

Politics, identity and popular music in contemporary Greece

Jane K. Cowan

I Introduction

Having arrived in Greece for the first time in July 1975, as a 21-year-old university student, it is hard for me to imagine how music could be viewed, as it long has been within the dominant ideologies of my own culture, as a realm of pure expression divorced from the world of politics and power. Greece at that time was still bursting with the energy released when the dead hand of censorship and repression began to be lifted after 1974, and intoxicated with the sense of future possibilities. All the students that I got to know during that year seemed to belong either to "KKE-exoterikou" (the traditional Communist Party, aligned with Moscow), or "KKE-esoterikou" (the Euro-communist party); and when they weren't engaging their new, rather naive and as yet linguistically unskilled American friend in intense political dialogues, they were playing music: *Romiosini*, *Canto General*, *The Songs of Mauthausen*, *andartika*, *rebetika*, *rizitika*, Savvopoulos. I went with them to their flats and their respective Communist Party youth headquarters, to tavernas, to boîtes and to the parties' youth festivals in massive stadia – and everywhere there were songs which made my friends come alive. In later years, when my visits coincided with the pre-election periods, I marvelled how the very air became a sonic battleground, as tape-recorded theme songs of rival political parties were blasted out from morning till night from local party-political offices, from cars which cruised round the neighbourhoods, and from apartment blocks. During my fieldwork between 1983 and 1985, in a small town north-east of Thessaloniki, I was constantly witness to the ways ordinary people – at wedding feasts or at the annual dances of the town Soccer Club – used songs, whether as a defiant assertion of strength (individual or collective), or as a way to insult, annoy or challenge their fellow townspeople who belonged to a rival political organisation or faction.

One could argue that this pervasive "politicization" (πολιτικοποίηση) of everyday life in Greece, whereby party politics saturates all cultural and social activity, is a phenomenon of the post-dictatorship period; but this, I think, is only partly true. Using songs for political purposes has a much older pedigree. The practice of doing battle in song – and in dance (which I have explored elsewhere at length [Cowan 1990], and will not elaborate upon here) – is rooted in the traditional social and celebratory practices of an oral culture.

This is quite apparent when one considers music-making as a social and cultural practice in the Greek context. In the small villages where the vast majority of Greeks lived until after the Second World War (and where some, of course, still live) music-making was at the symbolic and often *literal* centre of social life. At weddings, baptisms, religious feast days, Apokreas, people came out of their houses and gathered together to feast, sing and dance. Part of being a fully-fledged member of that community was knowing the songs, the steps, the social codes, and the etiquette these events involved and participating in the social reciprocities they entailed.

Phrasing this in slightly more theoretical terms, the cultural and social practices of music and dance involved the construction of individual subjects with specific identities and locations. Conventions of what could be sung, or danced, what instruments could be played, by whom, where, when and how, expressed social distinctions based on age, gender, religion, ethnic group, status and class, and located the individual subject thus identified within various social hierarchies. At the same time, musical practices were themselves sites where subjects could articulate these (thoroughly "constructed") identities, experiences, beliefs, desires, sensations, and where they could also articulate and negotiate their relations with each other. The important point to emphasise is that the subjects constituted by these traditional discourses and practices (here, of music/dance) were also *agents*, with capacities to assert, defend, criticise and protest through their adept manipulation of such forms.

Indeed, because these *were* shared, collective forms which existed beyond individuals and enjoyed a kind of authority, and because they were comprised of metaphors and symbols whose referents were ultimately unfixed, it was possible to use them to

"say" things one couldn't otherwise "say". We need only look at the use of the rhyming couplets of the Aegean: one who had transgressed social codes could hardly expect to escape the barbed – if humorous – innuendo of the couplet singer, yet he (or she) in turn could retort in defiance or counter-accusation (see, e.g., Herzfeld 1979). Or we could consider the ways that women have used death laments (μοιρολογία) to protest not only the metaphysical injustices of death but the social injustices of their position as women, as people like Anna Caraveli have pointed out (1985); or in the case of Mani in the early part of the century, described by Seremetakis (1991), how women used laments to castigate and shame their menfolk and pressure them to seek vengeance.

Traditionally, a song provided a means of both "saying" and "not saying". One could speak through it allusively, allegorically, to comment upon a situation close to hand; such specific meanings of a song were always suggested and negotiated within a particular context of performance and its aftermath, and the processes of exegesis involved a high degree of "local knowledge" (see, e.g., Caraveli 1982, Herzfeld 1979). Meaning might be fixed here, but only fleetingly. Yet one could also take refuge in its ambiguity of meaning, its articulation of seemingly collective sentiments and – though perhaps ingenuously – in the fact that "it's only a song".

The advent of sound-recording technologies, and the widespread dissemination of folk and popular songs through phonographic disks, tape cassettes, radio and television programmes and, more recently, CDs and music videos, has resulted in a greater fixity in the *form* of a song than occurred when transmission was wholly oral. Nonetheless, in many Greek communities these songs have been added to the collective repertoire, and performed using the same etiquette and social-aesthetic codes and practices as obtained within the existing oral tradition. Here, too, what the songs are made to "say" (or "not say") is always negotiated within particular situations.

