‘Our Land is the Whole World’: Monsieur Doumani and Reinventing Cypriot Traditional Music

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The lights went out. A projector began showing old photos of the Cypriot countryside, modified with bright, sometimes neon, colours. A trombone began playing at the back of the room, only to be joined seconds later by a guitar and a *tzouras*, a plucked string instrument, like a smaller version of a bouzouki. The trio – with the somewhat cryptic name ‘Monsieur Doumani’ – began walking through the crowd, the tables and chairs, towards the stage, still playing, and with the slides and lights still flashing in the direction they were heading. The three men who made up the group, all of them in their early to mid-thirties, funkily dressed – one in a chequered shirt and cap, the second with bright red suspenders, the third one sporting a turban – took their places on stage. They were playing Cypriot traditional songs on instruments that were new for that music, with new arrangements and harmonies, and modified lyrics. ‘Don’t think this is any old kind of traditional music’, the owner of the venue had earlier informed me as he was showing me to my seat. ‘This is Cypriot music all jazzed up’. With this hard-to-define piece of information – a warning? a promise? a threat? – I settled into my seat, behind small tables where other attendees were already enjoying their beer or wine, waiting for the concert to begin. As I was soon to discover, in addition to variations on older songs, Monsieur Doumani were playing new compositions with lyrics that reflected life in present-day Cyprus; one of them, for instance, was about the current financial crisis. Their sound mixed traditional, jazz, blues, Balkan rock, and *rebetiko*. After each song, the band stopped playing, and one of its members briefly explained to the audience what the song they had just heard was about, or how they had come up with a particular tune or set of lyrics. The audience, for its part, reacted enthusiastically to both the music and this dialogue with the band, as well as the visual prompts.

This was the launch of Monsieur Doumani’s first album, *Grippy Grappa*.[1] It was an unplanned third concert in what was supposed to be a series of two, which took place in May 2013 in Kala Kathoumena, a café/concert venue in the old part of Nicosia. The group’s two previous concerts at the same place had sold out, so a third one had been hastily put together to please the many members of the audience who were queuing up to see them. The area of the city where the group was playing is the place one readily associates with hip culture and subculture, be it in music, fashion, art, or cuisine. It is, most definitely, not the sort of place one associates with traditional music of any kind, ‘jazzed up’ or otherwise.

This was, as Monsieur Doumani had said in an interview I had come across before attending their concert, all about ‘mutation’ (*metallaxi*), ‘new form[s]’, reinvention: a reinvention of Cyprus’s traditional music.[2] If what I was experiencing in Kala Kathoumena was indeed reinvention, then why was there this need for it? What were Monsieur Doumani meant to modernize—and, most crucially, how?

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[1] This article deals exclusively with Monsieur Doumani’s first CD, *Grippy Grappa*. The band released their second CD, *Sikoses*, in March 2015, just as this article was going into press.

[2] Meropi Moiseos, ‘Monsieur Doumani: Living la vida local [sic]’; *Πολίτης*, 30 April 2013. Available from: <http://www.parathyro.com/?p=20670> (accessed 14 October 2014).

Tradition, Modernity, and the Cypriot Traditional Music Scene

> [Monsieur Doumani's] mission is the research into the rich Cypriot and Greek music tradition in order to reinvent these tunes and bring them closer to today's aesthetics and realities. Their music is a well-balanced blend of the traditional element with more contemporary styles such as ska, jazz, rock, bossa-nova and their repertoire includes their own compositions as well. […] Their live appearances in festivals and venues in Cyprus have been very well-received by the Cypriot audience, thanks to their freshly-approached style towards the by-now 'sacred' traditional music of Cyprus.[3]

This was one of the earliest statements that Monsieur Doumani made in the press. Aside from a general description of their own music – 'a well-balanced blend of the traditional element with more contemporary styles' – what caught my attention the first time I read this was the word 'sacred'. The idea that Cypriot traditional music is 'sacred' and that it should be preserved 'as it is' is prevalent in the public discourse on music in Cyprus (see next section). Anyone familiar with this discourse would readily identify – or at least suspect – a sarcastic and subversive mood in Monsieur Doumani's statement; the fact that the word appears in quotes further corroborates this suspicion. Besides sarcasm and subversion, however, the choice of this word points to a sense of exasperation with the way Cypriot traditional music has been both approached as a musical genre by performers and discussed by performers and non-performers alike. When I finally met and interviewed Monsieur Doumani in Nicosia in September 2013, I was able to discuss this 'sacredness' with them at length, along with many other things. I was curious to know: In what way was Cypriot traditional music sacred? Why did they feel a compulsion to change it? The more I read their early statement, the more I was also struck by something else that it intimated: that 'the Cypriot audience' had been, in a sense, waiting for this 'freshly-approached style'; once Monsieur Doumani arrived, the audience was ready to embrace them. Far from solely asking why they thought this was the case, I also wanted to know what Monsieur Doumani were meant to substitute, or at least complement. And the first clue to begin answering this latter question, even before meeting the band, was to look at precisely that; in this case, Cypriot traditional music.

