shaped his rebetika culture in response to Greek modernity, which he describes as "a crazy decadent delirium spiraling down into nothing" (Vassiliou 2008). He also resists the culture promoted by other rebetadika that he feels pander to the negative trends in contemporary Greece. Worried that Greeks are betraying even their own modernity by ignoring the cultural

treasures of the past, Vassiliou draws from an urban music culture of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century in order to create a model for contemporary Greek culture.

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou attempts to protect his ideal of Greekness by resisting the forces of capitalism in numerous ways. First, he gears his rebetiko culture towards the student and the working class who bear the brunt of difficult economic times in Greece—Rebetiki Istoria is by far the cheapest *rebetadiko* in Athens. Vassiliou has not changed its culture or its prices in thirty years. Even with the switch to the Euro and the subsequent inflation his prices remained the same. In addition, Vassiliou does not provide opportunity for patrons to spend large amounts of money on food or drink. He provides no trays of flowers to buy or plates to break in ostentatious displays of wealth.

Though Vassiliou struggles to keep the capitalism as removed as possible from his rebetika culture, he is often unsuccessful. For example, in the late 1990s, Vassiliou gave three free drinks to customers without printing a receipt. Under cover tax agents were in the audience and fined Vassiliou the equivalent of 90,000 Euros. These same tax agents are rumored not to enter the largest nightclubs whose owners have paid off the police and tax agents not to report them. The difficult economic situation caused by the failing capitalist system in Greece creeps into Rebetiki Istoria in other ways as well. For example, when customers call to reserve a table at Rebetiki Istoria, they rarely ask about the music and the entertainment as they once did. Rather, they ask the cost of a drink or a bottle of wine and whether wine is sold more cheaply in pitchers or only in bottles.

A second means through which Vassiliou defensively protects Greek culture and identity is by resisting the mass media. According to Vassiliou, the change from popular culture to mass culture via mass media technology is a major cause of the downfall of

contemporary Greek culture. His beliefs echo Dominic Strinati's distinction between mass and popular culture: Mass culture is "popular culture which is produced by the industrial techniques of mass production, and marketed for profit to a mass public of consumers" (Strinati 2004, 10). Here, mass culture is popular culture produced in a specific way for the purpose of securing economic profit. Its existence depends on the capitalist market economy and on mechanisms of mass production.

To Vassiliou, mass media culture is simply a capitalist mechanism meant to control and gain profit from the powerless masses. His ideas closely resemble those of cultural theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno who argued that mass culture manipulates its consumers and imposes false needs and false desires on them.[125] According to Vassiliou, this is just the case. He argues that this manipulation is achieved through capitalism's strongest weapon, which is advertising. In her book *Are They Selling Her Lips?—Advertising and Identity*, Carol Moog points out the encircling nature of advertising.

> Advertising shapes egos, influences our sense of self-worth. It reinforces our fears that we never have enough; we're never healthy enough, good-looking enough, or lively enough… It feeds our wishes, profits from our illnesses, plays on our insecurities, cautions us, exhorts us, reminds us of our past and future, and encourages us to behave in ways we have never behaved before. (1990, 222-23)

In resistance of mass media culture, Vassiliou refuses to advertize by hanging posters, producing pamphlets or making any television appearances. Out of what calls "sheer

[125] Others argued for a more complex relationship between the masses and mass culture, suggesting that the people played an active role in the selection of mass culture. Stuart Hall offers three possible audience responses to mass culture: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. In the dominant response, the audience accepts the text's message at face value; in the negotiated response, the audience might dispute a particular claim while accepting the overall system; and in an oppositional response, the audience rejects the mass culture entirely, rejecting the capitalist system in the interests of the subordinate class. Hall's responses illustrate how text, medium and audience play an important role in the creation of meaning. Dick Hebdige echoes this idea in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) in which he discusses how subcultures "negotiate" the dominant culture, appropriating its objects and symbols changing or transferring their meanings in order to unify a smaller social group.

necessity" to keep his business open, he places only one advertisement every other week in the *Athinorama* magazine.[126]

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou hopes to turn a particular popular music into mass culture. But he aims to do this through channels of distribution other than those of the mass culture industry. He believes that the mass culture industry has altered the shape of live Greek music entertainment into a transnational culture with no identity of its own. For mass music culture is impersonal and governed by broad international markets. This is illustrated by a major shift in urban nightlife that has taken place over the last thirty years: rather than gathering with a few friends in a small friendly neighbourhood tavern and either making or enjoying Greek music and culture, Greek youth gather in large groups in particular areas of Athens: Psyri, Gazi, Glyfada. Here they sit in cafes or dance in bars and clubs that blast loud pop and disco music.

Vassiliou believes that this gathering of the masses has led to the ghettoization of certain areas of Athens and has paved the way for a youth culture of increasing anonymity. This anonymity has a predominantly negative effect in that it affords freedom for various destructive activities including drug use and prostitution. Indeed, mass culture theory argues that if people are organized as masses, they lose their human identity and quality. "They are related to one another neither as individuals nor as members of communities. Instead, every individual exists as a solitary atom, uniform with and undifferentiated from thousands and millions of other atoms that make up "the lonely

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[126] The category REBETIKA AND *LAÏKA* offers around one dozen establishments featuring live nighttime rebetika performance in Athens. Rebetiki Istoria is listed under the shorter "*Kompanies*" section:

> **REBETIKI ISTORIA**. Ippokratous 181, Exarcheia, 2106424937. Rebetika & *laïka* with Pavlos's band. Hor d'oeuvres, cold plates. Drink Euro 6. Bottle of whiskey 75. Closed on Mondays.

While the 2-Euro Athinorama is relatively cheap to purchase, (it's price rose from 1.80 to 2.00 Euro with the change of the 2009 New Year (1.80 Euro), advertizing in the magazine is expensive.

crowd" (MacDonald 1957, 69).[127] In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou resists the impersonal nature of the contemporary mass music culture in Greece. He maintains a warm and personal rapport with his patrons most of whom get to know and befriend Vassiliou.

Rebetiki Istoria is a defensive attempt to maintain a sense of self that appears to be fading in the maelstrom of Greek modernity. At the same time, it is pervaded by decadence also typical of modernity, in which Vassiliou maintains no real hope for change. The reach of modernity is too broad for him to have but a small influence on his fellow Greeks. For as long as he resists the capitalist mass media system that governs the Greek nation and the rest of the world, Vassiliou cannot influence a large number of people in a significant manner.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I contextualized my discussion of Rebetiki Istoria through an ethnography of contemporary Athens. I discussed how the complexities of Greek modernity shape and reflect the physical and aural landscape of the capital city. I proposed that while major forces such as globalization, Europeanization and Westernization do alter fundamental perceptions of self and other in Greece, the quest to define the Greek national identity continues to shape the Greek imaginary. In the second half of the chapter I discussed the Athenian *musikscape* as an amalgam of foreign influences of the mass media. I argued that Rebetiki Istoria resists the maelstrom of

[127] Vassiliou believes that this impersonal aspect is detrimental to Greekness for Greeks have become used to buying mass-produced items from international corporations that have no connection to traditional Greek culture. This contributes to the widespread ignorance and cultural amnesia that characterizes contemporary Greeks. He worries that this has become so engrained in the Greek conscience that distant and impersonal relationships have become the social norm of consumption of most products. See (McClelland 1964) for a discussion of the changed relationship between producer and consumer in contemporary society through the example of the supermarket.

Greek modernity both in its promotion of traditional Greek culture and in its rejection of mass media culture. It is an expression of Pavlos Vassiliou's defensive nationalism for Greece. In the next chapter I present an ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria, analyzing the music culture as it shapes and reflects Greek modernity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF REBETIKI ISTORIA

> I opened Rebetiki Istoria out of a great love for rebetika. And at a time when no other such place existed. Greeks were listening to *laïka* and *skiladika* and anything foreign.[128] I worried for the fate of Greek music and culture that had become an incorporation of all things foreign and that bore little connection to Greekness.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou, 2008

> After all these years, when all of the other music clubs changed the entertainment style, changed the musical style, Mr. Vassiliou never changed his path. He never sold out and never gave in to this or that latest trend. And that is why he is unique. That is why everyone knows him…because Rebetiki Istoria has an identity. I truly believe it is the only *rebetadiko* in Athens.
> Long-time Rebetiki Istoria patron, 2008

Introduction

This chapter is an ethnography of Rebetiki Istoria. It presents its rebetiko culture as an expression of Pavlos Vassiliou's defensive nationalism for Greece. Musical style and context play a fundamental role in the creation of musical meaning in the *rebetadiko.* Though musicians and patrons alike significantly influence the rebetiko culture, Vassiliou is the central force behind Rebetiki Istoria and he works to shape the musical entertainment to reflect certain ideals. By promoting the performance and enjoyment of

[128] *Skiladika* can defined as "dog den music." The term refers to a certain style of popular music (1960s – present day) performed in large nightclubs hat are referred to by the same name.

rebetika in particular ways, Vassiliou hopes to promote his understanding of Greekness and to defend Greek culture against invasive transnational forces.

The chapter is divided into two parts. In Part One, I position Rebetiki Istoria against the backdrop of Greek modernity. I propose that Rebetiki Istoria is an authenticity culture that exists in a liminal stage between Greek modernity and Vassiliou's imagined utopian ideal for Greece. For while the rebetiko culture resists the fundamental metanarratives of Greek modernity, its very existence as an authenticity culture is dependent upon this modernity. Basic themes that shape this discussion are longing for the past, rejecting the present, and combining old and new to create a unique temporality. The concepts of authenticity, decadence and culture help illuminate this complex existential relationship.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyze how musical meanings are negotiated within the Rebetiki Istoria culture. Christopher Small's notion of *musicking* (Small 1998) provides the theoretical framework. *Musicking* suggests that all aspects of a musical performance such as audience behavior and performance process affect the music making. Within this framework, I ask two basic questions: First, how do musicians and patrons alike shape the rebetiko music and culture? Second, how does Vassiliou relay musical and political ideas to his audience? I propose that musical style plays a fundamental role in answering these questions. It provides clues to the audience about the cultural and political beliefs of the performers and about the expected style of rebetiko enjoyment. And patron reactions to the music signal the musicians in similar ways. Based on three years of ethnographic research, I enrich my discussion with interview transcriptions of musicians and patrons and with personal experiences.

I. PART ONE: REBETIKI ISTORIA AND GREEK MODERNITY

A Defensive Authenticity Culture

Rebetiki Istoria is an authenticity culture. As defined by Julie M. Peetet, an authenticity culture results from a process of demarcating borders by defining what is considered to be the essence of a culture (1993). Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture is all about border creation. As part of his efforts to present true early-style rebetika culture, he creates and recreates physical and ideological borders around it. These borders reject the negative attributes of Greek modernity that he believes corrupt contemporary Greekness. Yet, the very notion of authenticity is dependent upon modernity. Guignon's description of a "culture of authenticity" reveals the connection: "[a culture of authenticity signifies] the attempt to recover a sense of oneness and wholeness that appears to have been lost with the rise of modernity" (2004, 1). To Guignon, the destabilizing effects of modernity cause the search for authenticity. This is the search for an imagined essence that has been lost in the wake of teleological time.

Rebetiki Istoria is clearly a symptom of Greek modernity. First, Vassiliou and other musicians long for an imagined past that they fear is disappearing. This longing is largely the result of modernity's teleological march of time. Second, and perhaps most telling is the creation of a unique Rebetiki Istoria temporality. Vassiliou does not actually hope to return to the past or even to achieve the greatness of the early musicians. The early musicians will always be "more authentic" because they created and lived rebetika. Rather he brings the past into the present in unique ways, thus creating a unique temporality. I begin with a discussion of the longing for the past that permeates the Rebetiki Istoria culture.

At first glance, Rebetiki Istoria seems to be quite shielded from modernity and from the rapid pace of contemporary Athens. Its culture and design is modeled on the early-twentieth century tavern. Its decoration is simple and understated. The few pieces of visibly modern technology such as the air conditioning units and the somewhat archaic cash register seem strangely anachronistic. The walls of the *rebetadiko* are covered with black and white photographs of the greatest rebetika musicians, all deceased. These same photographs once inspired dismay and confusion by some of Vassiliou's acquaintances from his home island of Skopelos, who wondered why he would "want to surround himself with photographs of the deceased." The aural landscape echoes the visual: early-style rebetika recordings from the 1950s and earlier provide the soundtrack before the live music starts. The sound of the needle on the record and the crackle of the old recordings mask the fact that they have been reissued on compact disc.

The musicians evidence great longing for the past in their everyday conversation. They lament that old ways of listening have died—Contemporary audiences rarely listen for musical modes and rebetiko ornamentation styles; they agree heartily that one cannot write a rebetiko song today; they engage in endless conversations about the original rebetika musicians; and they complain that the younger generations have not held onto Greek traditions and are only concerned with foreign mass media culture. In Rebetiki Istoria the décor, musical style and attitude give the initial impression that Vassiliou and other musicians want to return to better times now lost. In a typical nostalgic reverie, Vassiliou stated the following to Vangelis, the guitarist:

> VASSILIOU : Do you remember, Vangeli,[129] back then… those were the days. Down in a little dark basement tavern in Monastiraki. Across from the *Palio*

[129] Imperative form of the name Vangelis.

> *Stratona* jail… and there were *grammofonitzides*."[130] He sings the first line of "Oloi oi *fonografitzides*" ["All of the phonograph players"] by Batis. "He carried a gramophone and, I don't know, 20 records? He goes into the tavern- *to Kapilio* for example- There were just five or six tables. And no steaks or anything. There was no food like that. *Sardelitsa* [sardines], feta cheese and a half-kilo of wine. And no tablecloths, forget that too. Marble tables… Those were nice times… So the *fonografitzis* came, and you gave him a drachma- one little drachma, not one Euro, a drachma. You said, "Play this record for me." And that's what you heard. There were no other situations to hear recorded music. He came in, and I don't know how many customers, maybe twenty- they each gave him a *drachmoula* [a little drachma], and you heard twenty songs. That was enough for you. You know, when I was eighteen and twenty… I didn't say I'm going to go out today to have a good time in a *rebetadika* or *taverna*. I went to drink wine and to listen. In my time all that was abolished.

But Vassiliou admits time and again that "the past was really no better", that "it was always the same no good," and that he is "just continuing the struggle against forces that have corrupted Greek culture since the founding of the Greek nation" (Vassiliou 2008). In fact, Vassiliou does not truly long to return to the past and never hopes to achieve the greatness of the early rebetika musicians. Vassiliou expressed this sentiment in his discussion of the early bouzouki great Markos Vamvakaris:

> Ask a rebetiko musician today to play the solo of Markos. He might be much more of a virtuoso and play it faster or with more flare. He might play all the notes correctly, and wow you with his skill. But it will not be Markos. Its character will be different. Its essence will be different. No one could ever match that which was Markos. (Vassiliou 2007)

Rather, the act of longing for the past is more significant and permeates every aspect of the decadent Rebetiki Istoria culture.

As such, Vassiliou works towards combining old and new into a unique present. This is a present that pays homage to the past and to traditional Greek culture. This act is reminiscent of Greek modernity and of its dealings with ancient Greek culture as outlined

[130] *Grammofonitzides* (*grammofonitzis* sing.) *and fonografitzides* (*fonografitzis* sing.) refer to itinerant phonographers common in mid-twentieth century Greece. Carrying a gramophone and a case of records, they traveled to the tavern and *kapilio* [wine cellar] and for a small fee played records on the gramophone.

in Chapter Six. The unique rebetiko temporality was made evident by one of the first conversations I heard in Rebetiki Istoria:

One evening Kostas who owned the gyro shop across the street came into Rebetiki Istoria. Sweat dripped down his forehead and his white apron was covered with grease. He looked exhausted.

KOSTAS: "Hoooo!" he called out.

VASSILIOU: "Hooo! What's happening, Kosta?

KOSTAS: "Eh, I'm waiting to die", he said, a wry smile on his lips.

VASSILIOU: "Any business?"

KOSTAS: "Nothing."

VASSILIOU: "Eh, same here."

KOSTAS: "It's as we say. Every last year and better."[131]

VASSILIOU: Yes, yes, that's how it is."

KOSTAS: "What can I say? Okay, I'm going." He leaves.

YONA: "Do you believe that?" I ask Vassiliou, "every last year and better?"

VASSILIOU: "Bah, no… only if you are talking economics. Otherwise it has always been the same no good."

Vassiliou and the other Rebetiki Istoria musicians do not truly long to return to the past. Rather, they partake in Svetlana Boym's notion of "reflective nostalgia," enjoying the process of longing for the past without harboring a true desire to return to it.

I offer a third type of nostalgia that better describes the sentiment that characterizes Vassiliou and his Rebetiki Istoria culture. This is what I call "productive

[131] "*Kathe persi kai kalitera*." Literal translation, "Every last year and better." This expression suggests that a situation is getting worse with time.

nostalgia," the use of nostalgic longing for the past to change ones present condition. Through "productive nostalgia," Vassiliou attempts to spread a rebetika culture that is not merely a brief window into the past for his patrons. Rather, it teaches them how to formulate a more-desirable present. But this productive nostalgia is laced with decadence, for Vassiliou does not truly harbor hopes for changing contemporary Greek culture on a broad level. In summary, the Rebetiki Istoria culture reflects the temporal ideology of Greek modernity, the blending of past and present into a liminal stage of unfulfilled longing. Whereas Vassiliou creates a unique temporality in his longing to bring the rebetiko past into the present, Greek modernity does so in its combination of ancient and modern. As such, Rebetiki Istoria reflects the very Greek modernity that it rejects.

What is the Point of Rebetiki Istoria?

