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## Bodies in the Margins: Refiguring the Rebetika as Literature

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BODIES IN THE MARGINS  
Refiguring the Rebetika as Literature

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Submitted April 25th, 2020

## Abstract

This thesis engages a literary analysis of a corpus of songs and recordings known as the *rebetika* (sing. *rebetiko*), which prospered in the port districts of major cities throughout the Aegean in the early 20th century. Engaging the *rebetika* as literary texts, I argue, helps us understand how they have functioned as a kind of pressure point on the borders between nation and Other. Without making unprovable biographical claims about the motives of the music progenitors, I examine why so many have reached for the *rebetika* as texts with which to articulate various political and cultural desires. Using a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that includes Elaine Scarry, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Mark C. Jerng, and Judith Butler, I track the ways the *rebetika* are implicated in the social marking and rendering of different kinds of bodies. I argue that through the devices of metaphor and metonymy, the songs, recordings, and lyrics of the *rebetika* preserve the memory of state violence and the experience of bodies in exile and, in doing so, clashed with contemporaneous processes of negotiating Greek national identity and policing the geosocial borders of "Europe." I also examine the kinds of meanings and body formations that secondary materials about the *rebetika* discursively produce. I ultimately argue that the *rebetika* provide a useful narrative vocabulary for talking about different kinds of marginality.

"Listening night after night to the rembetika is like being tattooed."

—John Berger, *To The Wedding*

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## Introduction: Reading the Rebetika

The term "rebetiko" most commonly describes a subculture of musicians formed in the lower-class and refugee port neighborhoods of major cities around the Aegean, including Athens, Thessaloniki, and Smyrna<sup>1</sup> in the early 20th century and through the 1930s (Tragaki 25). Scorned by the state and much of the elite class writing in the press at that time, these musicians, called *rebetes*<sup>2</sup>, developed a musical style that was uniquely syncretic, blending musical traditions from all over the Mediterranean, including Turkish and Levantine influences, but featured most principally the *bouzouki* and *baglamas* (Gauntlett 2018, 110). In the context of a post-Independence Greece that was, on an institutional and civil level, configuring its relationship to Europe, these songs and the people who produced them were a subject of controversy, with many in the press calling for their censorship (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 96)(Sarbanes 19). In defiance of the Greek political and religious establishment, the police, and much of the media, many of these musicians adopted a distinctive countercultural aesthetic that revolved around the figure of the *mangas*, a word whose nuances are difficult to capture in English but might be compared to the terms "spiv" or "wise guy" (Sarbanes 19). The *manges*<sup>3</sup> embodied a kind of urban outlaw, one whose proclivities for gambling, hashish smoking, fighting, humiliating the police and, of course, playing and enjoying controversial music frequently landed him in prison, and for this reason, rebetiko frequently gets described as "the music of the underworld" associated with varying degrees of criminality (Anagnostou 292). As I will discuss both momentarily and later in

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek name for what is modernly Turkish city of Izmir. This name was used until around the 1930s, following the recapturing of the city in 1922 by the army of Kemal Atatürk, which ended the Greek occupation of the city that had been in place since 1919 (Encyclopædia Britannica 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Note this spelling change, and all others of Greek words reflect plurality and gender. This thesis may use, at separate points, "rebetes" (masculine plural), "rebetis" (masculine singular), "rebetissa" (feminine singular), and "rebetisses" (feminine plural).

<sup>3</sup> This thesis uses, at separate points, "mangas" (masculine singular), "manges" (masculine plural), "mangissa" (feminine singular), and "mangisses" (feminine plural).

this thesis, these are representations we must take with a grain of salt, understanding that they are, in part, part of a certain mythology.

Myth or reality, however, these representations do help to explain the number of times rebetiko has been banned or censored since its zenith period in the 1920s and 30s. In 1936, a ban was placed on rebetiko for the first time by the government of General Ioannis Metaxas (Tragaki 58). The music flourished anyway, but at the cost of tense relations between the rebetes or manges, producing a healthy archive of songs written in and about the prisons (Holst 30-32)(Tragaki 30-38, 58-59). The years 1941 to 1946 saw Nazi Germany's occupation of Greece, and while some clubs remained open, the occupation government again imposed a censorship on recording and broadcasting activities in 1943 (Holst 66)(Tragaki 63). These years were plagued by acute food shortages and poverty that worsened in the subsequent Civil War years (1946-1949), marked by some of the most atrocious crimes and widespread terror as prisons swelled with political prisoners and the Greek Islands became massive centers of torture and degradation (Holst 63-64). During this time, much of the country starved, and rebetes like Kostas Skarvelis and Panayiotis Toundas were among many who died (Holst 63-64). In 1967-1974, a military junta assumed power in Greece with American support, during which tens of thousands of Greeks went into exile and leftists were systematically sought out, imprisoned, and tortured (Gerstenzang and Boudreaux 1999). During this time, a ban was once again placed on rebetiko, which the Colonels (leaders of the military government) deemed corrupt (Papaeti 142-143). It was also during these years, in 1968, when the government imprisoned Elias Petropoulos, a leftist and an essayist, for publishing the first comprehensive anthology of the rebetika songs, effectively spurring the still relatively small field of rebetiko studies (Gauntlett 2018, 111).

It is here that I want to take note of a few points of contention within the field. I will present the nature of these debates before clarifying the approach that I take in this thesis. The first is with regard to "rebetiko" as a classifier of genre. The flimsiness of "rebetiko" as a classifier has been a point of critique for Anagnostou, who points out that the term was used pretty rarely during the first half of the twentieth century, which is when the music it describes was being produced (287). She writes that its use was reinforced during the 1960s revival of the music and used widely ever since, both locally and abroad (Anagnostou 287). In this sense, it is important to recognize that the "rebetiko" scholars refer to now is an entirely fabricated categorization whose usage is very much linked to the recording and subsequent global commercialization of rebetiko from around the 1920s onward, with American companies like Columbia promoting the use of the term in order to sell records (Anagnostou 286). The mass irony of all of this, of course, is that while rebetiko was being made into a profitable Greek export abroad, the progenitors of the music were still largely confined to the margins of Greek social life, imprisoned, or in exile (Sarbanes 19). With respect to the scholarship and the notion of "genre," however, it raises a critical question: how do we determine what can be called "rebetiko" when this term was not functionally contemporaneous with the music it describes?

Anagnostou writes that "rebetiko" tends to have two categorical functions that are related to the way its chronology is being imagined. Some use it to designate a subcategory of *laïko* or popular music<sup>4</sup> and distinguish it from other interwar<sup>5</sup> categories like Smyrneïko (Smyrna), amané or amanedes (vocal improvisational song), or demotika (regional and most commonly rural music in Greece)(Anagnostou 284). However, "rebetiko" just as frequently describes all

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<sup>4</sup> In the sense of being produced for and by a particular social class of people, rather than in the sense being widely known.

<sup>5</sup> Refers to the period between the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) and the end of the Second World War (1939-1945).



popular music of the interwar era—this usage prevails in much of the written English scholarship and is further complicated among the recordings, which are frequently marketed as spanning broad and arbitrary periods of time such as 1931-1957 (*The Outlaws in Rebetiko*, Hellenic Record 2004) or 1945-1960 (*The Rebetiko Songs in America, Vol.3*, FM Records 1993), well past the interwar period typically associated with rebetiko. The complication that emerges here is the interrelatedness of many of these subcategories—for example, the fact that the musicians who arrived in the mass migration of refugees from Smyrna in 1923 brought with them styles that were indispensable to the rebetiko sound (Gauntlet 2018 110). There is also considerable disagreement about the upper chronological terminus of rebetiko music, with some—including Anagnostou, it would seem—locating its decline around 1950, after the end of the Second World War when it was replaced by laïko (287). Economou argues for a periodization that accounts for the transformation of rebetiko into laïko during the 40s and in doing so arguably prolongs the life of rebetiko a bit more, imagining it as a lineage (17). The challenge becomes how to talk about the signified object of "rebetiko" while also recognizing the significant transformations it has undergone in its history.

The second and related point of contention is about correctly classifying the interior essence of the rebetika, a problem that is largely exacerbated by the relatively small amount of ethnography written about the subject. Many researchers have been concerned with answering the question of accounting for the intent behind the subversiveness of mangas culture, and how political the rebetes were as both individuals and as a subculture. To be sure, to the extent that rebetiko contained strong historical traces and, as we have seen, has origins in Ottoman music-making, it reinvigorated the cultural anxieties about whether Greece "belongs to the West or to the East," with Europhilic-minded individuals viewing the rebetika as "an embarrassing oriental

relic" (Gauntlett 2018 110). For many mainland Greeks, the arriving refugees from Smyrna represented a corruption of Greekness, or a "Turkofied" version of themselves who still bore too many traces of the Ottomans—Turkish language, Levantine mercantilism (Pappas 353). In this context, the performance of music that blended Greek language with traditionally eastern modalities and rhythms was a politicized act, as was the introduction of dance rhythms that became closely aligned with the rebetika repertoire, like the Turkish *zeibekiko* and *tsifteteli* (ibid 353-354). The perceived cultural threat of the rebetika came to a head in 1936, when the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas imposed the first censorship on rebetiko, both for its lyrical reference to illicit activity like drugs and gambling, as well as its Ottoman influence (Gauntlett 2018 110).

While there was demonstrably a cultural *politicization* of the rebetika, there exists a range of opinions about whether it was, finally, a political genre, and if the musicians themselves were acting with a political motive. In scholar accounts of the genesis period, there is relatively little certainty about whether the very notion *rebetia*, or the quality of being a rebetis, had a political valence. There is, for example, disagreement about the physical posturing the rebetes engaged in through their attire. Sarbanes suggests that rebetis mixing of Western and Eastern garments—wearing, for example, the *zonari* (Turkish cummerbund) with a European-style waistcoat, kohl on the eyes, and Turkish-style moustaches—was a deliberate choice to resist the pervasive hegemony of European cultures in Greece (19-20). She reads, similarly, the mixing of upper-class and proletarian styles of dress—bow ties, collars, and *republika* hats paired with more modest and proletarian elements, likely taking an analytical cue from Petropoulos, though the latter romantically insists that "The rebetes pre-dated both the police and the proletariat" (ibid)(Petropoulos 46). Holst, by a slightly different nuance, describes what she sees as a general

"eccentric disregard for convention," and corroborates a frequently cited story of the Athenian *koutsavakhides*, predecessors of the magkes, who would wear their jackets over the left shoulder in defiance of the infamous police chief Baraktaris, who would order the unused sleeve to be cut off (Holst 56). Gauntlett, however, cautions against the tendency of "rebetologists" toward a "romantic sociology" that attempts to provide scientific descriptions of actual people (Gauntlett 2018, 108). He writes, instead, that the rebetis is not a statically defined figure, but rather a "rhetorical construct" that performs a display of indifference to conformity and conventional respectability (ibid). In essence, that (he)<sup>6</sup> is a mythological figure, rather than a historical one.

Gauntlett's assertion is the jumping off point for the angle of this thesis, which is less concerned with the musicological origins and taxonomies of the rebetika, and more concerned with how the rebetika have functioned as a *text*, essentially, as a body of literature. I propose an engagement of the rebetika as a *literary genre* that witnessed the shifting dynamics of the Greek nation and, by extension, the delineation of the "West," but through the mode of individual human experience—diaspora, displacement, and social marginality. By engaging the rebetiko this way, I am implicitly arguing that "rebetiko" as a genre term is the most salient and useful when it most strongly connotes the fact of the social marginal space shared by refugees and local musicians alike. My analysis in the first chapter tracks the literary preservation of the exilic space as rebetiko became recorded and commercialized.

It is this transition into a commercial rebetiko after the turn of the century that enables us to look at it broadly as a text. As Gauntlett points out, the shift from a local, predominantly oral musical tradition to the commercial rebetiko that grew out of it was not without compromise, and

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<sup>6</sup> Imagining rebetiko as a text, I argue, creates new possibilities for imagining the rebetis and challenges the standing tendency to imagine **him** pretty exclusively (with some notable exceptions, see Petropoulos) as a cis-gendered heterosexual man. Chapter three looks at re-adaptations of the rebetis/mangas figure, as well as the ways male narratives in the rebetika are privileged over those of the women involved in these musicking communities.

certainly raises questions about the authenticity of the experiences these songs claim to represent (Gauntlett 1985, 70-73). The oral tradition of rebetiko was located in a landscape that, as mentioned, researchers tend to term the "Greek Underworld<sup>7</sup>," predominately consisting of the hashish-den, the gambling dives, and the prison that came to be associated with rebetis or mangas culture (Tragaki 49). The participants played for each other in a style that was relaxed, un-professional, in a setting that was private and relatively unorganized (Gauntlett 1985 55-73). Lyrics and melodic structure were mostly formed on the spot and were influenced by the interaction of players in the space (ibid). As these spaces were mostly only accessible to men, playing songs and writing lyrics for each other, there is a certain homosocial quality that characterizes the oral tradition of the rebetiko, one that was mostly preserved in commercial Piraeus-style rebetiko. Smyrna-style rebetiko, by contrast, had more female musicians and singers.

The shift to performing before an audience rather than a group of familiars changed the nature of the rebetiko, which was also impacted by the increased commercialization of these recordings into the 20s and 30s. The performance of these songs for any reason other than "spontaneous impulse to song" produced a more stylized and exaggerated account of the mangas experience that we might think of as the transition from oral to written storytelling; in essence, the transformation of the mangas into a literary figure (Gauntlett 1985, 73). Besides the entrance of rebetiko into the cafe-amans demanding a certain consistency in performance, the prominence of wax-cylinder technology also limited performances to 3-4 minutes, limiting improvisation generally and eliminating the *taximi*, an extended improvisational form connected to the Ottoman tradition (Tragaki 55). Yet as lyrics became more static, it more firmly developed a

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<sup>7</sup> Though the inherent association of rebetiko with this landscape has not been sufficiently interrogated; see Chapter One, Section One, *Zaimakis*.

repertory of songs that shared thematic commonalities, developing, essentially, a literary archive. As rebetiko developed an audience, it followed that it developed a stronger aestheticism. The song became identifiable by a handful of themes and characters, in addition to musical flavor. It is in this shift to the public sphere that we might study the mangas/rebetis as a character, the protagonist of a particular literary tradition, upon which cultural desires could be projected.

An engagement of rebetiko as a text also contends with the problem of the political, creating possibilities to read the rebetis as a *literary figure* and a container for what may amount to being political, without agonizing over the biographical verities of the rebetis as a *historical figure*. Like Gauntlett, I agree that if the scholarly intent is to provide a biographical analysis of the rebetika, we should be skeptical of romantic historicizations of the rebetes that cast them as anti-establishment actors with a concise political text. At the same time, as a literary scholar, I subscribe to the notion that the text, finally, has a life of its own. A rebetika-as-literature approach allows us to acknowledge the meanings the text takes on as an independent entity in the world; that the motives of the rebetis as a literary figure are distinct from the motives of the rebetis as a historical figure, and that they merit consideration in their own right. It also makes space for the way the text thrives in the imaginations of the listener; the way our own needs and emotions figure into and inform our reading; the way heartache, too, can be political.

It is fitting that in 1922, that same year in which Smyrna burned to the ground, that across the Mediterranean in Granada, Federico García Lorca was delivering a fiery lecture in defense of the Andalusian *cante jondo*, or deep song, to an elite class of intellectuals that, too, associated its eastern qualities with a certain cultural shamefulness. "Notice, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the transcendence of deep song, and how rightly our people called it 'deep.' It is truly deep, deeper than all the wells and seas in the world, much deeper than the present

heart that creates it or the voice that sings it, because it is almost infinite. It comes from remote races and crosses the graveyard of the years and the fronds of parched winds." (Lorca 10) Lorca's love for cante jondo had less to do with providing an accurate account of the lives of those producing the music and everything to do with the what cante jondo, as a text, reflected about the human condition.

In the same vein, I argue for an engagement of the rebetika texts not as autobiographical artifacts, but rather as fictions that, like many fictions, frequently refract back to their reader some glimmer of truth. These songs are, at their core, about surviving. They are rooted in experiences that are unknowable to us beyond the familiarity of their humanity.

Lorca wrote, "It comes from the first sob and the first kiss."

\* \* \*

The three chapters of this thesis all approach rebetiko as a body of literature and explore the nuances of thinking of it as a genre. Chapter one looks at the classical period of the rebetika and the post-Independence prehistory that enabled its development, particularly the inciting event of the population exchanges in 1923. It examines the rebetika as a genre witnessing and contending with the political and cultural configuration of Greece in relationship to Europe, and the realities of diaspora, state violence, and displacement. Chapter two looks at adaptations of the rebetika, and the way texts following the classical period of the rebetiko speak about it; the kinds of meanings and symbols that get attached to the rebetika through the genre of works that reference and claim to represent them. In particular, it looks at the way rebetiko has been implicated in a discourse invested in an "oriental" strain of Greek identity and the way this has

been weaponized during particular moments of history as a tool of resisting cultural hegemony, though with perhaps foreseeable problems. Finally, chapter three examines the rebetika as offering a useful language for speaking about different kinds of marginality and considers the artistic utility of a radically queer rebetiko in a contemporary moment of austerity politics and violent neonationalism.

## Timeline

Note: Recognizing that this thesis covers a substantially broad period of time, I am providing the following timeline, from Gauntlett (1985) with some added information.

1. From the mid of the 19th century to the 1920s, rebetiko is a non-commercial oral tradition. Café-amans, an offshoot of the French café-chantant, featured companies of Jewish, Armenian, Smyrnaic<sup>8</sup>, and Roma musicians who played music featuring the lute, the kanun, the zither, and the clarinet, as well as gutturalizations and vocal freestyling (Tragaki 5, 7).
2. 1920 to 1936: first recordings and personal compositions. A substantial evolution develops following the population exchanges of 1922, giving way to two major and interrelated strains of rebetiko: the Smyrnaïka (from Smyrna, featuring instruments like the violin, the lyra, the santouri or kanun, the oud, the mandolin/mandola, and the guitar, as well as incorporating elements from the amanedes tradition (Pappas 364)) and the Pireotika (From Piraeus, principally featuring bouzouki, baglamas, and the male voice (Holst 51-61)).
3. The Metaxas' regime's imposition of censorship in 1936 to the invasion of Axis allied military forces in 1941. Despite the censorship, rebetiko was still produced and recorded outside of Greece.
4. 1941 to 1946: German occupation of Greece (World War II) and the suspension of commercial recording.
5. 1946 through 1950s: In the wake of the terror of the Greek Civil War from 1946 to 1969, there is a demand for optimistic and light music that would help repair the social fabric

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<sup>8</sup> Greeks from Smyrna or Asia Minor.



and lift spirits (Economou 21-23) Transformation of rebetiko into laïko and the emergence of *arhondorebetiko*, or rebetiko for the bourgeoisie.

6. 1960s to 1970s: revival of rebetiko music in urban intellectual circles, in part in response to the censorship of rebetiko/laïko music Regime of Colonels military government in place from 1967-1974.
7. 1980s to today: The second rebetiko revival, in which the new socialist government of Prime Minister Andreas Papandhreu appropriates and leverages the rebetiko, in part spurring a new wave of recordings and the re-entrance of rebetiko into nightlife, and the kind of commercialism that surrounds the rebetika today (Tragaki 130-136).

## Chapter One: The Bodies in the Margins

"Rebetiko" as a term is most commonly associated with a period of music that followed the 1923 population exchanges and the influx of refugee musicians into Greece's urban centers like Piraeus and Thessaloniki. Its genesis, however, is contiguous with a longer history of lower-class music-making communities that is inextricably bound up in the development of Greek national identity following independence from the Ottoman Empire. As we will see, the public debate about these "oriental" strains of music was critically linked to the negotiation of Greece's geosocial relationship to Europe. The attention to music during these post-independence years make Christopher Small's term *musicking* particularly useful throughout this section, in thinking about music not merely as object, but as an act that "establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships," within which "the meaning of the act lies" (13). The fact that rebetiko, in some ways, grew out of these post-Independence musical styles is important, because this means that the kinds of debates these styles sparked inform how we read the musicking content of the rebetika; stated differently, attending to these precursory styles helps us understand what it means to "do" rebetiko. For the purposes of this section, the musicking activities, relationships, and controversies that occurred during the post-Independence years (1832-1920s) might be thought of as a kind of rebetiko *pre-history*, one that critically shaped the later discourse about the rebetika and continued to do so as late as the 1970s.

