

# Folk Music and the Cultural Politics of the Military Junta in Greece (1967–1974)<sup>1</sup>

Anna Papaeti

Athens, Greece

anna.papaeti@googlemail.com

When a group of high-ranking military officers, commonly referred to as ‘the Colonels’, seized power in Greece through a coup d’état in the early hours of 21 April 1967, one of their first moves was to capture the headquarters of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (EIR).<sup>2</sup> From the very beginning, regime-controlled radio played heavy doses of marches and Greek folk songs. Aware of the power of music and radio to influence situations of political instability during and after a coup, the Junta made extensive use of mass media, such as radio and television; music institutions, such as song contests; and specific music genres, such as *demotiko tragoudi* (folk song) and *elafro tragoudi* (light song).<sup>3</sup> Its aim was to manipulate the public by restoring a sense of normality and creating a feeling of prosperity. The use of *demotiki mousiki* (folk music), intrinsically linked with Greek national identity, also aimed to legitimate the Junta’s regime.

This article investigates the use of folk music by the Junta through an examination of radio programming and articles in the weekly magazine *Radioprogramme* (renamed *Radiotelevision* from mid May 1968), newspaper articles, and a documentary film.<sup>4</sup> Taking into account the emergence of the national identity shaped during the 1821 struggle of independence against the Ottomans and the formation of the Greek state, the article discusses the ideological agendas surrounding the aesthetic preference for folk music. Seen as the authentic music of the Greek nation, springing from the soul of its people, folk music was also used as a tool of re-education at the Giaros prison camp (1967–1968), where music was one of several tools used to ‘break’

---

<sup>1</sup> Research for this article was generously funded by an Intra-European Fellowship of Marie Curie Actions, conducted at the Musicology Department of the University of Goettingen, 2011–2014.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek name is Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ραδιοφωνίας, hence the acronym EIR.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the connection between coups and early military music radio broadcasts, see Oluwafemi Alexander Lapado, ‘Martial Music at Dawn: Introit for Coups d’État’, in *The Soundtrack of Conflict: The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations*, ed. Morag Josephine Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Olms, 2013), 197–209. *Demotiko tragoudi* (folk song) refers to folk song styles developed in rural Greece during the Ottoman occupation. *Elafro tragoudi* (light song) was associated with the middle and upper classes, using elements of Western musical traditions. It is seen in contrast to *laiko tragoudi* (urban popular song), which essentially developed out of *rebetiko*. An urban popular genre associated with the musical instrument *bouzouki*, *rebetiko* was identified with the lower classes and criminal underclass, see Eleni Kallimopoulou and Panos Poulos, forthcoming. Brought by refugees from 1922 Asia Minor after Greece’s defeat in the war against Turkey, *rebetiko* was considered vulgar by Greece’s upper classes. In the 1950s it became popular and influential, particularly with the development of *laiko*. Composer Mikis Theodorakis wrote in detail about *laiko*, its continuities with Byzantine music and *demotiko* song, and what he saw as its deep associations with Greek national identity. The opposition between *elafro* and *laiko* can be viewed in the heated debates following two recordings of Theodorakis’ song cycle *Epitafios* (Epitaph, 1960), with different soloists and orchestration. For more, see Mikis Theodorakis, *Για την ελληνική μουσική* (On Greek Music) (Athens: Pleias, 1974), 169–234; Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 81–6; Daphne Tragaki, ‘“Humanizing the Masses” Enlightened Intellectuals and the Music of the People’, in *The Mediterranean in Music. Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, ed. David Cooper and Kevin Dawe (Oxford: Scarecrow, 2005), 49–75.

<sup>4</sup> The title of the magazine *Ραδιοπρόγραμμα* (*Radioprogramme*) was changed to *Ραδιοτηλεόραση* (*Radioprogramme and Television*) from the 12–18 May 1968 issue onwards, with the introduction of national television in Greece. In the body of this article *Radioprogramme and Television* will be referred to as *Radiotelevision*, the nearest English translation of its Greek title.

political opponents. My discussion of the use of folk music in detention is based on interviews with former political prisoners, conducted between 2011 and 2014. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity and privacy of interviewees, adhering to the ethical requirements of the funding body of my research. I also examine the production of new songs in the *demotiko* style, which extolled the dictators' virility and messianic powers, and portrayed them as redeemers of the nation. The article shows, however, that folk music was not exclusively a symbol of the far right but was also used by left-wing musicians in their own attempt to re-appropriate and reclaim it.

## Folk Music and Greek National Identity

In the first hours of the coup, when tanks rumbled into Parliament Square, transforming the country overnight into a military dictatorship, the Colonels imposed radio silence. When broadcasts resumed around 5 a.m., radios jumped to attention with military marches. Aural recollections of those first weeks and ensuing seven years, however, reveal something more. Painfully inscribed on Greek collective memory was a new pairing of folk music with the marches, a combination that reflected an important aspect of the Junta's ideology. Musician Dimitris Economakis, a primary school student at the time, recalls the three-day spring holiday as a result of the 21 April 1967 coup:

The 21st of April 1967 found me in the 6th Grade in Serres and filled me with joy, I must admit. A three-day holiday, spring and the opportunity to go out with our slingshots to the nearby hills, hunting small insects and frightened sparrows, luckily with a small rate of success. The hunting was accompanied by the sounds of marches rolling out from the open windows. The marches gave way to clarinets [playing] *tsamika* and *kalamatiana* [Greek folk dances], only to come back with even more force, along with proclamations and speeches in an odd archaic language full of austerity and enthusiasm.<sup>5</sup>

