"Shifting" Identities or "Hidden" Messages?

A Musical Ethnohistory of Northwestern Greece

(An Introductory Note)

by *Athena Katsanevaki*

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Abstract: This research explores the musical culture of an unknown area of Northwestern Greece (Western Macedonia and Epirus) and its neighboring areas in the State of North Macedonia and Northern Epirus in Southern Albania. It reveals that areas considered alien and linguistically distinguished from each other, belong to the same musical culture despite the difference of language. Thus the conventional division of the area of Western Macedonia in Greece into three zones, the Greek-speaking part (the largest one), the Vlach-speaking part (on the Pindus Mountains), and the Slav-speaking, on the Northern part of the area, is seriously disputed. Emic comments of the locals about their language and identity, justify these findings and are confirmed by historical research in the Byzantine past of the area.

Keywords: Western Macedonia, Pindus, Epirus, Musical Ethnohistory, Historical Ethnomusicology, Identity, Vocal music, Historical meaning, musical form

The first encounter

Western Macedonia[1] in Greece participates in the wider context of the musical system of Western Greece and Southern Albania (Northern Epirus). Ethnographic

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[1] This is a short version of an overall analysis (the issue of the languages, the political scene of the area, the historical ethnographic and musical data of 7 case studies and the synthesis) presented in Athena Katsanevaki, *"Shifting" identities or "hidden" messages? A musical ethnohistory of Northwestern Greece*, Editions "Dimitris Themelis Archive of Greek Traditional Music," (Thessaloniki: School of Music Studies Library, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2021), e-book with full text: https://sophia.mus.auth.gr/xmlui/handle/123456789/2114?show=full.

Part of this research (both fieldwork and historical research) is presented in Athena Katsanevaki, *Vlach-speaking and Greek-speaking songs of the Northern Pindus mountain-range. A historical-ethnomusicological approach: Their archaism and their relationship with the historical background*, Part A and B [revised and enlarged printed edition of the PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1998], Athens: IEMA Institute for research on Music and Acoustics, 2017 (gr/engl.; electonically published in

and anthropological approaches as well as linguistic data divide the area mainly into two zones: the Greek-speaking part, which is strongly related to the central mountainous area of Pindus where the Vlachs (the third group) reside, and the Slav-speaking one, extending to the Northeast.

Such approaches however ignore the cultural background of its populations, who are self-identified in both cases as "Macedonians". In most relevant texts, it is not made clear that there is a Greek-speaking population equally local and self-identified as "Macedonian" as well. Nonetheless, small-scale fieldwork has revealed important data about the clear sub-divisions of self-definitions, and the inter-relationships which unify the areas. The data also provide information about the connection of these areas with the central zone of the Pindus Mountains despite the two different languages: the musical form of the ritual songs reveals the historical past, as well as the reasons for the gradual introduction of the Slavic language in the wider area of Western Macedonia in Greece and beyond. Language can serve in certain cases as a secondary cultural identity, while "hidden" identities can be represented by other cultural expressions (in this case the musical form), carefully guarded by the communities but not apparent to outsiders.

This research reveals a different relationship of music and identity.[2] Musical form becomes a symbol and vehicle in order for an ethnic group to convey oral messages of its own hidden and endangered group identity. Thus, it becomes a means of sustainability and endurance of a hidden and oppressed ethnic identity in the course of time. Essentially, it becomes a symbol. Turino claims that music is a powerful sign of identity because it is a sign of "direct feeling and experience" unmediated by language, stressing the difference between "propositional semantico-referential language and non-propositional sign modes" like music and dance.[3] It must be stressed that my field was slightly different: in the course of the research it became

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2014), and ead., "Modern Laments in Northwestern Greece, Their Importance in Social and Musical Life and the 'Making' of Oral Tradition," *Musicologist,* International Journal of Music Studies, Turkey: Karadeniz Technical University State Conservatory, Vol. 1, no 1 (December, 2017): 95-140.