The Rebetiki Istoria authenticity culture is a decadent reaction to Greek modernity for Vassiliou believes there is no hope for improvement of Greek culture, politics or economy. Vassiliou is the archetypal "cultural pessimist," defined by Stroup and Shuck as one who "sees various domains of contemporary life as linked, headed in a disastrous direction, and capable of improvement only in the event of a striking and complete reversal of direction" (Stroup and Shuck 2007, xvi). He believes that the Greek political system will never change, that there is no cure for the ailing capitalist system and that globalization will forever corrupt traditional Greek culture. Rebetiki Istoria then is not so much an attempt to change contemporary Greek culture, as it is a masochistic ritual of defeat amongst likeminded individuals who partake in an eternal longing for a past that never was. These ideas are in concert with Vassiliou's leftist politics. For, as Russell

Jacoby suggests, "today, socialists and leftists do not dream of a future qualitatively different from the present. To put it differently, radicalism no longer believes in itself" (Jacoby as quoted by Dolan 2005, 3). Vassiliou does not believe that a better future is viable for Greece. He does not believe that Greeks will ever accept any other social system.

What is the perceived purpose then of this authenticity culture if the musicians could never return to the past, if they could never achieve the greatness of the early-style musicians and if they could never change the present? Vassiliou offered his response:

> Rebetiki Istoria allows Greeks to hear live rebetika performed in its authentic style. And it influences them to go home and buy the original recordings to listen to the songs in their authentic versions. Not as they hear it on remakes and covers and on all those television shows that do nothing but debase the music and misinform the Greek people about rebetika and about Greekness. It teaches people how to be Greeks! Something the Greek people have forgotten. They have forgotten how to be Greeks…And in Rebetiki Istoria, the goal is not for us to become well-known musicians. Rather, it is to introduce this music to the Greek youth in its proper style. (Vassiliou 2007)

While Vassiliou aims to pay tribute to these early musicians, his performance is not meant to replace the original recordings. In fact, Vassiliou refuses to record rebetika songs altogether. He simply performs rebetika in an effort to spread awareness to the Greek youth in its early style. In addition, he provides an opportunity for Greeks to enjoy early-style rebetika performed live.

II. REBETIKI ISTORIA AS ITS OWN CULTURE

I shape this ethnography around the notion that Rebetiki Istoria is its own culture complete with its own web of significance, history, worldview and even its own heroes. As such, this chapter comes in defense of the controversial notion of culture. I borrow

Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as "localized communities of people suspended in shared webs of meaning that they themselves have spun" (1973, 112). Extensive socialization in Rebetiki Istoria shapes these webs of meaning. It guides the actions of musicians and patrons, proscribing even the most basic of activities including how to listen, when and how to dance, when to talk and what songs to request. Insider understandings of this rebetika culture are highly praised and marked ideological and physical boundaries separate those who appreciate the music in certain acceptable ways from those who enjoy the music in other "incorrect" ways. Working with and against these rules, Rebetiki Istoria patrons demonstrate their understanding of the rebetiko culture and worldview. I examine these insider understandings in the next section of this chapter.

My characterization of Rebetiki Istoria as its own culture is also based upon personal experience. I lived through and across the culture boundaries during the three years I spent performing in Rebetiki Istoria. When I first arrived in 2007, Vassiliou stated that while my "point of view was correct, I had much to learn about this particular rebetiko culture" (Vassiliou 2007). Through three years of near-nightly performances, I had learned many of the rebetiko codes. Yet, I did maintain a complex role. While I only partly claimed the "understanding of an insider," I was often the center of the performance. This meant that I served as the example for others to learn about the particular music culture. Of course, as my experience attests, the culture is not closed and unchanging. My presence in the *rebetadiko* affected the culture as well. For example, I introduced many new American patrons to Rebetiki Istoria and brought new publicity.

Physical Structure of Rebetiki Istoria: Containing the Decadent Rebetiko Culture

Two fundamental aspects that help demarcate this rebetiko culture are the physical space of the rebetadiko and the insider understanding of the unique rebetiko culture. I begin by discussing the role of the physical space of the rebetadiko in facilitating and inhibiting the internal rebetiko culture. First, the physical design symbolically characterizes Rebetiki Istoria as part of, but separate from, the maelstrom of Greek modernity. For in the hermetic closure of Rebetiki Istoria, night blends seamlessly into day. The *rebetadiko* is housed on the ground floor of a two-story neoclassical building. Two heavy wooden doors form the entrance. Shutters cover the large wooden windows that have been sealed off from the inside with large wooden boards. Inside, these boards have been decorated to blend in with the concrete walls.

In Rebetiki Istoria, one is barely aware of the weather, of the passing traffic or of the goings on in the street. Cell phones lose signal, the temperature remains a steady cool, and the lighting remains dim all night. And while standing on the street in front of the *rebetadiko*, one must strain to hear the musical entertainment inside. In fact, the perceived distance from the outside world is so profound that during the major earthquake that struck Athens in 1992, people in Rebetiki Istoria barely noticed the tremors that shook the city of Athens and sent nearby apartment buildings crashing to the ground (Vassiliou 2007).

But how is the space of this neoclassical building turned into the place of the *rebetadiko*? [132] The physical design of Rebetiki Istoria helps guide the internal culture. As suggested by Carter Donald and Squires,

[132] See Gupta and Ferguson (2006) for a discussion of the relationship between space and place.

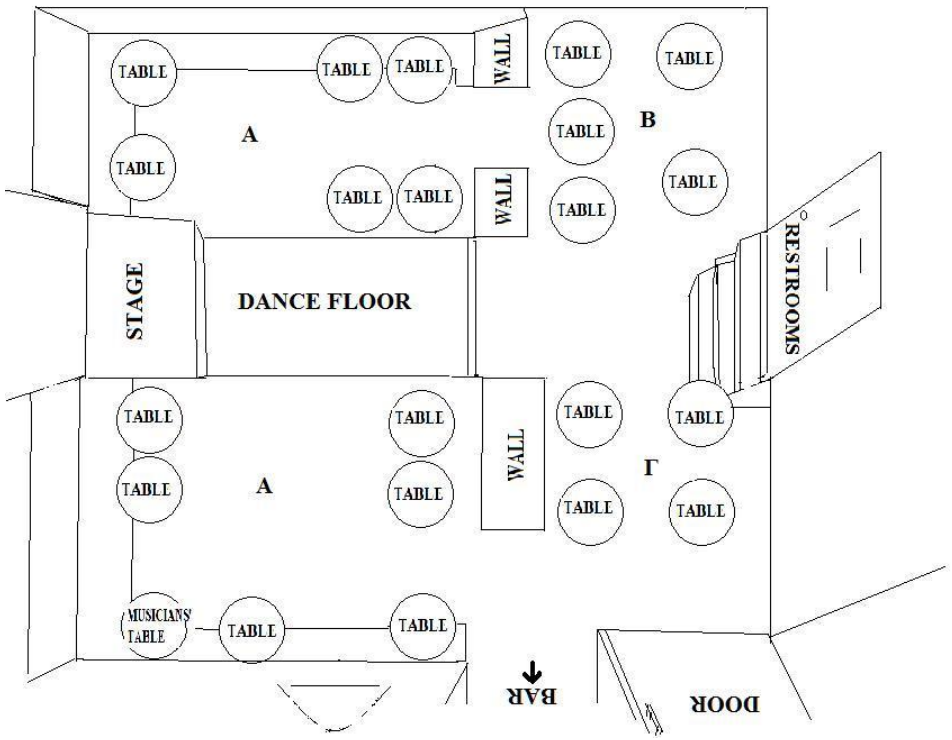
> It is not spaces which ground identifications but places. How then does space become place? By being named […] and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed. (Carter/Donald/Squires 1993, xii).

And in her discussion of a Jewish Muslim household in colonial Algeria, Bahloul discusses the way in which the semantics of memory are built into physical structures:

> The lack of windows opening onto the street becomes a metaphor for the ghettoization of the domestic group and the stifling of the individual. At the same time, the permanent openness of all interior doors is interpreted as giving conviviality and security. Open doors represent conviviality and good life but also lack of privacy: an open door may be either positive or negative. (Bahloul 1996, 32-33)

Once inside Rebetiki Istoria, one feels a subtle combination of sealed closure from the outside world and a warm friendly atmosphere. Figure 7.1 depicts a floor plan of the *rebetadiko*.

Figure 7.1: Rebetiki Istoria floor plan aerial view.



The physical layout of the *rebetadiko* helps guide the progression of the evening. As noted by Gudeman and Rivera, "the social and cultural world is organized in terms of metaphors provided by the house's physical layout. In the house model, a figure from the built world – with foundation, supports, and doors – is used to talk about and organize material practices" (Gudeman and Rivera 1990, 40). Rebetiki Istoria's interior architecture, the logic of its enclosure shapes and reflects the rebetika culture within. First and foremost, the design helps focus ones attention on the music. The small stage in the center of the magazi creates the expectation and need for a performance. The small dance floor in the center of the room signals the audience that dancing is encouraged. It warns them that they will come into close contact with other dancers and with the musicians. The centrality of the dance floor also directs attention to the dancers. However, the musicians playing on stage remain at the center of attention as the music blares forth from the overhead speakers and due to the fact that the stage is raised two feet above the dance floor.

The magazi has a warm and personal atmosphere that invites interaction amongst the patrons. It is small, with a legal capacity of 65 people but often fills beyond capacity. A small high table in the middle of the bar room with four stool chairs around it creates an intimate setting for conversation. A few years after opening the *rebetadiko*, Vassiliou cut a hole in the wall between the main room and the bar so the musicians could be better seen and heard from the bar area. To his disliking, Vassiliou had to keep the walls up that divide the rooms as they provide structural support for the building. However, he removed the doors between the rooms, and the resultant space is warm and intimate but

also full of corners into which groups of friends or young couples often settle for the evening.

In addition, the Rebetiki Istoria décor is meant to help teach people about the value of rebetika and about the proper way to listen to and enjoy the music. It is also meant to inspire respect on the part of musicians and patrons alike. For Rebetiki Istoria is not meant to serve as an anachronistic journey into the taverns and wine cellars of early-twentieth century Athens. Rather, it is meant to preserve and promote the early-twentieth century rebetika tradition and to respond to the shortcomings of Greek modernity. Annette Kuhn tells us that photographs serve as memory texts, and as such the photographs on the walls of the *rebetadiko* contribute to the creation of Rebetiki Istoria as place. As Kuhn states,

> Memory texts also appear to be a cultural phenomenon, a genre even, in their own right…What it is that makes us remember; the prompts, the pretexts, of memory; the reminders of the past that remain in the present…In the process of using-producing, selecting, ordering, displaying – photographs, the family is actually in the process of making itself. (Kuhn 1995, 5; 4; 19)

The rebetika photographs are also a means of judging ones understanding of the music and culture. During my very first visit to Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou tested my knowledge by asking me to name various musicians in the photographs on the wall. I too received clues about this particular rebetika culture by the decoration. The photograph of Sotiria Bellou with its autographed dedication to Vassiliou alerted me of his potential musical abilities.

Yet, the physical design of Rebetiki Istoria also inhibits the rebetiko culture. 181 Ippokratous Street was built for another purpose—it was originally a neoclassical house. The ground floor that now houses the *rebetadiko* contained the servants' quarters. In

addition, the numerous supporting walls that divide the structure define and inhibit potential symbolic organization of Rebetiki Istoria patrons. A number of tables are positioned behind some dividing walls and have no visibility of the stage, the musicians or the small dancing area. On numerous occasions, long-time Rebetiki Istoria patrons expressed their discontent, and have even left the *rebetadiko* in indignation for being seated at a table with an obstructed view of the stage. Vassiliou expresses his frustration about the incompatible structure and rebetiko culture:

> There is not another soul in Athens who would have kept this magazi for thirty years. You can't imagine what I have had to go through with this structure with these stupid walls…On the one hand, you want to give long-time patrons a good seat. On the other hand, if the whole front area is booked with one or two big groups, I can't break them up because some friend walked in. (Vassiliou 2008)

In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou promotes a level playing field between customers. He refuses to favor anyone. As Bachelard suggests, "Domestic space is designed as a space of social and cultural inscription structured by the collective and symbolic organization of its residents" (Bachelard 1969, 14). Conflicting perceptions of appropriate symbolic organization becomes evident when patrons are unhappy with the placement of their table.

Insider Understandings Demarcating Rebetiki Istoria Culture

The second significant demarcation of this unique rebetika culture is an insider's understanding of proper rebetika performance and enjoyment. This requires a particular viewpoint about how to reconcile past and present, how to react to Greek modernity and how to approach the rebetiko repertoire. In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou makes a tall order: he not only asks Greeks to humble themselves to the greatness of rebetika but also to

reject nearly all other forms of contemporary Greek music and culture.[133] In addition, no one should use rebetika in order to acquire personal fame. Such an act would illustrate a fundamental misunderstanding of the music and would be disrespectful to the early rebetika musicians.

The Rebetiki Istoria musicians have little patience for others who use the music in this way. On one occasion, the phone rang at around 12 a.m. and a woman informed the musicians that a well-known and widely-recorded rebetika musician was about to arrive at Rebetiki Istoria with a group of other musicians. Instead of the great reaction the musician and his friends seemed to expect upon arrival at Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou and the other musicians barely reacted at all. A member of the well-known musician's group of friends called out to Vassiliou, "Don't you recognize who just walked in?" Vassiliou looked towards the musician, squinted his eyes as if confused and said, "Have I seen you on television?" On another occasion, a caller asked to learn the names of every performer on stage. Vassiliou promptly listed the names of the entire wait staff. Part of what makes Vassiliou such an interesting figure case study is that fact that he often runs against the grain of *Ellinikotita* [Greekness] while trying to preserve it in a historically-correct way. But understanding his political and musical views is crucial to an understanding of the unique rebetiko culture.

The enclosed nature and specificity of this Rebetiki Istoria culture is emphasized when it is somehow disrupted. For example, patrons with little or no knowledge of rebetika music often disrupt the evening by responding to songs in unconventional ways, or simply by not responding at all. The atmosphere is infinitely disturbed by a patron who

[133] Exceptions are made for traditional songs and for certain compositions of Mikis Theodorakis, Manos Hadjdakis, Stavros Xarhakos, and Dionysios Savvopoulos.

has had too much to drink, and in a sudden burst of joy or anger knocks over his table sending drinks and glasses flying. The atmosphere changes when a respected rebetiko musician enters. In addition, there are numerous reminders that Rebetiki Istoria is a business and as such must abide by various laws. For example, as people enter the *rebetadiko*, Vassiliou sits at the bar stamping tickets and pressing buttons on the cash register. These tickets are required by law, as Vassiliou must pay taxes on every customer. "Rebetiki Istoria is a public space. Even though I have run the *magazi* for thirty years, I am still a servant in a public space. And I have to abide by the rules whether I like them or not" (Vassiliou 2008).

The Rebetiki Istoria culture is disrupted jarringly at times. Tax collectors or policemen performing checks to make sure business is in order enter the *rebetadiko*; a patron speaks rudely to Vassiliou and is scolded by another patron; on one occasion, three policemen ran into Rebetiki Istoria searching for a suspect they had lost sight of in the streets. Whereas unconventional occurrences such as these are not uncommon, at times they ruin the atmosphere for the duration of the evening. A patron requesting a song outside of the rebetiko canon also disrupts the rebetiko culture. The musicians' *kefi*, their desire to have a good time, can be ruined by such a request. This often incites Vassiliou to give a long lecture about the value of rebetika and the lack of depth and meaning in contemporary pop music.

> The only requirement for a pop song to become famous and loved by all of the Greek people is that it has a crazed rhythm and no musical or emotional meaning. In this way people join together their way of life and their entertainment and in the end, all they achieve is to take the angst of everyday life and to put it into the shape of entertainment. You must learn to differentiate between music that has value and music that does not. (Vassiliou, 2008)

According to Vassiliou, pop music disrespects to Greek tradition and embraces the delirium of modernity. He believes that during the early-twentieth century, before the crazed mass media culture took hold of the Greek nation, more people had knowledge of national traditions.

PART II. HOW DOES REBETIKI ISTORIA WORK?

Power and Meaning

In this section, I analyze how musical meaning is created in Rebetiki Istoria. A basic platform of this discussion is that the *rebetadiko* functions through a hierarchy of power. There is no question that Pavlos Vassiliou is in command. He directs the song order, the way people dance, how people order songs and even how and when people order drinks for the musicians in a show of praise and respect. He is the central force behind the progression of the evening and behind the creation of musical meaning. If customers become disrespectful or try to lead the evening with too many requests, Vassiliou has a way of not hearing their words. One or two requests at most per evening are appropriate.

Vassiliou is not shy to correct a statement made by a customer with regard to rebetika music or history. A casual comment by a patron often turns into a long lecture in which Vassiliou clearly and usually quite emotionally illustrates the validity of his own viewpoint and the inaccuracy of that of the customer. His speech is clear and defiant. He supports his ideas with extensive examples and explanation. It is rare for a patron to continue arguing his point after Vassiliou has finished his response. Indeed he dominates the conversation on most nights.

In the following exchange, the power balance between Vassiliou and other *magazi* members is obvious. Vassiliou clearly maintains control of its direction.

> PATRON: The other night I drove by _____ *skiladiko*. There were lines of people waiting outside to get in. And a line of limousines and taxis. Greek people do go out.
>
> VANGELIS: Yes, but not like they used to, friend.
>
> VASSILIOU: The Greek people have gone crazy… It is television. And state-supported programs. We don't know who we are any more. People do things only is in the name of economic profit. And out of the desire to be just like everyone else. Doesn't it make you wonder how today the young generations don't know what all of this represents for someone who wants to call himself Greek. And to dress up at any reason for holiday with goals of making money for some, with the colors of blue and white and to dance around making a whole load of ugly gestures only to show what it means to be the worst type of Greek. The different foreign-bred sports like soccer, basketball etc. and the different fruits that have been imported in the last century made the different generations forget many sports (track and field, discus… that are clearly Greek. The only thing that remains for us is every four years to hypocritically carry the flame of ancient Olympus and to use it only to make money and for no other reason. I could name numerous examples when in the name of economic profit that we dope our various athletes who even sell their own bodies.