The Colonels favoured folk dances primarily from mainland Greece, like *tsamiko*, which has been especially linked with the regime in collective memory. A traditional dance from Epirus, *tsamiko* is in 3/4 meter and danced in a circle. It had been associated with the 1821 struggle of independence against the Ottomans and was also believed to have been danced by the Klefts, the society of bandits who lived in the mountains during Ottoman rule. However, as Roderick Beaton writes, *kleftic* songs, which also predated the War of Independence, tell the story of the solitary rebel rather than the national hero.<sup>6</sup> The discourse that surrounded *kleftic* songs emphasised instead their purported patriotic character and associations with the 1821 war. In this context, *tsamiko*, originally performed only by men, has been considered as the dance of the bravest of men.<sup>7</sup> In *Choroi kai foresies tou topou mas* (Dances and Costumes of our Country), a documentary aired on Greek National Television in 1969, *tsamiko* is singled out as the best

---

<sup>5</sup> Dimitris Economakis, 'Ο δικτάτορας χόρευε τσάμικο. Η 21 Απριλίου, η επανάσταση και η χαμένη μας ροκιά' (The Dictator Danced Tsamiko: The 21<sup>st</sup> of April, Revolution, and Our Last Rock), *TAR: Μουσικό διαδουκιτικό περιοδικό με αφορμή την κιθάρα* (Online Music Magazine on the Guitar) <<http://www.tar.gr/content/print.php?id=1316>> (accessed 1 June 2014). All translations from Greek are my own.

<sup>6</sup> On Klefts and their songs see Roderick Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 102–11.

<sup>7</sup> Understood as a celebration of virility, *tsamiko* invokes bravery and patriotism, both quintessential elements of the Colonels' understanding of masculinity. On the gender aspects of dance in the Greek context, see Jane K. Cowan, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

known and bravest of all Greek dances, ‘passing through the heroic struggles of the race’.<sup>8</sup> ‘During the holy uprising for the nation’s liberation’, the narrator tells us, *tsamiko* ‘was danced by brave warriors before or after the intoxication of battle’.

Such was the saturation of *tsamiko* in the mass media, but also in detention centres, that it, along with its main instrument, the clarinet, has become identified with the Colonels in public memory. To this day many people who lived through the Junta find it hard to listen to *tsamiko* and the clarinet. For many, this music has been so intrinsically associated with the Colonels that they find it intolerable.<sup>9</sup> This has been explicitly admitted to me in an interview with the late C, a writer and left-wing fighter. From the post-civil-war era to the rule of the Colonels, C spent three decades in and out of exile and prison, often held on remote islands where he endured a great deal of torture. Yet, he asserted that the sound of clarinets was more painful to him than the physical torture inflicted on his body. It is important to note here that C had undergone brutal torture and interrogation during his many years in detention. In fact, as he explained in another interview, the Junta torturers of the Athens Security Forces were aware of his unusual tolerance for pain and physical torture from his sessions during previous years. As a result, the Athens Security Forces did not torture C themselves, but instead assigned it to their colleagues in the Piraeus Security Forces.<sup>10</sup> He told me, ‘I was so fed up with the clarinet [...] had they put a clarinet player inside the isolation cell [...] I would have said everything. They wouldn’t have had to torture me, I would have surrendered myself entirely, that’s how much I couldn’t take it’.<sup>11</sup> During the interview, C acknowledged the regular use of *tsamika* in the prison camp of Makronissos where he was held in 1953: ‘Oh my God, of course! All the time!’ Music was played there by the camp’s radio station and transmitted to all barracks and camps in the island.<sup>12</sup> In this context, C’s pointing to the clarinet’s ability to bring him to his ultimate breaking point attests not just to the specific associations and political charges of this instrument, but also and more generally to the damaging potential of music.<sup>13</sup>

Folk music, songs, and dances featured crucially in the ideological discourse of the regime. In the Junta’s version, Greek history unfolded in an unbroken sequence from ancient times through Alexander the Great’s empire, Byzantium, the 1821 war for independence against

---

<sup>8</sup> Nestor Matsas, director, *Χοροί και φορεσιές του τόπου μας* (Dances and Costumes of our Country) (Athens: Ministry of State, 1969) <[http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get\\_ac\\_id=4031](http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get_ac_id=4031)> (accessed 15 September 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Eleni Kallimopoulou has had similar findings with regard to an aversion to *tsamiko* due to its association with the Colonels’ regime. See, Eleni Kallimopoulou, *Paradosiaká: Music, Meaning and Identity in Modern Greece* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 18.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Η Αγνωστη αντίσταση κατά της Δικτατορίας Μέρος 3ο: Ελλάς Ελλήνων Χριστιανών’ (The Unknown Resistance Against the Dictatorship Part 3: Greece of Greek Christians), *Ρεπορτάζ χωρίς σύνορα* (Reportage Without Borders) <[http://rwf-archive.gr/interviews\\_senaria-new.php?id=189&interview=1&interview\\_id689](http://rwf-archive.gr/interviews_senaria-new.php?id=189&interview=1&interview_id689)> (accessed 13 January 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous C, interview by author, Greece, April 2012.

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that C made a distinction between *tsamiko* and other kinds of folk music. He noted that he was moved by other styles of folk music, for instance music from Crete, which he found non-conforming and uplifting.