The traditional music of Cyprus is the music that had routinely accompanied weddings, religious fairs, and other social occasions on the island until the 1960s and, in some cases, the 1970s or early 1980s.[4] In the Greek Cypriot community the instruments most readily associated with this music are the violin, tuned exactly like a Western instrument, and the *laouto*, a long-necked lute tuned in double courses arranged in fifths (c–g–d'–a'). Occasionally a frame drum known as *tamboutsia* also accompanies the two. In the last half-century the role of traditional music changed dramatically, primarily because of two reasons. First of these was the effect of urbanization that followed Cyprus's independence from Britain in 1960, which resulted in the move from a primarily agricultural economy to one based on services. Secondly, the island's *de facto* partition in 1974 brought about many social changes, including an enormous demographic shift resulting from the displacement of about a third of the country's population. The process of modernization in the Cypriot society—and hence the changes in how Cypriot music was perceived and enjoyed – had, in fact, already begun by the 1930s. This was the result of a first wave of internal migration from rural to larger urban centres, of technological developments, but

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[3] Ferrara Buskers Festival web page, <http://www.ferrarabuskers.com/en/artists/monsieur-doumani> (original in English; accessed 19 August 2012); this content is no longer available online.

[4] For Cypriot traditional music and its various stages of development, see Nicoletta Demetriou, 'Appropriating Culture: Traditional Music and the Greek Cypriots', in *Music in Cyprus*, ed. by Jim Samson and Nicoletta Demetriou (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 57-76; and Nicoletta Demetriou, 'Cyprus, II. Traditional Music', at *Grove Music Online,* ed. Laura Macy, <www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (available October 2015).

also of the appearance of a labour conscience that redefined the Cypriots' relationship with authority.[5] Linked with the latter was the emergence of the Cypriot Left as a major political actor on the island, which provided 'an alternative – to both colonialism and nationalism – modernizing movement'.[6] What seems to have changed after 1960, and particularly after 1974, was the scale with which urbanization – and the realization of the modernizing project – proceeded. Similarly, while traditional music had begun to be sidelined by 'modern' – that is, European – styles of music since the 1930s, it seems to have taken a definitive blow following 1974 and the effective collapse of older village structures.[7] As a result, from a means through which rituals were enacted (e.g., at weddings) and the type of music primarily intended for people's entertainment, traditional music was slowly turned into a cherished 'old tradition', mainly used as a part of folkloric shows (e.g., festivals focusing on folk music and dance).[8]

In the 1980s, a concern with preserving those traditions seen as threatened following the events of 1974 prompted the establishment of a number of music and dance groups that paved the way to a process of folklorization. To a great extent, it was precisely this process that gradually led to traditional music being seen as 'sacred'. In the early 1990s, following a period of relative quiet in terms of music production, when Cypriots were trying to make sense of their new surroundings, and as the socio-political situation on the island was being stabilized, new groups of traditional musicians and singers began making their appearance again. This was due to the impetus of a number of social and cultural events. Chief among these was the establishment of the first private radio stations in Cyprus, which offered a new platform for the music of the island to be played and heard again.[9] In time, this renewed interest in traditional music was translated into state sponsorship for traditional music events.

The process of folklorization, the radio, and state sponsorship for traditional music supported – one could argue to an extent *urged* – the emergence of a narrative to accompany the music that the new groups were performing: one that was based on the idea of the 'preservation and dissemination' of Cyprus's traditional music. The performers themselves, through their live performances and CD liner notes, became the principal carriers of this narrative. Whether it was the state that inspired this turn towards preservation, as a reaction towards the perceived threat of Cypriot traditions being 'lost' after 1974, or whether it was the performers themselves who

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[5] See Peter Loizos, 'Cyprus, 1878–1955: Structural Change, and its Contribution to Changing Relations of Authority', in *Unofficial Views: Cyprus: Society and Politics*, ed. by Peter Loizos (Nicosia: Intercollege, 2001), 127–40; first published in *Chypre: La vie quotidienne de l'antiquité à nos jours*, ed. by Y. de Sike (Paris: Musée de L'Homme, 1985). See also Panayiotis K. Persianis, *Πόλεις και Πολιτισμός: Ο Ρόλος των Κυπριακών Πόλεων στη Δημιουργία του Νεότερου Πολιτισμού της Κύπρου (1878–1931)* (Cities and Culture: The Role of Cypriot Cities in the Creation of Cyprus's Modern Culture [1878–1931]) (Nicosia: Intercollege, 2007). I am grateful to Nicos Philippou for pointing me to the direction of the discussion on Cypriot modernity in the 1930s.

[6] Nicos Philippou, 'The National Geographic and Half-Oriental Cyprus', in *Photography and Cyprus: Time, Place and Identity*, ed. by Liz Wells, Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert, and Nicos Philippou (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 36. See also Andreas Panayiotou, 'Lenin in the Coffee-Shop', *Postcolonial Studies* 9/3 (2006), 267–80.