One patron tries to lighten the atmosphere a bit and says with a smile: "It's not that bad." Vassiliou responds firmly, "Do not smile, do not smile at all." I cringe at the harshness of his words. Vassiliou is not fazed at all, and I am unsure of the patron's reaction.

> VASSILIOU : I will tell you something, my friend. 1971 was the last time Markos played with Stratos in a tavern. I went to hear him, but I never got to because they didn't play. Do you know why? Because they didn't have an audience! In a tavern- In a tavern! And they didn't play. And that always remained with me. It was Stratos, Markos… Argiris… another musician, I don't recall his name right now. Anyway, that night they didn't play- they didn't play every night anyway. But they waited for that night for a whole year- and in the end they went to play and they were no people and eventually they just left- can you believe it? It's as if I tell you that Rebetiki Istoria is closing today and that it will open in one year. And when we open it again, not a person walks in. Can you imagine? Greeks have lost all sense of musical value. They don't understand the difference between Markos and Rouvas. Not only do they not understand, but they gravitate towards Rouvas, towards whatever the television tells them they should listen to and like.

As usual, Vassiliou has made it difficult for the patron to refute his words. He brings the conversation to a close by playing the introduction of a song on his tzoura.

Proper Rebetika *Musicking*: How to Enjoy Rebetika

Customer: Play a song by Zambetas!
Vassiliou: Did he write songs?

In this section, I focus on the proper enjoyment of rebetika as outlined by Vassiliou in Rebetiki Istoria. As I discuss later, though Vassiliou maintains a dominant role in shaping the rebetiko culture, everyone present contributes to the creative process. This adds a complexity to the music culture as the atmosphere changes every night depending upon the crowd. No song is ever performed or enjoyed in the same way twice. Since there are marked correct and incorrect ways to enjoy rebetika, audience actions have the power to facilitate or ruin a rebetiko performance. They contribute directly to the performance, enjoyment and understanding of the music and help shape perceptions of Greekness. In fact, the significant role of the audience is even emphasized visually as well on most nights: when the musicians sit around the table and play, it is only the presence of instruments that visibly differentiates them from the audience. The atmosphere is constantly changing, depending upon the mood of the musicians and of the customers. And no matter the hour, when a group of regular patrons who share the musicians' views of rebetika enters, the musicians receive a new burst of energy.

Since Vassiliou spends much time talking to his patrons about rebetika and about Greece, I will base my discussion of rebetiko *musicking* on Vassiliou's words. Above all, Vassiliou believes that proper rebetiko *musicking* entails maintaining and demonstrating a

particular respect for the music. This is evidenced first and foremost by keeping the music at the center of attention. This means that patrons should engage with the songs and their meanings: they should not come to Rebetiki Istoria under the impression that the music will remain in the background or that it is purely an instrument for facilitating a night of wild dancing. Vassiliou illustrated this idea in the following statement:

> As pertains to my *magazi*, I do not give the music easily. Rebetika is not like that. It is not a song for entertainment. It is preeminently of people who are sad, of people for whom something is torturing them. Rebetiko is a song of comfort. It is not a song of crazy entertainment. It is not. Or it shouldn't be. No rebetika song is to have a crazy good time. It is for measured enjoyment, very measured- Low key. And what's more, it's a type of song that what it wants from people is to sit, to listen, to experience, to let loose their problem… to heal their worries. There is no connection between the customers of this *magazi* with those of other *magazia*. That is what I believe. (Vassiliou, 2007)

Above all, Rebetiki Istoria *musicking* requires knowledge about the music and about the repertoire. Patrons need to understand when and how to make song requests and which songs are part of the accepted rebetiko canon. Indeed, the infinite respect that Vassiliou expects for the music requires a humbling of one's own ego. The seasoned *rebetis* will understand this outlook whereas those with less rebetiko knowledge often take offense. Patrons who sing too loudly, who dance in an ostentatious manner, or seek to spend large amounts of money disrupt the rebetiko *musicking*. This holds true for musicians who have different understandings of rebetika as well. Vassiliou said the following to a new bouzouki player:

> VASSILIOU: *Rebetiko*, my friend, you must believe in it, because if you don't believe in it, you can't bring it out of yourself. Not from your fingers either. If you do not believe, you'll never be able to give the music that which it needs no matter how much talent you might have. Either you love a style and you give it your all or abandon it. Sing it in your bathroom. Don't tire the world with the microphone. Bonatsos may he rest in peace once said, "What do you want my lady and you are tiring the microphone so? Leave it and go do your work. Have these people done you any wrong? Leave it!" That wasn't mine what I just said

> now. It was of Bonatsos, may he rest in peace... For rebetiko therefore there exists a… I don't know, I at least believe in a different relationship. For those who like it and who listen to it and for those who listen to other types of music. Those who like it and who listen to it try for a deeper relation with it and a deeper understanding of it. If you don't do this with everything you do… (Vassiliou 2007)

Sincerity of intent on the part of musicians and audience is of primary significance in Rebetiki Istoria. It shapes all aspects of rebetiko *musicking*. I now outline the defined acceptable ways of *musicking* in Rebetiki Istoria.

Drink; talk; listen; sing; clap to the rhythm; applaud at the end of each song; dance; sit quietly; smoke; buy a round of drinks for the musicians. These are all acceptable behaviors in Rebetiki Istoria and are approved ways of enjoying the music. In fact, these behaviors become kinds of rituals, acts that "provoke people to be aware of rules to be followed, of behavior to avoid, and of the disjunction between representation and represented" (Keane, 1997 17). But knowing how and when to perform all of these actions is important. If you are to talk, do not shout; Pay attention to the music but do not show off your knowledge; Sing along or clap to the rhythm but do not do so disrespectfully. Praise the musicians but in an appropriate way. As illustrated by this list, there are many unspoken codes of rebetiko enjoyment, too many to cover in detail in this thesis. As such, in the following section I examine a few of these codes. I begin with a discussion of appropriate ways to give praise in Rebetiki Istoria.

Giving Just Enough Praise

When calling out *epeufimies* [praise] or *hairetismoi* [acknowledgments], musicians and audience alike must do so in a respectful manner. It is common tradition to call out specific phrases of praise if a musician is playing well or if a dancer is

particularly adept. Yet there are distinctly appropriate and inappropriate ways and times to call out determined by the timbre of ones voice, the words chosen, the timing, and the speed of words according to the song and the situation. It is very easy for a phrase of praise to border on the ironic. Common phrases spoken in Rebetiki Istoria include "Hello ___ with your beautiful playing" "Hello ____" or "Hello ____ with your *bouzoukaki* [little bouzouki]." Bordering on the artificial are phrases such as "Hello ___ old *rebetis*" or "Hello ____ *mangas*." Most phrases include the name of the musician. *Hairetismoi* are a common feature of original rebetika recordings. In Rebetiki Istoria the musicians often acknowledge each other and pay homage to the original recording in this way. They may do this by imitating a phrase of praise from the original recording.[134]

Dancing a Good Zeïbekiko

This need of respect transfers into all aspects of rebetika enjoyment, especially into proper rebetika dancing by the audience. This is illustrated in the following exchange. When a young patron dances an inappropriately happy dance to a sad song, Vassiliou does not contain his annoyance. He stops the song in the middle and says:

> My friend, with rebetika you don't dance. You dance *zeïbekiko*- nothing else. You can't dance anything else with rebetika except for *zeïbekiko*. Not *hasapika*. Nothing. Well, there are *hasapika* that are called *politika* or *koulouriotika*- from

[134]Various phrases include: '*Opa' geia sas manges*" ['Opa' Hello Manges] in *Duo Manges Mes Sthn Filaki* [Two Manges in Jail] with Rita Abatzi. "*Opa geia sou Tourkolimaniotissa*" [Opa hello girl from Turkolimani] Rita Abatzi. Later she says "*Geia sou Ritaki mou*" [Hello My Rita], acknowledging her own self. On early recordings, these phrases of praise were often included in order to give credit to the musicians who might otherwise not be listed on the record. In addition, a well-played *taximi* is often cause for a *hairetisma* for the instrumentalist. At times, the praises can be humorous but they are always tactful. For example, in a the well-known recording of "*Mavra Matia, Mavra Fridia*" ["Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows"] by Markos Vamvakaris, the two singers Markos Vamvakaris and Kostas Roukounas acknowledge each other in a way that is respectful and humorous at the same time. Roukounas says "*Geia sou Marko mou Karouzo*" ["Hello my Marko Karouzo"] and Markos responds "*Geia sou Roukouna Kepoura*" ["Hello Roukouna Kepoura"]. Karouzo and Kepoura were names of well-known opera singers.

the island Salamina or Koulouri a bit out from Piraeus. They call it that because it is round like a *koulouri* [a cookie]. Today they danced it very nicely. That *hasapiko* that *koulouriotiko*, and the *zeïbekiko*- all the other *hasapika* don't have any connection with rebetika. All those *hasapika* that we see on television have no connection to rebetiko. That is simply a dance that is somewhat a fantasy. Most rebetika songs are not danced to. They are songs for someone isolated and on his own. In other words, the person who will go listen to rebetiko, if he has chosen to go listen, will have only himself as a companion and no one else. He has as company that which he is feeling at that moment and nothing else. In order to feel rebetika, you have to be alone.

PATRON: Well, I'm just having fun. I mean it's a *zeïbekiko*.

VASSILIOU: Listen my friend, you find everything in rebetika songs, everything. But they do not entertain you. They are pained. Even the greatest love song is a pained song. The person who listens to it or who sings it needs to have suffered in life. The song must speak to him. It isn't "*Ithela na Sandamona"* ["I wanted to Meet You"]. Rebetiko is also that. But it isn't only that. That one became known because it is a *zeïbekiko*, because it is simple… for a thousand and two reasons. Songs like "*Ap' tin Ora Sto Limani*" ["From That Time at the Port"], I don't like them. Well, I like them but they are for a lot of people. For many people to listen to. I personally like the pained songs in rebetika. Those that have inside of them… in other words… "*O Alitis Tragoudaei"* ["The Bum Sings"]. It has different words, different emotions, another… meaning. It has complaint inside. Pain. It is not happy. The happy song is not rebetiko. All of rebetika- that which we call classical rebetika- has no relation to joy. None. none. It is a sad song. A song in which the other enjoys himself while listening to it because it speaks to him. It speaks to his longing, to his pain.

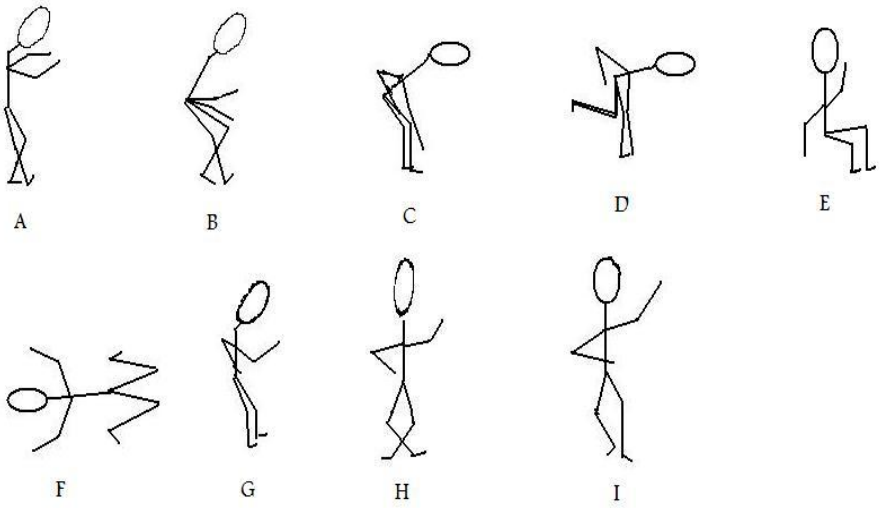
Figure 7.2: A Rebetiki Istoria patron dances a *zeïbekiko*.



The *zeïbekiko* dance is the archetypal rebetiko dance, or the only true rebetiko dance as characterized by Vassiliou. It is a solo improvisational dance with characteristic movements and steps. The *zeïbekiko* should be danced slowly even when the musicians play at a fast tempo. Vassiliou often directs his customers, "the faster the music the slower the dance."

Tragaki describes the *zeïbekiko*s dance in the following way: "*Zeïbekikos* is a celebration of masculinity danced in movements and gestures expressing an authoritative yet introspective performance of pain and self-contained pride that metaphorically reasserts with the *mangas*' dominance of public space" (Tragaki 2007, 40). In the Greek imagination, the *zeïbekiko* is considered a male dance, but today many women dance it as well. Women can be praised for dancing a good "feminine" *zeïbekiko*. Those with an insider's understanding of rebetika choose to dance to one particular song with special personal meaning. While an improvisatory dance, the *zeïbekiko* is comprised of a series of characteristic movements. The illustration in Figure 7.3 depicts some of these movements.

Figure 7.3: Some common *zeïbekiko* dance steps



The *zeïbekiko* is a slow dance. The dancer walks onto the dance floor, he bends at the waist and looks down at his feet or at the floor in front of him. He seems to be in deep thought and appears to have a great personal connection with the song. He holds both of his arms out to the side, or rests one hand on his thigh or holds it behind his back. The *zeïbekiko* consists of a series of different stances that the dancer selects, holds for a moment and then changes. He may bend down to the ground and brush the floor or his foot with the back of his hand. The dancer often crosses his legs. In between these stances he takes a series of small steps in any direction, though these are often diagonal. He mostly uses a small amount of space on the dance floor. The dancer ends up turning around quite a few times in both directions. He generally turns slowly while executing a number of steps, though at times he incorporates some sudden moments of movement.

Overall, the good *zeïbekiko* dancer should be completely in control of his movements at all times, but should often give the impression that now and again he is about to fall over. His movements vary from being in sync with the music to seemingly entirely out of sync. Drinking is thought to help put one in the mood for a *zeïbekiko* but one should always maintain control over one's movements. The *zeïbekiko* that receives the most praise is generally the slowest, the most controlled, and it illustrates the greatest and sincerest connection with the music. From week to week a patron may dance to one song again and again. When one person dances to more than one or two songs, his performance is usually categorized as insincere.

In the following discussion, Vassiliou described the *zeïbekiko* and the way in which one should feel the *zeïbekiko* dance:

> The *zeïbeikiko,* the dance rhythm that characterizes the man that is lost in the psychological state that is created by the sounds of the instruments, lyrics and

> rhythms. The dancer many times feels that he wants to take off, to fly, to not step on the earth, he believes he is alone and like another Atlas, carries on his shoulders all the troubles and worries of the world. He wants with one move to throw off all that which weighs on him. And there is little connection with the *zeïbekides*[135] dance that was foremost a war dance and that had a different ethos. There may exist a rhythmic relation. But it is too small of a relation to call the contemporary *zeïbekiko* a barbarian dance… The *rebetis* dancer has self-respect, he has rules even when the dancer has had too much to drink and under hallucination he respects those around him. Rarely does he bother someone else. Mainly he is lost in his own thoughts and in his own psychological world. There are times when the musician (and singer) align their voice and their playing on the figures and steps of the good dancer.

His words suggest the significance of a sincerity of intention on the part of the *zeïbekiko* dancer. In addition it implies the synchronization of musicians and dancer into one psychological and rhythmic world.

Just as one dancer might illustrate his knowledge of rebetika through his movements, another might illustrate his ignorance. A dancer who is a little bit too showy may engage in poses "E" and "F." He may pick up the glass from the floor with his mouth and drink the contents without using his hands. If a cigarette dangles from his lips during the dance, he may pull the entire lit cigarette into his mouth with his lips hold it for a few seconds and then push it back out and continue smoking. He may throw his cigarette on the ground and extinguish it by banging it with his hand, sending a shower of sparks in a circle around the singer. Worst of all, he might dance too quickly and in a showy manner. Sometimes a particularly ostentatious dancer might wear a jacket with one sleeve out in homage to the tradition of the *manges* of the early-twentieth century. This is generally frowned upon by the musicians and regarded as showy and insincere behavior. Many audiences tend to appreciate this sort of showmanship quite a bit.

[135] Refers to the *zeïbek* tribe of Thraki, Asia Minor that burgeoned during the late Ottoman Empire. The *zeïbekiko* dance took its name from the dance of the *zeïbeks*, though the dances differed significantly.

Onlookers are often pleased when a *zeïbekiko* is danced well. As part of a contemporary practice, the dancer's friends may kneel on the floor in a circle around the dancer and clap the rhythm. The dancer or one of his friends may place his drink on the floor in the center of the dance space, which the dancer will then use as the focal point of his movements. Next to or instead of the glass the dancer or his friends may balance a lit cigarette upright on the floor. The dancer is invigorated by this show of enthusiasm and energy and together with the musicians they contribute to the success of the *zeïbekiko*. The good *zeïbekiko* plays upon audience expectations but keeps the music rather than the abilities of the dancer at the center of the entertainment. The term entrainment can be used to refer to the process that occurs when two or more people become engaged in each other's rhythms, when they synchronize their movements. This occurs with the best *zeïbekika* as musicians, dancer and audience contribute to the dance.

Figure 7.4: Dancing a *zeïbekiko* in Rebetiki Istoria.