DOI:10.33906/musicologist.373186.   https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/musicologist/issue/33635/373186 (accessed 30.01.2021). See also Athena Katsanevaki, «Τα κρυμμένα Ιστορικά μηνύματα στη φωνητική παράδοση της Δυτικής Μακεδονίας» ["Hidden historical messages" in the vocal musical tradition in Western Macedonia], in *West Macedonia in Modern Times,* Proceedings of the 1st Conference for the History of West Macedonia, Society for West Macedonian Studies, Grevena: 2-5 October 2014 [e-book, 2014]: 1121-1140.

[2] The issue of Music and Identity has become a major topic in Ethnomusicology and has been reviewed in detail by Timothy Floyd Rice, "Reflections on Music and Identity in Ethnomusicology," *Musicology*, Journal no 7 (Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2007): 17-38.

[3] Thomas Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: A Peircian Semiotic Theory for Music Author(s)," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 43, No 2 (Spring-Summer, 1999): 221-255, pp. 222 and 250; Timothy Floyd Rice, "Disciplining Ethnomusicology: A Call for a new approach," *Ethnomusicology,* Vol. 54, No 2 (Spring/Summer, 2010): 318-325, p. 321-322).

clear that this music being almost exclusively vocal, is created by melodic formulas which are there and are formed (in the way they do it), due to the accents of the words. In this way, its symbolism and ability to function as a sign of feeling is directly bound with the ways, melody is composed along with language; in this case language is the core factor which has contributed to the creation of the musical norms. What I propose here is that, often, the carriers of these traditions become bilingual, while later they use the second language, and adjust the compositional technique of the original language to the second language. In this way they keep the same style of verse and the same way of combining melodic formulas with the accented and unaccented syllables. This technique of composition is bound with language but not with the meaning of the text as such. Together with the purely musical characteristics of the melodies this process lends the special melodic nature, the aesthetics and style to these melodies, and becomes the symbol of their ethnic emotions and identity while contributing to the sustainability of these communities.

In fact, keeping in mind Turino's model while proceeding with our own case-study would suggest that music in our case represents his "identity factor", while language and the linguistic shift I observe in these traditions represents his "hegemonic factor".[4]

It seems then that different parts of the area have more in common than one might consider during a first encounter.

To show what can be seen as unifying the area despite the different languages, I provide 7 case studies[5] (here only one of them) from certain parts of the area, which represent regional musical styles, and provide common musical forms among groups that are considered as "different". Far from being considered as mere borrowings, these forms are part of the historical ritual vocal repertory (wedding, funeral, Easter, Saint John's or other) of each group.

This work is outside any given framework in scholarship. It could be called Historical Ethnomusicological approach, but it has a personal style (delving in the Past) not previously supported by this subdivision of our field.[6] On the other hand, its regional style better suites with Ethnohistory:[7] considering its regional style and

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[4] Thomas Turino, "The Urban-Mestizo Charango Tradition in Southern Peru: A Statement of Shifting Identity," *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 28, No 2 (May, 1984): 253-270, pp. 253-254.

[5] See in Katsanevaki, *Shifting identities* [e-book].

[6] Jonathan McCollum and David Hebert, "Foundations of Historical Ethnomusicology. Introduction," in *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, ed. by Jonathan McCollum and David G. Hebert (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2014), 11-25.

[7] Today, the methodology of Ethnohistory typically "uses both historical and ethnographic data as its foundation". Ethnohistory is defined as an approach that is "essentially interdisciplinary with primary emphasis centered in the use of history, ethnology and other fields of knowledge employed to understand culture in its own terms": Kelly K Chaves, "Ethnohistory: from Inception to Postmodernism

the fact that starting from the musical data I kept changing my research orientation to all other aspects of the history and culture of the area I called it "*A Musical Ethnohistory*". And it considerably reveals that in a similar way that *"music makes history"*[8] *history equally makes music* and in this way, history and social change is traceable in musical form.