[7] I say this on the basis of a number of interviews I have conducted with elderly folk musicians in Cyprus in the past decade. Many of them have reported that from the 1930s to the 1960s 'modern' songs – that is, Greek songs imported on phonograph, later vinyl, discs, as well as European dances such as the polka – were often far more popular than Cypriot folk songs in events such as weddings and religious festivals.

[8] I am alluding here to Victor Turner's term, 'from ritual to theatre', from his eponymous book, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

[9] For the impact of the radio on Cypriot traditional music-making, see Nicoletta Demetriou, 'Kyriakou Pelagia: The Housewife/Grandmother-Star of Cyprus', in *Women Singers in Global Contexts*, ed. by Ruth Hellier (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2013), 112–30; and Demetriou, 'Appropriating Culture'. For a related discussion of the impact of the radio on folk poetry, see George Syrimis, 'Ideology, Orality, and Textuality: The Tradition of the *Poietáridhes* of Cyprus', in *Cyprus and Its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955–1997*, ed. by Vangelis Calotychos (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 205–22.

created it in a bid to justify, however unintentionally, their existence and to promote themselves in the newly-created market is a moot point.[10] In any case, after 'preservation and dissemination' were drilled into public consciousness, they became the motto that accompanied virtually every manifestation of traditional music on the island.[11] This was a goal uniformly referred to by bands, singers, the state, radio stations, and, eventually, audiences too. But each group or performer differed significantly in what they saw as the best way to approach this goal. So next to the 'preservation and dissemination' motto, a new narrative developed, this time along the lines of tradition and modernity. [12]

On one end of the spectrum, the traditionalists argue that the best way to preserve and disseminate music is to keep it 'as our forefathers bequeathed it to us'; that is, with as few changes as possible. [13] On the other end, the modernists maintain that the best way to preserve and disseminate music is by introducing new instruments – but not any instruments; only those associated with the music of the Eastern Mediterranean – by making new arrangements, and, above all, by adding rhythmic parts, or 'beat', that are more prominent than those used by the traditionalists. However, upon more careful reflection the implied antithesis here is rather misleading.

It could be argued that traditionalists preserve an idealized form of 'tradition' – not necessarily what it really was, but what it *could* have been. The instruments used are the same as those found on older recordings and seen played by older musicians. Yet the playing techniques and, frequently, the aesthetic of the performance differ dramatically.[14] This is hardly surprising. There are new, better-made instruments, the arrangements used are different, and, significantly, new bands use harmony – this is the role of the *laouto* – where before there was none.[15] Traditionalists argue that this is, however, 'the normal route' of things; had last century's musicians lived today, they would have played like current ones. So even while rooting for traditionalism, traditionalists are, in fact, embracing modernity, albeit selectively.

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[10] Demetriou, 'Appropriating Culture', 63-69 .

[11] See, for example, Michalis Hadjimichael, liner notes for *Τα Παραλιμνίτικα 2. Δημοτικά Τραγούδια της Κύπρου* (Songs from Paralimni 2. Folk Songs from Cyprus) (Paralimni: Municipality of Paralimni, 1997); or Michalis Tterlikkas, liner notes for *Κυπραία Φωνή. Στ' Αγνάρκα των Τζαιρών...* (Cypriot Voice. Tracing Back Through the Years…), multilingual edition (Nicosia: Mousa Music Productions, 2002), 26–38.

[12] For discussion of tradition versus modernity in music and other fields, see Raúl R. Romero, *Debating the Past: Music, Memory, and Identity in the Andes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Sutton, 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited: Existential Memory on a Greek Island', *History and Memory* 20 (2008), 84-105; and Vassos Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). In terms of music, the seemingly opposing forces of tradition and modernity – or, differently put, of the diverse ways tradition is envisioned and debated – often form the basis for music revivals. On the latter, see Tamara E. Livingston, 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory', *Ethnomusicology* 43 (1999), 66–85. In the specific context of Cypriot music, one could argue that the differentiation bewtween tradition and modernity was also a marketing strategy, or a means of distinguishing between competing groups.

[13] The characterizations of traditionalists and modernists, as well as the arguments in this paragraph, are based on interviews I conducted between 2005 and 2006 with groups and performers who were active in the 1990s and early 2000s, most of whom are still active today. As part of my interviews, I asked performers which of the two characterizations, 'traditionalist' or 'modernist', they would give to themselves and their music if they had to choose. Based on their answers, I would then ask them to elaborate on how they viewed either 'tradition' or 'modernity'.

[14] The most significant change is that modern playing and singing are influenced by international styles to a great extent. Regarding traditional singing in particular, the aesthetic has been overwhelmingly influenced by Greek popular (*entechno* and *laïko*) singers. For more on the latter, see Demetriou, 'Kyriakou Pelagia', 121.

[15] Bruno Nettl sees this as part of the westernization of musical cultures around the world. Traits such as harmony are described as 'central, [but] non-compatible'. Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 354.