Yet it is also true that sound-recording technologies had other effects: they expanded dramatically the community which shared songs to that of the entire Greek-speaking world, both within Greece and to Greeks in diaspora, in America, Australia, Northern Europe, North Africa and elsewhere. One could argue that throughout the twentieth century songs have

been critical in the formation of an "imagined community", in Benedict Anderson's (1983) phrasing, of the Greek nation-state, as well as standing as markers of a number of smaller communities – both established and newly developing – englobed within it. Simultaneously, over time, songs have begun to be appropriated by particular figures or constituencies, to become encrusted with certain social, cultural and political connotations, and to be deployed as musical signifiers in arguments about the national body politic.

II *The "political song" until 1974*

I begin my discussion about music and politics in the period from the 1960s to the present by charting the rise and fall of the "πολιτικό τραγούδι". The existence of this term is proof, if any were needed, of the ways music and politics have been intertwined in Greek culture. Yet the term is probably best translated not as "political song" but rather as "oppositional song", in that, although generally associated with broadly left-wing positions, it is not necessarily tied to any well-defined party or ideological line, but rather signifies a protest to the status quo, however that might be defined in a particular context. A "political song" can be sung or cited to express disaffection with relations within a family or a community, or with an international situation, as much as in a national government – the signified is not fixed. Moreover, there is something misleading about the term which invites us to imagine a *restricted category* of song in which specific political messages are wholly contained within the words and music. Some of the songs I examine here *were* composed in this highly intentional way, even if – in the face of censorship – composers used cryptic or metaphorical language to do it. However, these are in the minority. What is more striking is the way the very processes of censorship have, in a Foucaultian fashion, caused "political songs" to proliferate by enabling disaffected listeners to "hear" political meanings – in other words, to insert them – in an endless number of songs.

No doubt the best place to begin a discussion of the "political song" is with Mikis Theodorakis in the early 1960s. Theodorakis wanted to be a "cultural revolutionary" by creating a Greek popular music which was rooted in traditional forms of folk (δημοτική), popular (λαϊκή) and Orthodox liturgical music yet

which drew upon features of Western European classical and light music. His compositions thus often transgressed existing boundaries – they combined, as in the *Epitafios*, orchestral forms with *laika* and *rebetika* (see Holst 1980). Theodorakis seems to have addressed himself to a new sort of Greek who appears in great numbers in the post-war period: the rural migrant to the Greek cities, who has roots in a regional culture but who comes to live and work in a regionally-mixed yet primarily working-class and petit-bourgeois urban milieu. His tunes use rhythmic and melodic forms which are familiar without being exclusive to a particular region, and thus exclusionary; evident in this strategy is both an attempt to create a "national" music, appealing to a wide spectrum of Greek society, and a music which dignifies and celebrates the folk and popular elements at its core.

Theodorakis's politics, in that period, were similarly radical, and long before the military junta took power he found his songs repressed by the right-wing authorities. In 1961 his expressly "political works" were banned by the National Broadcasting Corporation; a film for which he had written the music, *A Neighbourhood, a Dream*, was closed down, and he was harassed by police when giving concerts. After the October 1961 elections, when Karamanlis was re-elected prime minister, all of Theodorakis's works were banned from the radio.

In the following year, Theodorakis became involved in a theatre production of *The Hostage* by Irish writer Brendan Behan. The play explored the Irish experience of British rule; the parallels with Britain's intervention in Cyprus were, nonetheless, plain to see, and the authorities, deeming the play "inflammatory", closed it down. When the left-wing peace candidate, Grigoris Lambrakis, was assassinated in Thessaloniki in 1963, one of the songs from this play about Ireland, "Το γελαστό παιδί" (The Smiling Boy), became associated in the minds of Greeks with that event. This association was acknowledged by the director Costa-Gavras, when in 1969, he made the film *Z* (meaning, of course, "ζει" – "he lives") examining both the assassination and the subsequent official enquiry; he used "Το γελαστό παιδί" as its theme song.

One August morning, before dawn,
going out to take the air,
I saw a girl crying on the flowery ground.

"My heart is broken, the smiling boy is gone."
 Cursed hour, cursed moment:
 our people have killed the smiling boy.

If the reference to Lambrakis's assassination was attached to "Το γελαστό παιδί" by the people of Greece, rather than the composer (who, after all, could not have predicted the event), Theodorakis was not averse to attacking the authorities directly in his songs. During the dictatorship, when all his music was banned from the public media and when people could be arrested for singing his songs in the taverna, Theodorakis wrote the "Songs for Andreas", a political activist held – like Theodorakis – in Averoff Prison for anti-Junta activities. Kept in solitary confinement, Andreas communicated with Theodorakis through tapping on the wall in morse code, and Theodorakis's songs document the interrogation and tortures which Andreas described. In "Το σφαγείο" (The Slaughterhouse), lyrics describing brutality are set to a rousing march:

At midday they beat him in the office,
 I count the blows, I measure the pain.

Το μεσημέρι χτυπάνε στο γραφείο,
 μετρώ τους χτύπους, τον πόνο μετρώ.

Recorded abroad, these banned LPs nonetheless circulated widely in Greece; singing "Το σφαγείο" was a means to express hatred and criticism of the regime directly yet collectively.