Why focus on a vocal ritual repertory which is no longer active?

This work focused on a vocal ritual repertory that is not anymore experienced in community life. For this reason, its "ethnographic" character can be easily disputed. I will try to explain the reasons to focus on this part of the repertory:

> "Most scholars agree that all over Macedonia until the end of the 19th century, religion was the principal factor taken into consideration by the Ottoman bureaucracy for dividing the population into administrative units; it was also the most important aspect of identity for most of the region's inhabitants. *This does not mean that no national categories existed, but that cultural background was not the most important criterion for the ascription of an individual to a collective entity*" (emphasis by the present author).[9]

Consequently, one might consider that at least at this time, cultural background was neither affected by, nor manipulated for purposes of ascription to collective entities. Thus one might focus exactly on the cultural background of this Ottoman Era and even earlier, in order to locate hidden identities, before the time of negotiations of these ethnic groups towards conforming to the accepted Western notion of nationality.

This means that a local vocal repertory that, was not anymore active (like the repertories I present partially here) could be ideal for revealing the hidden (and shifting at the time of negotiation) identities of the related ethnic groups. In fact, this statement confirms my own methodological purpose,[10] and orientation to avoid an exclusively contemporary ethnographic research, in order to locate what was behind the walls of today's' nationalistic western authorization.

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and beyond," *The Historian*, Published on behalf of PhiAlpha Theta History Honor Society, Vol. 70/3, (2008): 486-513, p. 493.

[8] Antony Seeger, "When music makes History," in *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, eds. Stephen Blum, Philip V. Bohlman, and Daniel M. Neuman (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 23–34.

[9] Ioannis Manos, "Visualising culture - Demostrating identity: Dance performance and Identity politics in a border region in Northern Greece" (PhD diss., Hamburg University, 2002), p. 8.

[10] See Katsanevaki, *Shifting identities* [e-book], chapter "On methodology".

Identity matters…

- Gritski Makedonski?

- Ne! Makedonski!

There are two more ways today to perceive the word "Macedonian" (both revealed in this short dialogue which took place between a Slav-speaking woman from Kostur in Greece and one of our collaborators in Skopje). Despite the different historical past and present of the term "Macedonian" (connected with Greece), in both cases the word "Macedonian" represents the Slavic language. For our collaborator from Skopje, any connection with Greece would be impossible, while for the women from Kastoria (Kostur) this was exactly what they wanted to know: "Hey! You! Any relation to Greece?"

I realized that, in a slightly different sense but with exactly the same result, this is what the Greek-speakers claim about themselves: "Gretski Makedonski" (Ellines Makedones, Greek Macedonians). This last definition gives a different meaning to the term "Macedonian": The "Gretski Makedonski" use the term to denote the Slavic language. So, in order to define that though speaking a Slavic dialect, they have Greek roots, or at least they come from a Greek place, they add the adjective Gretski. For the Greek-speaking Macedonians, the term "Macedonian" means a Greek past and origin and is clearly connected with Greek language. The adjective "Greek" is added in order to make clear that Macedonian means "Greek". So, though the term Macedonian has received a different secondary meaning, deviating from its primary Greek denotation to a Slavic linguistic contemporary present (for part of the population of Macedonia), both Slav-speaking and Greek-speaking Macedonians claimed their connection with Greece by adding the word "Greek". As I have shown elsewhere,[11] it seems that the secondary meaning of the term "Macedonian" as a Slav-speaker, was used as a differentiation from the Bulgarians. Outside interventions (mainly of the Bulgarian policies) manipulated the term "Macedonian" and attributed an anti-Greek sense to it, thus leading both groups to the same form of self-definition. In fact, there is here a process of symbolic deviation from the initial meaning of the word "Macedonian", creating two different stages of self-definition, which reveal the common reaction of both ethnic groups.

In both cases there was a competitiveness to identify themselves with the area of Macedonia and to declare their origin from this place, reacting positively or

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[11] In Katsanevaki *Shifting identities* [e-book].

negatively to the idea introduced in the 19th century by Bulgarian policies and Panslavism[12].