In summary, in Rebetiki Istoria musicians and patrons alike are pleased with a good *zeïbekiko* dance because it influences the musical performance, it draws the whole crowd together and it implies knowledge and certain beliefs about rebetika and about Greekness. Turino suggests that culturally specific styles of fitting in with others during performance

help determine the way in which a performance is interpreted. "When music makers and dancers are in sync, such signs move beyond felt resemblances to experienced fact of social connections and unity" (Turino 1999, 41). He continues on to state:

> Divergences in kinesic and other features of social style directly identify outsiders, those who are not like us. Such signs are typically felt as relative comfort or discomfort with others in daily interaction. Sonic and kinesic iconicity, or lack thereof, however, comes to the fore in participatory musical and dance occasions because in such occasions these signs are the focal point of attention. (Turino 1999, 234)

Other types of dancing in Rebetiki Istoria stray from the *zeïbekiko* criteria. These are not true rebetiko dances, according to Vassiliou. The *hasapiko* is a telling example, a synchronized dance in 2/4 meter with a proscribed series of steps. This is danced by two or three people at a time. Vassiliou characterizes the *hasapiko* as a pseudo-rebetiko dance like the *hasaposerviko* and the *sirtaki*.

> Another dance is the *hasapiko* that can be characterized as a sort of team dance. It is danced usually by two and sometimes rarely by three dancers and it has clear and specific figures and very in sync. It bears relation to people that live and who have a connection with the ocean. The *hasapiko* has many different versions like the characteristic politico (from the popular name of the City) and the *koulouriotiko* (from the popular name of the island Salamina). The *hasaposerviko* is a team dance and its development into *sirtaki* is very different and does not have a big relation to classical rebetika. (Vassiliou 2008)

Dancing to rebetika songs written in other rhythms strays quite a bit from the codes of "proper rebetiko enjoyment." For example, young girls dance belly dances on the small dance space. Their dancing is aggressive and overtly sexual, begging for attention. V-necks are cut low, and mini-skirts are short. Audience members are often tipsy or even drunk, sometimes losing their balance and falling back onto other patrons, onto the musicians or even onto the floor. Many patrons make overtly sexualized requests for songs, placing their hands on a musician's leg and whispering into his ear. This

generally is followed by a request for a fast dance or a belly dance, which the female patron will dance alone in the middle of the dance floor while facing the musicians. The musicians remain outwardly indifferent to this attention.

Figure 7.5: Belly dancing in Rebetiki Istoria.



In Rebetiki Istoria, patrons may also dance the *serviko*, a traditional circle dance. Often, the musicians play a series of two or three *servika* (pl.) that get faster and faster so that people can dance and expend energy. The circle dances may even stray from the rebetiko repertoire, categorized as *Anatolitika* [Eastern], *paradosiaka* [traditional] and *xena* [foreign].[136] But with most of these songs, the dancers still must be in the know. They must know the steps and they must recognize the dance type from the music. Many times they patrons feel the rhythm and understand which dance steps are needed, though they may not be able to explain the technical differences. Whereas this dancing and faster performance style counters Vassiliou's rebetiko beliefs, he has no choice but to offer such entertainment on Friday and Saturday nights. Otherwise his audiences would go elsewhere. Vassiliou acknowledges the necessity of this exception to his rebetiko culture:

> VASSILIOU: Young people who are going to go out on a Friday or a Saturday night are looking for another type of entertainment than during the week. They want to

[136] The dances include the *Tsifteteli*, the *Ballos*, the *Kalamatianos*, the Rumba and the Waltz.

> dance, to let out their energy, to have a good time and to pick up girls. And many of the Greek youth… most Rebetiki Istoria customers are young, college age, between twenty and thirty years old… many do not have enough money to go out more than once a week. So when they go out, they want to have a good time. I can't expect them to come and sit and listen to rebetika. Instead, I help them have a great time while celebrating early style rebetika. Rebetika can serve that purpose too… But I am not here for Friday or Saturday nights when the "*panigyri*" [festival] takes place. I am here for all of the other nights. But I don't have a choice, if I want to keep Rebetiki Istoria in business.

Figure 7.6: Dancing the *serviko* in Rebetiki Istoria.



This is the one exception he makes in his Rebetiki Istoria culture on Friday and Saturday nights. Since the music remains within the early style, he does not worry that he is corrupting the tradition in a significant way.

Participatory Discrepancies in Rebetiki Istoria Culture

From time to time, there is a surprising lack of understanding between the musicians and regular Rebetiki Istoria customers who are assumed to understand the rebetiko outlook. For example, on one particular occasion, Vassiliou sang a beautiful song by Markos Vamvakaris: "A small married girl, blonde-haired and blue-eyed, timid and youthful stole my heart, if you love me little one let me die on your chest while you give me two kisses." When the song ended, one Rebetiki Istoria patron of fifteen years

asked if Vassiliou knew another contemporary song with even more-beautiful lyrics. She sang, "The night is your house the moon your love." The musicians were not sure how to respond to the seeming shallowness of the lyrics and waited for Vassiliou to respond. As usual, his response turned into a discussion about the state of contemporary Greek culture.

> VASSILIOU: Listen, my friend. Rebetika is… come tomorrow and I will tell you what rebetiko is. We will sit here from 8 o'clock and I will sing for you until 5 in the morning and I will sing Markos and you will ask me, "Who wrote that poem Drosinis? Who wrote that?" Come now… Rebetika is popular poetry… Today computers churn out lyrics. People think that the more complicated the song lyrics, the better the song. Nowadays you need a dictionary and a degree in psychology to understand the meaning of a particular song… People sell the fake. No one goes for the real stuff, for wine, feta, *bakaliaro* and salads, Greek stuff. People want the superficial. Everything has changed. No one partakes n the tradition of the tavern. No one goes, drinks three or four kilos of wine, sings songs... Now they go out for fake food and fake music. Yesterday I went to a party held by lawyers association. At one of those upscale restaurants in the little streets of Exarcheia. Four people. We ordered a two-kilo of wine and some salad. 58 Euro. And a nothing salad, some greens and those sauces they pour over them. The situation has gotten out of hand.
>
> HARIS: It is superficial, the whole situation.
>
> VASSILIOU: We paid for nothing. I don't know who is profiting from this situation but somebody is… And people go to these restaurants! It was full! All of those kinds of places are full. All those posh restaurants on the back roads of Exarcheia.
>
> HARIS: That's where the youth go today.
>
> VASSILIOU: Not only the youth. Everyone goes there. It's enough to make you crazy!

Vassiliou cites a general lack of interest in traditional Greek music and culture, an increasing inability to decipher musics of value and the subsequent loss and degradation of Greekness.

On another occasion, an unsuspecting Rebetiki Istoria customer asked Vassiliou "to sing the song *Tout Oi Batsoi Pou'rthan Tora* [All the Cops That Came Now] but with

the good lyrics." He was referring to one of the few early or pre-rebetiko songs that features vulgar lyrics in one recorded version. Vulgar lyrics are entirely uncharacteristic of rebetika songs. Vassiliou responded with annoyance and a typical exchange ensued:

> VASSILIOU: Out of all the rebetika songs that exist, you want me to sing that one? Not one in a million. Not one in a million! From me you'll never hear that. What for? … My friend, can I tell you something? Just that kind of talk by all those people who betrayed rebetika, gave the music a bad name… I have infinite respect for rebetiko, friend. And that is not rebetiko. Rebetika songs have integrity. To request that song is to exacerbate the situation of the meaning that rebetika has in this country, exactly the meaning that rebetika has in this country. And to put it down to degrade it in other words, to put it there where all of those bums wanted it. Rebetiko, brother, I respect it and I love it. And I respect it and I love it and not for the hashish to which a handful of songs refer, because those songs refer to specific periods in rebetika and situations in Greek history, and it doesn't do any harm.

"But there are so many songs about hashish," the patron retorted.

> VASSILIOU: Listen, my friend. You have to consider how easy it was for a person to get mixed up with drugs in those times and in those circumstances. It was cheaper to buy hashish than it was to buy food. And you have to think about how the songs refer to drug use. They generally talk about the hardships, they don't praise it. Look, in any case, whether this musician smoked hashish or that one, what these musicians did with their personal lives is of no interest to me. What is of interest is this incredible corpus of music they left us. When I look up at the Acropolis I don't judge it by the way in which … or whoever lived his life. I judge it for its greatness its beauty. The same with rebetika.

Why are Pavlos Vassiliou and Rebetiki Istoria so Successful?

How can Vassiliou maintain such popularity and success when he makes such difficult requests of his patrons? While many musicians and patrons agree with Vassiliou's ideas about Greek music and politics, rarely are their views as extreme. Is it purely Vassiliou's musical ability that attracts people to him and to his *rebetadiko*? Or is it his skill as a performer and showman? Or perhaps his ideas resonate well with his Greek audiences?

I propose the following explanations of Vassiliou's success. First and foremost, those with insider understandings of the rebetiko culture have a very good time at Rebetiki Istoria. They dance, sing, drink, spend time with friends and most importantly of all, they listen to live rebetika in its early style of the highest quality. Vassiliou's success is also due in part to his vibrant personality and excellent social skills. In Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou is the guru, the bastion of knowledge about Greek music, history and politics. During his much-anticipated appearances on stage on Friday and Saturday nights, Vassiliou is the center of the program.[137] His appearance on stage can change the entire atmosphere of the magazi and his personality invigorates an entire room. Many people come just to listen to him sing. Patrons have great respect for Vassiliou, often calling him "maestro" or "teacher." Vangelis, the Rebetiki Istoria guitarist stated the following: "Vassiliou is the real thing. You know how I know? I have played guitar for 'Pavlara' for ten years and still there are moments when I awed by his singing" (Vangelis 2009).

Just as significant as his showmanship and musical talent are the political conversations Vassiliou has with his patrons. Patrons of all political persuasions enjoy engaging in heated political debates with him. Yet Vassiliou has a way with words that leaves little room for disagreement, and unknowing audiences often try to counter his words without success. As such, he is lauded not only for his musical abilities but also for his extensive knowledge about Greek history and politics. In addition, Vassiliou's adamant views about Greek culture and politics do ring true with much of his audience. His regular patrons are mostly progressive left-wing university students that appreciate the value of the music and who are concerned with the effects of Europeanization and capitalization on contemporary Greece. Interestingly, non-Greek tourists also illustrate a

[137] On weeknights, Vassiliou is the center of the program and sings almost all of the songs.

great interest in his work. Vassiliou attributes this to a different education that encourages interest in traditional culture. He contrasts this with the Greek lack of knowledge and interest in their own traditions caused by "an overwhelming desire to become just like everybody else" (Vassiliou 2007).

Finally, Rebetiki Istoria is so popular because it is unique in Athens and in all of Greece. It is the only rebetadiko that offers strict early-style rebetika; its warm and informal atmosphere; a close rapport with owner and lead singer Vassiliou. The same patrons often attend Rebetiki Istoria week after week. They bring large groups of friends and get to know other patrons throughout the course of the night. Though an atmosphere of respect prevails, musicians and patrons greet each other in an informal and friendly manner. Vassiliou is equally respectful and fond of his patrons. "The *magazi* is theirs, it is not mine. It belongs to the youth. And they know it. And that is why they keep coming back" (Vassiliou 2008).

IV. HOW TO PLAY REBETIKA IN REBETIKI ISTORIA

When the Five *Manges* in Pireaus Became Four: Humility and Respect in Rebetiko Performance

Vassiliou expects as much respect from the musicians as he does from his patrons. A musician who does not share Vassiliou's rebetiko outlook or that of most Rebetiki Istoria patrons will not have a long career in the *magazi*. On one occasion, a newly-hired bouzouki player accepted a song request from Yiorgos, a long-time patron. "Will you play the song "Five *Manges* in Pireaus"? The bouzouki player replied with a broad smile "Five *manges*? But one of them left and now there are only four." Without saying another word, Yiorgos gathered up his cigarettes and his worry beads, paid for his drink and left.

Usually a weekly customer, Yiorgos did not come to Rebetiki Istoria for the next two weeks. The bouzouki player's insult was too much to bear and illustrated a lack of appreciation and respect for rebetika. The bouzouki player was not rehired for the following season.

In Rebetiki Istoria, there is a distinct hierarchy amongst performers based upon age, musical ability, performance experience, whether they have worked with famous early rebetika musicians and whether they have the ability to draw a crowd. These relations determine basic power structures but also shape subtle behaviors. For example, one must know how and when to make a joke and whom one may mock. Vassiliou might say to a bouzouki player, "Come on, play something. Drive the people away." Or, "Play a *taximi* that is two hours long. Play one that goes from here all the way to Larissa." It would be inappropriate for the bouzouki player to make the same joke to Vassiliou.

Despite the power hierarchy in Rebetiki Istoria, Vassiliou promotes a level playing field between musicians. "Together we learn and help each other improve," he often says. But a persistent silent power play does exist between the musicians that I tried hard not to enter. This hierarchy determines who chooses the song order, and it determines who leads the program and even who sings which repertoire.[138] This power balance is often directly related to the skills of the performer. As such, the musicians use the music to re-inscribe or subvert hierarchies (Askew 2002, 121). Vassiliou believes that rebetika musicians tend to be over-confident, often attempting to sing or play a song that is above their abilities. He will tell them so without concern for the harshness of his

[138] In other *rebetadika*, musicians often claim the right to perform a certain song and expect no other musicians to perform it. This does not occur in Rebetiki Istoria, though many times musicians will not choose to sing a song that is part of another musician's repertoire in order to allow him to sing it if he chooses.

words. When a Rebetiki Istoria musician chose to sing a song that Vassiliou deemed outside of his abilities he called out "Who chose to play that song? Was it you? Or you? You made Sotiria Bellou's picture fall down off the wall."[139]

In "Rebetiki Istoria," Vassiliou's position of power may be repressive but it is also productive. Foucault writes that "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (Foucault 1979, 194). Indeed, many times Vassiliou gets his point across to musicians and audience by asserting his power. In addition, he has managed to sustain a particular live rebetiko culture for thirty years, resisting many outside influences and even turning down opportunities for greater financial success. His greatest concern has been maintaining a particular musical standard amongst his musicians.

Figure 7.7: Performing in Rebetiki Istoria, 2008. Pavlos Vassiliou, Yona Stamatis and Haris Hrisinis.



[139] He was referring to Sotiria Bellou, the early-style rebetiko performer who recorded this song. Vassiliou implied that the performance was so awful, that not even Bellou's photo on the wall could stand it.

Proper Musical Style and Musical Meaning: "Better to be Unknowing Than an Imitator"

In Rebetiki Istoria, the connection between musical style and musical meaning is a common topic of conversation. Musical style as expressed by certain descriptors helps form the bridge between musical sound and musical signification. It is the "heaviness" of the music or the "*metallo*" [timbre/metal] of a particular voice that makes Vassiliou believe that early-style rebetika resists the negative forces of Europeanization and globalization that are corrupting contemporary Greece. These are some of the features lacking in later renditions of early rebetika songs. In addition, it is musical style that leads the same rebetika songs performed in various Athenian *rebetadika* to sound so different.

The most common descriptors of the appropriate rebetika style are the terms "clean" and "direct" which refer to the pre-1955 repertoire and musical style. Authentic rebetika contrasts other rebetika performance styles but also contemporary popular music: Rebetika performed in any other style does injustice to the music and to Greekness itself and panders to a "superficial and foreign" contemporary music culture (Vassiliou, 2008). The most important factor that shapes musical style is having "*apopsi*," in other words, having the right viewpoint about rebetika. In fact, Vassiliou prefers his musicians to have the correct viewpoint rather than the ability to play virtuoso bouzouki in the wrong style. To Vassiliou, playing in another style demonstrates the fact that one imitates well but does not truly understand rebetika. "Better to be unknowing than an imitator" Vassiliou would often say in an effort to demonstrate the significance of the rebetiko belief system. In Rebetiki Istoria, it is better to admit that you do not know anything at all about rebetika style rather than to play in a style other than that of the original recording.

In fact, in Rebetiki Istoria, how the musician plays the songs is more important than the notes he plays. The essence of performing a rebetika song correctly lies in musical style, in the spirit of the performance, in the improvised ornamentations and improvisatory quality of the song. The following exchange I had with Vassiliou illustrates the great significance of musical style in designating a song as rebetika. We discussed the popular singer Stelios Kazantzidis famous as a popular singer but also for his interpretations of rebetika songs in a new style.

> YONA: The songs that Kazantzidis sang, were they *laïka* or rebetika?
>
> VASSILIOU: *Laïka*. His voice didn't have anything rebetika in it- maybe he had a very big voice, but it was a voice that didn't have any relation to rebetika.
>
> YONA: As people often say, he cries?
>
> VASSILIOU: Yes. And aside from crying, he didn't have the right color. The color was completely *laiko*.
>
> YONA: How can a song be *laiko* when Kazantzidis sings it and rebetiko when Bellou sings it? For example, both Kazantzidis and Bellou have recorded "Life Has Two Doors." What defines rebetika then?
>
> VASSILIOU: On the one hand, it is the style they give it. On the other, the voice. And the way in which they sing.

Rebetiki Istoria musicians constantly discuss musical style and meaning and believe in definite and defined correct and incorrect styles of playing. As a general rule, if one plays in the style of original recordings, it is correct rebetika. Any alterations contemporary musicians make to the style no matter how minute the result is incorrect or inauthentic rebetika. This includes playing in faster tempi, altering and expanding the instrumentation and changing the vocal ornamentation style. (See Chapter Four for a discussion of the musical characteristics of early-style rebetika.) Musical style is so important in Rebetiki Istoria that how one plays a particular song is usually given more

significance than the song choice itself. Hours of discussion amongst the musicians center on the refinement of musical details: their central goal is to shape the song style so that it resembles that of original rebetika recordings.