Whatever Theodorakis might or might not have intended to say in his songs, the complete ban upon them had the paradoxical effect of making virtually all of his songs "political songs", at least potentially. Where some heard "Βράχο, βράχο τον καημό μου" (My sorrow is a rock) as a simple song of exile (ξενιτιά), others identified it as a lament of one in political exile or prison, an interpretation which imbued the refrain, "When will I see you again, mama?", with a different sort of poignancy. People found it possible to discern oppositional meanings in Theodorakis's musical settings of even politically rather conservative Greek poets. Both the words and the gentle *hassapiko* setting of George Seferis's "Άρνηση" (Denial), for example, serve to emphasise its quality of nostalgia for a chance

not taken, an opportunity not realised. When, in the final stanza, the singer wistfully asserts,

With what heart and breath,
what desire and what passion
we lived our lives: a mistake!
And we changed them.

Με τι καρδιά, με τι πνοή,
τι πόθους και τι πάθος
πήραμε τη ζωή μας: λάθος!
κι αλλάξαμε ζωή

a space is provided for the *politically* (and not just romantically) disenchanted to ponder, yes, we made the wrong choice.

Yannis Markopoulos, though less flamboyant and less widely known than Theodorakis, also crafted "political songs" in this era. In 1971, in the studios of the colonels' Greece, he produced a record of orchestral settings of the Cretan *Rizitika*, a style of traditional unaccompanied song found in Western Crete. Both through the songs he selected and through his collaboration with the much loved left-wing singer and lyra-player, Nikos Xylouris, Markopoulos signalled that these songs of struggling with Charos and of mountain goats cavorting on the mountain side were actually allusions to the political present. One song in particular, "Πότε θα κάμει ξαστεριά" (When will the skies clear?) was unmistakably a call to arms, yet its origin as a rallying cry against the Turks in the late 19th century – and later as one against the German army of occupation – wrong-footed the censor, who may not have wished to be seen prohibiting such patriotic sentiments.

A third figure who must be mentioned in the context of "political songs" is Dionysis Savvopoulos. Though clearly left-wing in his sympathies (then, at least), Savvopoulos was not, like Theodorakis, out to rouse the people to action through his songs. Dubbed the Greek "Bob Dylan" his appeal was always somewhat limited – he was most popular among students and the urban middle class whose experience his songs articulated. His harsh intense voice was reminiscent of Dylan, his melodies drew both on American rock and contemporary Italian balladry, and his rhythms and metres – though they made references to the asymmetric metres of Greek dance music – were often complex and

unpredictable. They were memorable, but not always very singable. His lyrics, in particular, were cryptic, elaborate, full of puns and allusions, and the "voice" was personal, idiosyncratic, anguished, ambivalent, altogether different from the simple, heroic voice Theodorakis employed, following the convention in Greek folksongs generally.

Savvopoulos, too, had to work around the censor from the early 1960s onwards; and this fact no doubt accounts for some of the puns, allusions, and obscurities in his lyrics. A few songs were banned outright, like "Ήλιε, Ήλιε Αρχηγέ" (Sun, Sun my leader); and others, whose metaphors seem surprisingly transparent, slipped through. "Ολαρία Ολαρά", with a tune reminiscent of a summer camp jingle, talks of "snow falling and covering our tent" (the cold, muffling qualities of repression, perhaps) and of "those kids who love little soldiers, horses and wooden swords going wild at these verses" (a swipe, it would seem, at the childish self-importance and bigotry of the police-military establishment). Yet even this song lends itself to other sorts of readings which complicate the oppositional message. Later verses, as Van Dyck (1993) has pointed out, present "a carnival-esque utopia which celebrates confusion" in which victim and victor, oppressed and oppressor, are not clearly distinguished but instead, "irrevocably confused".

Olaria olara
the kids are all around
the Marquis de Sade and a hippy
the murderer and the victim embrace.

Ολαρία ολαρά
γύρω γύρω τα παιδιά
ο Μαρκήσιος ντε Σαντ με ένα χίππυ
ο φονιάς με το θύμα αγκαλιά.

Clearly, Savvopoulos seemed to relish taunting, teasing, tormenting the censor, and indeed, sometimes smuggled in references to the process in the very songs he handed in for vetting. In "Το Θηρίο" (The Beast), for instance, the speaker cheekily complains:

I wrote a story
to tell the peanut gallery
but before it was finished

in came the cens–

Έγραψα μιαν ιστορία
να την πω στη γαλαρία.
Πριν τελειώσει η ιστορία
ήρθε η λογοκρισί–

Yet if on first hearing one understands "the beast" to refer to the censor, the Greek police, or perhaps the repressive state as a whole, here again other interpretations are possible. Van Dyck argues that a close reading (or listening) reveals that while the song begins with speaker *as beast*, it shifts with the speaker *addressing the beast*, and ends by suggesting that, since "such a beast as you are, I even pay your state health insurance", the beast clearly depends on "us" (1993: 49-50). "We" who identify with the speaker in the song are not wholly innocent; to the contrary, we are implicated in the beast's survival. Thus, although both songs can be relished for their irreverent mischief, Savvopoulos can be understood as identifying a more ambiguous political situation. Dissenting from the familiar positing of a Manichean moral universe, Savvopoulos hints that the Greek people's complicity must be acknowledged even as the attacks on the authorities continue.