### *"oriental" music and the making of national identity*

After Greece gained independence from the Ottomans in 1832, the subsequent processes of formulating a national identity and "europeanizing" Greece placed music under the cultural microscope, particularly musical that were seen as linked to the former Ottoman Empire. These

cultural debates played out with varying stakes over several loci—namely, the emerging French-imported café-chantant scene, local newspapers, theatrical traditions like the musical *komeidhylio* genre and the *karaghiozis* shadow puppet theatre, and finally, the Church (Gauntlett 1985, 56)(Tragaki 5-7). The actual musicians of the controversial styles were rarely a part of these mostly-written debates, as illiteracy was fairly widespread at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries (Tragaki 3). Consequently, the discourses that shape the tradition of these precursory styles, as well as the rebetika in later years have their origin in elite and socially powerful circles. This is important to note, especially in consideration of the absence of ethnomusicological study of both the rebetika and the styles that preceded it. Even modernly, much of the rebetika I and others can study are actually discursive representations in the Foucauldian sense, meaning that which is presented as "knowledge" about the rebetika has been formed within a system of power (Hall 47-51).

Returning to these post-Independence years as a site of scholarly inquiry can be a critical part in exposing these knowledge productions. For example, Zaimakis's study of rebetiko musicking in the Lakkos district of Heraklion, Crete, suggests that precursory styles flourished in lower-strata brothel and port neighborhoods, which evolved into the more recognizable forms of rebetiko in the 20s and 30s (6). However, in the case of Lakkos, there is rather significantly the sense that the music preceded the proliferation of illicit activities. The 'Decree on Brothels' was issued by the Cretan Autonomous State in 1900, and it restricted prostitution houses to certain areas within the city limits, where it would not be visible or threatening to the more elite classes (Zaimakis 7). The rendering of Lakkos into a locality of illicit entertainment was also influenced critically by the presence of British soldiers, where the economy of musical entertainment was able to flourish largely because of British patronage of the brothels (ibid).

This critically shows the involvement of local government in the regulation of where these musical forms were permitted to exist—and by extension, the attempt of the state to corral socially undesirable activities into lower class neighborhoods, effecting a form of intra-state exile. It also, notably, has the effect of blurring the spatial boundaries between what might separately be licit and illicit activities. This intermingling potentially makes the illicit seem integral to the aestheticism of a developing social network of musicians while obfuscating the involvement of the state in the stigmatization of a certain class of people. While Zaimakis's is only one case, it does raise questions about the discursive tendency to associate rebetiko and its eastern precursory styles with the criminal underworld. Almost all of the scholarship discusses rebetiko's aesthetic association with either criminality or this mythical "underworld" landscape, but aside from Zaimakis there is relatively uncritical acceptance of this association as inherent to the culture of rebetiko. As the study of rebetiko continues, there is a need for both a healthy skepticism about the inherency of criminality to rebetiko's aesthetic, as well as an examination of the state as an apparatus that critically defined the boundaries of class in the neighborhoods in which rebetiko flourished.

Recommendations aside, what Zaimakis's study makes evident is that the post-Independence years have a critical role in shaping the later discourse about rebetiko, when "rebetiko" becomes a salient musical category. I return now to the sociohistorical processes that defined these post-Independence years. The debate about the presence of "oriental" music in Greek culture operated microcosmically, or perhaps even symbolically, for larger Enlightenment-era processes of negotiating national identity and "Europeanizing" Greece. Grigoriadis writes that Greek nationalism followed the lead of French republican nationalism in conceiving of a voluntaristic idea of national identity, but only within the confines of the *Rum*

*millet*, or the Christian populations of the Ottoman empire (168). As the process of carving out national identity progressed, Enlightenment figures like Adamantios Korais reinvigorated the concept of "Hellas," which represented a former, ancient, and "pure" culture that Greece had to return to by ridding itself of all Ottoman and Byzantine influences (ibid 169). Aside from the debate about the Greek music, there were concurrent efforts to "purify" both language and religion. Korais advocated for a reform that would rid vernacular Greek from Ottoman and Byzantine influences, in the form of the language that came to be known as "katharevousa" (ibid 169). Later, in his work "History of the Greek Nation," Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, an influential historian of the 19th century, attempted to reconcile ancient Greek and Byzantine historical legacies by synthesizing Hellenism with Christianity, and by extension, Orthodoxy (ibid 169).

While not directly tied to music, both these religious and linguistic efforts toward creating a homogenous national identity were not without consequence for the acceptance of the kinds of music that preceded the rebetika. The *café-aman* tradition, speculated as a kind of hybrid between the French cabaret tradition of the *café-chantant* and the Turkish *mani kahvesi*, typically featured companies of Jewish, Armenian, Smyrnaic<sup>9</sup>, and Roma musicians who played music featuring the lute, the kanun, the zither, and the clarinet, as well as gutturalizations and vocal freestyling (Tragaki 5, 7)(Gauntlett 1985, 65). The *café-aman* varied greatly in language—"Turkish and Arab tunes with Greek, Turkish or Arab lyrics, Greek traditional songs (from Ioannina, Morias, kleftika, etc.), urban folk songs of the great Mediterranean ports, arvanitika (of the Arvanites ethnic group), Rumanian (of the Roumanovlahoi ethnic group, also known as

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<sup>9</sup> Greeks from Smyrna or Asia Minor.

Gekidhes), Bulgarian and Egyptian music" (Tragaki 12). In this sense, one can see how these questions of music, language, and religion are all delicately intertwined.

Further, there were high stakes for the elite classes attempting to regulate these cultural categories. The post-Independence years were marked by cultural anxieties about negotiating a nascent category of Greek identity first in relationship to the former Ottoman rulership, and then later in relationship to other emerging nations—Albania, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia—following the Balkan Wars (1912-13)(Tragaki 13). Much of the Mediterranean offers case examples of why our modern acceptance of "naturally discontinuous" spaces, countries, and cultures is problematic, and the post-independence years in Greece are no different (Gupta and Ferguson 43-44). To apply Gupta and Ferguson's notion that production of difference is an indispensable tool in the creation of "places" as opposed to "spaces," we see in these years a political attentiveness to delineating the "place" of Greece from other nascent Balkan counterparts (ibid 39-40).

The formulation of Greece as a unique geo-cultural "space" arguably culminated in the promulgation of the "Great Idea" (*Megali Idhea*), which weaponized the reinvigorated concept of "Hellas," or a former great Greek civilization, for a colonial project of expansion. First introduced by Prime Minister Ioannis Kolettis in his inaugural speech of the first Greek Constitution in January of 1844, the "Great Idea" was aimed at the "'re-civilization' of the Near East through the expansion of Greece" (Grigoriadis 169). The idea was to recover Byzantine territories lost to the Ottomans, restoring a former "Hellenic Empire" (ibid 169). In view of this project, negotiation of a "Hellenic" national identity naturally emerged from the production of difference between Greece and the former Ottoman Empire, a dichotomy that was reinforced by Europe's philhellenism and the expectation of Greek assimilation into Europe following the

assistance of Britain, France, and Russia in securing Greek independence and instituting a monarchy under King Otto of Bavaria (Sarbanes 19)(Holst-Warhaft 2018, 88).

At the same time that it embarked on this colonial project, Greece underwent rapid transformation from the inside. The post-independence period coincided with a trend of migration toward Greece's urban centers, from around 1850 and peaking around 1922 following the population exchanges, when an estimated 1.5 million Greeks arrived in mainland Greece as refugees (Emery 19). Resultantly, the city was the nucleus of the negotiation of Greece's European identity, and much of the archive of debate about musical forms come from the local papers of major metropolitan centers, like Athens and Thessaloniki. In Thessaloniki, French influence proliferated and marked membership in the elite social classes of the city (Tragaki 4). French was a common language of both the press and education, and the first francophone school was established as early as 1873 by the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), a Parisian Jewish charity organization (ibid). European things broadly were in vogue for the city's well-off social classes: European architectural styles prevailed in public buildings and wealthy family residences, western dance schools began to proliferate as early as 1879, and there was an increase in popularity of classical music concerts, with performances by a multitude of philharmonic orchestras invited by local culture organizations (ibid 5).

The transformation of Thessaloniki into "the most European city of the Ottoman Empire" by the end of the 19th century demonstrates what Gramsci termed the "consent" of civil society, in which a cultural hegemony is brought about by voluntarily participating institutions—like the aforementioned schools, architectural planning, and arts organizations (Tragaki 5)(Said 6-7). Said expands on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony to write about its role in the construction of the "Orient" (Said 7). "It is hegemony, or rather the result of hegemony at work,"

writes Said, "that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength I have speaking about so far" (ibid). In the context of this contest for culture and the continued europeanization of Greece, a discourse formed that attempted to reconcile an exoticized "oriental" past with a desired "occidental" future. The gradual preference of European things to those which pre-existed them in Greece began to delineate undesirable and desirable cultural artifacts. At the same time, the Great Idea espoused a colonial project of "re-civilization," these external and internal processes effectively wielding a kind of totalizing politic of orientalism to secure Greece's place as a European country<sup>10</sup> (Grigoriadis 169).

Within Greece, the struggle to delineate "occidental" and "oriental" characteristics of Greek society is evident through the artistic forms that prevailed in the post-independence years, and the discourses that surrounded them. For example, the stereotypical characters of the *komeidhylio*, a kind of humorous musical theatre that flourished in urban centers in the 1890s, bore witness to the rapidly changing nature of Greek cities post-independence, as well as demonstrated a parodic conceptualization of Greek society as fundamentally bisected (Tragaki 5). There was an 'aristocrat' character, who was depicted as an untrustworthy, effeminate, and arrogant person who sought to impress other people through incorporating French words into his vocabulary and maintaining a dandy-like demeanor (ibid). This character was contrasted with the "oriental" character, who was depicted as "ludicrous, clumsy, naïve, voluptuous, callow and cowardly" (ibid). To the extent that both caricatures are, in essence, negative parodies, there is the sense of a kind of grappling with the binarism of "Occident" and "Orient," their inadequacies as descriptors, and their consequent push and pull.

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<sup>10</sup> Though not without contest. Until 1912, Thessaloniki was still under Ottoman rule, and Muslims were estimated to be the second largest population, including officers, lawyers, and liberal intellectuals who were later active in the Neoturk movement and held strongly against the processes of europeanization taking place (Tragaki 11).



The conversations about music, however, took a central role in the discursive project of producing and defining the "Orient" (Said 40). Parallel debates about the appropriateness of what were increasingly seen as "oriental," archaic, Byzantine-influenced forms of music occurred in both the sphere of public entertainment and in the church (Tragaki 6-7). The attentiveness of the press and various elites to the question of the appropriateness of "oriental" musical forms not only defined the "orient" through artifact, but also defines its significance—namely, whether or not Eastern musical forms constituted a cultural threat. The dominant language among those denouncing these musical forms, for example, favors rather clinical metaphors about uncleanness, infection, or impurity. One article in *Estia*, a newspaper from Thessaloniki, wrote that the cafes-aman<sup>11</sup> "constitute a public offence," a "wound" that local authorities should "heal," writing that "especially at night, the entire execrable face of the shame unravels, whence prurient voices and songs fill the atmosphere of the area with stench and malodour" (Tragaki 7).

Similar rhetoric prevailed in the discussion of Orthodox Church music. The introduction of choral polyphony into several churches during the 1880s fueled a debate about whether or not to preserve a church musical style that was seen as descendent from Byzantine chant (Tragaki 7). On the one side, an article from 1889 in the newspaper *Nea Efimeris* referred to choral polyphony disdainfully as the "music of the theatres," unfit for performance in the religious space (ibid). On the other side, a lecture given by a scholar Isidhoros Skylitis, argued that polyphony was the "authentic child" of the music of Greek antiquity, and Byzantine chant was the product of "barbarian influences of Jewish, Arabic, and Turkish origin" (ibid).

The fact that both exponents and opponents of "oriental" music forms linked their origin to Byzantine chant critically suggests a few things. Firstly, it extends the debate about music into

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<sup>11</sup> Pluralization of "cafes" rather than "aman" reflects French grammatical structure.

a question about the cultural value of Byzantine, which, until the end of the 19th century, was depreciated as an "obscure" historical era in the Greek academic community and furthermore associated with the demise of ancient Greece (Tragaki 8). Here, Gramsci's idea about cultural hegemony becomes relevant in that the academic (a participant in a "voluntary institution") tourniquets an era of history as containing an undesirable cultural moment and swiftly amputates it with the scalpel of "obscurity" or non-significance in view of a larger historicized view of Greece (Said 7).

Secondly, the association of "oriental" music with Byzantium in educated communities implicitly places chronological markers around the period of Greek history associated with the oriental, neatly confining Greece's "orientalness" to single a period with a perceivable starting point and terminus. "[The West's] Knowledge of the Orient," wrote Said, "because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (40). Similarly, he writes that the Orient is "*contained and represented*" by dominating frameworks—"the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison)" (ibid). In the sense that evolutionist linking of "oriental" musical forms to Byzantine is presented as knowledge, it functions to *create* the "Orient" within Greece and also importantly define its limits; by containing it within a single era, it can be imagined as a single moment of the past with a defined terminus. For the elite class of individuals producing this kind of knowledge, this was instrumental to the argument to either disinherit or, in the case of some of the literary elite, valorize. In this sense, orientalist discourse also helped secure the elite's relative position of power as producers of knowledge, while those actually making the music were implicitly kept out of the conversation by systemic factors, like literacy. Resultantly, it is the elite class that has

defined the discourse about both these precursory musical styles, like those in the café-aman, and the later rebetiko tradition which grew out of it.

While the common position among the elite seems to be that these "oriental relics" should be disinherited, there were also significant proponents of this music among the upper class, such as the Athenian literati who, perhaps ironically, also used language that reproduced the fable of the "Orient," albeit as a kind of heritage. In the 1880s, Nikolaos Politis, considered the founder of Greek folklore studies, and the *Parnassistes*<sup>12</sup> literary group took up an aesthetic interest in the demotic that extended from language, to music, to literature (Tragaki 8-9). For Politis, the café-aman tradition represented a rediscovery of local customs and a rejection of encroaching European cultural ideals (ibid 10). The search for a kind of cultural authenticity became associated with avant-garde aesthetics, though the kinds of prevailing rhetorics among the literary figures seeking demotic cultural experiences ultimately turned the amanedes into an orientalized fetish object (ibid 8-10). In a journal from the poet Georghios Drosinis, for example, he describes the experience of watching a kompania from Smyrna: "I feel these voluptuous, sybarite oriental tunes. . .denoting all the secrets of Asian palaces: the erotic sighs, the passionate tears, the fragrant narghiles. . .[they] penetrate the heart and transmit there the strong shudder of drunkenness and commotion." (ibid 9-10). As an aesthetic debate took place through the 1890s between the Parnassistes and intellectual groups associated with *Techni* and *Dionysos* magazines, and the specific style of the amanes began to decline around the turn of the century and into the 1910s, there was increasingly the sense that café-aman and their "oriental" aestheticism was a thing of the recent past (ibid 13-14). The literary imagining of this "oriental" past as *past* allows

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<sup>12</sup> This name was borrowed from the respective Parnassianism literary movement in France (Tragaki 8).

for the valorization of such musical forms as cultural relics, without jeopardizing Greece's claim to European identity.

The writings of Politis and others in the post-independence years establish a precedent wherein musical forms are treated as a literary metonymic device for a kind of distant lineage, or a "dual descentance," as the Cretan writer Nikos Kazantzakis would later describe in his 1965 travel narrative *Journey to the Morea*. The language Kazantzakis uses to talk about the amanes is evidence of the lasting impact of the musicking discourses that took place toward the end of the 19th century and in the early years of the 20th. "What has the dually descended modern Greek taken from his father, what from his mother? . . . He is clever and shallow, with no metaphysical anxieties, and yet, when he begins to sing, a universal bitterness leaps up from his oriental bowels, breaks through the crust of Greek logic and, from the depths of his being, totally mysterious and dark, the Orient emerges" (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 87). In Kazantzakis, the act of song becomes a metaphor for the teleology of Greek identity—where the Orient is something deeply internal, nearly unspeakable, feminine. I will return to the kinds of myths and fictions that become attached to the rebetika and its musical lineages through the medium of literary discourse (that is, *genre*) in chapter two. For now, I merely want to emphasize that when the first songs that later get called "rebetika" appeared (mostly after the failure of Greece's expansion project during Greco-Turkish War, 1919-1922), they were already tintured with broader processes of cultural negotiations that were not merely about Greek identity, but about finding the border of the "West." Before they even had a name, the rebetika were about making the world.

*from Smyrneiko to Pireotiko: diaspora and imaginings of exile*

As the previous section suggests, the rebetika were not random. The rise of rebetiko was at least partly enabled by enduring, though contested, musical styles that continued to flourish, enthusiastically, in major urban centers despite the growing preference for European cultural aesthetics among the upper classes. A few recordings in the rebetiko style were made before the 20s; Gauntlett writes that the earliest evidence of the rebetika entering the repertory of the *cafes-aman* during this time are the gramophone records recorded by Marika Papgika in the U.S. (1985, 68). However, the real catalyst for the peak years of the rebetika was the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922) which ended with the Turks successfully ending the British-backed Greek occupation of Smyrna<sup>13</sup>, in an event that is frequently referred to as the "Asia Minor Disaster" or the "Smyrna Disaster" (Gauntlett 2018, 110)(Anagnostou 283). A few days later, a fire with an unknown source broke out, destroying Greek and Armenian neighborhoods and killing many tens of thousands. Following this defeat and the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, Greece and Turkey entered into an agreement to exchange minority populations, leading to a massive influx of refugees into Greece, who brought with them and popularized music in the Smyrna style (Gauntlett 2018, 110)(Grigoriadis 170). The Treaty of Lausanne also crystalized the hegemony of Hellenic national ideology over Greek subjects and set off a tide of legislative measures aimed at erasing the cultural plurality of the former Ottoman empire, giving new Greek names to towns and villages with formerly Bulgarian, Turkish, or Albanian names (Grigoriadis 170-171).

The rigorous state effort to "Greek-ify" Greece and the devastation of the 1922 Smyrna Disaster frame the genesis of the rebetika, born of the forced displacement of people who had to be reconfigured as citizens of a new European Greek nation. While there was, demonstrably, songs of the same musicological nature as the rebetika that were performed prior to the mass

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<sup>13</sup> Modernly Izmir. Also referred to as Asia Minor.

migration of refugees from Smyrna, it is against the reality of this event that the lyrical content and the social setting that rebetiko musicking activities take on particular meaning.

Engaging in a study of the rebetika as literature challenges us as literary scholars to think broadly about what makes a text, and what can be treated, i.e. *read* as text. I argue that the rebetika establishes a variety of semiotic modes that make narrative meaning in the space between lyric and instrument, player and audience, word and voice. My own analysis weighs these modes against the historical context of the Smyrna crisis, and the exilic treatment of the newly arrived refugee populations in mainland Greece. As we will see, the rebetiko is typically conceived of as branching into two overlapping styles, those from Smyrna (*Smyrneika*) and those from Piraeus (*Pireotika*). Reading these styles as texts, I argue, offers a sense of how rebetiko functions as a *genre*, namely one that is concerned with the literary preservation of the exilic space and narratives that are metonymic for war and displacement. In the *Smyrneika*, the textual narrative of love songs established a kind of lexicon of sentiments that we might read as euphemistically bearing poetic witness to the experience of being a refugee and violent state processes of carving out a nation. The *Pireotika*, while traditionally less associated with refugees and more about mangas culture, established a kind of literary "underworld," and it is this imagined isolated world running parallel to normative society that builds a working metaphor for marginal existence, and thus overlaps in critical ways with the refugee experience and forms of exile.