<sup>13</sup> For the damaging potential of music in detention situations, see Suzanne Cusick, ‘Music as Torture/Music as Weapon’, *Transcultural de Música, Transcultural Music Review* 10 (2006), <[http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans10/cusick\\_eng.htm](http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/trans10/cusick_eng.htm)> (accessed 28 June 2015); Suzanne Cusick, “‘You Are in a Place out of the World’: Music in the Detention Camps of the ‘Global War on Terror’”, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2 (2008): 1–27; and Suzanne Cusick, ‘Musicology, Torture, Repair’, *Radical Musicology* 3 (2008), <<http://www.radical-musicology.org.uk/2008/Cusick.htm>> (accessed 20 February 2013); M. J. Grant and Anna Papaeti, eds. *The world of Music* (special issue): *Music and Torture, Music and Punishment* 2 (2013); and Anna Papaeti and M. J. Grant, *Torture: Journal on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture: Special Thematic Issue Music in Detention* 23 (2013).

Ottomans, and finally to the Colonels' so-called 'April 21st Revolution', the name they gave to their 1967 coup. This heroic version of Greek history was not their invention, however. In fact, it was already the ideological position on which Greek national identity had been founded during the 1821 war of independence and in the wake of the formation of the Greek state. As Michael Herzfeld has shown, folk studies became an ideological and political requisite for the formation of the new state, not only for building national identity, but also for appeasing and rallying support for proponents of philhellenism.<sup>14</sup> Emphasizing links to the West, which it saw as intrinsically connected with the spirit of Hellenism, folk studies constructed a narrative of cultural continuity from ancient to modern times, despite Byzantium's antagonistic view of ancient Greece. In this effort, *demotiko* song became the needed missing link affirming this politically constructed continuity. This ideological approach entailed a necessary control or suppression of material that did not support this argument. Composed and transmitted orally, *demotika* songs were the sung poetry of rural communities, many of which were also danced.<sup>15</sup>

An aesthetically central and ideologically charged category, *demotiko* song was the means through which the vast peasant and illiterate population, oblivious of classical Greece, would be rehabilitated. Reporting on a speech given by ethnologist Dr Demetrios Economidis on *kleftik* songs in 1968, the newspaper *Ta Nea* writes:

The roots of the *kleftik* song tradition are lost in the history of Hellenism. Scientific research has clearly corroborated their presence in the Hellenistic times – after Alexander the Great. During Ottoman times, the songs of the *klefts*, which have been associated with the songs of the *akritic* cycle, are the expression of the living Hellenistic soul. [...] The Greek *kleftik* song talks about the deep desire for liberation and expresses more intensely the idea of the motherland.<sup>16</sup>

Constructing cultural continuity through an archeological approach that wished to highlight similarities with present cultural elements (i.e., ethno-archeology) was instrumental in Greek folk studies since their inception.<sup>17</sup> In this sense the Junta's rhetoric was not novel but conformed to the way national identity was grounded in and legitimated by folk culture. The main difference lies perhaps in the crudeness with which the Colonels employed this ideological narrative. The purported purity and authenticity of Greek music, and its continuous role in history, was stressed on every possible occasion and by every available means. Typical is the above-mentioned documentary *Dances and Costumes of our Country*, looking at several regions in Greece through dance, costume, and archaeological artefacts. Commenting on the geometrical figurations of the costumes of the 'brave *Sarakatsanes*' – the women of a nomadic group known for contributing to the 1821 revolution against the Ottomans – the narrator notes that they continued the great tradition, 'obeying the secret voice of the race'. Geometric vases of ancient Greece and vases from the Hellenistic times were found to show movements and figurations analogous to those of folk dances. These, the narrator remarks, were still danced unchanged, 'another testimony of the holy continuity of the race, that nothing was able to break'. The archaic and Byzantine roots of traditional costumes are also pointed out, as well as the similarities of

---

<sup>14</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece* (New York: Pella, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> The revival of folk music did not begin with the Junta. It dates to the early twentieth century and continued after World War II. In this regard, Simon Karras was an important figure. Having begun to document and collect folk tunes in the 1930s, he also founded the national music department of Greek National Radio in 1938. Dora Stratou, another important figure, founded the Greek Dances Society-Dora Stratou in 1953.

<sup>16</sup> S. Anagnostopoulos, 'Greece and the Balkans: Kleftic Songs, Speech by D. Economidis', *Ta Néa*, 16 March 1968, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, 10–11, 99–102.

traditional instruments, like the wooden flute, clarinet, and lute, with those of ancient and Byzantine times: ‘Many of the instruments that accompany our dances have very ancient roots. [...] Everything is an extension of the living past.’ Produced by the Ministry of State, this documentary shows the fantasy of unbroken national purity, articulated through a specific appropriation of folk art and music. This is not to say that there were no significant continuities in the history of Greek folk art and music. The crude emphasis they were given by the regime, however, was clearly part of a larger ideological agenda.<sup>18</sup>

The Colonels’ rhetoric of cultural continuity focused especially on the 1821 independence struggle. The link between the so-called Greek Revolution and *demotiko* song – and thus indirectly with the Colonels’ coup – was reinforced through public education, mass media, and relentless repetition. The magazine *Radiotelevision*, to take one example, was one of the regime’s main propaganda outlets. In a 1971 article commemorating the 150-year anniversary of the 1821 uprising, the official take on *demotiko* song is emphatically set off in a separate box. The text makes the link between the 1821 uprising and *demotiko* song, national martyrdom, and the nation’s survival as Modern Greece:

The ’21 uprising was first echoed with the few but immortal verses of *demotiko* song. Echoed not in a romantic manner, but in that realistic and, at the same time, dramatic psychology of a fighting people, who, in taking on its shoulders such an enormous historical responsibility as ‘freedom or death’, knows in advance (but accepts) its path towards the Golgotha of national martyrdom. The Nation [...] not only did not perish, but was renewed and flourished as ‘Modern Greece’. The Modern Greece for which we are all proud today, striving for its improvement.<sup>19</sup>

Another special box in the schedule of radio listings in the previous issue directs readers’ attention to a series of three programmes by musicologist and radio presenter Athena Spanoudi for the 150th anniversary.<sup>20</sup> Broadcast on 27 March, and 3 and 10 April at 21:30 on the Third Programme of National Radio, these were entitled ‘The Heroic Element in Greek Music and Our Unbroken National Tradition’. The radio programming to celebrate the Junta’s first year in power, Easter Sunday, 21 April 1968 at the First Programme of Greek National Radio reveals the prominence given to folk music is.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, folk music programmes were played from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., with small breaks of news bulletins; celebratory speeches; Easter mass; a talk show on Greek history, nature, and culture; and some *elafra* (‘light songs’). The latter included:

‘Greek Tunes’ at 7 a.m., ‘Easter Songs and Tunes’ at 8:00, ‘Greek Tunes played by the Light Song Orchestra of EIR at 8:40, ‘Greek Dances and Songs’ at 10:05, ‘Songs from the Peloponnese and the Cyclades’ at 12:30 p.m., ‘Songs [*mantinades*] from Cyprus and Crete’ by the ‘Light Music’ Orchestra of EIR, and two soloists at 13:30, ‘Songs from Thrace and Crete’ at 17:00, ‘Greek Echoes’ at 18:00, and ‘Easter Feast with Greek Dances’ at 20:15.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the documentary *Song of Orpheus: Popular Musical Instruments and Dances* (1976), directed by the same director as *Dances and Costume of our Country*, deploys a different language to discuss traditional instruments and the representations of ancient vases, <[http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get\\_ac\\_id=3103&thid=14074](http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get_ac_id=3103&thid=14074)> (accessed 15 September 2014).

<sup>19</sup> *Ραδιοτηλέοραση*, 28 March–3 April 1971 (no. 59/1087), 88.

<sup>20</sup> *Ραδιοτηλέοραση*, 21–27 March 1971 (no. 58/1086), 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ραδιοπρόγραμμα*, 21–27 April 1968 (no. 279), 14; Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA-MIET), Athens.

<sup>22</sup> *Ραδιοπρόγραμμα*, 21–27 April 1968 (no. 279), 14.

As the above listings make clear, the regime identified itself with Greek folk music and all that it represented for purposes of legitimation. Although these radio programmes were broadcast on the regime's first anniversary, it is important to note that on regular days, too, there was a strong presence of folk music. This preference was more emphatic in the early, most vulnerable years of the coup.<sup>23</sup> However, this does not suggest that only folk music was played. Greek and foreign 'light music', western and Greek popular hits, and classical music – including Greek operetta – were played daily. The identification of the Colonels with the West and 'progress' meant that artists and genres perceived as 'foreign' or 'western' – *elafro* song, for instance – were also broadcast and promoted. This support extended to cultural institutions. For instance, the Olympiad of Song, inaugurated in 1968, was an international 'light-song' competition and one of the most lavish festivals organized by the regime.<sup>24</sup> This is only one example underlining the cultural opportunism of the Colonels, in which genres and institutions were used solely for the purposes of their political agendas and propaganda machine.

### The Colonels and the Moral Qualities of Music

Greek folk music became central to the ideological aesthetic of the Junta, and a means for asserting the desired continuity with the heroic past. In a talk given in 1970 for the inauguration of a Music Centre in Kalamata, Colonel Ioannis Ladas, General Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, gave an extensive account of music and its Greek origins.<sup>25</sup> Taking ancient Greece as music's starting point, Ladas underscored Aristotle's notion that 'music ennobles the soul'. He went on to discuss Aristoxenos and Theophrastus as the fathers of western music therapy, noting music's ability to heal and influence a person morally. From classical Greece to the 'metaphysical grandeur' of Byzantine music, Ladas moved to Ottoman times during which 'our music found its way to our patriotic *demotiko* song'. Seen as Greece's authentic music, *demotiko* was contrasted to 'foreign music' and ideas recently plaguing Greece:

The invasion of foreign ideas is unacceptable. Here I refer to psychedelic music and other similar tendencies, which instead of ennobling the passions and softening their character, as our forefathers have taught us, arouse the instincts and degrade human beings into sordid existences. As a result, this love for the foreign [*xenomania*] in music has overshadowed our folk music [*demotiki mousiki*], which after all was not created by drug-addict hippies, but sprang from *pure and authentic emotions* [my emphasis].<sup>26</sup>

The regime had already embraced the moral implications of Ladas's talk, in particular the idea that music affects persons morally. On 1 June 1967, Army Decree Number 13, issued by Deputy General Odysseas Angelis and the Army General Staff, banned the music of left-wing composer Mikis Theodorakis. According to the decree, it was forbidden to 'transmit in any way or form, [or] to perform the music and songs of the communist Mikis Theodorakis'.<sup>27</sup> His music,

---

<sup>23</sup> The so-called 'Greek Case' at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasburg was a constant nuisance for the regime, undermining it both nationally and internationally. Accused of human rights abuses and torture, the regime finally left the Council of Europe in December 1969 to avoid expulsion.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the Junta's aesthetic and political agendas regarding the Song Olympiad, see Anna Papaeti, 'Popular Music, Terror and Manipulation under the Colonels (1967–1974)', in *Made in Greece: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Daphne Tragaki (London and New York: Routledge, forthcoming 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Ioannis Ladas, *Λόγοι* (Speeches) (Athens: n.p., 1970), 92–6.