Much as we saw before with Theodorakis's songs, censorship bestowed a political cachet upon all of Savvopoulos's songs, enabling any listener who wished to insert his or her own political meanings into them. Was "Συννεφούλα" (Little Cloud) really just a love song? Perhaps the lover addressed is "Freedom" (as one young Greek woman suggested to me)? What about those lines lamenting the coming of "April and May without a song, a tear, a kiss"? "This year there's no spring," the song continues – was that 1967, by any chance? By labelling Savvopoulos as subversive, the censor has inadvertently invited *us* to find this subversion everywhere; indeed, invited us to *make* these songs subversive.

It was not only through the songs of these contemporary composers that political sentiments could be articulated. *Rebetika*, the songs of the Greek underworld, were "re-discovered" by young people in this era. These songs had long been condemned by both the Right and the Left: by the Right for their immorality (their references to sex, crime, hashish), by the Left for their politically unenlightened fatalism and

individualism. They spoke of persecution, suffering, fruitless dreams, impossible loves; their tone ranged from bitterness and irony to a jaunty toughness and will to survive. It was precisely these emotional qualities, and the timeliness of their themes, which appealed to the victims of another sort of repression. Moreover, most of the songs were strangely tolerated by these authorities. "*Rebetika* you sang in the taverna, Theodorakis you sang on the road," I was told by a man who had been a university student in those days (though others who lived through that period insist one would not have sung Theodorakis even there!). Through the *rebetika*, as with Markopoulos's *Rizitika*, you could sing about "Cloudy Sunday" and not just be talking about the weather.

Yet it would be wrong to imply that the regime saw no threat in the *rebetika*. In 1968 Ilias Petropoulos was jailed for publishing his landmark book, *Ρεμπέτικα Τραγούδια*, though ironically – again – the controversy merely served to stir up interest in the subject. And the occasional recording was banned. Perhaps the most famous example is Kaldaras's "Νύχτωσε χωρίς φεγγάρι" (Night is fallen without a moon). First recorded in 1947, during the Greek Civil War, it describes a political prisoner – a leftist – spending the night in a prison cell:

A door opens, a door closes,
but the key is turned twice;
what's the kid done
that they threw him in jail?

Πόρτ' ανοίγει, πόρτα κλείνει,
μα διπλό 'ναι το κλειδί,
τι έχει κάνει και το ρίξαν
το παιδί στη φυλακή;

With the regime's prison cells full of young people brought in for interrogation and torture, the lyrics simply achieved too direct a hit.

III The "political song" after 1974

With the demise of the dictatorship in 1974 and subsequent legalisation of left political parties, a newly released political energy was accompanied by a musical "ξέσπασμα", or bursting

out. Previously prohibited songs were sung loudly and jubilantly now in tavernas, on the streets, and at political gatherings. Returning from exile, Theodorakis toured Greece conducting his *Canto General*, settings of Pablo Neruda's poems which alluded to the Chilean dictatorship; his concerts filled stadia with thousands wherever he went. His songs, as well as those of Markopoulos, Loizos and others, became featured at the enormous youth festivals held annually by all the left-wing parties between 1975 and 1982. Other hitherto prohibited songs, like the *andartika* songs of the Civil War period, were researched, re-recorded and re-issued, finding especial popularity amongst the Communist party youth. This period also produced unusual gems, like the recording *Women of the Averoff Prison*, made by women who had been detained for political "crimes" in Averoff prison during the Civil War. These now elderly women gathered together some thirty years after their imprisonment to sing together the songs they wrote commemorating such events as a transfer of prisoners, or an execution. Their songs convey a serenity and unity which strikingly contrasts with the boisterous militancy of the *andartika*.

Alongside the revival of these expressly political songs, folksongs were newly recorded with an eye not only to authenticity in style and instrumentation but also to their reappropriation by the Left in a project of rethinking/redefining what it means to be Greek. This was, after all, a period when left-wing parties strove to repudiate the pro-Western stance of the right through a focus on "our roots" (οι ρίζες μας). Domna Samiou, for instance, a singer of Asia Minor refugee descent who was also active in left politics and who frequently performed in the Communist party youth festivals, began producing a series of remarkable LPs of Greek folkmusic in this period. The vitality and immediacy of the instrumental performances and her remarkable voice, along with vivid album covers which often included full lyrics, attracted a new audience of educated urban youth. Within a different aesthetic but making a similar claim for the relevance of folksong for the present, Vangelis's album *Ωδές* presented Irimi Pappas's spare soprano voice singing "Ο Μενούσης" and "Σαράντα Παλληκάρια" (Forty Young Lads) against a background of synthesiser and folk instruments.

But the most comprehensive musical revival was undoubtedly that of the *rebetika*. Initiated during the dictatorship, it

gathered force in the years after 1974. Its early phase involved literally a search for the old records, in the Monastiraki flea-market or in dusty family storerooms. The search resulted in a plethora of authentically scratchy re-issues of old recordings, compiled with varying degrees of systematicity and care by both small independent companies (like the Falireas Brothers) and the big established labels (EMI-Columbia, RCA). The popularity and geographical spread of this music became evident as researchers found recordings produced originally in studios not just in Greece, but also in Turkey and the United States.