Modernists, on the other hand, are similarly selective. While choosing to associate their music with genres and sounds found in the Eastern Mediterranean or, even more selectively, the Greek islands – what they often refer to as a 'natural choice' – they reject all other genres (e.g. jazz or rock) as intrinsically foreign, despite these genres arguably being more prominent in Cyprus's present soundscape. Geographical proximity seems to play a more important role in the modernists' narrative, and this, in turn, cancels out any sense of strangeness or otherness. In short, while traditionalists envision modernity chronologically (then vs. now), modernists envision modernity geographically (the Eastern Mediterranean vs. the world).

The notions of anonymity and collective composition also come into play. In the 1980s, when tradition was beginning to be systematically revived, these two notions were given a renewed boost.[16] But if anonymity and collective composition are seen as the *sine qua non* of traditional music, then it follows that, by definition, no new song can be a "traditional" song. Hence the emphasis remained on preservation and on dissemination of material that was, on the whole, already known.[17] In time, this material was turned into '*the* Tradition', an unchangeable body of music; in a word, a canon. A 'sacred status', then, was born out of a process of reification and folklorization.

Bearing this context in mind, Monsieur Doumani's 'mission' to 'reinvent […] tunes and bring them closer to today's aesthetics and realities' while challenging the music's 'sacred' status might, then, be read as an intention to redefine not merely Cypriot music, but also the narrative that accompanies it. What remained for me to ask was how they intended to do that.

'Cyprus Folk with a Twist'

> Monsieur Doumani specializes in smoking, drinking Grappa and playing music from the island of Cyprus.[18]

My first interview with Monsieur Doumani took place in a café-bar in the old part of Nicosia. On the appointed day, two local filmmakers were also shooting a documentary about the group and their success. In the weeks and months that followed the concert I had attended, Monsieur Doumani's album went on to receive countless distinctions, from laudatory comments in the local and international press to a place on the world music charts. Only a few weeks before our interview took place, Monsieur Doumani had been nominated for 'Best Newcomer' in the Songlines World Music Awards in London. Soon, this would lead to an invitation to perform at the WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance) Festival in the UK. I arrived at the café as the filming was reaching its end. I watched the three band members posing for photos, being filmed for the documentary, answering the filmmakers' questions, and greeting passers-by who congratulated them loudly. The two young filmmakers were intrigued by the fact that I was also there to interview the band on the same day for the purpose of writing this paper. In the end, that chance meeting at the café led to my being asked, a few days later, to contribute to the

[16] On the perceived 'anonymity' of traditional folk poetry, see Roderick Beaton, *Folk Poetry of Modern Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 152–3.

[17] There were some exceptions to this; namely, when performers brought out songs they had learned from 'original sources', normally elderly people. See also Livingston, 'Music Revivals'.

[18] This is the banner used to greet visitors to the group's Facebook page. See <https://www.facebook.com/m.doumani/info?ref=page_internal> (accessed 21 October 2014).

documentary by answering the film-makers' questions about the group from my perspective as an ethnomusicologist.[19]

Back at the café and the day of the interview, the three band members were smiling at each other and chuckling, still obviously puzzled by their success. But distinctions and awards aside, who were Monsieur Doumani apart from a group that 'specializes in smoking, drinking Grappa and playing music from the island of Cyprus'?

The three band members – Antonis Antoniou (*tzouras* and voice), Angelos Ionas (guitar and voice), and Demetris Yiasemides (flute and trombone) – are all trained and accomplished musicians. Before beginning to play the *tzouras*, Antoniou studied classical guitar in Cyprus and rock-pop and jazz in Athens. He later studied composition in London, and is currently completing a PhD in Sonic Arts, once again in London. Ionas, also a guitarist, similarly studied classical guitar in Cyprus but later specialized in Greek popular music genres (*entechno*, *laïko*, rebetiko) and blues. Over the years he has appeared with a number of different groups on the island. Yiasemides studied classical flute at master's level in the UK and learned to play the trombone on his own.

The idea of forming Monsieur Doumani in late 2011 belonged to Antoniou, the band member who has had the most exposure as both a performer and a composer.[20] Antoniou also composes most of the band's new songs and is responsible for their CDs' production. The initial reason for getting together was that they wanted to play music with each other. 'I can say that friendship played a big part', Antoniou told me.[21] 'I knew that if we worked together something good was going to come out of it because […] we communicated […] we were friends. […] It's a key ingredient, being able to get along with one another'. The idea to collaborate on Cypriot music was also there from the start, though initially they were not sure exactly what this meant. This was 'the project', as Antoniou put it, to experiment with Cypriot music. I asked him why. 'Look […] we cannot keep turning our back (*na paizoumen pellon*) to it [Cypriot music]'. They had all played and studied different kinds of music from all around the world, but at some point felt that they wanted to reconnect with their 'roots'.

> There's something in this thing we call 'root' […] that is, what you hear when you're growing up, what gets into your ear a bit more, what, let's say, becomes one with your body. But it's not only that. […] Then you have all those experiences […] for instance, the kinds of music that we were playing. […] Our motive was basically to produce something that's [like] ourselves, to be able to express ourselves, no matter how cliché that may sound […] to be able to play music and to feel that this is something that's coming out of us.