<sup>26</sup> Ladas, *Λόγοι* (Speeches), 94–5.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, 'Τά άσματα του Μ. Θεοδωράκη αποτελούν μέσον συνδέσμου μεταξύ των κομμουνιστών. Απγορευθή η μετάδοσις των' (Theodorakis Songs: A Means of Connection for Communists, They are Banned), *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος*, 2 June 1967.

they argued, acted as a bridge between communists. Also banned were hymns of political organizations that had been dissolved by another decree on 6 May 1967. Such songs, they asserted, reignited polarizing political passions that threatened the unity of the nation. Those who violate this decree would be prosecuted by ad hoc military tribunals under the ‘Under Siege Order’.

Ladas underscored the power of music to shape the individual and to serve and educate society. Music must be stopped, he remarked, when it ‘gives rise to immoral ideas, reactionary situations’, praises ‘pessimism and obscenity’ and ‘extol[s] such deniers of values as the Communists’. He continues:

Today the state also intervenes. If some people do not want to consider the education of society as the aim of the arts, then the state cannot allow them to set as its aim the corruption of society. It will stop them and stamp them out to protect both society and the arts, because arts are there to bring benefit and not to harm.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed the regime intervened not only by banning Theodorakis’s music, but also by imposing the strict control of music production through censorship. As early as its first year of power, it acted on its belief in music’s formative potential, by employing it for the re-education of political opponents imprisoned in the exile island of Giaros. I have shown elsewhere the various ways music and sound were used in the Junta’s different detention centres and facilities to humiliate, terrorize, and ‘break’ political opponents.<sup>29</sup> This function of re-education, however, was unique to the island of Giaros. A barren island of the Cyclades, Giaros has been a place of exile since Roman times. It functioned as a prison during and after the Greek Civil War, first from 1947 to 1952, during which time the prisoners themselves built their prison through imposed hard labour, and then again from 1955 to 1962. In the Colonels’ first year of power they reopened Giaros, imprisoning thousands of potential political opponents there. Most of them were later taken to other island prisons: Partheni and Lakki on the island of Leros, and Alikarnassos on Crete. Still, according to a report by Amnesty International, by January 1968 there were 2,777 people held without trial on Giaros and Leros.<sup>30</sup> Giaros prison camp was closed in November 1968 due to international condemnation and pressure, particularly from the Red Cross. It reopened briefly in February 1974 with 44 detainees. It was finally closed down following the regime’s collapse.

Although the aspect of re-education in Giaros was largely forgotten in Greece after the return to democracy, it was mentioned in an article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* in March 1974, four months before the fall of the Colonels in July. Entitled ‘Terrors of the Greek Gulag’, it noted that in the early days of the coup ‘seven thousand Communists were shipped to Giaros’, where ‘loudspeakers were used throughout the day to turn these beasts, as the then Deputy Brigadier Patakos described them, into “good Greeks.”’<sup>31</sup> Through interviews I conducted in 2011 and 2013 with survivors of Giaros, I established that their recollection of music remains vivid, mainly among some women imprisoned there. A group of 150 women who remained on the island after most of the exiles were moved to Leros and other locations had a

---

<sup>28</sup> Ladas, *Λόγοι* (Speeches), 95–96.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Papaeti, ‘Music, Torture, Testimony: Reopening the Case of the Greek Military Junta (1967–74)’, *The World of Music* (special issue): *Music and Torture, Music and Punishment* 2 (2013), 67–89; and Anna Papaeti, ‘Music and Re-Education in Greek Prison Camps: From Makronisos (1947–1953) to Giaros (1967–1968)’, *Torture: Journal on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture: Special Thematic Issue Music in Detention* 23 (2013), 34–43.

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International, *Torture in Greece: The First Torturers’ Trial 1975* (London: Amnesty International, 1977), 10.

<sup>31</sup> David Tonge, ‘Terrors of Greek ‘Gulag’’, *The Guardian*, 29 March 1974.

particularly difficult time. Imprisoned in a space intended for sixty people, they suffered acutely from continued exposure to the loudspeakers. For interviewee A, music was the worst torment during her one-year exile there. As she recalled:

Music was played non-stop for twelve hours at a time. It was something terrible. We were down on the ground, on mattresses made of hay. Locked in one room all 150 women [...] We would sleep head across legs like sardines. [...] A room five meters high, no windows. Up at the top there were openings and on the outside a parapet from where the guards would pass and look inside. No privacy, no nothing. Life there was tragically difficult. [...] We did not sleep or wake up like normal people. In our sleep we heard screams, women having nightmares [...] that kind of thing. But what was terrible was the morning wake-up call with loud, blasting music: *demotika* songs and national-liberation songs. ‘The Enemy’s Troops Have Passed’ [march] and ‘Famous Macedonia, Country of Alexander’ [*demotiko* song]. And from then on, the *Gerakines* [folk dances] and all that would start. Essentially they played what we loved. I can still dance ‘Famous Macedonia’. I come from Macedonia. We had learned the dance at school and I loved it. But when this was taken by them [...] they appropriated it as if they were the Greeks and we the non-Greeks.