I return, here, to Kazantzakis. The "universal bitterness" that he spoke of as "leap[ing] up from [the singer's] oriental bowels" and "break[ing] through the crust of Greek logic" was, in context, referring to the *amanedes*, or a type of vocal improvisation that used the word "aman" to exhibit the singer's vocal skill (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 87). Even as a relatively lyric-less form,

there are narrative interpretations that flow from the act of language destruction that occurs in the *amanes* (sing.) song and the implications it has in expressing pain. Here I wish to briefly take note of the debate surrounding the categorical boundaries of the rebetika as a musicological tradition. For some scholars, the Smyrniot amanedes do not fall under the category of "rebetiko," and are an entirely different genre. As Pappas points out, the Smyrnaïka is frequently treated as a "pubescent" version of the Piraeus style that followed, part of the prehistory, rather than the repertory of the rebetika (361). While we may observe different boundaries on the basis of musicological taxonomy, I am including the amanedes both because I see their re-popularization as part and parcel of the history that enabled the rise of the commercial rebetiko, but also because I see them as participating in a literary genre of rebetiko that is primarily about marginal existence (Pappas 359). The music of the Smyrniot musicians was incompatible with the increasingly philoeuropean text of the state, evidenced by the fact that the amanedes alongside the bouzouki-style Piraeus rebetiko were targets of Metaxas's censorship in 1936 (Pappas 360).

This was in part because they epitomized, in some sense, the strain of "oriental" Greek music, and accordingly, newspapers and public discourse tended to refer to "oriental music" as interchangeable with "amanedes" (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 90)(Tragaki 5-8). This made them particularly visible in the debate about the toleration of musical forms, particularly so when the Kemalist government in Turkey banned them for reasons believed to be connected to "modernization and Europeanization" (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 96). The amanes was also closely associated with the female voice and the act of lament (ibid 89). Holst-Warhaft has written extensively about the feminized tradition of lament in Greek society and points out that women who sang laments (called *mirologistres*), though considered essential at the moment of death,

were otherwise regarded warily and that this stigmatization inflects the performance of the amanes (ibid 89-90).

In narrative terms, and in thinking about the amanedes as shaping literary genre of rebetiko, I argue that what is "dangerous" about the amanes is its emotionally mnemonic recreation of war and exile. It is a text of extreme emotional distress and excess, characterized by discordance, lapses of language, and cries of pain that preclude cause and effect. The lyrics of an amanes are characteristically sparse, and what is present is rendered nearly nonsensical by the persistence of "aman," the filler word from which the song takes its name, which slowly swallows all other language. The following is a transcription<sup>14</sup> of a recording of "*Manes Tis Kalinixtias*" ("The Goodnight Amanes") by Antonis Dalgas in 1926:

Aman!

So comes the hour and the moment...

My mouth, aman, aman! Let it open, aman aman!

(Here's to you, Antonis!

Cheers, my boy!)<sup>15</sup>

From my mouth, let it open

and in this good company of mine:

Goodnight, aman! Let it drown all else out aman, aman!

aman, aman!

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<sup>14</sup> The transcription and translation are my own, see Appendix A for complete lyrics. As I am analyzing a particular recording here, it is cited in the discography under "Dalgas."

<sup>15</sup> Parentheticals in song lyrics denote spoken interjection in recordings. It is common in many of the recordings for musicians to greet and complement each other, imitating the way these songs would have been performed in the more private and familiar settings of the oral tradition (Kaloyanides 137-148).



As these songs are, at their core, improvisations, there are many slight variations of the text performer to performer and performance to performance. The delivery is almost trancelike, with each repetition of "aman" flowing from the singer in a visceral way that occasionally clips the end of word or smudges it into the next cry. In this sense, the dominant action of the amanes is to gradually unravel the language; to unmake it. This linguistic unmaking mimics the interior structure of pain, which Elaine Scarry writes "does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned." (4) In thinking about the rebetika as a literary genre that is, at times, interpreted as operating in defiance to the state, part of what makes the amanes "dangerous," is that its aesthetic comes from the way the performer holds the listener in the space of pain, in the anterior state. For the Smyrniot musicians to perform such songs in the company of other refugees produces a space of collective sentiment, which has implications that potentially amount to the political. For one, through emotional evocation, the amanes bore witness to the consequences and pains of the population exchanges. In this sense, it may also be said that it made visible the fabricated nature of modern Hellenic identity. Secondly, it unified people of similar experience in the same emotional space and in doing so may have amounted to a practical tool of mobilization. The scarcity of lyrics, the interrupting, uncontrollable quality of the incantation, and the precedence of voice over lyric all have the effect of destroying the narrative alongside the language. As a text that offers a kind of literary witness, the amanes suggests that there is story, too, in narrative fragmentation; that the stories we must tell are not always cohesive or linear. The broken plot of the amanes challenges the

expectation that recounting history, particularly traumatic and painful history, must necessarily be linear to be legible to reader/listener.

The amanes as a text offers a meaningful case study of what might be referred to as the emotional literacy of song and other performed texts, or the idea that there is narrative content that exceeds the lyrics, made in the space of performance. Lorca, in his defense of deep song, spoke of a "terrible scream" at the beginning of the *siguiriya* "that divides the landscape into two hemispheres" (Lorca 4). "It is the scream of dead generations," he said, "a poignant elegy for lost centuries, the pathetic evocation of love under other moons and other winds." (ibid) The inarticulate space of emotion creates narrative through the invitation to the audience to engage in an emotional mimesis, evoking an experience not in spoken language but in the vocabularies of sentiment. The few words that do appear in the amanes are discordant, strange. The singer of "Goodnight Amanes" takes an almost evocative tone in saying "My mouth/let it open" as though the action is laborious or painful. Similarly, the reference to "good company" creates a tension with the wailing performance of the singer, where the vocal delivery is rendered more legible than the lyrical content.

The notion of song as having an emotional literacy is perhaps what most strongly connects the amanedes to their successors that are more firmly rooted in the rebetika tradition. The Smyrneika songs with lyrics, in contrast with the eventually more successful Pireotika, bear many of the same characteristics as the amanedes, including more general sentimentality and more featuring of the female voice, in contrast with the relative masculinist stoicism of the Pireotika (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 96-97)(Holst 51-61). They also featured different instruments, including the violin, the lyra, the santouri or kanun, the oud, the mandolin/mandola, and the guitar, while the Pireotika used principally the bouzouki and baglamas (Holst 51-61)(Pappas

364). Smyrneika revival recordings such as those made in the 80s by Haris Alexiou, Eleftheria Arvanitaki, and Glykeria frequently stylized performance even more, incorporating instruments like clarinet and the accordion. It is also important to note that Smyrneika and Pireotika are frequently not tidy musical categories within the rebetika. As previously mentioned, both refugees and local musicians lived and performed in lower-class urban neighborhood, producing a range of syncretic rebetika songs that may feature, for example, Piraeus-style instrumentation with lyrics that bear more thematic resemblance to the Smyrna tradition, or vice versa.

As songs directly linked to the deterritorialization of Asia Minor Greeks, it is striking that much of the repertory of the Smyrneika are love songs. In the poetics of the rebetika, the love song (or more accurately, the loss-of-love song) creates an emotional texture within which alternate interpretations about displacement, war, and diaspora are made possible. Love, in the universe of the rebetiko song, is extremely fraught and characterized by a lexicon of emotions that have also have a legibility within marginalized existence—betrayal, intense longing or nostalgia, addiction, madness. It is through the emotional literacy of these songs that we may see that heartache, too, has political valence.

The love songs of the Smyrniot and Smyrna-influenced rebetika repertory are characterized by betrayal narratives whose peripatetic qualities occasionally appear to stand in metaphorically for the experience of diaspora. For example, in the song "*Yiati Foumaro Kokaini*"<sup>16</sup> ("Why I Smoke Cocaine") the speaker sings, "I tangled with a tough guy,/oh, a first-class magkas./He took all I had and left me./He took my heart,/my youth, my cash,/and from my pain I smoke cocaine." In the song "*Dolophonissa*" or "Murderess," the speaker addresses the former love directly with accusations: "You melted me like a candle,/bitch, you burned me

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<sup>16</sup> Lyrics and translation are mostly from Holst-Warhaft (original work 1975, reprinted fourth edition 2006), exceptions are noted.

up/and you don't pity me./Why did you poison my heart/with so much cruelty?/You take away my soul/you wicked murderess./The pain of all the world/you heap on my poor body." What is immediately striking about these love songs is their violence, both emotionally in language like "bitch" and "wicked murderess," and physically, in lines that suggest love is an attack on the body. In both these songs there is significantly particular emphasis on the speaker being left with nothing. Love, in the rebetiko song, takes away not only material possessions, as in the first song, but the very notion of selfhood, the "soul." In this sense, love songs mnemonically recreate the experience of diaspora through both vocabularies of violence and an extreme defamiliarization of the body in relationship to the world, the production of alienated existence.

The physical body is frequently under attack in the love songs, displacing the listener's attention from setting and instead turning attention toward the speaker's body. Madness and the metaphor of poison/being poisoned recur frequently. "Ah, ah, my God, I can't hold out!/I'm going crazy I'm so much in love" ("*Neo Hasapaki*," or "Young Butcher"). Madness and love are nearly inseparable in the rebetiko tradition. "My blackeyed one, because of you I've gone crazy,/I'll die, I can't stand it, I'm half the man I was" ("*Mavra Matia, Mavra Frydia*" or "Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows"<sup>17</sup>). Poison functions in tandem, as a metaphor for the corruption of the body from the inside out. "But you, evil woman,/want to find a poison/to poison me with," cries the singer of "Murderess." Similarly, in "*Kouklaki*" or "Little Doll" the speaker laments "You poisoned my wretched life, little doll,/darling, you knocked the wind out of me." Love colonizes the body, turns it against the speaker in the manner of physical torture (Scarry 47). Some songs, like "Young Butcher," even descend into incantations of "aman," evoking the pre-linguistic performance of pain in the amanedes ("aman, aman, he's hurt me so much!/So many times,

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<sup>17</sup> Lyrics and translation from Butterworth and Schneider (First Edition 1974, Second edition 2014).

aman, aman!"). These songs mimic the experience of deterritorialization through the attack on that which makes "place," in the normative human experience. The absence of material possessions, livelihood, and the corruption of the physical body defamiliarizes the speaker from their world, until all that remains is the song—the totalizing experience of their pain.

Nostalgia, too, constitutes an important part of the emotional lexicon of the love/diaspora song. "Why I Smoke Cocaine" is structured in a narrative "before" and "after" the speaker's "tang[ling] with a tough guy, a first class magkas." Most of the song stanzas, in fact, are less about the emotionally vagrant magkas character and more so a lament for how good the speaker's life was before meeting him. "Where have all my good looks gone,/all the beauty I had?/There wasn't another girl in Athens who knew how to swing like me./I was really and truly a doll,/and a classy one at that./I'm telling you the honest truth,/I drove the whole world wild!" Love is transformative; the peripeteia of a character's arc. Nostalgic traces of a near-distant past attempt, in their own frantic way, to account for the moment of transformation, oscillating between two synchronistic points and emphasizing, particularly the notion of loss. The notion of a "before" and "after" are particularly resonant within stories of displacement, which conceive of places as attached to a chronological frame—"before" represents not merely a chronometric, but also a denominated place, a life that has been completely uprooted. The diaspora narrative that is potentially behind the text of "Why I Smoke Cocaine" helps the listener place the lament-like quality of the singer's delivery.

In the song "*Ti Se Mellei Esenane*<sup>18</sup>" ("What's It To You"), the speaker curiously collapses the love story into a narrative about diasporic movement, producing the rather discordant choral refrain "What's it to you and why are you always asking me/where it is I'm

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<sup>18</sup> Lyrics and translation are mine, based off a recording made in the U.S. by the singer Marika Papagika c.1919-1925. See Appendix A for complete lyrics.

from when you don't love me." This refrain transcribes the relative cultural incongruity of the newly arrived Smyrniot refugees into a narrative about love. It appropriates the vocabularies of the love song ("What's it to you and why are you always asking me/when you don't pity me, darling, when you torture me so") to talk about the hostilities faced by refugees attempting to assimilate. At a time when the state was essentially engaging in a project of mass disinheritance—all that bore traces of Ottoman or "oriental" influence—including music, people, and language—the rebetiko song recasts the state as a fickle lover who is insistent about knowing where the speaker comes from, but does not love them. The lines "From Smyrna I came to find some comfort,/to find in Athens some love and someone to hold" reimagines the seeking of refuge as the pursuit of love and affection. In this way, "What's It To You" is an example of a song that teaches the listener how to "read" the poetic text of the rebetika by paradigmatically linking love and displacement.

As texts, this sampling of songs demonstrate the kinds of literary devices used in Smyrniot love songs in order to give voice to the experience of the diaspora at a time when refugees were a highly stigmatized and despised population. As previously discussed, there was a particular contention about the Smyrniot strains of rebetiko, which was mostly condemned by political figures and media, but also occasionally fetishized by bourgeois intellectual adherents of the "Asian muse" (Tragaki 55-58). The gradual commercial preference for bouzouki-style rebetiko beginning in the mid-1930s perhaps evidences a cultural shift away from the musical styles that bore Ottoman influence, but the reality is a bit more complicated. Due to the fact that there was demonstrably much cross-fertilization in the Smyrniot and Pireotiko musical styles within the rebetika, it is arguably a bit reductive to say that one necessarily "triumphed" over the other. The preference for bouzouki and Piraeus-style hoarse and flat vocal delivery (called

*mangiko*) was also, in part, nurtured by the commercial success of U.S. bouzouki records in the 1920s (ibid). Subsequently, in the 30s, local bouzouki players like Markos Vamvakaris, Stelios Keromytis, Anestis Dhelias, Giorghos Batis, Yiannis Papaioannou, and Mihalis Yenitsaris rose to fame through commercial demand for both recordings and live performances (ibid). Café-aman ensembles began to recruit bouzouki players and the amanedes gradually fell away from the rebetika repertory (ibid)(Holst-Warhaft 2018, 96-97).

Another significant contributing factor to the ascension of the bouzouki rebetika was the role of the state and the consequent symbolism assumed by the rebetika culture. The 1936 censorship imposed on recordings of rebetiko song, which was seen as dangerous to Hellenic-Orthodox customs, essentially criminalized both the bouzouki and the magkas way of life (Tragaki 58). Tragaki's research suggests that the enforcement of the ban, however, differed city to city, writing that Thessaloniki's police chief Nikolaos Moushondis, for example, was a fan of the bouzouki and Vamvakaris and offered a refuge for rebetiko at a time when persecution of bouzouki players in Athens was at a particular high (58-63). Thus, bouzouki still flourished despite the ban.

In this context, the bouzouki song of the manges<sup>19</sup>, whose themes included gambling, hashish smoking, and perhaps most critically, resistance to the police, was crystalized as a symbol against the policies of General Ioannis Metaxas, the ultimate figure of authority (ibid). The bouzouki songs of Batis, Vamvakaris, Dhelias and others developed what was essentially a character, as Gauntlett asserts—the rebetika did not provide biography, but instead produced a literary character whose core was subverting authority (2018, 108). In "Oi Laxanades" ("The Pick-Pockets"), the speaker taunts the police figure: "Mister Policeman, don't beat us because

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<sup>19</sup> Spelling change reflects plurality in original Greek.

you know very well/this is our job and don't expect a kick-back./We pinch wallets and purses so the jail doors/can see us nice and regular inside." Going to jail becomes a badge of honor, a lesser tier of martyrdom for a character who parodies the normativity of the working world by insisting that his profession is being a thief. As discussed, "rebetologists" have been rightly criticized for treating the mythology of rebetiko as biographical; however, it is true that the performance space and the archive of recordings left by the first generation of the rebetes engage in a collapsing of the fictional magkas and the real magkas. The result is that it makes it nearly impossible for outsiders, voyeurs, researchers in the 21st century, etc. to make any credible claim about the authentic or autobiographical character of the mangas. This is true even on the level of the lyric—the vast majority of the mangas songs use slang that not only resisted comprehension by normative society, but also hampers the efforts of scholars attempting to translate the songs into English (Holst-Warhaft 1990, 185-191)(Paivanas 107-125).

As a project about the rebetika as literature, a study of the mangas primarily as a character offers a way to navigate the question about whether the subversiveness of mangas culture was, finally, political. For example, it is implausible that Vamvakaris and his contemporaries were intentionally engaging in a cultural critique about the state's role in weeding out Ottoman influence in order to assimilate into Europe. Yet, we must consider that when revivals after the classical period typically associated with the rebetika (~1920s up until about 1940) began to occur, many of the most significant revivalists projected political meaning onto the rebetiko and the mangas character alike. It would be impossible to generalize the motivations of such a large group of musicians anyway, but this does not alter the fact that Mikis Theodorakis, for example, composing in the 60s, wrote that the "greekness identified in the rebetiko was a 'romeic' greekness; it involved an expression 'of the genuine Greek culture that



has its roots in the Orient" and set Yiannis Ritsos's poem "Romiosyni" to rebetiko style bouzouki (Tragaki 98-101). Similarly, the reader may take stock of the essayist Elias Petropoulos's claim that the magkas, as a figure, was a "phallocrat," whose scorn for normative social behaviors like marriage and courtship meant that he may sleep with men as well as women, but would "never [walk] arm in arm with a woman because, officially at least, he scorned all women" (Petropoulos 57-62). For Petropoulos, a leftist who was imprisoned for publishing the first comprehensive rebetiko songbook as well as a dictionary of *Kaliarnta*, or gay slang, queerness (or more accurately, a certain masculinist homoeroticism) was an essential part of the subversive character of the mangas, as well as a means to resist and challenge the oppressive military government that eventually drove him into exile (Emery 36-37)(Tragaki 109-111). Both of these interpretations are enabled by the way Piraeus-style rebetika fictionalized both the mangas character and his world. The kind of "underworld" envisioned in the rebetika songs provided a flexible landscape that could act as a container for different kinds of projections and literary reinterpretations of life at the margins. For both Petropoulos and Theodorakis, the mangas was a figure who, albeit for different reasons, was incompatible with mainstream society. Chapter three considers more in depth the genre possibilities for interpreting this landscape as about queer experience.

The development of an "underworld" aesthetic in the bouzouki rebetika/Pireotiko, or the idea of a world that runs parallel to normative society, thus builds a working metaphor for different kinds of exile—either literal, in the case of the many refugees who were forced into the kinds of lower-class districts associated with the "underworld," or, for the non-refugee musicians co-habiting these spaces, a symbolic exile that was wrapped up in class and state forms of cultural policing (Pappas 359). In this way, even as the bouzouki-style rebetiko prevailed in the commercial world, it contained the strong traces of this history of the Smyrna refugees, as many

of these musicians were either themselves refugees, or existing in the same social margins and spaces as these refugees. The kind of masculinist posturing of rebetiko as criminal counter-culture thus drew its aesthetics in part from the life experience of the many refugees whose existence in Greece *was* exilic; their music and customs debated, fetishized, and eventually criminalized (Pappas 359-362). This is not to say that these were mutually exclusive groups, but that the magkes, the refugees, and any overlap between coexisted in a kind of social exile and that there was demonstrable overlap in their musical expressions of pain and longing.

The kinds of literary tropes used in rebetika songs make this kind of cultural syncretism apparent. For example, drug culture in the rebetika has a largely cause-and-effect framing that portrays it as a natural coping mechanism to the pains of social ostracism. The following is an excerpt from a recording called "I Phoni tou Argile" ("The Voice of the Narghile") that dramatizes a dialogue between two friends, in the manner of the *karagiozis* shadow-puppet theatre:

Speaker 1: What's that you're holding?