To be able to play music that reflected their own 'complex' music and life experiences was crucial. The other two band members agreed. And the instruments they use reflect, to an extent, that complexity. They were not bothered that the *tzouras,* guitar, flute, and trombone are not commonly associated with Cypriot music. They wanted to play music with each other; these

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[19] The documentary, made by Marilena Sofokleous and Christiana Pyrishi, later appeared under the title 'The Monsieur Doumani Documentary' (2014). Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFXrP5xkzyk> (accessed 21 October 2014).

[20] Antoniou is also a member of Trio Tekke, a band that performs 'neo-rebetiko', and whose recordings were similarly very successful on the world music charts. See <http://www.triotekke.com/> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[21] Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Monsieur Doumani are from the interview I conducted with them in Nicosia on 4 September 2013. Similarly, unless otherwise stated, all translations in this paper are mine. Yiasemides was not present for the recorded interview, yet I was able to get his view on several issues in a number of subsequent informal meetings with the band. These meetings naturally also allowed me to discuss many of the points raised in the interview with the other two musicians anew. During the first interview I was also informed that all three band members are comfortable with any of the others answering questions individually, on behalf of all.

were the instruments they knew how to play, and this was how they decided to play it. 'I can't play the violin', Antoniou told me, naming the instrument that most Cypriots would readily associate with traditional music. 'Nor do I want to start learning the violin now in order to play [Cypriot music]. I want to play [with the instruments] I know how to play […] the music that I want to play, and, logically, I'll get my own colour [out of this]'.

But there was an additional motive besides simply reconnecting with their roots. All these tunes they all knew, Ionas said, were, on the whole, 'played badly' (*kakopaigmena*) by the older generation of traditional performers. 'So I wanted to hear [this music] differently […] to have it challenge me even more with the sound experiences [*akousmata*] I have now, or with the way of life I have now, or with the mood I'm in now'.

They began by playing Cypriot tunes they all knew. As Antoniou put it, 'we grew up with these things […] they were in our ear'. They later continued with more songs they found through recordings or on the internet. They never began with a preconceived idea of what they wanted to play, but let things develop in the course of their rehearsals. Once they chose the tune, they all met up and began playing together and jamming. Their adaptations and instrumentations grew out of this process, without, they said, any pre-planning. As part of this practice, anything could change countless times – 'or be completely overturned', in Ionas's words – until it turned into something they all liked.

Their first CD, *Grippy Grappa*, was an instant hit. It contains a total of thirteen tracks. Eleven are new versions of old traditional tunes – seven are songs, four are instrumental pieces – while two are original compositions by Antoniou, including, in both cases, new lyrics in the Cypriot dialect of Greek. Their reinventions include pieces that have been influenced by the variety of genres all three musicians had previously been exposed to, including blues, rebetiko, hip-hop, and Balkan rock. The two original songs deal with Cyprus's present. *O ahaparos*, which they translate as 'Out-of-Touch Guy', is a satirical song describing the final thoughts of the policeman who fined the band on the charge of 'begging' – they were in fact busking as part of a street festival in central Nicosia. *Paiakin myroaton,* translated on the CD as 'Young Upwardly-Mobile Professional', is sung by the elderly village singer Maroulla Constantinou, and deals with the current financial crisis as seen from the perspective of one such young, upwardly-mobile professional.

The CD's title points to the group's desire to be 'playful' – a word they used many times in the course of our interview. It is an allusion to the group's drinking habits – they all like grappa, and are frequently seen drinking it during their live shows – and also points to one of their adaptations. Included in their traditional songs is *I vraka,* translated on the CD as 'My Baggy Trousers'. The lyrics of this song include the words 'grippy grappa', which a playful alteration of the original 'trikki trakka', itself a humorous onomatopoeia referring to the sound that the *vraka* supposedly makes when someone walks in it.

The band's name is similarly 'playful'. 'We wanted to move beyond stereotypes', Ionas told me, to find 'something that's in our style'; 'Something playful', Antoniou completed the sentence. 'Yes, just like our music', Ionas continued, 'so with Monsieur Doumani [as a name], because […] what we're playing is not that clear […] what kind of music it is.' 'Yes', Antoniou continued, 'things are hazy. […] Hazy in the sense that [what we play] has many elements that you cannot take apart. […] it's a fusion'. This is the kind of fusion that is reflected in the use of a French honorific and a Turkish/Greek word. The word *doumani* comes from the Turkish word *duman,* meaning 'smoke'. The fact that all three musicians smoke profusely also played its part, they added, laughing; their rehearsal room is constantly full of *duman*. I put it to them that in Cypriot Greek *doumani* can also designate something that stinks. 'There are some people who think that what we do stinks', laughed Ionas, 'but that's fine'.

As they are quick to recognize, not everyone likes these changes or the playfulness they bring with them. 'There are people who don't like any change', Antoniou said, who cannot see how 'paradoxical' it is to be singing about things that have no relation to life as it is today. But 'there is the possibility of bringing out our own music. […] which speaks to today […] that can address people in Cyprus today'. This is what they have done with the two new songs on their CD, and this, they said, is the direction their music is heading.