The search for original recordings spawned a small industry of interpreters to make sense of the historical phases and regional variations within this loose (and somewhat inaccurately titled) category of *rebetika*. Aficionados and scholars began to write books and articles analysing the music and social context, to compile collections of songs, to interview the surviving members of this subculture and to produce biographies and autobiographies (see, e.g., Beaton 1980a and 1980b, Butterworth and Schneider 1975, Gauntlett 1982, Holst 1977, Vamvakaris 1973). In the early 1980s a Centre for the Study of Rebetic Song was established in Athens. This flurry of activity raised a number of important questions: what *is rebetika*? Where did it come from? What is its relation to the demotic tradition? How did it change over time and according to the social context within which it found itself? What is its relevance for the present?

In the winter of 1981 a number of small clubs (like Kouasimodo in Kolonaki, home of the remarkable Οπισθοδρομική Κομπανία, or Retrograde Company) began popping up in Athens and a few provincial cities. Here, usually in an intimate setting, ensembles meticulously performed *rebetika* and *συμρνέκα* (songs of Smyrna) learned from the old recordings. It is true that these clubs attracted the educated youth and urban middle classes rather than working people or peasants, who had never really abandoned this *rebetika-laika* music as it continued on its musical trajectory to Kazantzidhis, Marinella and Keti Gray, along with many less gifted performers. The clubs were deemed by some as "κουλτουριάρικα": pretentious, artificial, self-consciously "cultured". As cultural sites they nonetheless manifested the fascination of both performers and audience for two hitherto repressed aspects of Greek historical experience:

the culture of the economic and social margin and that of the Orient.

Whilst the early phase of the revival was concerned with recovering a lost history and re-presenting the treasures found with rigorous care for purity and authenticity, gradually we begin to see amongst composers and ensembles a growing confidence and willingness to experiment. No longer content simply to revive old songs, some start to compose music in one or another *rebetiko* or *smyrneiko* style. One groundbreaking and enormously popular LP of this type was *Η Εκδίκηση της Γυφτιάς* (The Revenge of Gypsiness), released in 1978, with songs by the composer-lyricist team Nikos Xidhakis and Manolis Rassoulis (who have continued to develop within this genre of *neo-anatolitika*, or "neo-Oriental songs") and featuring Nikos Papazoglou. It also features, and was produced by, Dionysis Savvopoulos, and it is he who, on the album jacket, explains the significance of the title, "The Revenge of Gypsiness":

After the war *rebetika* had become a kind of French music with a bit of bouzouki thrown in. The plebs reacted with their own homely style which later defenders of the purity of the race called "Indianish", "Turkish-gypsy-ish" (τουρκο-γύφτικο) or just "gypsiness" (γυφτιά). It's the opposite of *archondorebetika* ("posh" *rebetika*). *Archondorebetika* and *elafrolaika* ("light popular") is *rebetika* wearing a European hat, while *yiftia* is *rebetika* wearing an Eastern hat.

Appealing to a narrower audience perhaps, Nikos Mamangakis's settings of poems by Yiorghos Ioannou on the album *Κέντρο Διερχομένων* (Grand Central Station), produced in 1982, capture the idiom of *rebetika* while expanding its musical boundaries. It is worth noting that this collaboration between composer and poet presents striking differences with analogous projects by Theodorakis: the latter has always emphasised the heroic, majestic, uplifting qualities of contemporary poets like Elytis and Seferis or the dignity of the common man celebrated in Ritsos. Even his musical appropriation of rebetic sounds (such as using Bithikotsis as singer) was oriented toward ennobling this music. Ioannou's poems, by contrast, portray a sleazy underworld of prostitution and homosexuality, yet also the humanity of its people – the songs convey desire, vulnerability, cynicism. Mamangakis uses

rebetic voices and rebetic rhythms like *zeibekiko* and *karsilamas*, though not slavishly, but he combines instruments from different sub-styles of *rebetika* (bouzouki, drums, piano, violi) with strings from the western art music tradition (classical guitar, 12-string guitar, cello, bass). Indeed, one of Mamangakis's signatures is his use of violin which shifts fluidly between smyrnaic, western classical and Stefan Grappelli-ish French jazz styles.

IV *The 1980s: From musical opposition to musical reformulation*

These recordings by Papazoglou and Xidhakis-Rassoulis, by Mamangakis and by others, signal a more general shift in Greek popular music which gathers force in the mid-1980s, significantly, not long after PASOK came to power in 1981. The immediate aftermath of the election was a high-spirited musical triumphalism, with the party's supporters singing "Καλημέρα Ήλιε" (Good Morning, Sun – in direct reference to PASOK's green rising sun logo) at every public gathering or blasting it out on their tape-players. But gradually, with the Left in power, the "political song" as a variety of fundamentally oppositional song began to lose its focus for lack of an object to attack. Interestingly, during the entire period we have been talking about, it is hard to think of even one song which could be characterised as a "political song" of the Right – for the simple reason that they had always been the established power. In the early '80s the Right admitted that its lack of cultural production was a serious problem, and Robert Williams was enlisted to produce for its youth organisation an official theme song, "Ὁ Ὕμνος τῆς Γαλάζιας Γενιάς" (Hymn for the Sky-Blue Generation). It was only later, in 1986, under the leadership of Evert, New Democracy mayor of Athens, that the Right as an opposition force was able to launch an influential cultural initiative.