This kind of re-education was a practice retained from the civil-war and post-civil-war eras in Greece. It aimed to force the prisoners to sign declarations of loyalty to the government, renouncing their party and comrades. Doing so led in turn to a life of political isolation. The practice was conceived, institutionalized, and executed on the island of Makronissos from 1947 to 1953, complementing a regime of brutal torture. On Makronissos, music was played, along with speeches, from the camp radio station and transmitted through loudspeakers in all the barracks and camps on the island. Forced singing was used to humiliate the inmates. And, reminiscent of Nazi camps, music, as accompaniment to forced labour, was employed as a means of terror.<sup>32</sup> That the re-education tactics developed on Giaros may be connected to those developed on Makronissos is attested by one interviewee, a woman held in Giaros from 1967 to 1968. She noted that one of the officers involved in Giaros had also taken part in the Makronissos re-education experiments of the previous decades.<sup>33</sup>

## Re-Appropriations of Folk Music

The ideological rhetoric of national continuity and its aesthetic counterpart, folk music, was not simply promoted by the Colonels. They also personally acted it out publicly through performative displays of dance. The dictators never missed an opportunity to lead folk dances in public, during televised national celebrations. In this way, they actively and publicly performed their virility, as well as their claimed roles as the carriers of tradition and the redeemers of the nation. The Colonels even arranged to be filmed dancing with barracked soldiers for broadcast on national television on Easter Sunday. According to the newspaper *Ta Nea*, technical difficulties required such broadcasts to be shot on Good Friday in order to be broadcast on Easter Sunday. The article describes how the soldiers turned ‘the lamb on a spit’ and played *daouli* [Greek drums] and

---

<sup>32</sup> For more on the use of music in Makronissos see Anna Papaeti, ‘Music and Re-Education’.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous P, interview by author, April 2014, Athens.

violins while the dictators danced *tsamiko* and *kalamatiano*.<sup>34</sup> In the article, this image is juxtaposed to the rest of the Athenians attending the Mass of Passion on this primary day of mourning in the Greek Orthodox Church. This example indicates the Colonels' recognition of the power of television and other mass media. Characteristic of the regime's crudeness and falsification of information, this carefully crafted scene combined many of the official representations of Greek national identity: a profoundly masculine, militant image consisting of soldiers united with their leaders in celebrating the Greek religion through traditional dance, music, and local Easter customs.

Arguably one of the most outrageous mutilations inflicted on the collective memory of Greek folk music was its use in the production of populist and propagandistic new songs that extolled the cult of the heroic Colonels, who were depicted as national saviours. Numerous songs shamelessly praised the dictators' virility, masculinity, and messianic nature. In the style of folk music and dance, these songs presumably targeted rural populations courted systematically by the regime.<sup>35</sup> Strategically using musical and literary topoi associated with *demotiko* song, these songs claim for the Colonels a direct lineage from the glorious heroes of the past. They often draw on the rich imagery of natural elements characteristic of the folk song, such as talking birds, to convey the emotions expressed. Another allusion to the folk song is the use of the exclamatory praise word *ore* (roughly, 'hooray for'). Composed in the musical style and rhythm of folk dances, most of them feature the clarinet prominently. Many also adhere, although not always very strictly, to metrical patterns of *demotiko* song, predominated by the fifteen-syllable iambic line. For instance, the *tsamiko* song *Ore i ethniki kivernisi* (Hooray for the National Government), uses the exclamation *ore* in the opening of each stanza.<sup>36</sup> Singing the praise of the national government, 'redeemer of our nation', the song names the dictators Giorgos Papadopoulos and Stylianos Patakos as the country's brave heroes. The verses are in iambic metre, with alternating ten- and seven-syllable lines, apart from the last one, which has fifteen syllables. It is the music, however, that primarily moulds this song into a *tsamiko*, clearly recognizable to the people, to be danced at village festivals and feasts. Like most of its kind, this song now circulates online without much detail about its composers and performers. In common with the folk songs they mimic, these new songs appear to be anonymous. This perceived anonymity, however, is likely due to the reluctance of anyone originally involved with its production to be associated the Junta after the restoration of democracy. Indeed, much pro-Junta regime material, such as books and music albums, disappeared after the regime's fall.

Another example is the song *To len oi petropérdikes* (The Stone Partridges Say It), written and composed by Giorgos Koros, Charalampos Vasiliadis, and Ninta Kanaki. On the recorded version, it is sung by Kanaki and Andreas Vasios, with Koros playing violin and Vassilis Batzis the clarinet.<sup>37</sup> This song is a good example of the use of the image of personified nature, in which stone partridges and nightingales praising the dictator Georgios Papadopoulos. Once again, it also uses the exclamation, *ore*. Musically set as a *kalamatianos* – a circle dance in 7/8 rhythm – the song

---

<sup>34</sup> N. Kabanis, 'Οι χουντικοί γιόρταζαν το Πάσχα απ' τη Παρασκευή... λόγω τηλεόρασης' (The Juntists Celebrated Easter from Good Friday!... Because of Television), *Ta Néa*, 7 September 1974, 4.

<sup>35</sup> The forgiveness of farmers' debt, which exceeded seven million *drachmas*, is indicative of the regime's populist approach towards the rural population. This was praised in several quasi folk songs such as *Συ μεγάλε κυβερνήτη*, (You Big Governor), also known as *Ta χρεή* (The Debts!), available on *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccZ5393tbeI>> (accessed 15 September 2014). Another song inspired by this event is *Μια καλή χειρονομία* (A Good Gesture).

<sup>36</sup> *YouTube* <https://youtube.com/watch?v=1s9UyCk6AwQ> (accessed 15 September 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Institute for Research on Music and Acoustics, Panagiotis Kounadis Archive <[http://digitize.iema.gr/is\\_ent.php?phys\\_item\\_id=4261&entity\\_id=6669](http://digitize.iema.gr/is_ent.php?phys_item_id=4261&entity_id=6669)> (accessed 14 September 2014).

highlights the clarinet. The text is composed of a consistent alternation between fifteen-syllable iambic lines and nine- or ten-syllable trochaic ones.