It is not only the music that got a revamp, though. The band have also reinvented how Cypriot music is presented and marketed. What they brought with them was the 'playfulness' they saw reflected in their own name. Their photo shoots are extremely elaborate artistic procedures, be it for their website or their concert flyers and posters. Experimentation may be present when the three musicians are jamming, but in their photo sessions nothing is left to chance. The haziness that exists in their name and music is to be found in their photos too; rarely is anything sharp, clear-cut, or in focus.[22] They are playing with shadows, different colours, smoke. Even their clothes are carefully chosen. Antoniou's turban, Ionas's hat, Yiasemides's suspenders – described in the opening section above – are all essential accessories to their 'playful' image. In the same spirit, they choose 'playful' images for the slide show that unfailingly accompanies their performances. (A geisha made of carton was also part of their stage decor until it broke.) It is not only the images, but also the colours that change with every song. But there is meaning behind this, as Antoniou explained.

> [We] tried to play around [with the photos on the slide show] in the same way we play around [with the music], to make it more colourful. […] We also see our music this way; that more colours are coming in, as if you're using many palette. […] You might think that traditional [music], the way you hear it […] might be a black-and-white thing in your mind and you colour it in, like children's colouring book […] it becomes alive, it gets out.

The artwork on their CD cover is indicative of precisely that. It features a print by the Cypriot printmaker Hambis Tsangaris, which was coloured in with bright blue, red, and pink – the original print is in black-and-white – and given a prominent green neon background. The message is clear: just as the old print has been given new colour, so has the music.

But what was it about their 'reinvention' that made them so popular all of a sudden? Where do they see themselves in relation to the rest of Cypriot music? Do they feel they have a 'mission', as they said back in 2012? 'That was a heavy word to use back then', mused Antoniou. 'It was probably a mistake to use it.' They are under no illusions that what they do represents 'Cypriot music' as a whole. 'It's a huge weight and a huge responsibility to say that my music is Cypriot traditional music', said Ionas, adding that such a designation would make him feel 'scared'. 'It's Cypriot music but changed, modified', added Antoniou. 'We say Cyprus folk […] with a twist'.[23] This twist, however, can be explained in more ways than one.

Tradition as Modernity

In September 2013, as part of the University of Cyprus Cultural Festival, Monsieur Doumani presented *Grippy Grappa* to an ecstatic audience that filled the Axiothea Mansion in the old part of Nicosia. The very fact that the concert was taking place there had its own significance. Axiothea, as the place is commonly known, is a restored eighteenth-century traditional house, complete with an internal courtyard – the setting for performances that take place there – around which are several arches, all built with the local yellow sandstone. Axiothea is a model of

[22] See, for example, the photos of the band on their website: <http://www.monsieurdoumani. com/> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[23] Antoniou used the phrase 'Cyprus folk… with a twist' in English.

traditional Cypriot urban architecture, a visual reminder of 'old' Cyprus. The fact that it was the setting of a concert by a very modern band contributed to the juxtaposition of the old and the new, which Monsieur Doumani's music represents. What is more, the festival itself is a rather prestigious affair, organized by the country's state university. Inviting Monsieur Doumani to play there was also a signal that what might have appeared as marginal only a few years earlier, precisely because of Monsieur Doumani's renegotiation of Cypriot music's 'sacredness', was now being welcomed by the establishment.

On the night of the concert the venue was so full that extra chairs had to be brought in, and when these were not enough, people just sat on the floor. Of the many things that caught my eye that evening, two in particular stood out: the number of young people in the audience (and the fact that they were having fun; there was even some impromptu dancing towards the end of the show), and that a traditional singer of 'the old guard', Michalis Tterlikkas, took part in the concert as a guest

Tterlikkas is one of Cyprus's most recognizable traditional singers. He became popular in the 1990s and early 2000s through his recordings, live and televised appearances, and his cameo roles in films, TV series, and theatre plays. He has a readily identifiable voice and equally identifiable looks; his thick moustache is his trademark. Tterlikkas is often identified – and also identifies himself – as one of the more traditionalist performers of Cypriot music.[24] Despite this, he does not hesitate to recognize that there is scope – not by performers of his generation, but by younger musicians – to develop new sounds and new tunes out of the existing traditional music material.[25] His appearance at the Monsieur Doumani concert was an eloquent statement of his belief that Monsieur Doumani might be doing just that.

In the course of three summers (2004–2006) I had the chance to tour Cyprus with Tterlikkas and his group, Mousa, as part of my fieldwork. Together we visited dozens of villages and towns and performed in village fairs and festivals. No matter where we found ourselves, the audience always seemed to be 'the same': people in their forties, fifties, and above, often accompanied by their young children or grandchildren. As I have written elsewhere, 'teenagers, as well as people in their twenties and thirties, were, in the great majority of cases, conspicuously absent'.[26] Our audience, then, consisted of people who had some experience of 'tradition' from older times, and who came to our performances to reawaken their memories of the past.