Speaker 2: A narghile!

1: A narghile?

2: Well, what did you expect to be holding, a trans-Atlantic liner?

1: But it's always the same thing, brother Stellakis, whenever I come to see you I always find you with a narghile in your hand.

2: You're right, my friend Vango! But if you knew the pain and troubles I have you wouldn't ever judge me wrong. Listen, brother Vango, so you can comfort me a bit...

He then sings, "Five years I got, in Yende Koulé<sup>20</sup> jail/ball and chain turned me on to the narghile." From these songs, we get a sense of the liminal landscape of rebetiko, wedged in the cracks of society. In the case of the hashish den, the idea of drug culture and altered states maintains psychological distance between the manges and normative society. In "The Voice of the Nargile" the participation in drug culture is linked to great personal pain, perhaps paradigmatically linking different kinds of experiences of life at the margins. This kind of cause-and-effect formulation appears in the previously mentioned Smyrnaic song "Why I Smoke Cocaine," creating parallels between the refugee text and that of the mangas.

The prison, too, has particular significance in the rebetiko tradition as a setting that encapsulates social incongruity in a most literal sense. The plethora of prison songs (see, *inter alia*, "O Isovitis" ["The Lifer"], "Nyhtose Horis Feggari" ["Night is Fallen Without Moon"], "Gedi-Koulé," "To Sakaki" ["The Jacket"], "I Phoni tou Argile" ["Voice of the Hookah"]) suggest in some ways that prison, for the songwriters, has a kind of inevitability; the looming threat of prison as an apparatus of the punitive state is ever present. In the song "Oropos," the lyrics even suggest that life in jail is better for the mangas than life on the outside, "We have a good time in Oropos jail,/better than in Athens./Tuesday and Thursday they give us macaroni/and the manges give up years./On Sunday they give us meat,/it's free I tell you, and so is the barber's." The mangas protagonist of this song demonstrates a kind of savviness that suggests that prison is a normal, almost natural, part of the rebetes existence. In this sense, there is an acknowledgement that it is not the individual, but a certain kind of existence broadly that is subject to punishment by the state.

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<sup>20</sup> The name of a prison in Thessaloniki (Holst-Warhaft 2014, 127).

As this song suggests, there is also something of a tone of martyrdom that became integral to the mythology of the rebetika, with its constant references to death. Sometimes these were of a syncretic nature, as in the song "San Pethano Sto Tavani" ("If I Die on the Boat") which alludes to Smyrna through its lyrical sparseness and content ("Ah, if I die on the boat, throw me in the sea/so the black fish and brine can eat me. Aman! Aman!") but uses bouzouki/Piraeus-style instrumentation. There is also a substantial repertory of songs about death from tuberculosis that bear witness to the condition of life in lower-class neighborhoods and appear in both Smyrna and Piraeus styles, demonstrating the ways in which both refugee and non-refugee musicians were subject to the same spatial ailments. An example of this is "San Pethano" ("When I Die"). In a recording of this song by Kostas Roukounas, one of the Smyrnaïka musicians, he coughs theatrically between verses, "Mother, my chest is hurting and I sigh./This year, mother, I won't see it out."

As these two examples suggest, songs about death constitute a fascinating and ironic point of hybridity in the rebetika archive wherein it is difficult to really call these songs either Smyrnaïka or Pireotika. What these songs make evident are the stakes of the social marginality shared by refugees and manges alike. In these texts, the notion of "underworld" is less about criminality and more about the looming figure of death; the liminality of urban lower-class neighborhoods plagued by tuberculosis, addiction, poverty, hunger. I want to return here to the claim I make in introducing this section—that these texts are not autobiographical works, but that in fictionalizing a particular experience they frequently stumble upon a kind of truth. Haunting is the recording of "To Parapono tou Prezakia" ("The Junkie's Complaint"<sup>21</sup>) made by Anestis Delias, or "Artemis," as he was known, one of the refugee musicians who came to Piraeus from

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<sup>21</sup> Some recordings alternatively call this "O Ponos tou Pezakia" or "The Junkie's Pain."

Smyrna at eight years old, and who rose to fame playing alongside Vamvakaris and Batis, but died at just twenty-nine years old of a heroin overdose outside a teké called Seraphim, cradling his bouzouki (Holst, 44-47). The lyrics of "The Junkie's Complaint" demonstrate there are many ways to be in exile, and many vocabularies for displacement:

From the time I started to smoke the dose  
the world turned its back, I'm at a loss.

Wherever I am people bother me,  
I can't bear to be called a junkie.

From sniffing it up I went on the needle  
and slowly my body wasted away.

Nothing was left to do in this world  
because dope led me to die in the streets.

Songs like this one demonstrate the way the fictional text of the rebetika was sincerely grounded in a particular experience, as well as the tendency of text and experience to occasionally overlap. "The Junkie's Complaint" also makes evident the relationship of these texts to the broader state processes concurrent with music production, which would appear to lurk behind the tone of despair, the persistence of the "I" pronoun and the isolation it creates. Many of these songs were arguably threatening to the state because they articulated the consequences, through the human experience, of the injustices committed by the state against the population it violently displaced and then ghettoized. The fact that each verse repeats itself from second line to first, too, produces a kind of chicken and egg effect that perhaps operates as a response to the

presumed criminality of the rebetiko "underworld." This is particularly salient in the last verse:  
"Nothing was left to do in this world, because dope led me to die in the streets. Because dope led me to die in the streets, there was nothing left to do in this world."

Most of what scholars claim to know about the rebetika is drawing from what are, in fact, fictions. Even in work that is traditionally viewed as perhaps more methodologically "truthful," like ethnography, the researcher is still trusting, in some capacity, the stories we tell about ourselves, others, and our lives together. I do not wish to suggest that the songs of the rebetika archive be treated as data; they are performed fictions and ought to be treated as such. However, like any good fiction, they are grounded in experience, in the specificity of the human voice, its own devastating and painful relationships to truth.

## Chapter Two: Rebetika Resurrections

My question thus far has been about how the archive of rebetika functions as a literary text, one that was witnessing not merely the devastation of the Greco-Turkish War and the population exchanges, but also bound up in shifting geosocial boundaries as part of a process that enabled Greece's integration into Europe. As Greece became firstly a salient "place" and then one that was part of Europe, it became part of the clay that formed the structures we contemporarily accept as natural and static. The text of the rebetika arguably deserves to be studied because, from the point of view of the state, it applied the necessary pressure under which the structure of "Europe" began to crumble. This supersedes the *intention* of the musicians, refugees, dancers, hashish smokers who shaped its archive and instead engages the art and edifice of rebetiko; the meanings it assumed and assumes in the world as a form with a pulse, a form that breathes.

This chapter follows the oxidation of the rebetika through the literary medium, looking at texts for the ways they conceived of the essential character of the rebetiko. Studying these texts is critical, I argue, because they demonstrate the kinds of meanings that get attached to the rebetika through the work of genre. This section is primarily concerned with deaths and revivals: the first two texts, Costas Ferris's film *Rebetiko* (1983) and Nikos Kazantzakis's 1946 novel *Zorba the Greek* both evoke the rebetika primarily through the vocabularies of death and elegy. While only Kazantzakis was writing contemporaneously, both texts are depicting the same era, and therefore this section will also map the transition out of rebetika and toward *laïko* or popular music and the concurrent historical events, namely the German occupation of Greece (1941-46) and the Greek Civil War (1946-49). I argue that through the vehicular body of the rebetis/rebetissa, the deaths in these texts are elegizing broader cultural epochs that the text

producers see as having been lost. Thus, in these literary adaptations, rebetiko continues to be bound up in the question of shifting boundaries and the production of Europe.

In Ferris's *Rebetiko*, the death of the protagonist Marika (purportedly modeled after Marika Ninou, though there are few biographical similarities to support this claim) occurs at the entry of the rebetika into bourgeois entertainment circles, suggesting that it is the processes of commercialization and gentrifying rebetiko that has killed it. Examining the historical processes makes for a convincing syllogism; in context, the character's death makes a cultural critique about uniquely Greek folk traditions rendered part of a kitschy distant history in the process of assimilating into Europe. In Kazantzakis' *Zorba the Greek*, his two principle characters embody the dichotomy he postulates in *Journey to the Morea*; the bookish narrator poignantly rendered nameless against the garish sentimentality of the elegized Alexis Zorba. Zorba's alignment with both the principles of rebetika mythology and the pre-industrial landscape of Crete constitutes a kind of lament for a pre-European Greece, though perhaps in a sense that is more obtusely orientalist than Ferris's adaptation.

I then look at the way Kazantzakis's text directly fed into the revival of the rebetika in the context of the military junta from 1967 to 1974, when the debate that began in the 40s in communist circles, about whether rebetika might be leveraged as a tool of class consciousness, came to a head. I examine the arguments made by the communist intelligentsia for the rebetika as a political tool and the ways these logics drew upon long standing literary tropes and productions of ethnicity. Here we see a paradox emerge from the formulation of rebetiko lives and deaths in that in both the rebetiko is given a kind of textual "life" as the sight of projection for cultural desires. In the genre of rebetiko adaptation, rebetiko music and culture becomes political not because the original archive was necessarily formulated with such aims, but because



those attempting to articulate various desires, aspirations, critiques, have repeatedly reached for the rebetika to do so.

*Cloudy Sundays: the end-times of rebetiko*

The 1936 censorship instituted by General Metaxas was one of the inciting factors for the gradual transformation of rebetiko into laïko, or popular song. Compared to the steady rise of rebetiko during the 20s, there was a significant decline in the number of songs composed and recorded, with certain categories of song disappearing from the recorded repertory of rebetika music (Tragaki 60-61). In order to pass the censors, songwriters began eliminating any association with lumpen urban culture, meaning they ceased to use slang and removed the depiction of marginal practices, especially drug consumption, from the lyrical text (ibid). It was in this context of an effort to sanitize the rebetiko that gave way to a new cadre of musicians who began initiating the change in the character of rebetiko. One such performer was Vasilis Tsitsanis, who began composing music from around 1937 onward, whose music is widely credited by scholars as "detaching rebetiko from the underworld of the manges" (Economou 19). His lyrics, which he described as *kantadhes*, or love serenades, expunged the low-life content, instead favoring a more pronouncedly poetic aesthetics over the relatively simple and repetitive structure of the lyrics of composers like Vamvakaris and his contemporaries. For example, "Synefiasmeni Kyriaki" or "Cloudy Sunday"<sup>22</sup>, one of his most famous compositions was broadly seen as being about the German occupation of Greece (1941-46), where the singer laments the deportation of his lover to the concentration camps. "Cloudy Sunday" was written in circa 1943-44, and preserves the kind of poetic witnessing of many of the first-wave rebetika

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<sup>22</sup> Translation by Petropoulos (111).

songs in that it perpetuates the paradigmatic association of love and state violence (Holst, 168-169):

Cloudy Sunday  
you are like my heart  
which is always cloudy,  
by Christ and the Holy Virgin.

You're a day like the day  
when I lost my joy,  
Cloudy Sunday,  
you make my heart bleed.

When I see you rainy,  
I can't rest for a moment.  
You make my life black,  
and I sigh deeply.

Interestingly, while the song would seem to write about the lost love interest in the third person ("my joy" in this reading is a personification), the second-person narrative of the song borrows much of the language of the traditional rebetika songs—"You make my life black," for example, engages a tonal mimicry of the older songs addressed to a fickle lover. There is a syntactic stacking of metaphor and simile, which creates a cloudy texture in the poetics. On the

one hand, the addressee is literally the weather, the landscape, but is standing in metaphorically for the lost love. Layered onto this are the interior similes—"you are like my heart" and "you're a day like the day when I lost my joy," which cloud and create tension with the central metaphor. The love interest is tenor for the changing weather "cloudy Sunday" to "rainy" which, in turn, is vehicular for the shifting political leadership, the unforeseen occupation and subsequent systematic deportation and murder of the vast majority of Greece's Jewish population, including the destruction of Thessaloniki's Sephardic community, which was pivotal to the development of the rebetiko (Tragaki 63-65). The discordance of the weather/landscape as metaphor suggests the singer's own lamentable complicity as a witness.

I want to briefly note here that the involvement of Jewish communities in the development and diffusion of rebetiko appears to be a relatively neglected area of study for scholars in the field, despite the celebrity of singers like Stella Haskil and Roza Eskenazi, who were both Jewish, and the many traveling Jewish *kompanies* that proliferated and performed between the major cities of Greece and Asia Minor before the 1923 population exchanges and the resurgence of eastern musical forms (Tragaki 2-4). Given the nationalization and the institutionalization of the rebetika in the 80s and 90s, the negligence of the contributions of this group arguably reflects an ongoing cultural stigma around the Jewish communities that flourished in Greece prior to the occupation and the systemic murder of these groups and others (Gauntlet 111).

The music of Tsitsanis marks a turning point in the production of rebetiko music. While his music grew out of the rebetiko tradition, from the early 1940s onward Tsitsanis exclusively described his music as "*laiko*" or "popular song," distancing himself from "rebetiko" and the

world of the manges (Economou 20-21). In musical terms, he abandoned the *dromoi*<sup>23</sup> (literally "roads") or modes system of rebetiko in favor of functional harmony and a plethora of styles, including more classically Western-style compositions, as well as borrowings from Turkish and Indian musical styles (ibid). However, in rhetorical terms, the music of Tsitsanis also marks the beginning of a transformation of rebetiko largely brought about by the question of its textual meaning.

While portions of this discourse were contiguous with the debate at the end of the 19th century, about the solubility of the "oriental" character of rebetiko in the context of Greek europeanization, this also bled over into and interacted with a debate about the class affiliation and the national character of the rebetiko. In the transition out of German occupation and into the civil war years, the debate on the predominantly middle-class Left about whether the rebetika was a viable artistic vehicle toward proletarian, class-conscious militancy (Zaimakis 2009, 17-18). This debate hinged principally on the low-life content of rebetiko, which was alternately interpreted as being an authentic expression of the desires of the masses, or, per the more common Marxist view, "apolitical, lascivious songs that spread the spirit of immoral individualism, hedonism, and fatalism within society" (Zaimakis 2010, 7-16). Much of this debate involves the mapping of rebetika onto "the trap of ethnocentric obsession," where many arguments were, perhaps ironically, substantiated within the bourgeois and nationalist idea of a Greek dual-descendance, despite this narrative's conformity to the cultural hegemony of European orientalism. I will return to the intricacies of each of these arguments, with attention to the particular evolutionist schema they share, later in this section, particularly as it becomes relevant to Kazantzakis's novel.

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<sup>23</sup> There are about a dozen of these dhromoi, which are essentially scales that follow a makam, or a meandering progression of notes (Harrison, in Petropoulos 148-149).

In the world of the producers of this music, which occasionally overlapped with but was mostly spatially divorced from the intellectual circles and writings of the Leftists, Tsitsanis' music marked the beginning of an era where greater scrutiny and reflection was placed on the marginal and low-life content of the rebetika. Zaimakis conceives of this as a "labor phase" of rebetiko, spanning from 1940 to 1953 wherein the lyrics of the rebetika became more suffused with the proletarian movement, including elements of working-class culture (2009, 20). One of the most commonly cited examples is "*Oi Fabrikes*" or "The Factories" by Tsitsanis, which was recorded in 1950, each verse punctuated with the refrain "Here's to proud, immortal labour!" (Holst 158-159). As both the title and refrain would suggest, the song romanticizes the factory work of the post-war industrial period, praising "the girls in the textile mills/and others who work at the looms" who "don't give a damn for worldly fame" and have instead "learned to live life simply,/ their sweat drips in golden drops" (ibid).

At the same time, however, the 40s and 50s saw the ennoblement of the bouzouki and the sanitization of the rebetiko, which was directly linked to the politico-cultural moment. Emerging from years of occupation, and then civil war, during which the fabric of social life was irreparably damaged by terror and violence, Economou writes the rebetika were recast by some in the political establishment as a musical tool meant to instill in their audience a certain optimism (Economou 21-23). Tsitsanis was an example of this to an extent, as a musician who received formal violin lessons from an Italian teacher and verbally distanced himself from both the fatalism of the manges and the *hasiklidhika*, or the hashish songs, which mostly had a pessimistic tone (Tragaki 62). However, the most pronounced sanitization of the rebetiko occurred in the development of *archontorebetiko*, or a rebetiko that was for the bourgeois class, created in the musical theatre in the late 1940s and spanning until the end of the 1950s

(Economou 21-23). The archontorebetika had melodies and rhythms borrowed from rebetiko-laïko, but were notably performed with Western instruments, and combined with *elafry traghoudhi*, or light song (Tragaki 66). Under this transformation, the rebetis was reinterpreted as a kind of bohemian savant of the lavish nightclub scene, surrounded by beautiful women, who spent in an exhibitionist manner (ibid). The phrase "let's go to the *bouzoukia*" (a club where one could hear the bouzouki) became associated with a certain ostentatiousness and opulence (ibid).

Following the Civil War years, Greece underwent a process of rapid urbanization and modernization, with the economy reaching, at one point, one of the largest growth rates in the world (Economou 18). In the context of this national growth, rebetiko and its descendent styles were able to flourish in a more commercial sense than rebetiko had previously, making appearances in popular theatre, the radio, and cinema (Economou 22). Composer innovation, in this context, was a parallel process to the growth of the economy. Departing from the older styles, developed under conditions of censorship, occupation, and displacement, and performed in strictly lower-class and covert localities, the social changes affecting audience and performance space necessitated a musical split from the previous generation. "I had inside me my own big musical world," insisted Tsitsanis, whose social world was considerably different from that of Vamvakaris (Tragaki 62). Even composers who were more directly linked to the world of the mangas appear to be affected by some totalizing impulse toward a new period of "modernity." Manolis Hiotis, who was born in 1921 and learned to play in the mangas circles of Thessaloniki and Nafplio, contributed the most to the dissemination of bouzouki music to the bourgeois class, creating various innovations borrowed from Western-style clubs and orchestras (Economou 22). Tsitsanis's reference to a new "musical world" appears to aptly conceptualize

what was not merely a deviation from the norms of the past, but a translation of rebetiko into an entirely different and "modern" milieu.

This process, which we might think of as the gentrification of rebetiko, also notably included the academic and intellectual spheres of cultural life. In his 1949 lecture, for example, the composer Manos Hadjidakis reinvigorated an evolutionist schema dating back to the late 19th century that saw rebetiko (and Greek Eastern music broadly) as descended from Byzantium, therefore preserving some authentic Greek cultural remnant whose "pristine psychic quality," he argued, ought to be heralded as "art" (Tragaki 7-8, 95). While rebetiko was largely neglected by Greek academics, there was some movement in the world of art criticism. The well-known critic Sofia Spanoudhi, for example, initially took a negative stance toward rebetiko but eventually came to praise Tsitsanis's musicality and his elevation of rebetiko (Tragaki 95). In this way, elite acceptance of rebetiko was predicated on its transformation, elevation, and fusion with more conventionally western musical style. Even as the country underwent an unprecedented period of economic growth, distribution of wealth was most principally enjoyed by the elite class while unemployment among the middle and lower classes sparked the second big wave of immigration from 1955 to 1970, with some 900,000 people immigrating for economic reasons (ibid). This makes for what is perhaps a familiar pattern: as rebetiko was gradually gaining traction among the upper classes, it was also becoming progressively less affordable for the lower class communities who shaped its development.