As the "political song" diminishes in importance in the early '80s, what we see in its place is a proliferation of composers and groups grappling with the problem of how to formulate and to articulate Greek identity and Greek experience within the specific political, social and cultural conditions of the late twentieth century. There is, I would argue, a major shift in the nature of the "politics" with which musicians are concerned

when they play. Hence, the "political song" presupposes, and signals a position within, a Left-Right model of politics, and is itself considered an instrument of protest and emancipation. The songs of the 1980s, by contrast, are oriented toward a more broadly defined cultural politics at a moment when the political map looks less Manichean, more fragmented and more ambiguous; they arise within and reflect a period of bizarre parliamentary coalitions between Right and far Left, and given the contradictory effects of Greece's membership of the European Community, a period of intense debate on the nature and value of Greece's identification with Europe and "the West".

Among the most striking aspects of music of the 1980s is the way categorical boundaries between Greek musical genres – δημοτικά, ρεμπέτικα, σμυρνείικα, λαϊκά, νέο κύμα, ελαφρο-λαϊκά – begin to collapse as musicians raid freely from one or another and create novel combinations. Musicians continue to explore Eastern traditions – though some of them move even further eastward – but there is also among some groups a less slavishly imitative and more creative manipulation of Western popular forms (blues, jazz, rock, disco, rap, even Latin styles). The plurality of musical approaches, which range from authentic reconstructions of forgotten traditions to a post-modern bricolage, is remarkable, and I would like to spend the final part of the present essay exploring a few of these.

Here, I think, one must return first to Savvopoulos, because he stands as a kind of barometer of such political and cultural shifts. Once a major symbol of left-wing opposition, in the years of fervent political activity following the dictatorship's demise Savvopoulos increasingly expressed his distrust and disillusionment with the political "fanaticism" that he saw on the left, particularly amongst members of PASOK. In *Πεζέριβα*, a collection of songs written between 1976 and 1979, he derided the cynical opportunists who used the rhetoric of socialism for personal gain, as in "Πολιτευτής" (Power-broker), yet he lamented equally the idealistic political fervour which, in the song "Για τα παιδιά που είναι στο κόμμα" (For the Party Youth), blinds the young woman he desires to other human passions. His songs and his interviews of this period constantly insisted that this sort of politics failed to acknowledge the complexity of people's lives and to articulate their aspirations. In a 1976 interview in "Έλευθεροτυπία" Savvopoulos confessed:

I have belonged to the Left since 1962. I feel no obligation to give allegiance to any one of the political parties. What really interests me is the signs through which young people express their differences with the machinery of whatever party they belong to. Whenever I see a young Pasoka express doubts, whenever I see a Riga (a member of the Eurocommunist Party Youth) feel likewise, whenever I see some slight melancholy expression flicker across the face of a Kniti (a member of the traditional Communist Party Youth), whenever I see some such thing amongst any of our non-Parliamentary groups, I feel right at home.

Savvopoulos' most belligerent howl of alienation from the politicized society of this period is undoubtedly "Το Χειμώνα ετούτο" (That Winter). His images are visceral – "I want to dance, I want to vomit" (θέλω να χορεύω, και να κάνω εμετό) and "I'm sixteen years old, and I fuck your lycées" (είμαι δεκαεξάρης, σας γαμώ τα λύκεια), though significantly what is best remembered is his defiant anti-political claim: "I'm not PASOK, I'm not KKE, I am what I am and what I sing for you" (Δεν είμαι Πασόκα, δεν είμαι ούτε ΚΚΕ, είμαι ό,τι είμαι κι ό,τι τραγουδώ για σε). But the aggressive style of this song is at odds with the joyous exuberance of most of the other songs on *Τραπεζάκια έξω* (Little Tables Outside), released in 1983, and taken as a whole, the recording strikes a very different chord from *Πεζέρβα*. In "ΑΣ κρατήσουνε οι χοροί": (Let's Keep the Dances), performed to a quick *kalamatiano* rhythm, one finds something quite new: a sentimental optimism that demotic forms (symbolised by the circling dance) might form a basis for a new modern Hellenic culture. As he suggests nostalgically, "Let the lanterns of summer nights cement our friendship, and mix old and varied tracks with the 'rock' of our future" (Και στης νύχτας το λαμπάδιασμα να πυκνώνει ο δεσμός μας και να σμίγει παλιές κι αναμμένες τροχιές με το ροκ του μέλλοντός μας).