The mixed audience at the Monsieur Doumani concerts I had attended told a different story. There were university students in their twenties, young professionals in their early thirties and forties, and a handful of people in their fifties and sixties; there were also hip-hop aficionados, rock n' roll and heavy metal band members, self-proclaimed 'anarchists' and 'alternatives'.[27] What is more, they were all responding excitedly to both the music and, it seemed, to the whole aesthetic of the performance. This was neither the audience nor the reactions I was used to seeing in traditional music concerts in Cyprus until then. But if we assume that older people, such as the ones I used to see at Michalis Tterlikkas's concerts, go back to traditional music as a recourse to memory – for example, of the rural setting of one's village, the way people used to dress, or the food they used to eat – then the younger people at Monsieur Doumani's

[24] I have known Tterlikkas since 1992 and have often discussed these issues with him over the years, both in informal conversation and in formal interviews.

[25] It may appear contradictory that someone who wants to perform music 'as our forefathers bequeathed it to us' also sees the need to develop new sounds. As Michalis Tterlikkas told to me in an interview in 2005, he sees three roles in traditional music-making in Cyprus. The first is that of the 'grandfather' who hands a song down to the younger generation, the second is that of people of his generation who preserve the music they were given, and the third belongs to younger musicians who will create new music based on the existing material.

[26] Demetriou, 'Appropriating Culture', note 29.

[27] My description of audience members is based on my personal acquaintance with many of them.

concert seemed to acquire a new relationship with tradition under the guise of modernity. As the anthropologist David Sutton has argued in his work on tradition, modernity, and memory on the island of Kalymnos, 'increasingly "modernity" does not need to be argued for, whereas "tradition" needs discursive support'.[28] In the case of Cypriot music, this 'discursive support' has come in the form of world music.

It does not take long for the listener of Monsieur Doumani's music to realize that the 'reinvention' discussed here is, in fact, one of 'world music-ing'. Monsieur Doumani certainly never tried to hide this, and they were particularly proud of their Songlines World Music nomination. World music has promoted a search for 'sonic otherness', through which traditional, often 're-discovered' musics are filtered through already known 'international' sounds (rock, jazz, blues, etc.) and rebranded as 'ethnic'.[29] To borrow from Dafni Tragaki's discussion of *rebetiko* and world music, 'by "other-ing" [music] in the light of the "ethnic" music trend, "our" rare, ancient, and thus sacred sounds are aestheticized through acquiring an "exotic" gloss'.[30] In fact, some of the arguments that Monsieur Doumani use when it comes to promoting their music are no different from those used by other 'ethnic' music groups that want to get a place on the world music scene; namely, that the 'reinvention' of their music has to do with the fact that only through this change will music become agreeable to 'foreign' ears and thus reach a wider audience.[31]

'We're interested in other people, outside Cyprus, getting to know us, what we're doing', Antoniou told me. 'We're interested because we believe that there's something, let's say, worthy [in what we do …] we believe in what we do, so we want to take it out [of Cyprus]'. What Monsieur Doumani do, of course, is play not the type of Cypriot traditional music performed by the older generation of folk musicians such as Tterlikkas in village festivals, but (as one of their reviewers put it) 'a lively mix of Cypriot folk music, modern and global music elements and good humor'.[32]

Similar examples of such mixes of local and global music sounds abound. One need only open a world music magazine or have a look at the line-up of world music festivals to find comparable trends. A review of *Queen Between*, an album by the London-based Indian singer Susheela Raman in *Songlines* magazine, for instance, described different tracks in terms of how they related to international or 'global' terms, or at any rate how they were recognizable as such in the West. One of the tracks was described as 'English-sounding pagan psych-folk'; a second as 'a hypnotic piece of Asian-tinged left-field rock'; and a third as a 'throbbing Gypsy party opener'. All this was set against the 'ecstatic voices' of a *qawwali* group combined with 'a band of Rajasthani folk musicians' – Raman's own 'local' musical elements.[33] The music of Bassekou Kouyate, a Malian musician who appeared at the WOMAD Festival in the UK in 2014 – in the line-up that also included Monsieur Doumani – was described by the same magazine as 'a thrilling, urgent mix of African blues, rock and funk, with Bassekou's electrified banjo-like *ngoni* [a

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[28] Sutton, 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited', 87.

[29] Steven Feld, 'From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of "World Music" and "World Beat"', in *Music Grooves*, ed. by Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 262.

[30] Dafni Tragaki, *Rebetiko Worlds: Ethnomusicology and Ethnography in the City* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 279.

[31] See Tragaki, *Rebetiko Worlds*, 279.