Musical Style and Signification: Respecting the Past Through Rebetika Song

> Style means respect. Respect for what you do, respect and belief in what you are trying to achieve, and concern about how you will give this music to others. Playing rebetika in its correct style means respecting the music. Playing in a way so that people realize what you are trying to do and what you are trying to say with the music. Most of all you need sincerity. Sincerity of intention. Even if the listener doesn't understand or like what you play he will respect you for your true intentions. If you change the style of rebetika songs, all you achieve is to show others that you think you are better than the creator. Which you are not.
> -Pavlos Vassiliou, 2007

Why is such an emphasis is placed on achieving early musical style? Is it merely a matter of taste or does musical style bear relation to other issues significant to the musicians? In order to analyze this question, I examine the way in which Rebetiki Istoria musicians talk about musical style and trace the connections they make to the determination of musical meaning. In Rebetiki Istoria, the central factor to which musical style speaks is the definition of a contemporary Greek national identity: rebetika performed in the style of its original recording relays certain desired messages about Greekness and Greek national identity whereas rebetika performed in other ways contradicts these meanings. To Vassiliou, musical style is a manner of discourse shaped by the musical details and the signification added by extra-musical factors. As defined in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians:

> [Style is a] manner of discourse, mode of expression; more particularly, the manner of which a work of art is executed… Style manifests itself in characteristic usages of form, texture, harmony, melody, rhythm and ethos; and it

> is presented by creative personalities, conditioned by historical, social and geographical factors, performing resources and conventions.[140]

Central to this definition is the idea that style and signification are conditioned by historical, social and geographical factors. As ethnomusicologist Judith Becker has written, "Musical expression is a repository of culturally specific ideas which come to us subliminally, thus unselected, unfiltered and uncensored. Therein lies its power" (Becker 1981, 172). As such, it is not only a matter of repertoire but musical style of the rebetika songs performed in Rebetiki Istoria that leads people to describe it in certain predetermined ways and interpret the songs in similar ways.

While the connection between sound structures, social structures and identity formation is a topic well examined by ethnomusicologists (i.e. Seeger 1980; Feld 1982; Sugarman 1997), relatively little attention has been given to the often fundamental role of musical style in shaping musical meaning. This is no doubt due in part to the difficulties inherent in a discussion of musical style, whose lexicon relies largely on the use of subjective descriptors. This holds true for discussions about rebetika in which musicians describe its style with adjectives such as "authentic," "heavy" and "clean." Yet the constant struggle to describe the desired rebetika style in spite of the lack of specific terminology suggests the importance of clearly-defined musical style in Rebetiki Istoria. Ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger noted the difficulty of discussing music verbally, stating that musical knowing is not the same as verbal knowing. He found no way out of

[140]Oxford Music Online. "Style." [http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/27041?q=style&source=omo_gmo&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit] Visited on February 24, 2010.

this "linguo-centric predicament" other than to acknowledge that it is inherent to the "musicological juncture."[141]

In my discussion of musical style, I do not avoid the use of adjectives. Instead, I borrow the vocabulary of the Rebetiki Istoria musicians and then examine the way in which these adjectives apply to the music and to national identity beliefs. For the words they use give insight about greater ideological beliefs about the music. As stated by Bruce Horner, "We can no longer maintain any distinction between music and discourse about music, between the supposed object of analysis and the terms of analysis" (Horner 1999, 19). In Rebetiki Istoria, the way in which music is discussed affects musical production and reception. One must know how to use these common rebetika adjectives. For example, over the telephone, an inquiring patron once used a typical descriptor incorrectly. He asked Vassiliou "How heavy is your rebetika?" Vassiliou turned to us and said, "What should I tell him, 4 or 5 kilos?"[142] The following is a list of the most common adjectives Vassiliou uses to describe early-style rebetika:

1. Clean
2. Clear
3. Direct
4. Rhythmic
5. Staccato (for bouzouki-picking style)
6. Grounded
7. Steady

[141] Randel echoes this idea in his article "The Canon and the Musicological Toolbox" (1992).
[142] Rebetiko musician Vassilis Tsitsanis wrote that people make an error when they call them heavy *zeïbekika* and heavy *hasapika*. Rather there are only slow and fast songs (1982, 32).

8. Even

9. Loud

10. Energized pulse

11. With soul

These descriptors contrast Vassiliou's portrayal of other Greek popular music song styles such as *laïka*. He describes *laïka* as more superficial, often faster paced with a lighter rhythmic pulse and a great emphasis placed on virtuoso showmanship. Playing rebetika in the *laiko* style confuses the musical messages.

In Rebetiki Istoria, musical meaning, which I use to signify a shared category of thought about a particular musical sign or sign system, is not static. Rather it changes with each performance of a song as people pile up memories and associations with a song. But certain elements influence musical interpretation such as defining the social frame of the performance. This is how ideas about Greek national identity are created and transferred through the music.

Vassiliou emphasizes a direct semiotic connection between musical style and national identity perceptions: in sum, rebetika performed in its early style embodies a desirable Greekness. Those knowledgeable about rebetika will receive the intended messages; those new to rebetika will recognize the sincerity of the musicians' efforts and will try to understand the message you want to portray. In other words, a sincerity of intention helps one relay one's message to an unknowledgeable audience:

> If someone comes who may have no relation with the specific subject at all, when he comes and sees you and sees that you want to give something, something that is clearly yours, your stance, what you have set up, your eh let's say, your attachment to it, and your efforts, it will make him respect exactly that which you are doing. Whether he likes it or he doesn't' like it, he will try to understand, if it

> is possible, to penetrate inside your mind, inside your efforts, and to become one with that which in that moment you are trying to give forth. (Vassiliou 2008)

How do the musicians shape musical meaning? In other words, how does this early style represent a more desirable Greek national identity? This is done in two ways: by playing off of contextual marking in the physical and aural realm and by talking about the music. The social frame is largely responsible for directing the way in which signs are interpreted. Bauman states that performance is "marked" in order to be interpreted in certain ways. In Rebetiki Istoria, the anachronistic décor, the early style rebetiko performance and extensive musical discussion "mark" the performance. These elements then combine with the audience's semiosphere,[143] and help determine the semantic value of a particular rebetika performance to the individual.

Semantic Snowballing and Musical Meaning

In Rebetiki Istoria, the musical style of a particular performance is believed to be directly related to the national identity perceptions of its performer: interpretations that resemble early-style rebetika signify a rejection of Europeanization, globalization and capitalization; interpretations that stray from the early style and lean towards *laïka* and other popular forms signify an acceptance of these transnational forces.

Discussions of musical style and meaning are complex because a variety of musical elements simultaneously play a fundamental role in shaping the rebetiko style: these include timbre, tempo, meter, melodic shape and instrumentation. Turino

[143] I borrow Yuri Lotman's definition of the semiosphere: "From squeaks to sonatas, from blips on the radar to burps at the dinner table… [one's semiosphere] includes all acts past and present, possessing a 'memory'" (Lotman as quoted by Papastergiadis 1997, 268). See Papastergiadis for a discussion of Lotman's semiosphere.

emphasizes the fact that it is the simultaneity of these components in a musical work that allows for multiple semiotic interpretations:

> *The multi-componential aspect of music cannot be overemphasized as a basis of music's affective and semiotic potential…* The rhythm, meter, tempo, mode, melodic shape, and texture likewise may each function as discrete signs that compliment, chafe, or contradict the other signs sounding at the same time—contributing to the power of a particular meaning, to new insights, or to emotional tension, respectively. (Turino 1999, 237)

Which elements are emphasized and how they are brought out of the music is key. Turino suggests that though musical events do bear multiple meanings simultaneously, these meanings are stratified into a hierarchy of events: "Any musical unit is comprised of a number of components including: pitch, scale type, timbre, rhythmic motion, tempo, melodic shape, meter, dynamics, harmony (where applicable), specific melodies, quotes, genres—all sounding simultaneously" (Turino 1999, 236). Therefore, the use of specific musical features such as timbre, tempo and instrumentation give meaning to the music within a specific context. A simplified equation of musical meaning might be:

Musical notes + Musical style + Context = Musical meaning.

In this case, the musical meaning inferred refers to Greek national identity beliefs. The following is a list of the most hierarchically significant stylistic features of early rebetika:

A strong rhythmic pulse

A directness of playing style

A clean picking style in the bouzouki and guitar

A loud dynamic

Knowledge of the rebetika modes

Ability to improvise

Having suffered in life

If any of these items are missing, the rebetika interpretation will be lacking. Even worse, it will lean towards the later *laiko* style and send a different message to the audience—that the musicians accept Europeanization and globalization and their effects on traditional Greek culture.

The following transcription illustrates a typical argument between Vassiliou and the musicians about the correct stylistic version of a song. As always, the conversation is heated and each musician believes strongly in his own understanding of the song. The connections between rebetiko style and national identity perceptions are clear. Vassiliou plays a phrase on his tzoura and then asks a fellow bouzouki player:

VASSILIOU: There, did you hear that note there? That is how you should play it.

MUSICIAN: That's what I played, "Pavlara" [affectionate way of saying Pavlos]. That's what I played. This is where the song goes.

VASSILIOU: You did not play that my friend. Play it again.

MUSICIAN: [plays the phrase again]

VASSILIOU: No! That's not it!

MUSICIAN: Fine if I'm such a bad bouzouki player then I'll just go break my bouzouki, and send it to hell! I mean come on now. [Stands and angrily puts his bouzouki down on the bench nearby]

VASSILIOU: Oh come on, don't get angry. We're trying to do some work here. You can't get angry if we're going to get some work done.

MUSICIAN: We've been over it one hundred times. I know this piece. I've played it one thousand times.

VASSILIOU: Yes. And you played it just as you "know" it. In whatever version you heard it, from whatever bum went and plastered his name and face on a recording for all time. You learned it from him. Don't play, just listen: (Vassiliou plays a rough outline of the phrase)

MUSICIAN: Right, that is where the song goes. (Plays the phrase)

VASSILIOU: What did you play just there? Play "sol" there!

MUSICIAN: You're always telling me that I don't play correctly.

VASSILIOU: In the name of God, play "sol," I TELL YOU, PLAY A "SOL," AND KEEP IT THERE! [Plays a G chord.] HOLD IT!

MUSICIAN: Relax, in the name of God.

VASSILIOU: Listen, friend. No, you do play the song correctly if you play it just as you want to hear it, just as you learned it. You don't understand what I am saying. Because you have learned all of these songs well in their modern renditions, you have gotten stuck there! Am I right or not? Why can't you listen to the original recording and learn the songs from those? Why would you go listen to someone else's incorrect version of it and learn it like that? I don't understand you…

MUSICIAN: Well, people like it like that, Pavlara. Don't you see how everyone gets up to dance on Friday and Saturday nights with that song?

VASSILIOU: Listen, friend, tonight is not Friday night… That's exactly it. You don't care if you show that you are one with all those other people who believe we should stop being Greeks. Who copy what they see on television, that embarrassing kitsch of the various live music shows just to be like everyone else. Those are the people who believe that by throwing flowers and breaking plates they are being Greek. And that singing rebetika in the style of Kazantzidis is okay. That is not rebetika, my friend. Rebetika means respect. Respect and skill. I have owned Rebetiki Istoria for thirty years. I have sung with hundreds of bouzouki players. Hundreds! I never let my *magazi* lose its reputation and lose its clientele for a different one. And I won't do it now.

And so on. The discrepancy is musical and ideological. It centers on what Turino characterizes as a "semantic snowballing" of musical indices—when a musical sign gathers multiple objects to it simultaneously (Turino 1999, 237). To Vassiliou, playing or

omitting the note "sol" in a particular phrase in one rebetiko song could alter the entire semantic value of the song. From an homage to early-style rebetika, the song would instead deliver a message of disrespect for traditional Greek culture. But to the bouzouki player, the lack of the note "sol" did not alter the style of the performance at all. Despite the heated nature of the musical arguments, a few moments later the musicians seem to have forgotten all about their fight and are once again the best of friends.

Rebetika as a Live Tradition: "Playing Yourself" Into Rebetika

Musicians characterize rebetika as a live tradition, by which they mean that the music requires constant improvisation. The most adept rebetika musicians rarely play a song the same way twice. Rather, their performance is a constant improvisation based upon the basic structure of the original song. For an example of this singing style as realized by Vassiliou, see Figure 4.1, a transcription of Vassiliou's rendition of "There is a Spell on My Mind" by Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas."

Rebetika musicians make continuous conscious choices about how many notes to play, which notes these will be, and when and how they will play them. The more-seasoned rebetika musician struggles less to make these decisions and plays in the desired style with greater ease. Other musicians might describe this type of musician with the complimentary expression, "he has it in him." In Rebetiki Istoria, praise is given to the musician who has played rebetika all his life as well as to the singer who has knowledge and experience from a young age singing Byzantine chant in the Greek Orthodox Church. Vassiliou stated:

> The rebetika style is not something that can be obtained from one day to the next. It has to do with your life, your way of life, it has to do with what you believe,

> how you perceive this specific masterpiece that is called *rebetiko*, how much it speaks inside of you, and from there on, having that as a base, at some point your style becomes landed property. It becomes yours. This of course you cannot build in one day or in one week or in one month, neither in five months, neither in ten months. It is acquired. All those bouzouki players you hear who are really fantastic, let's say Nikos or Tapsakis, they have been playing bouzouki since they were little. They know the style so well because they have heard it and played it all their lives. (Vassiliou, 2007)

In his theoretical discussion of musical style, Leonard Meyer suggests that style is often equated with the *manner* in which something is expressed as opposed to the *matter* that is presented (Meyer 1996, 7). In rebetika performance, this distinction does not apply. As a result of the live character of the tradition, rebetika style results both from how the music is being expressed in addition to the notes that are played.

Playing in the correct musical style is crucial for another fundamental aspect of rebetika performance: it is needed for the achievement of *kefi*, the good spirits and desire to play. Knowledgeable and respectful patrons help one achieve *kefi* as well. If a musician is not in the mood to play or is not playing well he might say, "I don't have *kefi*" or "They ruined my *kefi*." Inside Rebetiki Istoria, musicians and patrons alike can ruin ones *kefi*. Sometimes a patron will request to sing a song along with the musicians. It is a rare occurrence for a patron to sing in the early rebetika style and often he will sing entirely out of tune and without rhythm. This ruins the *kefi* of musicians and audience alike. Musicians with knowledge and respect for the music will not ask to sing. They will realize the work it takes to sing rebetika correctly.

Since there exists an enormous body of rebetika songs, a musician generally chooses a repertoire that speaks to him personally and shapes rebetika into a musical form that suits him. Others judge his views about rebetika partly by the repertoire he chooses: they consider the song content, its composer and original performer and the way

in which the contemporary performer illustrates his knowledge and respect. For example, while Pavlos Vassiliou's repertoire spans the gamut of rebetika songs, he is particularly partial to the songs sung by Antonis Dalgas, and those sung by Stratos Payioumtzis. And one Rebetiki Istoria bouzouki player Nikolas has in his personal repertoire many songs of the early rebetika recordings by Yiovan Tsaous and Kostas Skarvelis. Stelios the physics teacher who plays bouzouki in Rebetiki Istoria on Friday nights enjoys the *mourmourika* songs by composers such as Yiovan Tsaous, Kostas Bezos, Panayiotis Tountas and others of the Smyrneiko school. All of these composers, performers and songs are considered to belong to the early-style rebetiko category. However, while every musician has his own personal repertoire, all performing rebetika musicians must know a certain standard set of the most popular songs.[144]

According to Vassiliou, Sotiria Bellou (1921-1997) and Stratos Payioumtzis (1904-1971) are the best examples of proper rebetiko-style singing. He firmly believes that no one could ever achieve the greatness of these voices or sing in a way that would better represent the rebetiko style. Intention and naturalness of performance style are key factors to their success:

> Bellou couldn't sing without feeling what she was singing. Without crying what she was singing. She sang about certain topics that spoke to her: poverty, society, mothers etc. Even though she didn't write a lot of the songs she sang, people knew what songs to write for her, they knew what topics would speak to her. She cried the songs. She felt what she was singing. She didn't sing happy songs. She had a nice family, especially for the times, she had a proper family. She left, and never went back. She lived a life that was harder than what a man could live. At 16 she threw vitriol in her husband's face and left him.

[144] These include songs such as: "*Sinnefiasmeni Kyriaki*" [Cloudy Sunday], "*Tis Gerakinas Gios*" [The Son of the Hawk], "*Giati Me Xipnises Proi*" [Why Did You Wake Me so Early] and "*Baxe Tsifliki*" [Tsifliki Garden] by Vassilis Tsitsanis; "*Frankosyriani*" [Frankosyrian Girl], "*Bouzouki Mou Diploxordo*" [My Two-Course Bouzouki], "*Ta Matoklada Sou Lamboun*" [Your Eyelashes Shine] and "*Mavra Matia, Mavra Fridia*" Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows" by Markos Vamvakaris.

Vassiliou later told me that he accepted me into Rebetiki Istoria as "one of their own" partly as a result of my admiration of rebetika singer Sotiria Bellou. He deems her performance style the epitome of rebetika style. It was so definitive of the genre in fact, that even when she sang non-rebetika songs, she made them a little bit rebetika.