### *deaths and revivals*

The appropriation of the rebetiko by the bourgeois class is dramatized in Costas Ferris's 1983 film *Rebetiko*. Following the life of a rebetiko singer, Marika, from Smyrna, the film

chronicles the rise of rebetiko music among the lower classes and ends with the archontorebetika in vogue. The film begins in 1919, just three years before the Asia Minor Disaster and the population exchanges. Within the first ten minutes of the film, there's a textual synopsis of these event that uses an overlay of historical footage, and the viewer is transported to the refugee slums of Piraeus. Ferris's rebetiko, thus, is firmly rooted in the refugee experience; it sees this as a vital contextual part of its character. Ferris's imagining of the life of the rebetissa is romantically tragic—as a child, she's beaten by her father and later witnesses his murder of her mother; she runs away from home and becomes pregnant by a magician, who then leaves her alone with the child, landing her in the nightclub scene that drove her parents to economic desperation and abuse. Through this deluge of trauma the film stakes out what it sees as the sort of *ars poetica* of rebetiko music: the notion that emotional authenticity begets great art. In a scene that takes place in the lemon market, Marika asks her childhood friend Yorgos, who is encouraging her to sing in the nightclubs, "How do I know if my voice is any good?" to which he replies, "any good? Do you have sorrow? Do you have pain? That's all you need."

In this formulation, the aesthetic value of rebetiko stems from the way it taps into a raw emotional authenticity, one that is only accessible to those who have lived through great trauma. Ferris's rebetiko therefore perhaps leans more toward the Asia Minor/Smyrna strains of the rebetika than the Piraeus songs about urban low-life, valorizing the former for their translation of disaster into artistic expression. So too does the soundtrack, composed principally by Stavros Xarchakos, angle toward Smyrnaic instrumentation, themes, and vocal style, though with lyrics that are considerably more embellished and poeticized than anything written in the first generation of rebetiko.



The narrative privileging of the Smyrnaic and refugee origins of rebetiko has rhetorical weight that arguably operates in both the era depicted as well as the post-Junta (1967-1974) moment in which Ferris's film was made. To break this down, I will begin with the way rebetiko's political messaging is being imagined within the post-war period the film depicts. The song that becomes the sort of "theme" of the film is called "*Mana Mou Ellas*," meaning "Mother Greece," which was written by Stavros Xarhakos and Nikos Dimitratos for the film but became popular and has since been covered by artists like George Dalaras. This song signals the Smyrnaic style through instrumentation and scale, as well as its use of an amanes-like introductory portion that has a similar *dhromos*, or road, as the famous "Amanes Tis Kalinixtias" or "Goodnight Amanes" discussed in chapter 1. By incorporating the amanes in this way, "Mana Mou Ellas" focalizes the Smyrnaic and lament strains of the rebetika before launching into the more conventionally-rebetiko sounding chorus, which principally uses baglama and bouzouki. In this sense, the song almost summarizes the musicological progression of the rebetiko—from amanes to bouzouki. The song is ultimately a lament, however, with highly poeticized lyrics that gesture more strongly to the lyrical content of the Smyrnaika over the Pireotiko. Leaning toward the Smyrnaika in this way has rhetorical implications in that it perhaps lends credence to the idea of rebetiko as an authentic expression of the lower class. In contrast with the Pireotiko or mangas rebetiko, the real or imagined political messaging of rebetiko as criticizing the state apparatus/normative bourgeois society becomes more easily legible when prescribed onto displaced bodies, rather than those that are inarticulately subversive.

It follows thus that "Mana Mou Ellas" accompanies the most tragic moments of the film. It first appears in the scene in which Marika's father beats her mother to death in the street outside of their house, while she watches from the doorway. As the father's face yields a sudden

moment of self-realization, the song lyrics gently fade in, beginning "Those elusive words and lies/you fed me with your milk/But now that the snakes are awakening/You're wearing your ancient adornments." As the camera closes in on Marika, touching her mother's lifeless body, the song crescendoes: "And never do you weep, Mother Greece/even as you sell your children into slavery." The camera fades to black before presenting a litany of stock footage that is—to my eye, at least—difficult to place. War footage is cross-cut with what appears to be crowds of aristocratically-dressed men, which, when coupled with the previous scene's location in the refugee slum of Piraeus, suggests that it is the wealthy and the powerful who control the course of war while it is the poor who suffer for it. The final shot where the neighbors look on at the girl hovering over her mother's body appears to create a kind of tableau of life in the slums, situating the "elusive words and lies" and the accusation about "sell[ing] your children into slavery" as being about state violence and the deal brokered between Greece and Turkey via the Treaty of Lausanne that led to the population exchanges (Grigoriadis 170).

Similarly, the song reappears again at the end of the film, when Marika returns to Greece for a reunion concert after having gone to America to record, abandoning her daughter at a convent in the process. When she returns, in 1956, her childhood friend and bandmate Yorgos, and the bouzouki player Babis, for whom she carries a torch, organize a reunion concert, even though, as Babis says to Yorgos, "Rebetiko is dead. The whole world wants *elaphry* (light music). Do you see any rebetes working?" Nevertheless, they hold the concert, where Marika appears before a room clad in upper-class attire—suits, gowns, and pearls—and sings "Mana Mou Ellas" only to discover the whole room knows the song and gleefully claps along to those same lyrics. Her blank expression looking out at the audience mirrors the semantic effect of a bourgeois crowd parroting her lyrics, both devoid of meaning. The scene cuts to her and Yorgos

outside, speaking on a bench, while a crowd of lavish and drunken clubgoers taunt a mentally ill man on the street, throwing confetti at him and jeering. The scene toys with an ironic, albeit ableist, reversal—though they torment the "madman" figure, the bourgeois crowd's appropriation of rebetiko semantically drains the theme of its diasporic and disenfranchised lyrical content, rendering its political messaging nonsensical, illegible, in the same way as literary conceptions of madness.

Yorgos leaves and Marika remains on the bench, waiting for the sunrise, when suddenly the mentally-ill man bursts from the crowd and stabs her in the stomach, and she dies outside the club, in the fashion of the famous real mangas called "Artemis," who purportedly died in the street outside a club of an overdose, cradling his bouzouki. Alluding to the lived mythologies of the subculture in this way configures Marika as the personification of rebetiko; it is critical that she dies when the music enters the upper classes. The rebetiko scene of the 50s and 60s indeed became characterized by commercialism and displays of extravagance—the price of drink and food began to bar access to the formerly working class patrons of the rebetika and the new clientele frequenting the night clubs engaged in performative spending, tipping the musicians in excess as well as purchasing plates and cups to smash, a gesture that was common in mangas circles (Holst 71-73). In Ferris's film, the death of rebetiko occurs via its entry into the upper classes and a consequent drainage of its semantic field; lyrics, presentation, social practices, accessibility. Marika's death signals rebetiko's loss of selfhood.

Ferris's critique notably functions in two separate temporal frames. The film came out in 1983, an era following the collapse of the Junta, as well as the end of the monarchy system and the establishment of an official republic. In 1981 the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) came to power with the commitment to shelter Greek popular culture and and proclaim

opposition to the right-wing agenda of instituting a uniform catalogue of "panhellenic traditional musics and dance," a project of the former Junta establishment (Tragaki 130-132). In this context, rebetiko was appropriated and leveraged by the socialist government due to its incongruity with the fascists' vision and it subsequently entered a kind of political and commercial revitalization, with the coinage of the term *tsiftetelokratia* ("belly-dance-ocracy") to describe the government of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou<sup>24</sup> (Gauntlett 2018, 111). Papandreou also famously attended the funerals of both Tsitsanis and the singer Sotiria Bellou, the latter of whom was buried with state honors, which was perhaps particularly unusual because she was publicly scorned for being a lesbian (Tragaki 130-132)(Holst 67). A photo that appeared in *Difono* magazine depicted the Prime Minister dancing a zeibekikos in a bouzoukia club, which symbolically operated like a socialist response to the famous tsamikos danced by Colonel Georghios Papadopoulos during the dictatorship (Tragaki 130-132).

In this context, Ferris's film would also appear to leverage a bit of a critique against the state appropriation of the rebetiko for purposes of posturing. The film's angling toward the Smyrnaic strains of rebetiko past work rhetorically, in this temporal framing, to point out that rebetiko's greatest political utility was realized in adverse socio-political conditions, where marginalized groups were able to articulate their experience against the mechanism of the state. In both temporal frames of reference, however, the object of critique is the semantic depreciation of rebetiko by those in positions of power. By synchronically linking the post-war era and the post-Junta entrenchment of left-leaning neoliberalism, the film's adaptation of rebetiko aligns it with a kind of pre-capitalist and pre-industrial expression of the socially marginalized and

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<sup>24</sup> It is unclear as to who exactly coined this term, but it would appear to be used by the press (Gauntlett 2018).

laments that bourgeois/state appropriation has "killed" its political utility. Rebetiko "deaths," here, become a vehicle by which to lament the loss of some idyllic past era.

As we saw in the first chapter, the literary discourse about rebetiko and "oriental" music broadly serving as a kind of mnemonic device for a lost strain of Greek history has held traction since the end of the 19th century. Ferris's film is not an exception to this kind of genre, though his retelling of the decline of the rebetiko era arguably obeys less of the kind of exoticizing and orientalizing impulses that characterized the work of Nikos Politis and his contemporaries. As I have shown, his film does, however, encode a political messaging of sorts that contributes to a literary genre of adapted rebetiko. I argue that "genre" is a useful term here because it encapsulates the kinds of meanings that adhere to the rebetika after the terminus of their initial creation period. "Genre" can also help us consolidate the question of whether rebetiko is truly political. "A text would not *belong* to any genre," wrote Derrida, "Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (Jerng 10). To apply this, texts that *politicize* the rebetiko, as Ferris's arguably does, participate in a literary genre of rebetiko that then takes on political valence. The critique of the state, for example, is not necessarily inherent—it does not *belong*—to the rebetiko but becomes discursively linked to it through literary representations like Ferris's.

Rebetiko as genre becomes particularly useful in parsing out the Marxist debate about the viability of rebetiko as a tool of class-consciousness. As I will demonstrate, the widely prevailing myth of a "dual-descendance" among the Greek Left cast rebetiko as being intimately connected to an "oriental" (as opposed to "occidental") strain of Greek identity. For some, this gave rebetiko a particular currency in the context of resisting the cultural hegemony of the military

dictatorship in the 60s and 70s. Critically, this "dual descentance" strain of thought and the Orient it produced<sup>25</sup> has its origins in literature—particularly in the way rebetiko was written about secondarily. My analysis looks at Nikos Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek* as a participant text in the literary genre of rebetiko, and one that links rebetiko and the "dual-descentance" myth.

I argue that this ethnocentric language, from which Greek Marxists struggled to free themselves in the debate about rebetiko, was pulled from a literary genre invested in the tropes of the "dual-descentance" mythology as a way to account for the rapidly shifting social, cultural, and geopolitical processes of the country as it withdrew from Ottoman Empire and into Europe. The connection between the language in the works of Kazantzakis and those of the Leftists writing some 30 years later also demonstrates that narrative is never innocent. As Mark C. Jerng points out in his book about literary genre and race, "By focusing on the narrative mechanisms by which these genres embed race in the reader's capacity to recount the past and imagine the future, we can see the development of racial modes of thought that have escaped our attention because they are not dependent on the biological or cultural visibility of bodily difference. *They carry out their effects whether race is seen or not.*" (19) Analyzing ethnicity production in texts like Kazantzakis's thus also engages in the work of detaching social difference—be that race, religion, ethnicity—from biological bases.

In *Zorba the Greek* too, one of the most internationally famous texts of the Greek literary canon, allusions to the rebetika take on an elegiac tone. Kazantzakis's novel is a lament not

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<sup>4</sup> The discourse of "dual descentance" in literary texts like Kazantzakis's may amount to a production of race, but the particularities of race making in the "dual-descentance" literary genre is perhaps beyond the scope of this paper. Principally due to the fact that the producers of this discourse were also the subjects thereof, I choose to use the vocabularies of "orientalism" rather "race/racism" here. However, because the tropes that emerge are orientalist in nature, it is not without consequence for non-Greek racialized subjects—for this reason I do not wish to rule out calling this "race," either.

merely for his obtusely stereotyped character Alexis Zorba, but for the entirety of the imagined world which makes him, its Orientalized primitivity, its pre-industrial untouchedness. Zorba's simultaneous alignment with the ethos of rebetiko—its hedonism, its sorrow and frenzy—links rebetiko to a romantic and elegized Orient in the text. By contrast, the nameless narrator of Kazantzakis's text would appear to be some projection of the selfhood of the author: a European-educated scholar who desires an authentic, lived experience as an escape from his intellectualism. These two characterizations embody the question Kazantzakis poses in *Journey to the Morea*, which was later published in 1965: "What has the dually descended modern Greek taken from his father, what from his mother?" (Holst-Warhaft 2018, 87). The deep admiration with which the narrator studies Zorba and his way of life, bordering on the erotic (and indeed, it is significant that the narrator never takes a female lover, repeatedly refusing the advances of the widow character), betrays a longing for the roughness, the primitivity, the unbridled sentimentality of the world he represents: "this Zorba," he writes, "was precisely the person I had been seeking for such a long time and not finding: a vivacious heart, warm voice, a great unrefined, unsophisticated soul with its umbilical cord not yet severed from earth. Using the simplest human speech, this workman made clear for me the meaning of art, love, beauty, purity, passion." (Kazantzakis 20). In addition to embodying the homoerotic tone between these two characters, this excerpt demonstrates the kind of evolutionist schema Kazantzakis is conceptualizing between them. The modern, European intellectual turns to the exoticized, "unrefined workman" to reconnect with some authentic, manual, earthly essence. In this formulation, the Orient is not merely valorized for its perceived proximity to the land, but this is spoken about erotically, with an undercurrent fetishism in phrases like "vivacious heart," "unrefined, unsophisticated soul" and of course, the "[un]severed umbilical" which does the

double work of metaphorizing proximity to the land while also insinuating a certain infantilism. Meanwhile, these same erotic vocabularies of longing with which the narrator talks about Zorba also operatively suggest his own alienation from the earth, his own body.

Though these characters are presented as binaries, there are scenes and moments that function to break down their oppositional boundaries, creating between them, as Kazantzakis would later describe, a kind of child of dual parentage. For example, Zorba is initially presented as a kind of antithesis to the ethos of capitalism, particularly so in a monologue responding to the narrator's suggestion that Zorba might play the santouri for him as part of his contract:

"If I'm in the mood, do you hear? If I'm in the mood! As far as working for you as much as you want, I'm your slave. But the santouri is something else—a wild beast—and it needs freedom. I'll play if I feel like it. I'll even sing, and I'll dance the zeibekiko, the hasapiko, the pendozali. But I need to be in the mood—that's a cut-and-dried bargain. Straightforward business: if you pressure me, you lose me. What you need to know is this: in such things I'm a human being." (Kazantzakis 22)

The appeal to feeling (reiteration of "If I'm in the mood"), as well as "freedom," reject the requisite mechanical condition of the human under capitalism. "In such things I'm a human being" also clearly implies that there is something fundamentally inhuman about the nature of capitalism. However, later Zorba becomes frustrated with him for trying to learn about the lives of his workers—"You'll end up with heartache; you'll love them more than you should and more than is good for our work," he warns, later demanding "What are you, after all, a preacher or a capitalist? You've got to choose." (Kazantzakis 66). The way these characters wear off on each other breaks down the presupposed binaries they represent—Occident versus Orient, capitalism versus socialism, intellect versus psyche, industrialism versus working the land—producing



Kazantzakis syncretic liminal space. The narrator, too, desires a "symbiosis" that he cannot have, one that would "enable these deadly opposites to become brothers and therefore allow me to profit from both this earthly life and the kingdom of heaven" (ibid). This section microcosmically summarizes Greece's transition into European post-industrial capitalism as a kind of purgatory, being stuck between opposing and irreconcilable realms.

In this logic of these false binaries, rebetiko serves as a symbolic device with which to emphasize the alignment of Zorba with the Orient. Importantly, he plays the santouri, a traditional instrument of the Smrynaic tradition. He also embodies the character of rebetiko, not in the sense of the mangas figure, but of the music itself. This is perhaps best demonstrated in one of the more famous monologues of the book, after the Narrator tells Zorba his plan about mining lignite is really a ploy so that people "wouldn't throw lemon peels" at them while they, instead, "put ideas into practice"—which suggestively refers to the sort of ongoing metaphysical quest shared by the two men (Kazantzakis 85). When the narrator makes this confession, Zorba bursts into a *zeibekiko* with such fervor that he frightens the narrator. Zorba explains:

"Why are you looking at me like that? You saw the way I am. I have the Devil inside me. He shouts and I do whatever he tells me to do. Whenever I'm about to suffocate, he shouts, 'Dance!' and I dance. I cure my suffocation. Once, when my son Dimitrakis died in Halkidiki, I got up like that and danced. My relatives and friends, seeing me dancing before the remains, rushed to take hold of me. 'Zorba has gone mad!' They shouted. But if I hadn't danced at that moment, I truly would have gone mad from the pain, because he was my first son and three years old and I could not bear his loss." (Kazantzakis 88)

Through the narrator's retelling of this monologue, this scene suggests the kind of oscillating disgust and fascination the narrator has for Zorba and the kind of Orient he embodies.

The line "I have the Devil inside me" obviously speaks to the narrator's own orientalist fetishisms, but it also operatively connects this monologue to the rebetika. In addition to zeibekiko being a traditional dance of the rebetiko with a particular time signature, the idea of bursting into song or dance when overcome with strong emotion ("the Devil inside") gestures to the fundamental ethos of rebetiko, epitomized in the much cited quote from the Smyrnaic composer Giorgos Rovertakis: "The rebetis was a man who had a sorrow and threw it out." (Holst 19). As discussed in Chapter One, the vocabularies of "madness" and "pain" also factor heavily into the lyrical body of rebetika music.

Over the course of the book, it is the viscera, the raw, uninhibited sentimentality of Zorba and his world that incrementally begins to seduce the narrator who, writing furiously all the while (he calls this "battling"), loses his enchantment with his books and his text-based pursuits of a higher truth. One morning, he wakes up to Zorba gone and tries to read one of his favorites—a collection of Stéphane Mallarmé poems—only to find himself utterly disgusted with the way "pure" poetry "dematerializes and dissipates" the human condition "through alchemical transformation within the smelting furnace of the mind" (Kazantzakis 155). Two things are notable here. The first is that the narrator finds himself disgusted by a French poet that he previously loved. In the years following Greek independence, the cultural, architectural and educational transformations enacted in Greece were done so under supervision of the French (Tragaki 4). Consequently, French cultural artifacts were broadly in vogue and exalted by the bourgeois class, and French texts and language prevailed in many of the institutions of higher education (ibid). The Narrator's sudden rejection of the Mallarmé gestures to a distaste for the European cultural transformation of Greece, and the way it has sucked the life from the human condition of art. "Humanity has been emptied," he writes, "no sperm any longer, no excrement,

no blood. Every material thing has degenerated into a word, every word into a musical amusement, and now the 'last man' sits at the edge of his desert and decomposes this music into mute mathematical ratios" (Kazantzakis 156).

Secondly, the particular reference to "alchemical transformation" and the "smelting furnace of the mind" has a particular temporal resonance in consideration of the fact that this novel was published at the end of the German occupation of Greece, when the vast majority of Greece's Jewish population was systematically deported and murdered. It is not merely that the narrator is frustrated with the idea of a stuffy European intellectualism; rather, he is calling the concept of Europe a cultural holocaust. The reference to biological fluids—"sperm," "excrement," and "blood"—situates the idea of "europeanization" in the body. It is the European cultural lens that slowly and violently unmakes the human body, that disembowels and decays the unique cultural corpus of Greece.

What lurks just behind the text of this scene is a contemporaneous discourse about "greekness" that, beyond attempting to get at a definition of Greek identity, has implications about the cultural hegemony of "Europe." This scene, as well as the previously mentioned one in which the narrator finds himself momentarily taken aback by Zorba's display of emotion, orbit around the question of who is to be included in "Europe," who is not to be included, and how the bodies of those not included are marked and made legible. These scenes thus circulate around critical questions of race/ethnicity-making, with a particular concern for preserving a strain of identity that Zorba embodies in the face of European cultural hegemony.