We see here and in other songs, like "Τσάμικο", with its klarino and its strong 3/4 rhythm, not only a celebration of folk/popular symbols and of the people united by them (leading some critics to identify a turn in Savvopoulos's music toward λαϊκισμός or "populism") but also an acknowledgement of Orthodoxy as central to Greekness. This album coincided, of course, with Savvopoulos's turn to neo-Orthodoxy, a move that the Greek public found enormously perplexing and difficult to

reconcile with his anarchic left-wing origins; but actually it was only the beginning. In 1987 Savvopoulos shocked the public by cutting his hair and shaving his beard and moustache, in apparent repudiation of his shaggy radical past, commemorating the occasion with an album entitled *Το Κούρεμα* (The Haircut). Its most notorious song was "Κωλοέλληνες" (literally, Greek Assholes) which scathingly attacked the "Νεοέλληνες", the rising middle class who did well economically in the years of PASOK's ascendancy. Since then he has caused numerous minor sensations and Greeks continue to puzzle over the incongruity of his present positions (his apparent support for New Democracy, his pro-military stance, his alleged materialism) with the anarchic Nionio of the '60s and '70s.

Savvopoulos has not really stopped writing "oppositional songs", even though his own politics have changed and, consequently, the institutions he attacks are different. Yet we also see in Savvopoulos an attempt to come to terms with his Greekness, to think about what this entails, what it means. Thus, above and beyond the fascination he evokes as a cultural figure, his musical trajectory reveals a composer whose changing *musical* articulations of the problem of Greek identity reflect both his own idiosyncratic development and those in Greek society at large.

Others have contributed to this musical/cultural debate in the 1980s in quite different ways. Ross Daly, the immensely talented "Κρητικο-ιρλανδός" (Cretan-Irishman), for example, must be credited with two quite distinct achievements, above and beyond the shining example of his impeccable musicianship. First, he has introduced the Greek public to music of the Orient understood in a slightly different and much broader sense than before. More than anyone else he has drawn attention to the Ottoman classical tradition which, he is at pains to point out, was a cosmopolitan, non-ethnic tradition in which Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Turks collaborated until the early twentieth century. He has also introduced instruments and musical styles from further east and south into his ensembles, playing many of these himself: from India, the sitar and tabla, and from North Africa, the percussive bendir and nakares. His second achievement follows from this: that is, in a fashion which might seem paradoxical but which is actually profoundly true to the cultural realities of Greece up until this century, Ross Daly combines a

meticulous sensitivity to the subtleties of regional (and micro-regional) ways of playing (of tuning the strings, of strumming and bowing, of melodic range, of styles of improvisation), all of which he can reproduce with exquisite mastery, with an openness to unusual combinations of instruments.

Although this reflects in part his own personal history of living in various places in the Orient and the influences these cultures had upon him as a musician, Daly insists that such borrowings back and forth amongst the different peoples of this region were entirely commonplace; and that it is only recently that these small nations and peoples located in the Orient have come to follow the West and have thus stopped communicating with each other. This is at one and the same time an argument against the rigidity of the musical purists, and an invitation to a more tolerant and open cultural (and indeed, political) discourse across national boundaries. His position is exemplified in his 1987 album, *Ανάδυση* (Emergence), in which Daly surrounds himself with a truly multi-ethnic group of musicians – Greek, Turkish, Armenian, American, Irish and North African – using instruments of equally diverse origins. It has also been echoed by other musical personalities, as evidenced in the album, *Maria Farandouri sings Livaneli* in which a singer, discovered by and best known for her collaboration with Theodorakis, interprets the work of a Turkish composer, Livaneli, and his compatriot, the poet Nazim Hikmet.

Ross Daly is no purist, but his eclecticism is by and large confined within the broadened boundaries of Eastern or Oriental music. His own compositions show no inclination to transgress the admittedly wide parameters of these traditions; he appears to find within them sufficient scope to express his experiences as an adopted Greek at this moment in history. For others, being Greek involves moving between Oriental and Western, indigenous and imported, cultural sites and cultural practices. Vangelis Yermanos, a singer and songwriter whose music shows influences of Savvopoulos, Italian modern ballads and jazz and whose name would never be associated with *anatolitika*, nonetheless included a *rebetika*-styled *hassapiko*, sung with Sotiria Bellou, on his 1981 album, *Τα Μπαράκια* (Bars). Interestingly, this *rebetiko* song – the final cut – is preceded by a tune as brief as an advertising jingle, accompanied by jazz-style vibes:

How I love going to the bars at night,
to see my friends, to have a drink.
I can't stand coffeehouses, tavernas.

Πώς γουστάρω στα μπαράκια
τους φίλους να δω, και κάτι να πω,
δεν μπορώ καφεενεία, ταβέρνα.

This melancholy rift seems to signal Yermanos's aesthetic allegiance to the culture of the urban West; it is immediately followed, nonetheless, by just the sort of *hassapiko* tune one might hear in the taverna "he" claims to despise. Each musical statement retains its cultural integrity and autonomy; yet they are intimately juxtaposed.