In Rebetiki Istoria, a musician should not become too confident or egotistical, no matter ones abilities. One should be humbled before the early rebetika musicians since even they were humble themselves. For example, Vassiliou tells us that as great of a musician as Vassilis Tsitsanis was, he was always humbled before Markos Vamvakaris. In his performances, even Tsitsanis acknowledged the greatness of those who came before him: "seven out of ten songs he played were by Vamvakaris and only one was his own" (Vassiliou 2008); Vamvakaris did not have such technical dexterity on the bouzouki but his playing and his compositions epitomized rebetika:

> Time and again we went to Kaisariani to hear Tsitsanis, Papaioannou, Bellou- who played many songs of Markos. All the songs Tsitsanis played were songs of Markos. Out of ten songs that he would play, seven would be of Markos…In 1975 (in 1974 I left the army) I was 23 years old- I hung out with Tsitsanis, Keroumitis, Bagiaderas- I loved them very much and they loved me because I had great respect for them. I called Tsitsanis teacher- In 1975 Tsitsanis wrote "*To Vapori Ap'tin Persia*" ["The Boat From Persia"]- written in a form of Markos- Like his song "*Mes sthn Xthesinh Ploimmhra*" ["In Yesterday's Flood"]. As soon as he wrote it, before he recorded it- we went to the magazi early. He said "Come *alani* [affectionate term], let me show you a song I wrote." They had caught a boat full of hashish. A lot. 75 tons or something like that. A he wrote the song and used the event as a theme. So we sat at a little table. He took the bouzouki and played it. It was a disrespectful thing for me to do, but I said to him "Teacher, it's good. But it reminds me of "The Flood" by Vamvakaris. "Eh, get lost" he said to me. "I put other elements in the song too." [*Vassiliou chuckles*.] In other words, they were old-fashioned people. They weren't sneaky. Tsitsanis was not sneaky. In comparison with people today. I'm talking about 40, 45 years ago. When you talked to Tsitsanis he blushed through and through. (Vassiliou 2007)

How to Shape a Rebetiko Evening

A rebetiko musician must be able to read his audience and shape a program according to its likes and dislikes while still remaining faithful to his rebetiko beliefs. Playing too many songs in one style or misreading one's audience can ruin an evening: the patrons can get up and leave, they can stop ordering drinks and they can simply stop paying attention to the music. For example, if particularly knowledgeable patrons come into Rebetiki Istoria, the musicians may play a series of slower "heavier" songs by composers such as Dimitris Gongos "Bayiaderas,"[145] Yiovan Tsaous and Anestis Delias, and may choose lesser-known songs. The musicians particularly enjoy such a performance, since the varied repertoire makes the evening more interesting. In addition, the musicians are free to choose songs that speak to them rather than only try and appeal to the audience. In the reverse scenario in which patrons seem to have little knowledge of rebetika, the musicians will play faster more popular songs. These patrons often come to Rebetiki Istoria in order to dance rather than with the intention of sitting and listening to the music. While each night is shaped by extensive routines, every performance ends up feeling quite different depending upon the moods of the musicians and the customers present.

On weeknights in Rebetiki Istoria, the musicians often perform songs without any particular order. But, they do make sure there is variety in the program. However, on Friday and Saturday nights, they present a more-structured "program" in which much significance is placed on song order. The musicians do not necessarily play the same songs from week to week, but they play particular song types at different points in the

[145] Dimitris Gongos (1903-1985) was given the nickname Bayiaderas because of his special liking for the Eric Calman opera "Bayiaderas". He was said to have played the opera song "Bayiadera" on his bouzouki.

evening. A rebetika evening may last five to six hours and the musician must shape the progression of the evening. Haris, the bouzouki player, described the progression of the evening as a cycle of songs with careful variety. He stated,

> If you don't do this, if you don't make a cycle and just play all loud songs you give people a headache, you don't let them talk and think and enjoy their drink. If it's all slow songs you put them to sleep and no one has the desire to get up and dance. You need a careful balance. (Xrisinis 2007)

Guitarist Vangelis Nikolaidis emphasized creating a good pace for the night: "The problem with many other *rebetadika* is that they don't have any pace to the night. They play and the whole time it's that "drang drung drang drung" and it's tiring. The ear gets tired. It can really give you a headache" (Vangelis 2007).

The program on Friday and Saturday nights is also free, though many of the same songs are repeated from week to week. A proper program should offer a continued variety of *zeïbekika*, *hasapika* and faster dance songs such as *servika* and *hasaposervika*. Audience and performers alike decide whether people get up to dance or not. The evenings during which people get up and dance are considered the most successful. In the following section, I present a sample program outline for Friday and Saturday nights.

1. The musicians begin with a selection of instrumental songs. This is a warm-up for the musicians and for the audience. Appropriate songs include "*To Perasma*" ["The Passing"] by Bagiaderas and "*To Atelioto*" ["The Endless"] by Tsitsanis.

2. They begin the program with a series of calm songs such as: "*H Amaxa Mes Sthn Vrohi*" ["The Carriage in the Rain"] by Vassilis Tsitsanis, "*Souromenos Na'rtho Pali*" ["Tipsy I will Come Again"] of Ioannis Papaioannou, "*Mes Sthn Hasapiki Agora*" ["In the Butcher Market"] of Panayiotis Tountas.

3. As the evening progresses the musicians play an increasing number of *servika* in an effort to build a climax and to allow patrons to dance. These songs include "*Dimitroula Mou*" ["My Dimitroula"] and "*H Garsona*" ["The Waitress"] by Panagiotis Tountas and a number of fast instrumental pieces. During this time, Vassiliou generally leaves the stage. He will make another appearance towards the end of the program. If people seem to be enjoying a fast dance, the musicians might play two or three in succession so that the dance continues for a longer time. A solo instrumentalist such as a bouzouki player or violinist might play a particularly long taximi for the same purpose.

4. A successful rebetika program will have a climax at some point in the evening, generally a bit after the mid-point in the program. During this time, the musicians will play more-popular songs such as: "*O Psaras*" ["The Fisherman"] by Yiorgos Mouflouzelis, "*Pente Manges Ston Peiraia*" ["Five Manges in Piraeus"] by Yiovan Tsaous, "*H Atakti*" ["The Naughty Girl"] by Markos Vamvakaris, "*Tis Gerakinas Gios*" ["The Song of the Hawk"] by Vassilis Tsitsanis and "*Ta Paidia tis Geitonias Sou*" ["The Guys in Your Neighborhood"] (traditional). These songs incite a big reaction from the crowd who sing along and clap and dance.

5. Late in the program, Vassiliou comes onto the stage. He will sing a selection of popular "heavier" songs and some that are unknown to most audiences.

6. The musicians then close the program with a small selection of softer slower songs such as "*To Mangalaki*" ["The Fireplace"] by Apostolos Hatzihristos or "*H Tabakiera*" ["The Cigarette Box"] by Joseph Ritsiardis.

The most successful rebetiko evening consists of an interaction between the musicians and audience, a transfer of energy that keeps the *kefi* [high spirit] going. Some singers and bouzouki players have an excellent ability to perform in such a way that motivates the audience to dance. In fact, the same song sung by one musician might incite people to dance nearly every time while another singer may never get people to dance. As such, playing a song correctly and getting people to dance are considered different talents. Often, playing rebetika in the refined manner of the original recordings will not incite people to dance. Rather, one needs to have talent as an entertainer. Vassiliou often tries to balance out his musicians by having one singer/bouzouki player who is especially skilled at entertaining the crowd (useful for Friday and Saturday nights) and another who is more low-key and who plays the songs in the early rebetika style. A bouzouki player who has the ability to do both of these is a rare, if impossible, find.

My Learning Rebetiki Istoria Culture and the Early Rebetiko Musical Style

Earning a living as a rebetika musician is hard work. It requires performing for five or six hours without a break. One must have the skill and energy to fulfill a variety of song requests; one must be sure to keep the crowd entertained; one must create a program that appeals to the particular crowd; and one tries to remain somewhat true to ones rebetika beliefs. Perhaps most difficult of all, working as a rebetika musician is a nighttime profession. This detracts from one's daytime waking hours, limits the time one has to spend with family and is generally exhausting. Perhaps coincidence and perhaps consequence, all of the musicians in Rebetiki Istoria are single, divorced or married to

other rebetika musicians. Working at night provided an extra challenge for me personally while I was writing my dissertation.

Other challenges shaped my experience in Rebetiki Istoria as well. For example, achieving or approaching bi-musicality (Hood, 1960), proficiency in more than one musical form, was so much more than mastering musical technique. It meant adapting the rebetika way of viewing the world and feeling the musical style. It also meant pushing the years of study of classical music out of my ears, a feat that I found surprisingly pleasant. In addition, the values for a rebetika violinist are quite different from those for a classical musician. Rebetika requires a style and technique that differ from classical music. For example, I was often praised for changing the timbre of a note by moving away from the sounding point and producing an unclean sound. In addition, I changed the position of my left hand, often nearly pressing my palm against the neck of the violin, which allows me to join notes with slides and small *glissandi*. I added much ornamentation between notes and became accustomed to listening more to the sounds between the notes and less to the clarity of the notes themselves. Finally, I adapted a lighter bowing style with my right hand and mostly used the upper half of the bow.

Vassiliou was generally quite complimentary about my rebetiko performance. He insisted that I had made extremely rapid progress and that I had truly grasped the early style. While my repertoire was still small, I played in the correct clean and clear style and had the correct *apopsi*, viewpoint about the music. One evening, after noting my passion for the bouzouki, Vassiliou gave me a tzoura, a small-sized bouzouki as a present. This would help me cement the correct rebetiko style in my ears. Vassiliou commanded me to continue playing rebetika violin, which he considers the king of instruments, much more

difficult and satisfying as an instrument of rebetika. He assured me that since my intentions were true, I would achieve great success playing rebetika. He often emphasized the significance of the intentions of the musicians as vital to a good live rebetika performance.

> Key to a good rebetika performance are the intentions of the musicians and especially of the singer. For example, let us speak of the music program on weekdays, not on Friday and Saturday night when the program may not be purely rebetiko song from the specific time period 1930-1960. On weekdays, there exists no program. There exists only the mood of the singer and of the song he will sing. In Rebetiki Istoria, there is no specific song order. This you have lived in all this time you have been here. There are only the intentions and mood of the musicians. Which songs they like to play and sing and which they do not. Nothing else. One cannot cater to the needs and the likes and dislikes of ones audience. Of course we try to honor song requests but always within reason. It doesn't concern me and it never concerned me if a group of people come and the people don't like the program and they get up and leave or if they like it and bring others. (Vassiliou 2007)

Yet throughout my tenure in Rebetiki Istoria, I was constantly torn by a duality. On the one hand, I felt that my outsider status and American upbringing prevented me from ever becoming a full member of the rebetika culture. On the other hand, I often felt that I lived and understood rebetika more than many Greek rebetika musicians who incorporated other musics and musical styles into their playing and who enjoyed playing the most "played out" popular songs. With time, I realized that I had to be content with the fact that my understanding of rebetika would always be my own, and always slightly different from the understandings of other rebetika musicians. As ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice described in his quest to understand the art of Bulgarian bag piping, his understanding of the music was neither that of an insider, nor of an outsider, but somewhere in between in a place that was entirely his own:

> The perspective I had acquired in the process of learning to play competently (not necessarily well) was neither emic nor etic. It was my own… If emic

> understandings are located in other people's heads and given to us in their language reports, then my understanding wasn't emic. On the other hand, if etic understanding involves applying objective analytic methods to sounds without regard for their cultural salience, then my understanding wasn't etic either. I felt as if I had achieved a mediation between these two theoretical categories, these two ontological conditions… Although I wasn't Bulgarian, I could act like a Bulgarian in the production of a complicated musical form, and when I acted like a Bulgarian in this particular way, they did too; that is, if the occasion were right, they danced. (1994, 110-11)

I most certainly imagined rebetika songs in a manner different than the musicians. I learned this early on during my time in Rebetiki Istoria when Pavlos gave me my first homework assignment, to learn a particular rebetika song. I began by transcribing the melody of the song. When I arrived the next day with my score, the expression suggested that he did not quite understand why I had done this with the music. Why would I go through the process of writing a song down when I could just learn it from the original recording? This experience speaks to the way in which music is learned and how this is often culturally or even genre-specific. Vassiliou's assessment of my methodology changed with time and he even came to praise it for its exactness. When two musicians were arguing over a phrase Vassiliou said, "Let Yianna go home and listen to it. She'll listen to it, write it down exactly and tell us tomorrow."

During my time in Greece, I surely affected the Rebetiki Istoria culture as well. I introduced to Pavlos Vassiliou many interested Greeks and Americans many of whom praised the exceptional work he and the other Rebetiki Istoria musicians have done in preserving and promoting this traditional Greek cultural form. On one evening, members of the Fulbright Foundation Athens Branch accompanied the Greek Minister of Culture Pavlos Geroulanos and a significant number of bodyguards to Rebetiki Istoria where they

stayed for hours listening to us play and discussing the music and history of rebetika.[146] In addition, the Modern Greek Program at the University of Michigan helped organize performances by the Rebetiki Istoria musicians at the University of Michigan, USA in 2009.[147] This first American appearance by the group met astounding success. I prefaced the concerts with lectures about the history of rebetika and the work of the Rebetiki Istoria musicians. The concerts spanned the gamut of the rebetika repertoire. All appearances were sold out and we were greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm from the audience and especially from the Greek-American Community. The trip itinerary also included an interview and live rebetika performance with the Rebetiki Istoria musicians on National Public Radio Detroit Today show.[148] A second concert tour took place in 2011 in which Rebetiki Istoria performed in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; Columbus, Ohio; Bloomington, Indiana. The initial North American Rebetiki Istoria concert tour has now blossomed into a thriving bi-annual tradition.

Figure 7.8: Rebetiki Istoria performs in Stamps Auditorium, University of Michigan, April, 2009.



Photo courtesy of Yiannis Theodorakis, 2009.

[146] The Fulbright Foundation supported one year of dissertation research in Athens.
[147] Financial support for this event was also provided by the Foundation for Modern Greek Studies, and the following University of Michigan Sectors: the Center for World Performance Studies, the Weiser Center for European Studies, the Office of the Provost and the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments.
[148] Listen to the show online at [www.detroittodayshow.com] Visited May 10, 2010.

During my final year performing in Rebetiki Istoria, my role in the *rebetadiko* and my relationship with the musicians had surely changed. I had gained the skill and confidence and the other musicians seemed to accept me as one of their own and often to forget about my presence altogether. The musicians stopped noticing my mp3 recorder and once I felt that I had collected a sufficient amount of recorded data, I often did not bring the recorder with me. The musicians began to speak with me as they did with each other, and no longer polite, launched into arguments with me and openly criticized my playing as they did with each other. Perhaps indicative of my new role in the *rebetadiko* was the change in the way the musicians referred to me. As seems to occur for most Rebetiki Istoria musicians, I was given a nickname upon my arrival in the *magazi*. I was called "*Yianna Amerikana*," "Yianna the American girl." One bouzouki player in particular enjoyed repeating the rhyming phrase. However, unlike most musicians, my nickname changed over time and after my first year I came to be affectionately known as "Yiannoula," "little Yianna" and sometimes as "Yiannaki," the masculine version of my name, when I played the bouzouki.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented the Rebetiki Istoria music culture as an expression of Vassiliou's alternative national identity ideals for Greece. The Chapter was divided into two parts. In Part One, I positioned Rebetiki Istoria within the broader fabric of Greek modernity. I illustrated how the rebetadiko exists in a liminal stage between contemporary Greek modernity and Vassiliou's imagined ideal for Greece. This culture

of authenticity glorifies early rebetika musicians. It is an imagined utopia in its decadent striving for a better contemporary Greece.

In Part Two, I discussed the internal rebetiko culture as an expression of Vassiliou's alternative Greekness. In Rebetiki Istoria, playing and enjoying rebetika in particular ways illustrates knowledge of traditional Greek culture and resistance to foreign cultural influences. Christopher Small's notion of *musicking* provided the theoretical framework for this discussion. Thomas Turino's theory of semantic value in music helped explain the connections between musical style and musical meaning in Rebetiki Istoria. I also illustrated how Vassiliou plays a major role in determining musical meaning by directing the musical style, talk about the music and the framing of the performance.

In Chapter Eight, the conclusion, I summarize the main points of this thesis. In addition, I raise pressing concerns about the future of rebetiko performance in contemporary Greece. The current difficult economic and socio-political situation has altered the pace of live music entertainment. Many *rebetadika* struggle to keep their doors open. While Rebetiki Istoria is still the most popular Athenian *rebetadiko*, its culture is surely affected by the great changes that shape the Greek nation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: REBETIKA, AN UNFINISHED STORY

"Could those who have embezzled money ever be forced to give it back?" a young Rebetiki Istoria patron once asked Vassiliou.

"Give the money back?" Vassiliou asked in surprise. "How can it be given back when it has already been turned into cars and villas and yachts and traveled all the way to Switzerland?"

This thesis investigated Pavlos Vassiliou's Rebetiki Istoria culture within the context of contemporary Greek modernity. It discussed his use of early-style rebetika to promote an alternative national identity for Greece. This identity resists the forces of Europeanization and capitalization that Vassiliou believes corrupt contemporary Greekness. The ethnographic focus of the thesis was Vassiliou's rebetiko music and culture in Rebetiki Istoria as a medium for sharing beliefs about Greek national identity. It emphasized the significance of musical style as a semantic medium for the ongoing dialogue about contemporary Greekness. In addition, it suggested that audiences play a significant role in shaping the rebetiko culture.

The socio-cultural implications of the Rebetiki Istoria culture within the context of Greek modernity have been thoroughly examined throughout this study. I draw this work to a close by commenting upon the broader implications of this rebetiko culture in

contemporary Greece. I conclude that Vassiliou's defensive nationalist stance ironically prevents him from fully resisting the undesirable aspects of Greek modernity. Rather, it confines his Rebetiki Istoria culture to a liminal space between contemporary Greek modernity and an imagined utopian ideal for Greece—for as long as its existence depends upon this modernity, it will never be able to fully reject its fundamental ideologies.