Around the same year that *Zorba the Greek* was published, Yiannis Ritsos published his poem "Romiosyni" in Athens. It was around the start of the Greek Civil War, and just a few years before Ritsos was arrested and imprisoned for eight years on various Greek islands,

Lemnos, Makronisos, and Ayios Efstratios for the communist leanings of his work. "Romiosyni" was a political poem that adhered to the idea of *romios*, or the understanding of greekness that draws heritage from both the Byzantine historic tradition and also, sometimes, from Ottoman occupation (Sharon 128). There are, notably, varying definitions in the way this term gets used, and different limits to what kinds of "eastern" heritage are valorized. A "romaic" definition of greekness was contrasted with a "hellenic" one, which implied the heritage of a "golden age" ancient past (Tragaki 100). These ideas of the separate "strains" of identity dated back to the post-independence years, and for much of the upper class elite, the idea of "romaic" identity had long been a shameful relic that was evidence of Ottoman domination, with many instead adhering to the philhellenic ideas of Britain and France, who helped secure independence (Sharon 128). In Kazantzakis's text, it is this romaic identity that represents some authentic and unique aspect of Greek identity that is under the attack of European philhellenism.

For communists like Ritsos, there was a renewed interest in romaic identity during the civil war because it emphasized the demotic aspects of identity and glorified the working people and their attachment to the land. In Ritsos's poem, the inseparability of the landscape and its people (in the poem, fighters of the Greek resistance army) is emphasized through personification and the interchangeability of pronouns. The first section of the poem starts:

These trees cannot be contained under a lesser sky,  
 these stones are not content beneath an alien heel,  
 these faces cannot be contained except under the sun,  
 these hearts are not content except with justice.

This landscape is as merciless as silence;

it hugs the scorching stones against its body  
 and presses in its light the orphaned olive-trees and vines;  
 its teeth are clenched. No water here. Light only. (Ritsos 13, trans. Germanacos)

The physical body and landscape collapse into one another in the space of Ritsos's poem, "trees" become "bodies," creating the pathetic fallacy through natural language that suggests anatomy, "vines" for "veins," "light" for "blood." The suggestion is that it is not merely the people, but also the landscape that is engaged in the act of resistance—first to German, then British, then American military domination. Ritsos's poem is portraiture of a people intimately and righteously (perhaps even biologically) connected to the land, a people who "when they tighten their grip the sun/is certain of the world;/when they smile a tiny swallow rises/from their tangled beards" (Ritsos 13).

I bring up Ritsos in order to demonstrate that both he and Kazantzakis are participating in a genre that is discursively conceiving of a fundamental split in Greek identity, and in doing so, establishes the way this split is to be treated—that is, its significance and functionality in the world. In writing about race and genre, Jerng writes that genre "activates certain ways in which racial meaning will be used in the composition of a world—establishing situations and justifying actions while making others seem less possible or realizable" (16). Conversely, he also argues that race then shapes genre by "acting a possible set of referents, as narrative anticipations, and as the social structuring of meanings" that create expectations for how the world might operate (ibid).

While I am hesitant to call Kazantzakis's and Ritsos's formulations of identity *race*, the same dialectic is applicable: their texts participate in a genre which *produces* a strain of romaic/orientalized identity. In doing so, this identity takes on constellations of meaning and

characteristics—the association with the communist movement in Ritsos text, the association with rebetiko in Kazantzakis's, the proximity to the landscape in both. It is through this work of genre that rebetiko becomes linked to some elegized past in the work of both Kazantzakis and Ferris, for example. These characteristics then *produce* genre. This is why, when talk of reviving the rebetika entered communist circles in the 60s and 70s, it had already picked up certain associations with the Orient, romaic identity, the working people, etc., from these literary works, and arguably one of the great pitfalls of rebetika-as-resistance discourse during this time was the inability of Leftists to break from these kind of dualistic clusters of stereotypes (Zaimakis 8).

The military dictatorship or Junta was established in 1967 and remained in place, with American support, until 1974. During this time, as during the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1941), music was again placed under the political microscope with regard to its role in affirming or challenging a state project of national identity. The Colonels (as the leaders referred to themselves) developed a particular penchant for certain kinds of "folk music," which they appropriated to legitimate the regime as well as argue its connection to ancient Greece in service to an idea of national purity, authenticity, and continuity (Papaeti 139-141). Simultaneously, they also permitted and played Greek and foreign elafry or "light music," pop music, and classical music, largely because these were seen to be in line with the "West" and its culture (Papaeti 142). However, the promotion of elafry was paired with a staunch opposition to laïko, which had grown out of rebetiko and was seen as culturally and musically corrupted—thus a ban was once again placed on rebetiko and this time, laïko as well (Papaeti 142-143). It was during this time that Ilias Petropoulos published his massive rebetiko anthology and was subsequently imprisoned, his book banned (Tragaki 109). One of the most effective tools the state had in policing music was the Song Olympiad, an international festival that, beyond being used as a fig

leaf to cover up the ongoing European investigation and allegations of torture used by the state, legitimized the military government's activities by hosting artists from 17 predominantly European countries—including the U.K., Spain, Belgium, France, Germany, and Italy (Papaeti 144-145).

In this context, there was a renewed interest in the rebetiko among Marxist intellectuals, who were seeking a proletarian song that would also build a sense of nationhood and, per a Gramscian model, challenge the hegemonic system of "habits, tastes, and beliefs of the ruling classes," which, they believed, constituted an uncritical acceptance of western and elite cultural practice (Zaimakis 9). The vast majority of the Communist leadership ended up rejecting the rebetika, primarily for the reason that they viewed it as individualistic, hedonistic, apolitical, and cynical in their outlook—they were, essentially, critical without fighting spirit (Zaimakis 16). However, some very influential communist figures continued to vocalize support and interest in the rebetika, including the sociologist and philosopher Nikos Poulantzas and the composer Mikis Theodorakis (Zaimakis 12). Poulantzas's writings about rebetiko are arguably the most nuanced and the most convincing. He comes the closest, in my view, to rejecting the Orientalist formulation of dual descendance, rejecting both the western scholar's nostalgic fetishism of the folkloric as connected to ancient Greece, as well as the idea of the populist authenticity and purity inherent to the idea of a demotic or people's culture (ibid). Instead, he underscores the tradition of social class revolt in which rebetiko has historically been bound up and emphasizes that they are not perfect—pointing out that the low status of women in the rebetiko song perpetuated the subjugation of women to men in capitalist society (Zaimakis 11-12). Theodorakis, similarly, advocated for a rebetiko with the kind of asterisk of reform. He valorized the long-standing tradition of rebetiko, which he felt captured the "love, torment, and valor of the

proletariat in urban centers" (Zaimakis 19). At the same time, however, and where he deviates from Poulantzas, he felt that it had to be cleansed from its "unhealthy, impure elements," meaning its underworld content, Turkish and Anatolian motifs, melodies, and associations (Zaimakis 11). He, too, would appear to valorize the notion of the romaic, but in the sense of a folkloric connection to Byzantium, rather than the hybridity facilitated by Ottoman occupation (Tragaki 94).

Theodorakis's interest in the rebetiko and his eventual decision to set Ritsos's poem to a bouzouki laïko song cycle might be said to synthesize a kind of constellation of components in a way that has been instructed by literary genre. This is to say that looking at dual-descendance and rebetiko as genre(s) that occasionally overlap allows us to see the ways in which these orbital associations of rebetiko, popular resistance, dual-descendance, pre-industrialism, pre-capitalism/socialism become literary patterns in the secondary writings about the rebetika. These referents, these "narrative anticipations" have consequences for the question of what constitutes political art.

They also help us identify some of the problems of rebetika as resistance art. In the case of the revival during the junta years, the convoluted logics of many Marxist intellectuals continued to rely on ethnocentric notions of split identity, that arguably pandered to the very cultural hegemony they were trying to resist. The question of whether these figures could do the work of separating rebetiko from this framework became a moot point, however, due to the communist leadership's rejection of rebetiko, the subsequent collapse of the military government, and the fact that it then became so commercialized in the years following the Junta. The next chapter continues to look at genre as a discursively transformative force and grapples with the question of how to catalyze resistance art, or how one might re-radicalize the rebetika.



### Chapter Three: Toward a Queer Rebetiko

In the years following the collapse of the Regime of Colonels in 1974, the prohibition of rebetiko (and laïko) was removed and it subsequently surged in popularity as a kind of culturally authentic artifact. Through the late 70s and early 80s, new recordings of rebetika classics by singers like George Dalaras, Haris Alexiou, Stelios Kazantzidis, Eleftheria Arvanitaki, and Glykeria, among others, re-popularized songs from the zenith of rebetiko in the 20s and 30s, like "Tha Spaso Koupes" ("I'll Smash the Cups") and "Oloi oi Rebetes tou Dounia" ("All the Rebetes of the World"). Today, many of these songs continue to be performed on Greek television before a studio audience, covered by pop stars, and of course, used by restaurant owners in the U.S. and Greece alike to perform a kind of cultural authenticity.

The broad international commercialization of rebetika recordings throughout the 80s as well as its appropriation by the state (discussed in previous chapter) seems to have rendered the debate about its political content something of a moot point, as the discourse about rebetiko retreated into the docility of cultural kitsch. Indeed, when I began my initial musings that would later become this project, I had a conversation with a relative in Crete who disdainfully referred to it as "tourist music"; its rhetorical valence waned to a commercial strategy, an elevator music played by tavernas to lure foreign patrons to come inside. From an American perspective, the arc of the rebetika seemed familiar, inevitable, an anachronistic echoing of the many lives and deaths of American counterculture, the vestiges of which form our own brand of lamentable kitsch—our many young adult clothing stores peddling pre-distressed Nirvana shirts, film cameras, re-issued vinyls. I saw in the rebetika a familiar and profound absence; something like the embarrassment of listening to radio pop stars embellish Bob Dylan lyrics with pristine and flashy vocal runs, or that the burger restaurant where I waitressed as a teenager played mostly Motown classics, their

own grim histories of segregation and exploitation muted into a background noise punctuated by the sticky clatter of plates on lacquered countertops.

This is to say I recognized in the rebetika a kind of semiotic crisis, a translation failure somewhere between playing the song and *hearing* it. In some ways, it would appear that this was a critical issue during periods of revival like the Regime of Colonels. Musicians like Theodorakis, for example, were hearing something they could not make their colleagues hear in the same way, evidenced by the outrage of many who heard his rebetiko adaptation of Ritsos's *Epitaphios*, calling it "disastrous," "cheap," a "distort[ion] of the poetic text" (Tragaki 93-96). The critical question of adaptation is how to make others hear what the artist is hearing—how, for example, could Theodorakis have produced a rebetiko song and made his colleagues hear in it the sounds of a proletariat demanding revolution? Building off the previous two chapters, this chapter works from an understanding of rebetiko as complexly intertwined with counterculture and protest, and consequently explores the options of recovering rebetiko as an artistic means to point out systemic inequities in a modern setting. For artists and scholars alike grappling with the question of how to produce meaningful modes of resistance, there is much to be learned in returning to the rebetika, which have historically operated as a destabilizing force to the normative social order. New translations and adaptations of rebetiko, I argue, also have the potential to lift it as a genre from the trap of the orientalist and ethnocentric discourse that have historically undermined its viability as a vehicle of resistance.

When we speak about adaptation, it is of rebetiko as a *genre*. This means that contributions to "rebetiko" modernly exist within a kind of constellating network that do not alter the fact of the lived experience of the rebetiko from the early to mid 20th century, but rather, in their orbit around the *artifact* of rebetiko, demonstrate that rebetiko is not a static "closed

system," but rather a dynamic and changing cultural practice (Tragaki xvii). Participation in the *genre* of rebetiko, per the Derridean formulation, creates a porousness that moves us toward a definition of the rebetiko that is rooted in lived experience. It is here that I wish to pose the following interrelated questions: to what extent do the lived experiences of queerness and rebetiko overlap and what is to be gained from genre work that explicitly connects these two experiences? This chapter grapples with these questions by first providing a few examples of what a queer rebetiko might actually look like in practice before launching into an analysis of the discursive functionality of a queer rebetiko, and its particular relevance in the contemporary moment of resurgent neo-nationalism and austerity politics.

***marginal bodies: re-imagining the mangas***

What brought me to the question of a queer rebetiko was the film *Head On* (1998), directed by Australian-Greek director Ana Kokkinos, adapted from the 1995 novel *Loaded* by Christos Tsiolkas. In what I offer as the "rebetiko reading" of *Head On*, the young Melburnian-Greek protagonist, Ari—as well as his best friend, Toula—offer something of a model for what a queer reinterpretation of the traditionally hypermasculine and heterosexual rebetis figure, reinterpreting the subversive character of the rebetes in a distinctly queer way. What may initially read as hyperbolic and stylized young adult rebelliousness succinctly gestures to the markers of rebetiko subculture, invoked through the vocabularies of characterization and setting. First, Ari's affinities for drugs, discrete back-alley sex, and clubs, as well as his kind of broody, masculine posturing closely aligns him with the caricature of the mangas, implicitly making a comparison between various kinds of cultural marginality—queerness, rebetiko, and something that would appear to border on grunge. The different localities in which the film is set—

including a kafeneio/gambling den, the police station, and a club called "the Steki" (a haunt, typically associated with rebetiko)—alludes to and adapts the traditional places of rebetika songs, like the *tekedes* (hashish bars), the bouzoukia, and the jailhouses.

In drawing a connection between the rebetiko culture of old and a contemporary (that is, 90s) experience of queer identity, the film underscores the marginality inherent to each, and does so in a way that frequently operates in a kind of trans-temporalism. The film opens at a wedding, in which Ari enthusiastically participates in a group dance, before stepping out of the circle, and watching, somewhat scornfully, as other guests pin money to the clothes of the bride and groom. When the bride's garter is caught by Ari's friend Joe, flashing between him and his girlfriend Dina, Ari leaves the celebration, ignoring the handful of guests outside who ask him where he is going. He then delivers a short yet angst-laden monologue in voice over, which constitutes the first dialogue of the film:

They tell you that God is dead, but man, they still want you to have a purpose. They say, "look at your parents, hard-working migrants. Worked two jobs. Struggle all your life, buy your kids a house. There, that's purpose." They tell you to be a doctor, a teacher. "Be creative, do something, believe in something. Believe in family and the future. Save the world. Believe in love." But fuck it. I'm no scholar. I'm no worker, I'm no poet.

This scene is striking for a few reasons. First, the sight of conflict is a wedding, which triggers something for Ari that leads into this rather nihilistic monologue. Marriage and courtship are paradigmatically fraught in both the archival rebetika songs and the rebetiko genre broadly. Chapter one discussed the prevalence of madness, addiction, and disease in love songs, and

marriage is arguably the apex of this particular lexicon of sentiment. One of the best-selling recordings of its day was Antonis Diamantidis's (also known as "Dalgas") 1931 recording of "H Pethera" ("The Mother-In-Law") which was a kind of ballad based on an actual murder case in which a man was killed by a relative of his wife, which was purportedly instigated by the wife and the man's mother-in-law (Holst 107). Elias Petropoulos, one of the first rebetiko ethnographers, insinuated that the mangas' scorn for marriage was symptomatic of his general disdain for normative society and women broadly (57-62). Arguably, the character Ari translates and adapts this to the lived experience of being gay—where scorn for marriage is perhaps less pronouncedly a product of misogyny and homosocialism (though I would not say that these are entirely eradicated from the text of *Head On*, either), and more so a consequence of holding a queer identity in a heteronormative society. Still, by evoking the paradigm of fraught marriage through a specifically queer lens, the film opens up new possibilities for translating the tropes of the rebetika as a means for talking about queer identity and marginality.

To this end, the nihilism in the monologue also takes something of the flavor of the rebetika, crossbred with a kind of pseudo-grunge. The rejection of both religion ("God is dead") and the productive moralism of late capitalist society ("I'm no scholar. I'm no worker, I'm no poet.") speaks to the kind of rejectionism in songs like "Oi Laxanades" ("The Pick-Pockets"), in which the speaker says "Mister Policeman, don't beat us because you know very well/this is our job, and don't expect a kick-back<sup>26</sup>." A mirror emerges between the "underworldism" of the rebetika texts and the sort of 90s revival of punk/grunge, engaging a kind of analogizing of countercultures, different translations of the same subversive impulse.

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<sup>26</sup> Translation from Holst-Warhaft, p.119

The fact that the monologue leads into a kind of back-alley sex fantasy scene also alludes to the occasional sexual hedonism of the rebetika archive. Considering the vastness of this archive and the different strains discussed in chapter one, I would not say, as many have argued, that hedonistic tendencies are a defining feature of the rebetika, but there are certainly a substantive number of songs that are more or less about drinking or getting high, singing and dancing with beautiful women (see, *inter alia*, "Ta Hanoumakia" ["The Tramps"<sup>27</sup>], "Stou Linardou" ["At Linardhos's Tavern"], "Stis Athinas tis Omorfies" ["Among the Beauties of Athens"]). Ari's own hedonistic tendencies are presented as response to the pressures of social normativity, which delicately intertwines late-capitalist notions of productive ambition with heterosexual marriage. In this scheme, Ari's text is not merely incongruous with cultural heteronormativity, it rejects the clustering of behaviors that occur within a heteropatriarchal framework ("purpose")—i.e. finding a good job so one can (fall in love and) support a family. In the parodic logic of his monologue, "believe in love" suggests that "love" is part of a teleological process that secures one's place as a productive cog in the social machine; it is this heteronormative (and reproductive) notion of love that drives us to be our most successful selves.

The film demonstrates that queering rebetiko may also be a viable way to critique structures of gender under heteropatriarchy and, in doing so, perhaps lift rebetiko from its somewhat misogynist and hypermasculine proclivities. In the film, notions of gender as performance become particularly salient through references to the culture of rebetiko. Butler, who coined the term "gender performativity" in her 1990 canonical work *Gender Trouble*, writes that gender is performative in the sense that "words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core of substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body" (173). Thus, these

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<sup>27</sup> This is a tenuous translation. Hanoumi or hanoumissa is similar to saying rebetissa, that is, a female rebetis, or one who runs in manges circles and/or is a Smyrna refugee. Purportedly derived from Turkish (Holst-Warhaft 105).

behaviors purport to corporeal signs of some interior "essence or identity," when in fact the opposite is true: the gendered body is produced through the "various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 173). The normative conceptualization of the gendered body—which sees it existing as either a man or a woman—also necessitates a "stable and oppositional heterosexuality" to maintain the coherence of each gender (Butler 30). In this way, gender and sexuality become inextricably linked and binarized in systems of institutional heterosexuality. Butler writes that institutional heterosexuality "presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire" (ibid).

One way Kokkinos's film is able to interact with these ideas is using the gendered vocabularies of rebetika dances. A scene building toward the climax of the film occurs in the nightclub called "the Steki," which appears to be a somewhat accurate representation of the popularity of rebetiko among the Greek-Melburnian youth in the 1990s, with a live band covering some of the rebetika songs made famous in the 80s, including "To Koritsi Apopse Thelei" ("Tonight, She'd Like To") and "Dimitroula Mou" ("My Dimitri") (Gauntlett 2018, 113-117). At the club, Ari runs into his brother's roommate, an "Anglo" young man named Sean who has come as the date of Ariadne, who is Greek. This creates tension as Sean and Ari appear to have a kind of unrealized sexual chemistry, as both men outwardly struggle to present as straight. At some point, Ari joins a small circle of men dancing a *zeibekiko*, which is an improvisational and dance typically in the time signature 9/4, that celebrates masculinity in an "authoritative yet introspective performance of pain and self-contained pride" (Tragaki 40). The *zeibekiko* is a performance of masculinity that implicates the whole body; the male dancer displays his strength by performing a series of acrobatic moves, such as swooping, balancing, and doing quick turns

on the spot typically while making intensely pained or solemn facial expressions (Gauntlett 2018, p.110). As Ari does this, he makes direct eye contact with Sean, who watches from the periphery of the club. The rebetiko dance lends the image symbolic legibility: by *doing* what is, in explicit terms, a performance of masculinity, Ari exploits the umbilical between gender and sexuality that heteropatriarchy presupposes. By producing masculinity on the surface of his body, an assumption is made that conceals his desire for Sean, who is symbolically in the margins of the social space, where women watch the male dancers. In this way, the fact of the characters' queerness is also concealed by the heteronormativity reproduced in the organization of the space, where Sean's desire is rendered feminine, the passive object of a display of hypermasculine preening.