But the musical statements of other Greek ensembles show more ambivalence, or indeed, more self-conscious attempts to bring together East and West. Fatme is one of the most interesting proponents of a "Greek-rock" that is not merely imitative of its American prototypes, but which uses this foremost idiom of a now international youth culture, "rock", to explore Greek realities for the country's youthful generation. A particularly vivid articulation of the pain and confusion yet also regeneration involved in embracing both East and West – symbols that stand for distinct, and often opposing and incompatible, histories, traditions, identities and ways of being in the world – appears in the title song of their 1985 recording, *Ρίσκο* (Risk). Its musical style is orientalist (*ανατολίτικο*) of *archondorebetiko* vintage, with electric piano, a driving, syncopated percussion and an insistent tempo. Its lyrics adopt the trope of a love song, with the singer describing the "two loves battling deep inside me". Rather than choose between them, since he can abandon neither as both inhabit him and indeed, *constitute* him, he searches for a way "to save them, to bind them together with a rhythm, to find a song which accommodates them both". Yet there is no set of rules, no obvious vocabulary to use in producing this synthesis. The song opens with this search for the tools to cope with these two antithetical loves, as the husky, agonised voice of the male singer implores:

Find me words, find me images
find me roads and modes and rules

find me a song to suit me
that embraces them both.

Two loves have made a fool of me
and I've been ruined.
They're always asking for something
and I love them both the same.

Βρες μου λόγια, βρες μου εικόνες
βρες μου δρόμους και κανόνες
βρες τραγούδι να μου μοιάζει
και τις δυο τους ν' αγκαλιάσει.

Δυο αγάπες μου γελάνε
κ' έπαθα ζημιά.
Όλα τίποτα ζητάνε
κ' εγώ τις δυο τους είχα μία.

The loves alluded to are only figuratively women. Fatme enthusiasts insist, and the lyrics seem to confirm, that these tyrannical loves are the music of the Orient and the West. Yet perhaps they can be heard and felt as metonyms for these distinct cultural universes, and invite a more comprehensive binding together of their respective elements. This is not a comfortable process – the one who undertakes it admits to being obsessed, tormented, beleaguered, duped – and it involves, as the title emphasizes, enormous "Risk" of the loss of identity and the death of the familiar self. Yet it is nonetheless a creative and fruitful process:

How it fulfils me, taking this risk
how it torments me, as it regenerates me.

Πόσο τη βρίσκω με αυτό το ρίσκο
και πώς με τυραννά που με ξαναγεννά.

A more comprehensive account of developments in Greek music in the last decade would have to consider what many Greek critics describe as a current "crisis" of the Greek popular song, a phenomenon related as much to the changing structure of the recording industry as to the chaotic political and social conditions of the present period. Disillusioned enthusiasts of an earlier phase of Greek music frequently point out the banality of much of what is now available in record shops and produced on

radio, television and the concert circuit, noting the resurgence of a certain genre of "dog's den" *rebetika* (σκυλάδικα) as well as the promotion of glitzy but vacuous super-singers like the famous "Le Pa" (Lefteris Pandazis) and his partner, Anna Vissy. While this broader musical context cannot be denied, the composers and performers whose work is explored in this paper – though they constitute a minority – represent a proliferation of musical articulations whose heterogeneity is unprecedented within the Greek scene. Moreover, they exhibit a musical inventiveness and eclecticism which attest to the continuing dynamism of their subject matter, the very meaning and experience of being Greek at this particular historical juncture.

Acknowledgements: I would like to express warm thanks to Antonios Rovolis, Artemis Serdaki, Liza Tsaliki and Giorgos Tsiukanis for their essential help in researching this paper, and to Karen Van Dyck for sharing with me her fascinating work on Savvopoulos.

References

- Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso
- Beaton, Roderick (1980a). *Folk poetry of modern Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Beaton, Roderick (1980b). "Modes and Roads: Factors of change and continuity in Greek musical tradition", *The Annual of the British School of Archaeology at Athens* 75, 1-11
- Butterworth, Katharine and Sara Schneider (1975). *Rebetika: Songs from the Old Greek Underworld*. Athens: Komboloi Press
- Caraveli, Anna (1982). "The Song beyond the Song: Aesthetics and social interaction in Greek folksong", *Journal of American Folklore* 95 (376), 129-58

Caraveli, Anna (1985). "The Symbolic Village: Community born in performance", *Journal of American Folklore* 98 (389), 260-86

Cowan, Jane (1990). *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

Damianakos, Stathis (1976). Δαμιανάκος, Σπάθης. *Κοινωνιολογία του ρεμπέτικου*. Athens

Gauntlett, Stathis (1982). "Rebetiko tragoudi as a generic term", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8, 77-102

Herzfeld, Michael (1979). "Exploring a Metaphor of Exposure", *Journal of American Folklore* 92 (365), 285-301

Holst, Gail (1977). *Road to Rembetika: Music of a Greek sub-culture; songs of love, sorrow and hashish*. Limni and Athens: Denise Harvey and Co.

Holst, Gail (1980) *Theodorakis: Myth and politics in modern Greek music*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert

Morris, Roderick Conway (1980). "Greek Café Music", London: The British Institute of Sound Recording

Petropoulos, Ilias (1968). Πετρόπουλος, Ηλίας. *Ρεμπέτικα τραγούδια*. Athens (enlarged and revised 2nd edition 1979)

Seremetakis, C. Nadia (1991). *The Last Word: Women, death and divination in Inner Mani*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Vamvakaris, Markos (1973). Βαμβακάρης, Μάρκος. *Αυτοβιογραφία*. ed. A. Kail. Athens

Van Dyck, Karen (1993). "Power, language and the discourses of the Dictatorship", unpublished ms