Το λεν οι πετροπέρδικες, το λέει και τ' αηδόνη.  
Ωρε Γιώργο Παπαδόπουλε. [2x]  
Για σενα μιλάει ο ντουνιάς, για σένα καμαρώνει.  
Βάστα τα κλειδιά, βάσταξε γερά. [2x]  
Παντού σε κάμπους και βουνά όλοι μιλουν για σενα.  
Ωρε Γιώργο Παπαδόπουλε. [2x]  
Εσυ ξαναζωντάνεψες και το εικοσιένα.  
Βάστα τα κλειδιά, βάσταξε γερά. [2x]  
Το όνομα σου τώρα πια αιώνια θα μείνει.  
Ωρε Γιώργο Παπαδοπουλε. [2x]  
Μες στις ελληνικές καρδιές γράφτηκε και δεν σβήνει.  
Βάστα τα κλειδιά, βάσταξε γερά. [2x]

(Stone partridges say it, the nightingale too / *Ore* Giorgos Papadopoulos / For you the people are talking, for you they are proud / Hold on to the keys, hold on firmly / Everywhere in the countryside and the mountains, all talk about you / *Ore* Giorgos Papadopoulos. / You brought back to life '21 [1821] / Hold on to the keys, hold on firmly / Your name will now stay eternally / *Ore* Giorgos Papadopoulos / In the Greek hearts it's been written and will not be erased. / Hold on to the keys, hold on firmly.)

It is important to note, however, that folk music was not only used by regime supporters. It was also used by composers who attempted to reclaim it from the Junta's misappropriation. Mikis Theodorakis is probably the best known of these. Theodorakis made the rhythms, harmonies, and instruments of Greek folk music essential to his quest for a national musical culture before, during, and after the dictatorship. For Theodorakis, *laiko tragoudi* (urban popular song) was the national genre, encompassing elements of folk and Byzantine music, a conviction he professed through his songs and writings.<sup>38</sup> Also prominent were the left-wing composer Yannis Markopoulos and singer and Cretan lyra player Nikos Xilouris. Their 1971 album, *Rizitika*, released at the midpoint of Junta's rule, included folksongs from western Crete. The traditional origins of *Rizitika* misled the censors, who failed to understand its revolutionary intent. A success with the public, songs like *Pote tha kanei zasteria* (When Will the Sky Clear?), whose lyrics purportedly describe family feuds, became symbols of resistance. It is still retains this significance to this day.

A different and more subversive use of the *demotiko* song was expressed by the younger generation of musicians, and notably by singer-songwriter Dionissis Savvopoulos, whose songs have been masterfully interpreted by Dimitris Papanikolaou in his book *Singing Poets*. The title of Savvopoulos's song *Odi to Giorgo Karaiskaki* (Ode to Georgios Karaiskakis), released in 1969 on the album *To periboli tou trellou* (The Fool's Garden), refers to the famous hero of the 1821 revolution. But Karaiskakis' name is referred to only in the title and is not mentioned in the song, a rock ballad about the death of a contemporary solitary hero. Similarly, the song's instrumental opening, which begins with guitar, continues with violin, wooden flute, clarinet, and Greek bagpipe, instruments that allude to folk music. Along with the instruments, the introduction's motives and increasing quick rhythm recall folk dances, but this folk-style music is abandoned for the main part of the song, and only returns in fragments at the end. Thus, both the textural references to Karaiskakis and the heroism of 1821 and the framing musical allusions to *demotiko*

---

<sup>38</sup> Theodorakis, *Για την ελληνική μουσική* (On Greek Music), 157–267.

song, are at odds with the actual song, which transforms these symbols. According to Papanikolaou, ‘the folk song is torn and emptied, in order to open up a place in its kernel for a rock ballad; Karaiskakis’s myth is kept as an empty shell in which the image of a new hero is infused’.<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, the discourse of folk music under the Junta was by no means homogeneous. On the contrary, it was polyphonic and must be understood in the context of political, aesthetic, and academic struggles over appropriation. Its success was evident in the association of certain styles of folk music with the regime even after the return to democracy, leading to a decline in their popularity.<sup>40</sup> This was achieved through the Junta’s control over media representations and national celebrations and its mechanisms of repressing dissent. Nevertheless, the Junta’s approach to music was as inconsistent and opportunistic as its political and economic narrative *vis-à-vis* their actual policies. On the one hand, there was the official discourse of national purity and continuity, and, on the other, the regime’s identification with the West, progress, and modernization. In this sense, musical institutions and musical genres associated with the West, such as ‘light song’ and jazz, continued to be supported. Acknowledging the importance of music and cultural institutions in manipulating public opinion, the Junta successfully linked its nexus of power, its ideology, and its policies with folk music, popular songs, mass media, and cultural institutions.