In this chapter, I analyze how the socio-political upheaval that characterizes Greek modernity drastically affects the Rebetiki Istoria culture and music. It also provides new challenges for Vassiliou in his resistance of the pitfalls of contemporary Greek society. Here, a summary of these concerns is listed:

1. An atmosphere of increasing social and political unrest
2. Extensive economic corruption and the surging national debt
3. The popular system of political and social favor-trading
4. Changing perceptions of Greekness
5. Europeanization efforts affecting identity perceptions

These five elements play an increasingly invasive role in Vassiliou's rebetika culture. They also emphasize the place of Rebetiki Istoria in the context of Greek modernity, emphasizing his struggle to resist these perceived negative forces. In the next section I describe briefly the changing realities of rebetiko performance in contemporary Athens.

I. REBETIKI ISTORIA IN UNSETTLED TIMES

When I left Greece for the United States in early 2011, the atmosphere in Rebetiki Istoria had changed significantly. Concern about the fate of live rebetika performance permeated the evening discussion and entertainment. Musicians and patrons alike spent

more time analyzing the volatile political and economic situation than they did discussing the music: they worried about the effects of new economic austerity measures on the Greek people; they criticized the media for spreading unnecessary panic about the current situation; they lamented the decreasing popularity of Athenian nightlife. Most of all, they worried about the future of the *rebetadiko*—the decrease in the number of customers and the newfound frugality of the primarily working class and student clientele suggested significant economic hardship.

In addition, Rebetiki Istoria was now struggling under the weight of its own ideology. Vassiliou had designed the *rebetadiko* as a space shielded from the dominance of capitalism and of mass media culture. Ironically, it is harder for him to rebel against the capitalist system now that it is failing. For example, the change to the Euro, the subsequent inflation and the new austerity measures, have increased his expenses drastically. But Vassiliou will not raise his prices in order to appeal to a wealthier clientele. Some patrons question Vassiliou's decision to keep his prices low and to keep such a modest setup in his *magazi*. But Vassiliou will not change the style of entertainment, the musical style or the décor in order to appeal to changing tastes. These changes, he believes, would destroy the identity of Rebetiki Istoria and would not help business in any case. Might Vassiliou's utopian escape from the capitalist mass media culture be overcome by a failing capitalist system? In other words, must the capitalist system remain strong in order for Rebetiki Istoria to function well?

Perhaps Vassiliou is making the best decisions for his business. Rebetiki Istoria continues to be the most popular Athenian *rebetadiko*. On many nights when all other *rebetadika* close for lack of customers, Rebetiki Istoria is filled with its regular student

population. Low prices most likely play a role. In times of extreme economic hardship, it is logical that Greeks would search for cheaper entertainment options. In fact, many people who called Rebetiki Istoria in the 2010-2011 season asked about the minimum amount they must spend at the *magazi*. They are usually surprised to learn that the only requirement is that they order one drink.

Greece in Crisis

As discussed at length in Chapter Six, a general instability and cultural pessimism permeate Greece and especially Athens, the capital city. As I ended my fieldwork stay in Athens in 2011,"crisis" was the new buzzword. The term permeated television and radio news shows, decorated casual conversation and enlivened a seeming endless flood of newspaper articles that warned of the tragic developments in the Greek economy: "The Economic Crisis… Harms Health!" in *Ta Nea* [The News], March 16, 2010.[149] "The Sale of 400 Hotels Due to the Economic Crisis" in *Kathimerini* [The Daily] March 17, 2010.[150] "The Simitis Archive, Another Victim of the Economic Crisis" in *Eleftherotypia* [The Free Press] March 17, 2010.[151]

Just what is this economic crisis that Greeks face? In January 2009, the Greek economy officially tipped into recession and public sector debt reached an all-time high of 97.4% of the GDP. Greece faces a staggering 280 billion deficit and recently borrowed

[149] *Ta Nea* Online: *Ygeia, Drasi, Zoi* (The News Online: Health, Action, Life). "*I Oikonomiki Krisi Ofelei tin Ygeia*!" (The Econmic Crisis Harms Health!) by Martha Kaitanidi. [http://ygeia.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=8&ct=1&articleID=9174&la=1] Visited May 10 2010.
[150] *Kathimerini*. "*Politirio se 400 Xenodohia Logo tis Oikonomikis Krisis*" (Sale of 400 Hotels Due to the Economic Crisis) by Sathis Kousounis. [http://news.kathimerini.gr/4dcgi/_w_articles_economyepix_1_16/01/2010_386995] Visited January 17 2010.
[151] "*Kai to Arheio Simiti Allo Ena Thima tis Oikonomikis Krisis*" (The Simitis Archive, Another Victim of the Economic Crisis) [http://antenna975.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-post_736.html] Visited March 17, 2010.

even more money from the International Monetary Fund and from Germany. Yet the crisis encompasses more than just finances: it has come to influence fundamental beliefs about Greek national identity. For example, the severe lack of economic transparency of Greek politicians caused the European Commission to threaten Greece with expulsion from the European Union. This raised questions about the Europeanness of the Greek nation. And Germans used elements of ancient Greek cultural heritage to insult Greeks for their behavior. For example, the cover of the German Focus magazine showed the statue of Aphrodite holding her middle finger in the air behind a caption that read, "Betrüger in der Euro-famille" [Crook in the Euro-family].[152] Even Greece's glorious ancient past had turned its back on modern Greece, the cartoon suggested.

Leaders of the Greek government strive to keep the nation a member of the European Union. In addition, they devise numerous strategies for coping with the economic crisis. These often include austerity measures said to help eliminate widespread corruption—economic dishonesty characterizes the common business transaction in Greece.[153] For example, many people collect disability checks when in perfect physical and mental health while others continue to collect the retirement checks of a long-deceased family member. In addition, Greece has an overwhelming number of employees in the public sector: in 2010 the number of public sector workers reached 786,000, who receive generous wages, bonuses, numerous personal perks such as free cell phone usage,

[152] Focus. "*Focus Magazin Archiv*" (Focus Magazine Archive) Betrüger in der Euro-famille" (Crook in the Euro-family) [http://www.focus.de/magazin/archiv/jahrgang_2010/ausgabe_8/]

[153] On March 11, 2010 Landon Thomas Jr. wrote the article, "Patchwork Pension Plan Adds to Greek Debt Woes" in *The New York Times*. The author discussed the problems in the Greek social security system, citing numerous examples of professions open to early-retirement that seem to lack proper justification. For example, in Greece radio and television presenters, musicians and hairdressers have the right to retire early with full pension because their jobs are considered hazardous to their health. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/business/global/12pension.html] Visited March 11, 2010.

and very sufficient retirement plans all on behalf of the Greek state. How many of these people receive payment but do not actually go to work is unknown.

The current PASOK government under Giorgos Papandreou has made substantial efforts to root out corruption. But many Greeks wonder about the validity and sincerity of these attempts. For example, in 2008, extraordinary tax evasion by successful doctors in the well-off Kolonaki neighborhood was suddenly made public information over the mass media: doctors had recorded a yearly income of only 365 Euro on their tax returns. Many question whether they faced punishment of any kind. In addition, in an effort to combat insurance fraud on the part of small and large business owners, the Greek government has requested that the Greek people collect receipts from all of their purchases. This has angered the Greek people who claim that this technique does not get to the root of the problem: those committing large-sized insurance fraud will continue to do so by cutting deals and writing false receipts, and innocent citizens have the added burden of collecting receipts for every purchase they make whether it is a pack of gum or a new car. Discomfort with the implication of the austerity measures is rampant: it not only permeates everyday conversation but fuels the numerous violent outbursts by various anarchist groups as well as the many peaceful strikes and demonstrations.[154]

Another common national strategy for dealing with the economic crisis is the rampant privatization of Greek land, goods and companies by foreigners. For example, in

[154] The usual working class argument is that those who embezzled large amounts of money in Greece and those with unjustly large salaries and retirement bonuses should be held responsible for the economic debt. Members of the working class who struggle financially should not have to bear the weight of this economic crisis: The already meager retirement pension of the village grandmother, they say, should not be reduced further. Participants in demonstrations by PAME, the All Workers Militant Front, shout slogans about the unjust handling of the economic debt such as, "*Kamia thisia gia thn ploutokratia, tin krisi na plirose i oligarhia*" [No sacrifice for the rich, the crisis should be paid for by the oligarchy]. The reasons become clear why members of G700 (an active Greek youth group that fights for the concerns of young workers), PAME and others protest the austerity measures that also affect the lowest wage earners and owners of small businesses who have never enjoyed any special benefits.

2007, Germany purchased shares of the Greek telephone company OTE. Yet many disagree with this transaction, citing a loss of national sovereignty. During OTE negotiations, protesters gathered in the central Syntagma Square holding signs that read "No to another German occupation" and some even burned the German flag. Pavlos Vassiliou characterized this transaction as "just another example of the shameless selling of themselves by the Greek people, another example of how Greeks are willing to betray their country in the name of economic profit and Europeanization" (Vassiliou 2007).

In this conclusion, I emphasize the notions of crisis and instability in Greece for two reasons: First, the difficult economic situation became even more acute as my fieldwork research progressed and it began to take a significant toll on the Rebetiki Istoria culture and musicians. Second, the instability evidenced a renewed presence of national identity discussions in Greece: During difficult times, the nation often serves as a fundamental metanarrative that informs the way citizens imagine themselves. Today, many question the future of Greece as a sovereign nation. They ask whether Greece is simply a pawn for larger more powerful nations of the European Union? As such, Vassiliou's defensive nationalism through rebetiko performance resonates with many Greeks who reject government measures to stabilize the Greek economy as corruptive of Greekness itself. In the next section I examine how the unstable situation affects the Rebetiki Istoria culture on a daily basis.

Rebetiki Istoria in Times of Crisis

When I returned to Rebetiki Istoria for my second year of dissertation research in 2008, I had already removed the rose-colored lenses that an emerging rebetika musician

and scholar might wear. The differences I noted in Athens and in Rebetiki Istoria were astounding. Hours of conversation in Rebetiki Istoria now revolved around economic difficulties. The musicians often characterized the situation with the expression "running and never getting there." While Rebetiki Istoria continues to remain open six nights a week as it has for the past thirty years, often very few customers attend on weeknights. Musicians and patrons alike blame the decline in business on a wide range of factors including: economic difficulties; changing musical tastes; the national obsession with soccer that keeps customers at home in front of their television sets;[155] a general lack of interest in traditional Greek culture.

The location of Rebetiki Istoria also provides other challenges. When the common riots and demonstrations take place in the popular Exarcheia Square or at the University of Athens on Panepistimiou Street, police close off Ippokratous Street or even the entire city center for hours on end. In addition to instilling fear in Rebetiki Istoria customers, it physically prevents them from entering the city center. The fact that the PASOK Offices are on Ippokratous Street and that anarchist groups frequently gather outside the offices during the middle of the night and cause disturbances is also detrimental for business.

Ippokratous Street has been affected by the unstable situation in other ways as well. When I left Greece for the United States in 2011, great changes were taking place on this central road. After thirty years, Kostas sold his gyro shop that stood across the street from Rebetiki Istoria. The music store changed ownership and was now selling alcoholic beverages. The *psilikatzidiko* closed next door. Aside from Rebetiki Istoria, the only business that seemed to be flourishing was the Lotto store that even moved to a

[155] On the Saturday evening of the 2009 Eurovision finals, twenty customers came into Rebetiki Istoria. On a usual Saturday night the *magazi* would fill to capacity.

larger location across the street. The post office across the street underwent extensive renovations after its windows were smashed and appliances destroyed during the December 2008 riots; new trash receptacles lined the streets ever since the old ones were destroyed during the riots; Rebetiki Istoria was one of the few establishments that remained unscathed on the outside.

During the last few months that I spent in Rebetiki Istoria, business was slow. Sometimes the musicians went home without having played a single note all evening. There is a general sentiment in the *rebetadiko* that Vassiliou and the other musicians mind their own business but are constantly intruded upon by various people for different reasons. There are a series of somewhat harmless interjections such as various requests for Vassiliou to promote his *magazi* within the European national community. For example, a salesman from Barcelona, Spain asked Vassiliou to list Rebetiki Istoria listed in the European City Guide, an inter-professional guide that would appear on COMPACT DISC-Rom and the Internet. The cost to advertize is 997 Euro per year. And some years ago, the Nea Dimokratia administration sent a representative to teach Vassiliou to incorporate computers into his business an effort to keep his establishment "up to date" and his transactions carefully monitored. The representative enjoyed many evenings of live rebetika performance but never managed to give any computer lessons. Vassiliou regarded this move as an interjection into his business and as an ideological pandering to Europe: rebetika performance in its historically-legitimate form has no use for a computer.

A series of even more imposing interjections have been the cause of much greater angst for Vassiliou. The regular burdens include having to pay copyright for having live

music. Why does he have to pay AEPI when the musicians whose music he performs are long deceased? Who is profiting from their creations? In addition to this, tax agents perform random surprise inspections to make sure that Vassiliou has accounted for each and every customer and drink ordered. A customer who has slipped in unnoticed and does not have a ticket would result in a large fine for Vassiliou.

Perhaps the greatest invasion of all into Vassiliou's rebetiko culture is a brand new law passed as part of efforts to Europeanize Greece. In 2009, Greece implemented a "no-smoking policy" for most businesses. However, those that fulfilled a list of requirements were allowed to cordon off thirty percent of the establishment for smokers with two-meter high Plexiglas walls as well as the installation of an expensive aeration system. Rebetiki Istoria is legally ten meters too large to legally create a smoking section. (It is of no significance that these ten meters are part of a storage closet attached to the bathrooms.) In any case, for a *rebetadiko* this size, Plexiglas walls would ruin the intimate atmosphere and turn customers away. In addition, the old neoclassical building would have to undergo a series of extensive renovations and the installation of an expensive aeration system in order to legally allow customers to smoke inside.

A non-smoking customer is rare in Rebetiki Istoria. On the first Friday night that Vassiliou enforced the ban, nearly every customer left. In general, the ban has been largely unsuccessful throughout Greece. As stated by Nikoleta Moutousi in the newspaper Ta Nea, "The ash trays are gone, the cups are still coming with the antismoking law: the owners declare that smoking is not allowed, but 'close their eyes' to the fanatic smokers, who light a cigarette. And this is how the cups in bars and nighttime

establishments have become improvised ashtrays!"[156] Vassiliou filled out all of the necessary forms to ban smoking but never received the no-smoking sticker from the city. If a customer is caught smoking, he will be fined 50 Euro and the owner will be fined 500 Euro. This has caused an uproar, especially from owners of large bars and clubs who claim that they cannot possibly guard 500 people to make sure that they are not smoking in a nation where over 90% of the population smokes. On July 1, 2010 smoking was banned entirely from all indoor spaces. Had Rebetiki Istoria been ten meters smaller in size, Vassiliou might have paid the thousands of dollars needed to install the ventilation system and Plexiglas walls. This money would have gone to waste with the implementation of the all-inclusive smoking ban.

The specifics of his particular owner's license narrowly exempted Vassiliou and Rebetiki Istoria from yet another catastrophe. A new law was passed in the city of Athens that requires establishments to stop all musical entertainment at 11 pm on weeknights and 1 am on weekends in an effort to control noise pollution. As reported by Nikoletta Moutousi in the newspaper *To Vima* "Nighttime entertainment in Athens was turned upside down by the decision made last evening by the Public Committee of the Athens Dimou. Reactions are strong. Eliza Drakou, co-owner of Tribeca Bar in Kolonaki stated, "The city is playing with us when it tells us that we can keep our businesses open until 4 a.m. but after 11 p.m.… it is forbidden for us to play music! Who would drink his drink in silence? In essence they are inviting us to throw out our own customers in the midst of an economic crisis!" And barman Stathis Vontas commented, "Drink without a cigarette

[156] *Ta Nea* Online (The News Online). "*Tsiagaro Ateleioto… Para thn Apagorevsh*" (Endless Cigarettes… Despite the Ban) by Nikoletta Moutousi. [http://www.tanea.gr/default.asp?pid=2&artid=4535511&ct=1] Visited September 11, 2009.

and now… without music? Entertainment is drying up and in reality nobody wins- not the customer not the owner but neither the worker, since the work hours remain the same we just simply will be forced to work… in silence."[157] Before the specifics of the law became widely known, there was much cause for concern by the Rebetiki Istoria musicians.

A new rise in tax on alcohol has led many suggest to Vassiliou that he raise his prices. How can he make a profit with such low prices? Vassiliou refuses, stating that he does not want to become part of the problem. He says, "What does it add up to, 10 cents per drink? I'm going to charge an extra Euro for that? Or add ten cents to the price? Have people pay 8 Euro and 10 cents for a drink? No, I will bear the weight of it. Or else I am just continuing the chain of no good" (Vassiliou 2009). Indeed, Vassiliou's prices are the same as they were fifteen years ago even though his expenses increased significantly. At times Vassiliou throws his hands in the air and exclaims, "It has just gone too far. There are too many hoops to jump through and it has just become exhausting. And for what good? They [referring to those in power] have just about destroyed Athenian nightlife in any case" (Vassiliou 2010). And Rebetiki Istoria is one of the most successful r*ebetadika*. In fact, on many evenings, musicians from other *rebetadika* who have no business of their own spend evenings at Rebetiki Istoria.