In any case the common use of the name "Macedonian" is supported by the musical form itself. In the following comparative table (**Example 1**) it is attested that a Greek-speaking ritual song on the Pindus mountains and a Slav-speaking polyphonic ritual song in the Ptolemaida Valley share a common basis in their musical form.[13]

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[12] See in Victor Bérard, *La Turquie et l'Hellénisme Contemporain* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1893), 123: https://books.google.gr/books?id=rOIcghpWTEQC&pg=PP11&hl=el&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false (accesed on 30.01.2021).

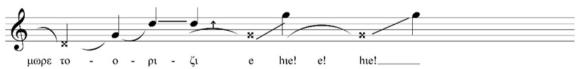[13] For more details and the full transcriptions of the two songs, see Katsanevaki, *Shifting identities* [e-book], Audio and musical example 11a "Agio Gianni mou", a Greek-speaking song sung on the Day of Saint John the Baptist, from the village of *Rodia* in the mountains of *Grevena*. Field recording by the author of the e-book, on the 18th of May, 2003, in *Rodia*. The audio file of the entire song can be found at https://sophia.mus.auth.gr/xmlui/handle/123456789/2113?show=full and a very short extract (a cadence) of the same song is presented in http://musicologistjournal.com/8-last-cd1_track22_agios_yannis_rodia/ http://dergipark.gov.tr/musicologist/issue/33635/373186 and Audio and musical example 11b "Aide miso sdrave", Slav-speaking song from *Bobishta* in the area of *Kastoria* (todays'*Verga)*. Recording by Nikolai Kaufmann. http://www.sscor.eu/en/karton.asp?zapisID=235

Example 1

Comparative table with the songs "Agio Gianni mou", and "Aide miso sdrave".[14]

Γιάν'ς πα - ντρέ - υε - (ε / hie!)

αι - δε ε μι-σο ο zdra - (a hie!)____

ε - ται μω - ρε ε!____ Γιάν'ς παν -

Interjection in the Greek speaking song

- υε____

ι! ντρε - υε - ται α hie! (ε - ται) e hie! e hie!

ve____ hie!____

αι-ντε κα - λή γυ - ναί - κα α παί - αι - ρνει α! hie!

i - lια a - da - sva - a to

The last part of the Greek-speaking song (verse) with a three-hemistich stanza (strophe) and with an even more similar (to the last part of ex.11b) melody.

μωρε το - ο - ρι - ζι e hie! e! hie!____

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[14] See previous footnote

Conclusions

This paper presents (in short) the self-definition of the two main ethnic-linguistic groups (Greek-speakers and Slav-speakers) in West Macedonia in Greece and its historical reasons revealed in musical form. Historical processes or relations, found in cultural notions or expressions of identity, are distinguishable in musical form. Fieldwork reveals local testimony about self-definition. Both groups call themselves "Macedonians" referring to their origins in the area of Macedonia. This definition is equally related to reactions against outside interventions. If isolated, these phenomena cannot be interpreted adequately. They are usually considered as negotiations with contemporary policies of nationalism without an ethnic, historical and cultural basis. Nonetheless fieldwork revealed certain connections in regard to cultural expressions within the vocal repertory of certain regional styles.

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Biography: Athena Katsanevaki received her PhD in Historical Ethnomusicology (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1998) and studied Violin, Music Theory, and Byzantine music. She has presented papers at international and World conferences, and is a member of the MOISA Society (Ancient Greek and Roman music) and a member and liaison officer of Greece in ICTM (Ethnomusicology-Traditional music). She published books and papers combining her two main fields of study: Historical musicology and Ethnomusicology. Traditional singing as sound, practice and performance is also one of her main research focuses since 1990. Her fieldwork in Northwestern Greece and the surrounding areas in Greece and abroad, has been honored by the Academy of Athens.