

To my Family

To Pavlos Vassiliou
for his lifelong devotion to rebetika
and for his generosity to this project

Acknowledgements

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A Note on Transliteration

Transliteration of Greek words follows the guidelines outlined by the Journal for Modern Greek Studies.¹ The English-language literature on rebetika is inconsistent in the transliteration style of the term “rebetika.” In Modern Greek, rebetika is a noun and an adjective and its endings change accordingly. With a few exceptions, in this thesis, I use the term in the following way.

Rebetika: Noun

Rebetika: Plural adjective

Rebetiko: Singular adjective

I make an exception to this rule when transliterating the name of the *rebetadiko* Ρεμπετική Ιστορία, which I transliterate directly as Rebetiki Istoría.

A Note on Translation

Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this thesis are my own. This includes song texts, poems and quotations.

¹ “Journal of Modern Greek Studies: Author Guidelines”.
[http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_modern_greek_studies/guidelines.html]. Visited on September 29, 2009.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an investigation of the fundamental ideological struggles of Greek modernity through the prism of contemporary rebetiko performance. Drawing from extensive ethnographic research in Athens, Greece, I focus on well-known musician Pavlos Vassiliou and the rebetiko culture he promotes in his music establishment Rebetiki Istoría [Rebetiko History]. Positioning Vassiliou's rebetiko culture as a type of defensive nationalism, I examine his rebetiko performance as an expression of his desired Greekness. Vassiliou believes that rebetika songs in the early style of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century are fundamental to Greek national consciousness. Working to preserve and promote the music in this way, he advocates for an alternative Greekness that resists the perceived negative forces of Europeanization, capitalization and globalization. Vassiliou's rebetiko performance speaks to the search for a Greek national identity that permeates the political and cultural foundations of the nation. In addition, it vouches for the continued relevance of the national in a world dominated by transnational influences. It suggests that transnational forces like Europeanization and globalization often cause increased significance of the national as defensive protection of conventional national identity paradigms.

This study is structured as a two-fold examination of the socio-cultural implications of Rebetiki Istoría within the context of contemporary Greek modernity. It is culturally and historically grounded in a discussion of Greek modernity that examines national identity constructions, musical and defensive nationalism and the role of Greece in the rapidly-

globalizing world. This is coupled with a close examination of the Rebetiki Istoria music culture, as a network of shared understandings between musicians and audience about Greek music and culture. Special attention is given to musical style as a semantic medium for the ongoing dialogue about Greek national identity. I propose that while resisting negative attributes of Greek modernity, Vassiliou and his music culture are fully embedded in it. This discussion illuminates rarely glimpsed attributes of contemporary rebetiko performance as a live and vital cultural tradition in Greek modernity. In addition, it fills a gap in rebetiko literature which calls for discussion of musical attributes and stylistic factors of rebetika.