But the difficult economic situation has also entered musicians into a competitive music scene. They constantly advertize on billboards, on television shows, on the Internet, and in journals and newspapers; they record compact discs and they play free

[157] "*Stahti… Ta Metra Gia to Kapnisma*" (Ash… The Smoking Measures) by Nikoletta Moutousi. [http://www.tovima.gr/default.asp?pid=46&ct=60&artid=293919&dt=10/03/2010] Visited October 04, 2010.

concerts in public spaces. In a less warm-hearted manner, they might make anonymous phone calls to learn if Rebetiki Istoria has customers on a particular evening. Or they might even try to jeopardize business by calling and reserving tables for nonexistent customers. Finally, perhaps unknowingly, taverns (restaurants offering food and drink) that also offer live musical performance are also detrimental to Rebetiki Istoria business. Legally, taverns may feature two or three musicians who play without amplification. However, most often musicians and tavern owners ignore these rules and offer elaborate musical entertainment. As a result, taverns have the extra advantage of offering food, music and dancing without having to pay the expensive fees for the proper licenses from the Greek state. In addition, since these taverns offer this musical entertainment illegally, they do not pay IKA insurance for the musicians, high AEPI charges for playing music or a high tax rate for the items they sell: a tavern is taxed at a rate of 13% whereas an "entertainment center" like Rebetiki Istoria is taxed at a rate of 23%.[158] This uneven playing ground proves detrimental for *rebetadika* whose licenses allow them to offer drinks and cold appetizers and require them to pay higher fees to the Greek state.

II. THE CENTRAL ARGUMENTS OF THIS THESIS

The central aim of this thesis was to discuss the complex ideological struggles of Greek modernity through the prism of rebetiko performance. Greek modernity is marked by attempts to define a Greek national identity that encompassed the relationship of Greece and Europe and the relationship of Greece and its ancient past. Throughout the dissertation, I discussed how music has played a central role in

[158] AEPI stands for *Elliniki Etairia Prostasias tis Pneumatikis Idioktisias* [Hellenic Society for the Protection of International Property].

shaping identity perceptions since the founding of the Greek nation. State-promoted versions of Greek music usually catered to foreign European music styles. Those who rejected the Europeanization of Greece promoted a different national music for Greece often influenced by Byzantine or folk tradition. Rebetiki Istoria is an example of an alternative national music that promotes traditional Greek culture.

Throughout the twentieth century, rebetika played a central role in national identity debates. The music, which arose amongst the urban poorest classes during an early stage of mass urbanization, maintained dominantly Eastern and Byzantine musical characteristics and differed from the Western-influenced popular music of the time. As such, throughout the twentieth century, those who identified rebetika as traditional Greek music often rejected the Europeanization of the Greek nation and promoted a different understanding of contemporary Hellenism. This explains how Vassiliou's promotion of rebetika as national Greek music readily speaks to his political and cultural beliefs. His performance is particularly pertinent in contemporary Greece where questions about Europeanization, globalization and national identity perceptions prevail. Vassiliou provides an interesting case study not only because he thinks about these issues so deeply, but also because he gives a musical sound to them.

This work challenges readers to regard rebetika performance against the backdrop of contemporary Greek modernity as a type of "musical ruin." Like ancient ruins, rebetika is a cultural element formed in the past that people endlessly try to incorporate into contemporary culture. How this is done speaks to ideologies about contemporary Greekness. Should rebetika be erased from cultural memory as the

songs of unwanted outcasts of society? Or is rebetika traditional urban folk music that represents Greekness itself? What is the role of rebetika in this time of crisis?

Questions about control over national heritage become more pronounced in instable economic and cultural times. Today, Greeks regularly question whether they should commodify their cultural heritage in order to account for the staggering national debt that has thrown the nation into what international press characterize as a time of crisis. Rebetika is embroiled in this controversy. In fact, many continue to scoff at the music and at the space of the rebetadiko. After an article was published on my research in the leading *Kathimerini* newspaper, a number of readers called Rebetiki Istoria in surprise. Many were openly insulting and called just to express their distaste of rebetika. For example, one phone call to Rebetiki Istoria began this way: "Hello, I am Professor _____ from the University of Athens. This is Rebetiki Istoria where the American woman performs, yes? I wonder, what is a woman with so many degrees doing in such a low-down place as a *rebetadiko*?" (as recounted by Vassiliou 2011). This negativity served as a poignant reminder of the misguided stereotyping of the music and culture that permeates contemporary Greek society.

Points for Further Study

While rebetika has received extensive scholarly attention in recent years amongst musicologists, historians and anthropologists alike, few engage in study of its musical characteristics. A great need exists for a study of rebetiko vocal styles that systematically categorizes the vocal technique and ornamentation style of major singers. In addition, an analysis of the musical aspects of the works of particular composers would provide a

much-needed history of the musical development of rebetika. This could lead to a comprehensive musical description of rebetika that focuses on its various fundamental characteristics such as the use of musical modes, its ornamentation styles, its timbre and the roles of the instruments.

Throughout the development of rebetika, its musical connection with Byzantine liturgy was often cited as proof of the Greekness of the music. Contemporary rebetika musicians continue to cite a direct connection between the modes and chanting style of the Byzantine liturgy and with rebetika songs. As such, a study of the shared musical characteristics is crucial for a better understanding of claims of musical ownership and the Greekness of rebetika. A final musical attribute that deserves further attention is the notion of musical movement in rebetika songs. Mode structure, melodic contour, rhythmic pacing and chordal accompaniment are all closely interrelated and shape the movement and character of the songs. A study of this interworking would advance understanding of rebetiko genre in theory and in practice, further situating the genre between Western music theory and, Byzantine chant, ancient Greek modes and the modes as realized in Turkey and in the Middle East.

In addition to the great need for scholarly publications that focus on the musical aspects of rebetika, there is much room for further examination of contemporary rebetika performance from an ethnographic and anthropological perspective. For example, an examination of gender roles as defined by and as they define rebetiko performance would reveal the persistence of marked gender stereotypes in contemporary Greece. A well-written account would take into account the fact that gender roles are not fixed categories but are rather constantly changing according to numerous factors within the social

context. For example, in contemporary rebetiko performance, gender often determines the instrument a musician plays. Rebetiki Istoria customers were usually awed by my ability to play the bouzouki, seemingly surprised to see a female bouzouki player. For example, one evening a new young female customer called out to the musicians on stage, "It really is so nice to see such a beautiful lady on stage with all of these guys playing bouzouki. It really makes the group stand out." Others were more skeptical about my instrument choice. In general, customers were less impressed by my musical and technical abilities on the violin.

Another useful study could discuss the ways in which gender bears implications on the social and political structure of *rebetadiko* entertainment. Gender determines the way in which male and female musicians interact with the music and with each other. It determines the songs he sings and often determines the command he has over other musicians. Gender roles and stereotypes define the way in which patrons interact with the music as well. For example, a central element of rebetiko enjoyment consists of dancing, and patrons perform their gender through dance in very specific ways. A study that takes into account the performative nature of gender and the way in which it interacts with musical and other identities in Rebetiki Istoria would be a fascinating addition to the limited scholarship on gender in rebetiko performance and gender and music performance in Greece.

Academic research on contemporary rebetiko performance is so limited that a comprehensive list of plausible areas of rebetiko research is impossible to create. Instead, I end by mentioning a few broad suggestions for areas of further research. First, an expanded and comprehensive survey of the repertoire and culture of the various Athenian

rebetadika would provide the basis for a well-grounded discussion of contemporary rebetiko performance in Athens. Using this as a basic framework one could then analyze the commodification of rebetika; the use of rebetika for entertainment; music and sexuality; the Athenian music scene and the prevalence of youth subcultures; the locating of cultural, national and other identities in popular music; how to become and act like a rebetiko musician. In addition to studying the culture of the *rebetadiko*, one could analyze the presentation of rebetika in other areas of Greek culture including on television shows, in concert halls and on compact discs. This could include a survey of the many ways that rebetika is packaged, whether as "songs of the underworld," "songs about substances" or as the "first Greek urban popular song." This would speak to various perceptions about Greek musical and national identities. One hopes that a conscientious scholar would work to eliminate the exaggerated stereotypes that continue to characterize rebetiko music and culture.

III. CONCLUSION

As I left Greece for the United States, I tried once more to place Rebetiki Istoria in the broader fabric of Greek modernity. While difficult economic times and changing tastes are surely affecting Rebetiki Istoria business, it is still the most successful *rebetadiko* in Athens. Could cheap prices be the only cause of its success? A long-time patron, a poet and journalist once posited a different reason:

> Mr. Vassiliou is so successful because he saw the forest and not the trees. He didn't chase after fame, television, recordings. He never ripped anyone off and raised his prices. He didn't change his style or the music. He is stable here… For thirty years he has just done his own thing. Rebetiki Istoria is the only *rebetadiko* in Athens. You can't find another *rebetadiko* in Athens. Those are *laiko*-

> *tsifteteladika* [popular bellydance clubs]. The music the entertainment, the atmosphere, they have no relation to a *rebetadiko*. (2008)

Patrons and musicians alike seem to agree that Rebetiki Istoria owes much of its success to the strong identity Vassiliou has created for himself and for the *magazi*. The bouzouki player Haris once said, "Rebetiki Istoria is a school. If rebetika ever does well again in Athens, if the economy gets better, then everyone will come to Rebetiki Istoria, just like they did in the 1990s" (Haris 2008). Rebetiki Istoria is a school, but unfortunately it relies on the economic situation of its customers: Vassiliou would not be able to promote the music or his national identity ideals without customers. And today, even when business thrives, the musicians engage in much less talk about the music and much more talk about money and about Greece. They are entirely consumed by the situation.

Interestingly, while Vassiliou is very highly praised for his musical efforts, he maintains a complex opinion about his life work. In one of our final conversations before I left Greece, Vassiliou assured me that he would never again open a *rebetadiko* or try to make a profit off of rebetika again: rebetika should be used for personal enjoyment, for playing with friends, for gathering with other musicians in a tavern and playing whatever songs come to mind; it is not a music one can play at the request of others or to entertain others or to obtain personal profit. I wondered what would happen to Rebetiki Istoria once Vassiliou retires. Would any future owner maintain its character, its style and its devotion to early-style rebetika? Would anyone be willing to make the personal and financial sacrifice that Vassiliou makes in order to maintain the integrity of his *magazi*? Can Rebetiki Istoria survive without Vassiliou's presence?

Rebetiki Istoria as a Utopia

Is Rebetiki Istoria a utopia, a safe-haven from the troubles of contemporary Athens? When I first suggested to Vassiliou that it was a kind of utopia he laughed and said, "Utopia? … Rebetiki Istoria is no utopia". But after a moment's pause he continued. "But alright, I guess one could say I am striving to create a utopian…space…in that it rejects or tries to escape all that is wrong with Greek society" (Vassiliou 2007). Indeed, if the term utopia suggests an ideal place that resists the downfalls of modernity, then Rebetiki Istoria fails miserably. It hardly rejects the many aspects of modernity to which Vassiliou is so adverse: for example, Rebetiki Istoria is inscribed in and dependent upon the capitalist system. No matter how low Vassiliou keeps his prices, he is still selling rebetika to his audiences, earning his wages off of this musical form.[159]

But perhaps Rebetiki Istoria is a utopia, if we define utopia not as a place but as a process, as a number of cultural theorists suggest (Gordin 2010; Dolan 2005). In this sense, utopia simply represents a striving for a better world. As Angelika Bammer suggests, it is time to "replace the idea of 'a utopia' as something fixed, a form to be fleshed out, with the idea of 'the utopian' as an *approach toward*, a movement beyond set limits into the realm of the not-yet-set" (Bammer as quoted by Dolan 2005, 7). Rebetiki Istoria is a utopia not for what it is but for what it is not. In other words, it is utopian for the ideals it rejects and how it does so. Accordingly, the Ancient Greek etymological definition of utopia is "no place", emphasizing the idea that a perfect place could never exist.

[159] Vassiliou often claims that he would not have opened Rebetiki Istoria thirty years ago if he had the hindsight he has now. Rebetika should exist for ones personal enjoyment, and should never be sold. For one should not attempt to make personal monetary profit off of the hardships of the early rebetika musicians. Most musicians died in great poverty and having received little recognition of their musical contribution.

Perhaps Rebetiki Istoria is a utopian world of play, a masochistic counter culture that simultaneously emphasizes the downfalls of Greek society and the impossibility of escape. Frederic Jameson believes that "[t]he force of the utopian text…is not to bring into focus the future that is coming to be, but rather to make us conscious precisely of the horizons of outer limits of what can be thought and imagined in our present" (Jameson quoted by Dolan 2005, 13). He suggests that the most successful utopias are those that fail the most miserably (Jameson 2005, xiii). If the best utopias are those that are the least successful, then Rebetiki Istoria surely qualifies, in its decadent striving to escape the negatives of Greek modernity.

Final Remarks

With this thesis, my intention has been to offer a thorough introduction of contemporary rebetiko performance in Athens, Greece. I touched upon a number of musical and socio-cultural issues including music and national identity, music and modernity, utopia, decadence and musical expressions of defensive nationalism. In addition, I listed a series of points of further study for rebetika scholars. I hope to inspire others to study rebetika not as a historical phenomenon of the past but as a vital living tradition with serious implications in the musical and cultural life of Greeks. I believe that those interested in researching rebetika should undertake a fieldwork project in which they learn to perform the music. Not only has participant-research has become the norm in the field of American ethnomusicology but it allows the researcher to engage with the material in a tangible and multifaceted manner. The large Greek-language and

smaller English-language rebetiko bibliography would benefit substantially from additional research of this kind.

Finally, this conclusion provides an opportunity for me to illustrate the way in which my understanding of contemporary Athenian rebetiko culture changed and developed throughout my tenure in Greece. While my initial enthusiasm for rebetika never faded, at the end of my research time in Athens, I returned to the United States concerned about the fate of the music and the musicians I had come to know and care about. During my final research year in Greece, I could no longer remain indifferent the situation. I worried for the future of rebetika and wondered how small business owners could possibly overcome the overwhelming economic challenges. I accompanied the musicians to rallies and demonstrations protesting the nationwide austerity measures implemented in an effort to account for the fiscal deficit. I wanted to tell the world about the difficulties and the injustice that these musicians face. I wanted people to share the sense of chaos and despair that has taken hold of contemporary Greeks and of contemporary rebetika culture. And I dream that one day a financial institution will recognize the work that Vassiliou does in promoting and preserving early-style rebetika culture and support Rebetiki Istoria as a protected cultural heritage site.

I am forever grateful for the years I spent in Rebetiki Istoria, for the unequaled experience of learning rebetiko music and culture alongside some of the finest rebetika musicians. I can only hope that I was able to contribute to the *rebetadiko* as well. The musicians were kind and welcoming through my entire stay and never seemed to quite get over their surprise about my great interest in learning rebetika. My greatest joy came when Vassiliou asked me to serve as the regular violinist in the *rebetadiko* in the 2008-

2010 seasons. When I had returned for my second year of fieldwork I was pleased to find two posters advertizing the Michigan concert on the wall next to the stage. And there, on the wall in the corner of the room amongst the photographs of the greatest rebetika icons, was a black and white photo of me sitting at the musician's table. I was touched and showed my surprise. With a half-smile and a shake of his head Vassiliou said, "Catch the egg and give it a haircut."

APPENDIX 1: Rebetiki Istoria menu with my English translation below.

ΠΟΤΑ ΑΤΟΜΙΚΑ	ΕΥΡΩ
ΠΟΤΟ ΑΠΛΟ	8.00
ΠΟΤΟ SPECIAL	10.00
ΜΠΥΡΑ 500 ml	8.00
ΑΝΑΨΥΚΤΙΚΑ	3.00
ΣΦΗΝΑΝΚΙ	6.00
ΝΕΡΟ ΕΜΦΙ.	3.00
ΦΙΑΛΗ ΟΥΙΣΚΙ - ΚΑΠ	80.00
ΦΙΑΛΗ SPECIAL	90.00
ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΕΣ	
ΤΥΡΙΩΝ	15.00
ΑΛΑΝΤΙΚΩΝ	15.00
ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ «ΡΕΜΠΕΤΙΚΗ»	35.00
ΞΗΡΟΙ ΚΑΡΠΟΙ	5.00
ΦΡΟΥΤΑ	5.00

ΚΡΑΣΙΑ ΛΕΥΚΑ 750 ml	ΕΥΡΩ
ΜΕΛΤΕΜΙ	30.00
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΝΗΣΙΑΚΟΣ	25.00
ΑΕΡΙΝΟΣ	20.00
ΜΑΝΤΙΝΕΙΑ ΜΟΣΧΟΦΙΛΕΡΟ	25.00
ΚΡΑΣΙΑ ΚΟΚΚΙΝΑ 750 ml	
ΜΕΛΤΕΜΙ	30.00
ΑΓΙΩΡΓΙΤΙΚΟ ΝΕΜΕΑΣ	35.00
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΝΗΣΙΑΚΟΣ	25.00
ΑΕΡΙΝΟΣ	20.00
ΚΡΑΣΙΑ ΡΟΖΕ 750ml	
ΜΕΛΤΕΜΙ	30.00
ΔΩΔΕΚΑΝΗΣΙΑΚΟΣ	25.00

SINGLE DRINKS	EURO
SINGLE DRINK	8.00
SPECIAL DRINK	10.00
BEER 500 ml	8.00
SODA	3.00
SHOT	6.00
BOTTLED WATER	3.00
BOTTLE OF WHISKEY ETC.	80.00
BOTTLE OF WHISKEY SPECIAL	90.00
APPETIZERS	
CHEESE	15.00
MEAT AND CHEESE	15.00
"REBETIKI MIX"	35.00
DRIED NUTS	5.00
FRUIT	5.00

WHITE WINE 750 ml	EURO
MELTEMI	30.00
DODEKANISIAKOS	25.00
AERINOS	20.00
MANTINEIA MOSHOFILERO	25.00
RED WINES 750 ml	
MELTEMI	30.00
AGIORGITIKO NEMEAS	35.00
DODEKANISIAKOS	25.00
AERINOS	20.00
WINE ROSE 750ml	
MELTEMI	30.00
DODEKANISIAKOS	25.00
AERINOS	20.00

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