## Bibliography

- Anonymous. ‘Theodorakis Songs: A Means of Connection for Communists. They are Banned.’ *Eleftheros Kosmos*. 2 June 1967.
- Anonymous. ‘Interview Transcript’, *The Unknown Resistance Against the Dictatorship Part 3: Greece of Greek Christians. Ρεπορτάζ χωρίς σύνορα* (Reportage Without Borders) <[http://rwf-archive.gr/interviews\\_senaria-new.php?id=189&interview=1&interview\\_id=689](http://rwf-archive.gr/interviews_senaria-new.php?id=189&interview=1&interview_id=689)> (accessed 14 September 2014).
- Amnesty International. *Torture in Greece: The First Torturers’ Trial 1975*. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1977.
- Anagnostopoulos, S. ‘Greece and the Balcans: Kleftic Songs. Speech by D. Economidis’. *Ta Nea*, 16 March 1968, 2.
- Athnasiadis, P. S. ‘Light Music Orchestra of EIR’. *Radiotelevision*, 11-17 June 1972 (no. 122/1150), 10–11.
- Beaton, Roderick. *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Cowan, Jane K. *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Economakis, Dimitris. ‘Ο δικτάτορας χόρευε τσάμικο. Η 21 Απριλίου, η επανάσταση και η χαμένη μας ροκιά’. (The Dictator Danced Tsamiko. The 21st April, Revolution and Our Last Rock). *TAR: Μουσικό διαδκτικακό περιοδικό με αφορμή την κιθάρα* (Online Music Magazine on the Guitar) <<http://www.tar.gr/content/print.php?id=1316>> (accessed 1 June 2014).

---

<sup>39</sup> My discussion draws upon Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets*, 140-1.

<sup>40</sup> Although genres like the *tsamiko* still hold associations for some people who lived during the Junta, it has been suggested to me while conducting fieldwork that later generations have now molded their own relations to these genres.

- Herzfeld, Michael. *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*. New York: Pella, 1986.
- Kabanis, N. ‘Οι χουντικοί γιόρταζαν το Πάσχα απ’ τη Παρασκευή ... λόγω τηλεόρασης’. (The Juntists Celebrated Easter from Good Friday! ... Because of Television). *Ta Nea*, 7 September 1974, 4.
- Ladas, Ioannis. *Λόγοι* (Speeches). Athens: n.p., 1970.
- Lapado, Oluwafemi Alexander. ‘Martial Music at Dawn: Introit for Coups d’État’, in *The Soundtrack of Conflict. The Role of Music in Radio Broadcasting in Wartime and in Conflict Situations*, eds. M. J. Grant and Férdia J. Stone-Davis. Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Olms, 2013. 197–209.
- Matsas, Nestor, director. *Χοροί και φορεσιές του τόπου μας* (Dances and Costumes of our Country) (Athens: Ministry of State, 1969).  
<[http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get\\_ac\\_id=4031](http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get_ac_id=4031)> (accessed 15 September 2014).
- \_\_\_\_\_, director. *Song of Orpheus: Popular Musical Instruments and Dances*. Athens, 1976.  
<[http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get\\_ac\\_id=3103&thid=14074](http://mam.avarchive.gr/portal/digitalview.jsp?get_ac_id=3103&thid=14074)> (accessed 15 September 2014).
- Papaeti, Anna. ‘Music, Torture, Testimony: Reopening the Case of the Greek Military Junta (1967–74)’. *The World of Music* (special issue): *Music and Torture/Music and Punishment* 2/1(2013), guest eds. M. J. Grant and Anna Papaeti, 67–89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ‘Music and Re-Education in Greek Prison Camps: From Makronisos (1947–1953) to Giaros (1967–1968)’. *Torture: Journal on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture: Special Thematic Issue Music in Detention* 23/2 (2013), guest eds. Anna Papaeti and M. J. Grant, 34–43.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ‘Popular Music, Terror and Manipulation under the Colonels (1967–1974)’, in *Made in Greece: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Dafni Tragaki. London and New York: Routledge: forthcoming.
- Papanikolaou, Dimitris. *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece*. London: Legenda, 2007.
- Radiotelevision* (no. 58/1086). 21–27 March 1971.
- Radiotelevision* (no. 59/1087). 28 March–3 April 1971.
- Radioprogramme* (no. 279). 21–27 April 1968.
- Theodorakis, Mikis. *Για την ελληνική μουσική* (On Greek Music). Athens: Pleias, 1974.
- Tonge, David. ‘Terrors of Greek “Gulag”’. *The Guardian*. 29 March 1974.
- Tragaki, Daphne. ‘“Humanizing the Masses”: Enlightened Intellectuals and the Music of the People’, in *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, eds. David Cooper and Kevin Da we. Oxford: Scarecrow, 2005. 49–75.

## Abstract

The appropriation of music for ideological purposes has been a characteristic feature of repressive political regimes. The Greek Junta (1967–1974) was no exception. During the seven-

year military dictatorship, music was closely linked to the regime's nexus of power, its ideology, and policies. This article examines how the Colonels used folk music as a tool of legitimation to propagate ideological fantasies of national purity and cultural continuity. The Colonels' nationalist discourse is analyzed in context, illuminating the Junta's appropriation of the folk studies that emerged during the 1821 struggle for independence. The article also underscores the moral formative qualities attributed to music by the Colonels. Their cultural politics sanctioned the banning of music of political opponents and the use of music to 'break' and 're-educate' political prisoners in the exile prison of Giaros (1967–1968). Lastly, it discusses how divergent and conflicting accounts of folk music advocated by musicians sympathetic to the regime and by left-wing musicians constituted a struggle over the appropriation of the Greek cultural tradition.

### **About the Author**

Anna Papaeti holds a PhD from King's College London. She has conducted postdoctoral research on Hanns Eisler (DAAD fellowship; Universität der Künste, Berlin) and on the use of music by the Greek military Junta (Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship; University of Göttingen). She has published in such journals as *Opera Quarterly*, *Music and Politics*, and *The World of Music (New Series)*, and in edited scholarly volumes.