By contrast, when the dance is finished Ari's friend Toula, a transgendered woman, comes in, amidst the laughing and jeering from the many patrons who presumably know her personally and have made presuppositions about her gender. She greets Ari coquettishly, touching his face and calling him "sugar" in a kind of flirtatious play, which makes the other patrons then turn on him. Someone yells, "Is that your girlfriend?" Ari storms out of the club as Toula dances a *tsifteteli*, which is a kind of belly dance that is, perhaps expectedly, associated with sensuality and femininity. The room is hypnotized, the camera shows a few disgusted faces, many more wearing an unabashed intrigue. There is something of a mirroring effect produced by the camerawork in this scene, where Toula's dance calls less attention to herself as the subject of the shot than it does the rest of the room. These two dances, one after the other, use the vocabularies of rebetika dances to destabilize heteronormative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Where Ari's dance demonstrates the tenuousness of the presupposed link between masculinity and heterosexual identity, Toula's dance calls into question the "truth" of gender



beyond performance. Her dance rejects the idea of gender as an internal and essential substance and demonstrates instead the facade of gender, its manufacturedness. The consequence is that the viewer's attention is shifted to the room, the spectacle of everyone else's quotidian performance.

Yet, the scene also makes apparent a critical aspect of Butler's analysis—that performances of gender that uphold the binary are a critical part of what "humanizes" subjects, and conversely, those that "fail to do their gender right" are punished at different levels of the normative system (177-178). The other clubgoers ridiculing Toula is an example of the punitive culture around gender and sexuality, one which is upheld by participating individuals in addition to larger and more institutional bodies. A more institutional example of this kind of punitive culture occurs in a scene taking place later in the night, when Toula and Ari are arrested for drug possession after their cab gets pulled over. Both are detained and subsequently interrogated by two officers, one of whom is Anglo-Australian, the other, Greek-Australian (when the latter first enters the room Toula says, "You're Greek, aren't you?"). The first officer quickly becomes antagonistic with Toula, who answers his questions with a certain flippancy while Ari remains silent and fearful. The interrogation takes a sadistic turn when the Greek officer orders them both to strip. Ari does so, but Toula refuses, protesting in Greek and then insulting him when he persists. Infuriated, he tears her shirt and beats her, shouting violences in Greek like, "They should have drowned you at birth."

Beyond depicting the realities of institutional (police) violence on queer and especially transgendered bodies, this scene is marked with the tropes of rebetika songs and culture. The jailhouse as a locality arguably offers one of the most salient points of crossover between the fictive world of rebetika songs and the life of the manges who sung them. The plethora of prison songs (see, *inter alia*, "O Isovitis" ["The Lifer"], "Nyhtose Horis Feggari" ["Night is Fallen

Without Moon"], "Gedi-Koulé," "To Sakaki" ["The Jacket"], "I Phoni tou Argile" ["Voice of the Hookah"]) undoubtedly dramatized the experience of prison and were wrapped up in the subversive aesthetics of the manges. Indeed, prison songs have a large part in imagining the "Rebetiko Underworld," that is, a landscape made up of prisons, *tekedes* or hookah bars, brothels, gambling dens, etc. However, as discussed in chapter one, these songs were also arguably bearing a kind of metaphorical witness to the realities of criminalized existence—the ghettoization of Smyrnaic refugee populations who contributed to the development of the rebetika, state-mandated efforts to eradicate Ottoman or "oriental" traces from Greek culture, including the bans placed on rebetiko and other Eastern musics, and institutional efforts to "clean" the Greek language of its foreign "impurities" (Tragaki 9)(Zaimakis 2011, 7)(Gauntlett 2018, 110). The prison/underworld of the rebetika tradition is all at once a lived experience, a fictional/aesthetic landscape, and a metonymic device for life at the margins of society.

One may imagine, then, that this configuration becomes particularly operative in the conjunction of rebetiko and queerness. In the scene with Ari and Toula, it is seemingly the drugs in Toula's purse that land them at the police station, but it is quickly made apparent that the actual crime being punished is Toula's selfhood, her inability to "do" gender "right" (Butler 178). Similarly, one could argue that the state focalized rebetiko music as the criminalized object, when in fact it was punishing those who failed to conform to the state's vision of "correct" (read: European) Greek identity. Ari's compliance and complicity renders his own queerness invisible, even as he becomes visibly, but not disruptively, upset by the officer's assault on Toula. In other words, the punitive system of heteropatriarchy *works* in this scene; fear drives Ari to silence rather than interference, which would potentially risk revealing his own queerness, his own stakes in the matter. This is not to say that being gay is necessarily *like* being trans, but that these

are both identities that fail, in some way, to perform gender/sexuality in the way heteronormativity demands. It is also significant that scene takes place under the gaze of the Anglo-Australian officer—where the stakes of a "correct" gender performance are augmented by the power dynamics of xenophobia, and the officer's demeaning tone toward both Ari and Toula as well as his Greek co-officer (Zaimakis 116).

Kokkinos's film, perhaps the only of its kind, demonstrates that queering the rebetiko is not only possible, but that the rebetika may even provide a useful vocabulary for talking about marginality, normative "passing," punitive cultures of gender/sexuality, and queer subversions. Granted, the allusions to the rebetika in *Head On* are subtle, difficult to recognize by those who are not familiar with the rebetika; they are not a particularly focal aspect of the film, and it is likely that much of the viewership of this film—that is mostly in English—would sooner recognize the 90s grunge and drug culture. Still, the film offers a starting point for what could potentially be a fully realized genre; that is, a queer rebetiko. Particularly, characters like Toula open up possibilities for re-imaginings of the figure of the rebetis as someone other than a heterosexual (or alternatively, as Petropoulos called them, "phallocratic") cisgendered man.

This being said, the phenomenon of queerness in the rebetiko is not merely a fiction, but an understudied reality. Petropoulos, who was the first to study the rebetiko and one of the few scholars who did so first-hand, made the observation of queerness in the world of the rebetes before rebetiko studies was even a field (Emery 36). As was mentioned briefly in chapter one, this was most commonly in the form of a kind of homosocialism and scorn for women that, at times, turned homoerotic (56-59, 61-62). "The love life of the rebetis had two poles," he wrote, "women and young men" (Petropoulos 56). The 1968 anthology *Rebetika Tragoudhia (Rebetika Songs)* is arguably Petropoulos's most famous work, but it is not insignificant that one of his

other most famous works is *Kaliarda* (1971), a dictionary of Greek gay slang and one of the first of its kind (Emergy 36-37). It seems many of Petropoulos's interests circulated around the body, sexuality, and the erotic (see Emery, "Foreword: The Life and Times of Elias Petropoulos," *The Brothel* [1980], and *The History of the Condom* [1999]). The link he made between queerness and the culture of the manges would appear to be less about conventionally defined queer identities, and more so about the connotative anomalousness of "queerness" to a normative order. For example, he writes the mangas "hated marriage and preferred free love" and that "in the world of the rebetes, adultery was considered neither a crime (as it was in the penal code) nor a sin" (Petropoulos 56). Similarly, he describes a certain "class" of rebetis rather derogatorily called "*poustromanges*" (literally, a "faggot mangas") who was generally respected and accepted in rebetiko circles, though notably appears to be distinguished from manges who had both homosexual and heterosexual relationships, where the insinuation is that the latter was not truly gay in the same sense (Petropoulos 62).

In Petropoulos's vision, sexual anomaly seems part and parcel of the mangas's life at the margins of society, that is, non-normative sexualities are of the "marginalia" that constitute his text of selfhood. Included in his anthology of songs published in 1968 (for which he was imprisoned by the military government on grounds of "obscenity" and "pornography") was one short song of the prison archive called "Kouna, Bebi" ("Swing, Baby"), believed to be the only explicitly homosexual rebetiko song written (Tragaki 109)(Butterworth and Schneider 154-155):

Swing your butt, baby,  
to please your lover.

Swing your farter, baby,

to please your heart.

It is difficult to know the veracity of Petropoulos's claims in terms of the actual lives and biographies of the mangas. I am not of the opinion that Petropoulos's observations should be entirely dismissed merely because he does not always adhere to the modern institutional norms of academic language and analysis, and in many ways it seems his lived proximity to the mangas world and his unparalleled archival work make him the most credible scholarly source on the rebetika. However, as Tragaki points out, he was also a leftist and an anti-nationalist in conflict with both the state and the academy at the time, and it is not unlikely that he had a personal investment in playing up the shock value of the rebetika, as well as its subversion and non-conformity (109-111). While these are important considerations, it does not alter the fact that these subversions then become part of the rebetiko-as-mythology, part of the constellation of meanings that attach themselves to the rebetika in the discourse of genre. Furthermore, when we consider the mangas as a *fictional figure*, there is much about him that overlaps with the experience of queerness under heteropatriarchy—from the use of slang as a kind of self-protection, to in-group codes of conduct and dress, to the stigmatization and fraughtness around marriage and courtship, to persecution at the hands of institutional authorities, like police.

Petropoulos's discussion of queerness is mostly androcentric, but he does briefly mention the women of rebetiko, or the figure of the *rebetissa*, who he writes was "the most liberated type of woman that Greece knew at that time. She bestowed her erotic favours on any man she fancied and may also have had lesbian relationships" (62). Ironically, the language here is more speculative than the queer assertions made about the male rebetes, despite the fact that there were no famous queer rebetes and one of the most high profile female singers of the rebetika tradition, Sotiria Bellou, was openly a lesbian, which was relatively unheard of at the time (Holst 67).

Without generalizing experience, it would appear that at least some women found that the world of rebetiko offered them more freedoms than mainstream society at that time. For example, the interviewees in an ethnography conducted in the Lakkos district of Heraklion, Crete included Despoina Skaloxoritou (born in 1928), a founding member of the Green Women's Union, and a member of the EDA (Hellenic Democratic Left) (Zaimakis 28-29). Skaloxoritou acknowledged the images of oppressed and exploited women in rebetika verses, but also emphasized that women in the rebetiko world "may have enjoyed a degree of freedom available nowhere else in Greek society": dancing, singing, smoking and drinking in the company of men (ibid). Arguably, the relative social liberation the rebetiko world offered some women in comparison to normative society was conducive to more freedoms in expression and social behaviors generally, including sexuality.

Particularly overlooked are the number of rebetika recordings that feature women performing songs written for a male singer<sup>28</sup> and the ways in which one might "read" these performances as a space of play for queer expressions. In moving toward the genre of a queer rebetiko, I revisit these recordings here as models of the way rebetika songs could lend language for talking about sexuality and gender, particularly through devices like parody/drag and satire. I approach these recordings in a manner consistent with the way I have treated all the songs/recordings in this thesis, which is as *texts*. I emphasize this here with the awareness that applying a queer lens to the rebetika is not a direction the scholarship has yet taken, however, this does not mean that these readings are not viable or useful. On the contrary, I argue that these literary analyses not only operate as a starting point for thinking about an intentional and contemporary genre of queer rebetiko, but also that they approach rebetiko from an angle that

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<sup>28</sup> "Written for a male singer" is not meant to assume heterosexuality, but rather refers to the genderedness of the Greek language and the way this is reflected in the text of the lyrics.

privileges women and breaks from the androcentrism with which much of the scholarship approaches rebetiko broadly. For the purposes of this paper I will look at three recordings; Rosa Eskenazi's recording of "*Stis Athinas tis Omorphies*" ("Among The Beauties of Athens")(1993), Ioanna Georgakopoulou's recording of "*O Pasatempos*" ("The Pastime")(1946), and Sotiria Bellou's "*Aliti M'Eipes Mia Vradhia*" ("You Called Me a Bum One Night")(recording c.1960, song written 1938), but many more exist and are truly hidden delights of the rebetiko archive, see also *inter alia* "*Hariklaki*," "*Anoixe Anoixe*" ("Open Up"), "*Paixte Bouzoukia*" ("Play Bouzoukia"), and "*To Pasoumi*" ("The Turkish Slipper"). I have chosen these three as emblematic of three distinctive modes of heteronormative subversion, where each text is offering slightly different expressions of queerness.

In "Among the Beauties of Athens," the speaker falls in love with a woman who's "got black eyes, black hair,/and a black beauty-spot on her cheek," a recurring description in rebetika songs about desirable women (see "*Mavra Matia, Mavra Phrydia*" ["Black Eyes, Black Eyebrows"]). The arc of the song is fairly linear in the way of love songs, ending with a rejection of the speaker's advances:

One day when I saw her, "Lady," I said,  
 "come be my girlfriend and mend my heart."  
 "I don't want you to love me," she said to me,  
 "I care for another, stop wanting me."<sup>29</sup>

Like many other love songs, this one deploys the usual Smyrnaic tropes of madness and disease in the lines "Aman, Aman, I'm going crazy! / From the time I first saw her she's done me

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<sup>29</sup> Transcription and translation from Holst-Warhaft (114-115).

no good, / and I'm wasting away from the love in my heart, / and without her I'll never be cured." Eskenazi's high and lilting voice adds to the frenzied tone. When sung by a woman to another woman, the trope of madness acquires a particular meaning about the stigma surrounding homosexual relationships broadly, but particularly those between women. It suggests that the speaker, too, is struggling to understand why she is feeling the way she does. Additionally, that the love interest should say "I don't want you to love me" and "stop wanting me" also suggests a kind of disgust, a failure to comprehend the speaker's emotional text. In Eskenazi's version of this song, we see how the fraught nature of love and heartache in the rebetika texts lend themselves to queer adaptations, where heteronormativity operates as the unseen saboteur, making the love seem impossible, nonsensical, grotesque. In this sense, the traditional and recurrent emotional vocabularies of the rebetika love songs easily become salient translations within queer love plots.

In a similar vein, the song "The Pastime" is about an impossible love, but with a particular emphasis on betrayal. Written by Manolis Hiotis in 1946, it is considered part of the *archontorebetika*, or rebetika for the bourgeoisie (Economou 22). Though it still deploys the bouzouki, its lyrics are perhaps a bit more palatable than some of the rebetika love songs of the 20s and 30s, and certainly a bit more poetic. In the song, the speaker refers to themselves as a pastime, a consequence of their lover's emotional flightiness:

Whatever you say I have heard enough  
 Your fairytales, I'm now above them  
 And I have understood what I was to you;  
 Your pastime, something to kill the hours.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Transcription and translation are mine, see Appendix A for complete lyrics.



The last verse of the song critically reveals that the love interest has left the speaker for someone else:

And when you go to that manga that you love

Don't tell him you had me for a pastime.

A couple of interpretations arise from this recording. There is a reading wherein the love interest leaves the speaker for a man, the "manga" figure at the end of the song. Here, the betrayal in question is operative within the constraints of heteropatriarchy, where same-sex relationships are rendered invalid, temporary, or even recreational, and the heterosexual relationship is presented as an inevitable end, the only viable performance of sexuality and courtship. At the same time, however, the husky quality of Georgakopoulou's voice has a certain indecipherability that operates on listener assumptions of voice/vocal tone as connected to gender. Without knowing the identity of the singer, one might alternatively hear the song as a straightforward heterosexual narrative in which the love interest leaves the speaker for another man, another mangas. The subjectiveness of what the listener hears produces something akin to gender parody (Butler 175). Stripped of the physical attributes we most commonly rely on in our dogmatic attempts to categorize humans into two normative gender groups, the recording instead isolates the voice, defamiliarizes it from the markers of the body. In doing so, it creates an ambiguity that highlights how arbitrarily certain signs on the human body are assigned to gender; revealing the tenuousness of the relationship between gender and the physical body. The register of Georgakopoulou's voice thus plays with our assumptions about mimicry versus original, in the manner of gender parody which Butler writes "does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate," but rather "the parody is *of* the very notion of an original" (175).

Taking this recording as a model, one might imagine the kinds of parodic performances that could emerge simply from making the performer's gender impossible to decipher by the cisheteronormatively-trained eye; in effect, playing with, parodying, and critiquing the rather cisheteropatriarchal notion of "androgyny," a term that only maintains its shape when reinforced by closed and binarized systems of gender expression.

Bellou's recording of "You Called Me a Bum One Night" also offers a model for a kind of "rebetiko drag." The song, first composed in 1938 by Apostolos Hadzichristos, one of the aficionados of the classical rebetiko period, features a melodic structure unembellished by vocal improvisations, featuring bouzouki on its own in the more masculine style of the Piraeus-based rebetiko (Holst 54, 68-69). Bellou's recording, then, is so compelling precisely because it breaks the paradigm of Piraeus bouzouki songs from the 20s and 30s that almost exclusively featured the male voice (Holst 54). The song itself is something of an artifact of classic mangas masculinity. The term *alitis* in the title most commonly gets translated as "bum," but it is difficult to capture all the connotative nuance of this term in a single word, which can also mean something similar to "punk" or even "bastard." Like "mangas," it is a mostly masculine term—while "mangissa" and "alitissa," the feminine forms, were used, they are not nearly as common or functional in the song archive as the masculine noun.

Bellou referring to herself as an "alitis" and covering a song written in a paradigmatically masculine style consequently has a kind of politics of co-optation to it, but also could be read as having parodic undertones. Bellou herself was something of an anomaly and undoubtedly had one of the most striking voices of any of the rebetika singers, which she presented with a certain stoicism and severity, mostly appearing in modest, simple clothing, her hair cropped short, and performed seated with her ankles crossed, her hands in her lap, as opposed to contemporary

divas like Mary Linda, who would often perform standing and in a gown (Holst 67). While her other recordings demonstrate the embellishing capabilities of her bluesy and growling voice, in "You Called Me a Bum One Night" her delivery is simple, gruff, in places toying with or trying on the nasally and clipped delivery of mangas performers like Markos Vamvakaris or Anestis Delias. The result is playful, delivering the lyrics with a sort of tongue-in-cheek machismo:

"Bum!" you called me one night, without any reason

but this bum's heart doesn't bear you any grudge

but this bum's heart doesn't bear you any grudge

"Bum!" you called me, but I won't hate you

I laugh, even though it still hurts, so as not to make you sad

I laugh, even though it still hurts, so as not to make you sad

There will come a day though, baby, when you'll regret it

You'll cry and weep for this bum who has your heart

You'll cry and weep for this bum who has your heart<sup>31</sup>

In one reading, the song's macho qualities, its *rebetia*, offer a vehicle for lesbian expressions of longing at a historical moment when being openly queer was not socially acceptable, where Bellou's lived biography bleeds over and inhabits the performance space. Here, the appropriation of mangas aesthetics for queer usage provides a means of expression for identities facing cultural censorship. In an alternative reading, one might read Bellou's playful tone as a kind of drag that satirizes the song's masculinity, engaging in a kind of mockery of the

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<sup>31</sup> Transcription and translation are mine, see Appendix A for complete lyrics.

self-righteous male figure who would appear to be something of a failure. In either case, recordings like this one as well as the Georgakopoulou demonstrate that a range of parodic possibilities emerge from engaging the rebetika as a kind of drag.

*underworlds, the state, and rebetika as resistance*

In returning to these recordings made by women, we see that forms of rebetiko drag that, while not yet a fully realized genre of performance, are potentially a response to Butler's questions about viable methods of gender subversion: "What performance where will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire. (*sic*)" (177) In addition, the performative qualities of mangas macho culture or rebetia provide a useful analogy for thinking about gender—both gender and "manga-ness" are things that are *done*, and have their own vocabularies of " words, acts, gestures, and desire" (Butler 173).

But queering the rebetika does not merely operate in a single direction. If rebetiko provides a kind of aesthetic vocabulary with which to parody and therefore destabilize static and binary categories of gender, I also argue that conversely, gender parody provides a working analogous method to destabilize constructed binary categories of "occident" and "orient" that have long been operative in the discourse about and around rebetiko, and have largely stunted its viability as a political utility (see chapter two). Put differently, queering and forms of gender parody provide instruction about how to "read" different kinds of bodies in a way that

counteracts orientalist conceptualizations of bodies, peoples, and places as being binary opposites. Just as there is no "internal core or substance" of gender, there is no essential truth to either category of "occident" or "orient" (Butler 173). In order to appear true or to create the illusion of some essential core, these categories, like gender, depend on two "stable and oppositional" systems of meaning that include, among other things, words, behaviors, gestures, and the signs of the body (Butler 30, 173). As an analogy, gender parody demonstrates not merely that both gender and place are constructed, but that these are constructions that we continue to "do"—with our language, with our behaviors, with our bodies. In this way, gender parody also turns the focus back to the discourse around rebetika, as a site that has historically been implicated in the social "doing" of orientalism. I argue therefore that queer adaptations of the rebetika apply the necessary pressure not merely to subvert its own gendered practices, but to call into questions all the binaries in which rebetiko or rather, the discourse around rebetiko, is invested, including the notion of an "occident" versus an "orient."

The problem of enduring orientalism and the places it exists in discourse directly translates to problems around race and racism. Hall has argued that race is fundamentally a *discourse* in the Foucauldian sense, adding "difference" to Foucault's observations about the dialectical relationship between power and knowledge, such that those in power manufacture both knowledge and difference, which in turn affirm the position of those in power (47-48). Therefore, people in positions of power implicitly claim to "know" bodies; to understand not only *what* marks people as different—that is, the set of signifiers that render the body racially intelligible—but what these signifiers *mean*, what features like skin tone, hair, eye shape, etc. are standing in for metaphorically and metonymically (Hall 63). By deploying orientalist tropes (a

kind of manufactured knowledge), the discourse around rebetiko contributes to the meaning, the significance, of otherness.

These productions have racially-charged consequences in the modern Greek climate of resurgent nationalism and austerity politics. As discussed in chapters one and two, much of history has seen rebetiko at the center of debates about Greek national identity, where both arguments in defense and against the rebetiko have deployed tropes that cast its "orientalness" as being associated with a certain primitivity, an excess of emotion, and perhaps most critically, an oil-and-water like insolubility with Greek "occidentalness," where rebetiko has been cast as evidence of an "oriental past." These tropes around the Orient have real and grave consequences in the modern climate of austerity and national emergency, where ideas about otherness figure into "necropolitical sovereignty," or the capacity of the state in determining "who is *disposable* and who is not" (Carastathis 75). In this way, Carastathis writes, the state is able to designate who the "authentic victims" of austerity are, while simultaneously producing an "affective economy of hostility" toward migrants, sowing the seeds of a public indifference toward particularly vulnerable groups; migrants facing detainment and deportation, hatred of LGBTQ+ people, and routine violent attacks on both of these groups (76-77). Far-right organizations in Greece have historically operated as an extension of the state—during the German occupation, the post civil-war period, and during the Junta (Carastathis 75-78). Modernly, neo-nazi groups, particularly the Golden Dawn, act and depend on these very productions of difference, where the austerity politics of survival and limited resources are enacted against the backdrop of routine gendered and racialized violence carried out by paramilitary battalions, and protected by the Hellenic Police, who have repeatedly refused to investigate cases involving members of the Golden Dawn (Amnesty International 2014)(Carastathis 75-78).

It is in the context of pervasive and violent nationalism that a recovery of the rebetika through a radically queer lens potentially has political utility against what Carastathis terms the "affective economy of hostility" (77). Importantly, violent racism and xenophobia are not merely an activity of right-wing neo-nazi groups, but rather a climate of hostile nationalism is also largely facilitated by the rhetoric employed at all levels of the state—from the national church leading counter-demonstrations against LGBTQ+ groups, to the Minister of Health warning Greek men not to "sleep with any foreign illegal prostitutes" at the risk of contracting AIDS, to even the more left-leaning rhetoric about owing hospitality to migrants, where "hospitality" as a framework implicitly indicates who it is that is at home (Carastathis 79, 82-83). I do not mean to suggest that art can replace the immediate measures necessary to institute protections for populations vulnerable to state and civil violence, nor should it be expected to. Yet, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, rebetiko's historical role as a form and community pushes us toward an understanding of art as the language we have for resisting the state's attack on the imagination of the people; one of the most critical tools we have in holding our own communities accountable.

A radically queer rebetika potentially responds to the modern climate of austerity and violent neonationalism in a few ways. First, it draws on rebetiko's historical role as threatening a vision of national identity manufactured by the state and the elite classes. Relatedly, it serves as a mnemonic device for the historical fact of Greece's, and by extension, Europe's shifting boundaries. Consequently, a radically queer rebetiko pokes holes in both a Hellenistic narrative about national purity, as well as the uncritical acceptance of "Europe" and "Europeanness" as having some essential and natural defining character, rather than a carefully negotiated geosocial space that has primarily to do with power and subjugation. Finally, as I have discussed in the

previous s, a radically queer rebetiko is primarily concerned with destabilizing binarizations of not merely gender, but also of orientalist taxonomies that feed directly into state-sanctioned forms of racism.

What are the narrative possibilities, for example, of reimagining the symbolic landscape of the "underworld" as a way to critique the necropolitics of the state; identifying and condemning the relegation of particular lives to social death? What are the politics of spatial reclamation at play in adapting the rebetika for drag performance? Or what rhetorical utility is there in merely pointing out that the producers of the rebetiko, a genre modernly heralded as an artifact of Greece's national culture, were once refugees who were ostracized, placed in ghettos, and delegitimized as "Turkofied" Greeks (Pappas 353)? Fundamentally, what I am proposing is not that the rebetika *could* be radicalized or queered in the interest of saving them from a state of commercialism and kitsch. Rather, I am suggesting that the rebetika actually offer narrative vocabularies for speaking about various types of inequity—racism, homophobia, state violence, xenophobia, transphobia—for people who need them.



**Conclusion: On Being Moved**

In early 2018, when I began the initial musings that would eventually become this project, I was skeptical about writing about a topic that would be obscure to the vast majority of an English-speaking readership, particularly so at a college in the midwestern United States. I was also acutely aware of the tenuousness of my own relationship to the songs, which, despite being the musical accompaniment to Sundays I spent helping clean the house as a child, represented for me then the profound distance between myself and the place that produced them. The collection of rebetika records belonged to my mother, an American who had spent the young adult years of her life raising my two brothers on the island of Crete before moving herself and both of them back to the U.S. permanently. For me, they were only a fragment of what was effectively a kind of living mausoleum for the life they had left behind, a complex archive that flourished in the many overlooked spaces of our home; seashells in the bathroom, photographs and letters slipped between the pages of copies of Kazantzakis that are no longer in print, the faded rugs, an evil eye ring left to me by an older relative I never got to meet.

Before I had even begun to consider the rebetika through an analytical lens, they represented for me an inexpressible longing shared by my mother and brothers that I was witness too, a life and world that was so proximate to me and yet in many ways so unknowable; an underworld of our own making. I should be clear: I do not know that I would have arrived at this project without this experience. Though they were so far from me, geographically, socially, linguistically, I heard in the rebetika something deeply personal. This is what I believe led me to see, finally, the rebetika as literary *texts*: they reflected something of the human condition that did not even necessarily require language, or rather, it was that they were instructive beyond the confines of word and line. This thesis begins with an epigraph from John Berger's *To The*

*Wedding*, in which he writes "Listening night after night to the rebetika is like being tattooed" (10). Berger, in his own succinct lyric, suggests precisely what was so magnetic about the rebetika for me and for, I am sure, many others: that their action is to get into the skin, that they mark the listener with sentiments pulled from somewhere deep in the body, at once exterior and interior. The rebetika are texts that enter through the nose and mouth.

What I termed the "emotional literacy" of the rebetika in the first chapter partially solves the problem of esotericism and also speaks to one of the more institutional goals of this project, which is to suggest that as literary scholars, there are many artifacts that we can "read" as texts. In fact, I would instead pose the question: *what can't we read as text?* This has implications that relate to the more explicitly political goals of this project as an investigation of artistic radicality and resistance. Perhaps there is something arcane about the rebetika and yet perhaps there is something arcane about *Henry VIII*, or Wordsworth, or *Moby Dick*—so on and so forth. I am suggesting a few things here. For one, that literary studies in the U.S. today present an array of standard texts that for many students, are at best uninteresting and at worst deeply alienating of their experience, or even re-traumatizing.

Much of the English literature we treat as canonical, in fact, operate as an apparatus of race-making and other structures of inequality—as Jerng writes, "Genres activate certain ways in which racial meaning will be used in the composition of a world—establishing situations and justifying actions while making others seem less possible or realizable" (16). This logic is arguably applicable to all kinds of social coding—misogyny, transphobia, antisemitism, heterosexism etc. To some extent, then, studying these texts is necessary in order to understand how they are contributing to contemporary structures of inequality. At the same time, however, conventional literary studies should be supplemented with opportunities for students to read,

study, write about, and adore texts of their own choosing, in whatever form that may take—book, song, techno, movie, oral story, tapestry, pottery and so on. What I hope this project demonstrates, in part, is that literary studies are a tool that can be widely and unconventionally applied, that the possibilities for textual analysis should be expansive and inspiring for students and researchers alike, rather than limiting.

To return again to the problem of the esoteric, I will conclude with the other principal goal of this project, which is to demonstrate that *nothing is esoteric*. As I have conceded, it was, finally, my own personal entanglements that lead me to the rebetika, but once there it became quickly apparent to me that the kinds of questions that orbit around the rebetika are far from obscure. The first generation of rebetika musicians in the 20s and 30s found their lives and livelihoods in the crosshairs of a public negotiation of national identity in which various actors had different investments. The consequences of these debates in the press was about navigating a Greek identity independent of the Ottoman Empire, but more critically, it was about policing the boundaries of Europe and determining the markers for otherness, a question whose consequences we are still very much ensnared in and resisting today.

Further, the kinds of secondary meanings that get attached to the rebetika and the ways they have been reached for by those attempting to articulate various aspirations or desires have implications broadly for how we think about resistance and the role of art. If there is something to be extracted from the histories of those moved by the rebetika—Theodorakis, Kazantzakis, Petropoulos, the many leftists forced into exile during the 60s and 70s—it is that we must necessarily be ruthless in seeking out the prejudices and inequalities that live on in our tools of resistance, lest they crumble in our hands. This, in some ways, brings me to the place where I arrived and have left this thesis; a chapter that I believe is ultimately hopeful, but firstly critical,

imagining the possibilities that could come of a rebetika that has been radicalized and adapted to serve the people who need it most. This final chapter was written with the knowledge that rebetiko has long operated as a kind of political and cultural pressure point and that as a literary body, it offers critical language for talking about marginality, displacement, and state violence.

It is in large part the complex and rich history of the rebetika that motivated the questions in this project, but it would be dishonest to suggest that this is the only reason. When the two young lovers dance together at the end of Berger's novel—which is, in some ways, what the whole text is climaxing toward—the prose contains the echoes of, and is in all likelihood referencing, Lorca's famous essay on *cante jondo*, or deep song, in the lines, "Music began—all the rebetes know it—with a howl lamenting a loss. The howl became a prayer and from the hope in the prayer started music, which can never forget its origin. In it, hope and loss are a pair." (196) By comparison, Lorca writes:

The Gypsy siguiriya begins with a terrible scream that divides the landscape into ideal hemispheres. It is the scream of dead generations, a poignant elegy for the lost centuries, the pathetic evocation of love under other moons and other winds...the melodic phrase begins to pry open the mystery of the tones and remove the precious stone of the sob, a resonant tear in the river of the voice. No Andalusian can help but shudder on hearing that scream. (4)

What occurs in both these excerpts is a kind of birth that results from witnessing the scream, a stream of unstoppable words that spill from the wail as if from an open wound. It is the fundamental absences of this music that pull language from our mouths. The songs produce in us a very physical and intuitive discomfort within our own bodies, an inability to sit still or keep quiet, which is likely responsible for the genesis of this project. This is all simply to say that that

which moves us is never irrelevant, never obscure. Berger's blind protagonist describes a bar owner and bouzouki player called Yanni who once played with Markos Vamvakaris, a real rebetis born in 1905 who, at 20 years old, first heard a bouzouki player from Aivali and subsequently told his father "I'll cut my hands off if I don't get a bouzouki" (Holst 43). What I and many others have loved about the rebetiko is that it gets into the body. Berger's protagonist says it the simplest:

"It can happen that if he plays, I dance."

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Appendix A: Songs

"Manes Tis Kalinixtias" ("Goodnight Amanes") 1926

as performed by Antonis Dalgas, translation by Sophia Schlesinger

For citation, see discography, "Dalgas."

Μανές Της Καληνυχτιάς

Αμάν!

Ἦρθε η ὥρα κι η στιγμή...

Το στόμα μου, αμάν! αμάν! Ν' ανοίξω, αμάν, αμαν!

(Γεια σου Αντωνάκη μου!

Γεια σου παιδί μου!)

Απ' το στόμα μου ν' ανοίξω

και στην καλή παρέα μου

καληνύχτια, αμάν! Ν' αφήσω αμάν, αμάν!

Αμάν, αμάν!

Goodnight Amanes

Aman!

So comes the hour and the moment...

My mouth, aman, aman! Let it open, aman aman!

(Here's to you, Antonis!

Cheers, my boy!)<sup>32</sup>

From my mouth, let it open

and in this good company of mine:

Goodnight, aman! Let it drown all else out aman, aman!

aman, aman!

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<sup>32</sup> Parentheticals in song lyrics denote spoken interjection in recordings. It is common in many of the recordings for musicians to greet and complement each other, imitating the way these songs would have been performed in the more private and familiar settings of the oral tradition (Kaloyanides 137-148).

"Ti Se Mellei Esenane" ("What's it to You") 1927

As performed by Marika Papagika, translation by Sophia Schlesinger

For citation, see bibliography, "Papagika."

Τι Σε Μέλλει Εσένανε

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε από πού είμ' εγώ

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε από πού είμ' εγώ

απ' το Καραντάσι, φως μου, ή απ' το Κορδελιό.

απ' το Καραντάσι, φως μου, ή απ' το Κορδελιό.

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,

από ποιό χωριό είμ' εγώ αφού δε μ'αγαπάς.

Απ' τον τόπο που ήρθα εγώ, ξεύρουν ν' αγαπούν

Απ' τον τόπο που ήρθα εγώ, ξεύρουν ν' αγαπούν

ξεύρουν τον καημό να κρύβουν, ξεύρουν να γλεντούν.

ξεύρουν τον καημό να κρύβουν, ξεύρουν να γλεντούν.

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,

από ποιό χωριό είμ' εγώ αφού δε μ'αγαπάς.

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,  
αφού δε με λυπάσαι, φως μου, και με τυραγνάς  
αφού δε με λυπάσαι, φως μου, και με τυραγνάς

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,  
από ποιό χωριό είμ' εγώ αφού δε μ'αγαπάς.

Απ' τη Σμύρνη έρχομαι να βρω παρηγοριά  
Απ' τη Σμύρνη έρχομαι να βρω παρηγοριά  
Να βρω μες στην Αθήνα μας αγάπη κι αγκαλιά  
Να βρω μες στην Αθήνα μας αγάπη κι αγκαλιά

Τι σε μέλλει εσένανε κι όλο με ρωτάς,  
από ποιό χωριό είμ' εγώ αφού δε μ'αγαπάς.

What's It To You

What's it to you where I'm from

What's it to you where I'm from

From Karantasi, my darling, or from Kordelio.

From Karantasi, my darling, or from Kordelio.

What's it to you and why are you always asking me

where it is I'm from when you don't love me.

Where I come from, they know how to love

Where I come from, they know how to love

They know how to hide their sorrows, they know how to laugh.

They know how to hide their sorrows, they know how to laugh.

What's it to you and why are you always asking me

where it is I'm from, when you don't love me.

What's it to you and why are you always asking me,

What's it to you and why are you always asking me,

when you don't pity me, darling, when you torture me so

when you don't pity me, darling, when you torture me so

What's it to you and why are you always asking me  
which village I'm from, when you don't love me.

From Smyrna I came to find some comfort,  
From Smyrna I came to find some comfort,  
to find in Athens some love and someone to hold.  
to find in Athens some love and someone to hold.

What's it to you and why are you always asking me  
which village I'm from, when you don't love me.



"Ο Pasatempos" ("The Pastime") 1946

as performed by Ioanna Georgakopoulou, translation by Sophia Schlesinger

Ο Πασατέμπος

Αυτά που λες εγώ τ' ακούω βερεσέ  
Τα παραμύθια σου τ' ανθίστηκα πια τώρα  
Και το κατάλαβα πως ήμουνα για σε  
Ο πασατέμπος σου για να περνά' τη' ώρα  
Και το κατάλαβα πως ήμουνα για σε  
Ο πασατέμπος σου για να περνά' τη' ώρα

Κάθε σου φίλημα το βρίσκω πια πικρό  
Και τον καημό μου δεν μπορείς να τον γλυκάνεις  
Μαζί μου έρχεσαι μπαμπέσικο μικρό  
Γιατί γυρεύεις κόνξες σ' άλλονε να κάνεις  
Μαζί μου έρχεσαι μπαμπέσικο μικρό  
Γιατί γυρεύεις κόνξες σ' άλλονε να κάνεις

Φύγε λοιπόν αφού το θες αλλού να πας  
κι 'ασ' τις μουρμούρες και τις κλάψες και τις τρίχες  
Κι όταν θα σμίξεις με τον μάγκα π' αγαπάς  
Να μην του πεις ότι για πασατέμπο μ' είχες

O Pasatempos

Whatever you say I have heard enough

Your fairytales, I'm now above them

And I have understood what I was to you;

Your pastime, something to kill the hours.

And I have understood what I was to you;

Your pastime, something to kill the hours.

Every kiss from you I find bitter

And you can't sweeten my yearning

You come to me, my little rascal

because you want one more to make your fool

You come to me, my little rascal

Because you want one more to make your fool

So go then, to wherever you want,

Cut the mumbling and the crying and the bullshit

And when you go to that manga that you love

Don't tell him you had me for a pastime.

"Aliti M'Eipes Mia Bradia" ("You Called Me a Bum One Night")

As performed by Sotiria Bellou, translation by Sophia Schlesinger

For citation, see bibliography, "Bellou."

Αλήτη Μ' είπες μια Βραδιά

«Αλήτη!» μ' είπες μια βραδιά, χωρίς καμιάν αιτία

μα του αλήτη η καρδιά δε σου κρατάει κακία

μα του αλήτη η καρδιά δε σου κρατάει κακία

«Αλήτη!» μ' είπες, μα εγώ αντί να σε μισήσω

γελώ, ακόμα κι ας πονώ, για να μη σε λυπήσω

γελώ, ακόμα κι ας πονώ, για να μη σε λυπήσω

θα έρθει μία μέρα όμως, μικρή, που θα μετανοήσεις

για του αλήτη την καρδιά θα κλάψεις, θα δακρύσεις.

για του αλήτη την καρδιά θα κλάψεις, θα δακρύσεις.

You Called Me a Bum One Night

"Bum!" you called me one night, without any reason

but this bum's heart doesn't bear you any grudge

but this bum's heart doesn't bear you any grudge

"Bum!" you called me, but I won't hate you

I laugh, even though it still hurts, so as not to make you sad

I laugh, even though it still hurts, so as not to make you sad

There will come a day though, baby, when you'll regret it

You'll cry and weep for this bum who has your heart

You'll cry and weep for this bum who has your heart