[32] Jamie Renton; review available from Monsieur Doumani's website: <http://www.monsieurdoumani.com/index.php?article=26> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[33] Nigel Williamson, 'A Raman for All Seasons: Susheela Branches Out'. Available from <http://www.songlines.co.uk/world-music-news/2014/06/album-review-top-of-the-world-susheela-raman-queen-between/> (accessed 26 October 2014).

traditional West African instrument] cranked up to the max'.[34] As if responding to such reviews, Kouyate's website makes the claim that his music – in this case, the music found on his latest album – '*engages with the world* in ways he could have only imagined 10 years before' (my emphasis).[35]

This engagement with the world is, in the sphere of world music, virtually always imagined in terms of its sonic result on the glocal level. According to reviewers, at least, this consists in the successful combination of local characteristics – such as instruments, rhythmic patterns, modes, and tunings – with global ones – such as elements borrowed from popular music genres found around the world, like blues or rock. The reviews such music receives, irrespective of the local context from which it stems, are often strikingly similar. Much like the reviews of Kouyate or Raman's focus on which aspects of their local traditions have been combined with global and/or easily identifiable genres (blues, rock, funk, left-field rock, Gypsy), so do the reviews of Monsieur Doumani's first album focus on how any 'regional' or 'local' sounds in their music have been made to work on the greater canvas of international music genres.

'I hear echoes of blues, swing jazz and various folk traditions in their sound but their local roots are felt strongly enough to hold all this in place', commented Monsieur Doumani's reviewer for *fRoots* magazine.[36] After signposting 'Cypriot folk music' in his piece, the reviewer for the World Music Central website noted that 'Grippy Grappa [*sic*] includes fascinating *tzouras* and flute interplays, Balkan brass band sounds, bluesy guitar, Gypsy swing and even funk'.[37] Finally, writing about *O ahaparos,* one of the two original compositions on *Grippy Grappa,* the *Songlines* reviewer remarked that 'it keeps its feet firmly planted in the regional music in which they excel but creates something new out of it'.[38] This 'something new' is precisely what places *Grippy Grappa,* and Monsieur Doumani as a band, firmly into the realm of world music.

Back in Cyprus, by labelling their reinvented Cypriot music as 'world music', Monsieur Doumani manage both to other and to exoticize it in the eyes of their local audience. Through this othering and exoticizing, Cypriot music has been exonerated from its former 'peasant' associations – what is commonly described in the Cypriot dialect of Greek as *horkatiko* – and become 'in'.[39] Inviting Michalis Tterlikkas to sing with them at the Axiothea concert was, then, in many respects a natural consequence of their artistic and marketing choices, especially since this came *after* their CD's positive reviews and their world music nomination. Secure in their recognition as a world music band, a 'traditional' traditional singer could only grant their work a mark of authenticity. In turn, Tterlikkas himself becomes exoticized in the eyes of the local audience, and so does his music.[40] Even the lyrics he performs about rural life in Cyprus in the

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[34] Nigel Williamson, 'Blurring the Line Between the Praise Song and the Protest Song'. Available from <http://www.songlines.co.uk/world-music-news/2013/02/top-of-the-world-bassekou-kouyate-ngoni-ba-jama-ko/> (accessed 26 October 2014). For the full line-up of WOMAD 2014, see <http://www.efestivals.co.uk/festivals/womad/2014> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[35] See <http://bassekoukouyate.com/> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[36] Jamie Renton, *op. cit.*

[37] Angel Romero; review available from <http://worldmusiccentral.org/2013/07/06/grippy-grappa/> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[38] Maria Lord; review available from Monsieur Doumani's website:

<http://www.monsieurdoumani.com/files/songlinesbig.jpg> (accessed 26 October 2014).

[39] For the effects of the notions of and states of being *χωρκάτικο* and *χωρκατοσύνη* (i.e., the state of being a peasant) in modern Greek Cypriot society, see Caesar V. Mavratsas, *Η Κοινωνία των Χώρκατων: Η Πολιτισμική και η Πολιτική Υπανάπτυξη των Ελληνοκυπρίων στις Απαρχές του 21ου Αιώνα* (The Society of *Horkates*: The Cultural and Political Underdevelopment of Greek Cypriots at the Beginning of the 21st Century) (Athens: Papazisi, 2012).

[40] See Paul Sant Cassia, 'Exoticizing Discoveries and Extraordinary Experiences: "Traditional' Music, Modernity, and Nostalgia in Malta and Other Mediterranean Societies", *Ethnomusicology* 44 (2000), 292-7.

last century – the same lyrics seen as folkloric or *horkatika* only a couple of years before – are now perceived as 'ours': authentic, and therefore acceptable.

As part of their reinvention, or world music-ing, Monsieur Doumani have also reinvented how those who perform traditional music look and behave. In Cyprus it is not only traditional music that is connected to a sense of conservatism, but also traditional singers. As discussed elsewhere, this may have something to do with the personal archetype set by the first major singer of Cypriot traditional music, Theodoulos Kallinikos, as well as with the image that singers who came after him also adopted, based on Kallinikos's archetype.[41] Men – and traditional music in Cyprus has been overwhelmingly represented by men – singing traditional songs in public have generally been conservative in terms of their projected image. This is manifest, for example, by wearing clothes in subdued colours, showing no outward signs of 'modernity' – such as a turban or brightly-coloured suspenders. It is also apparent in their public behaviour, through which they all appear to be 'pillars of the Cypriot music tradition, trying to save it from decay'. Additionally, they have all lived 'within the prescribed societal norms (i.e., they have all had full-time jobs other than singing, and they have all been married with children)'.[42] While many audience members of the concerts I had attended with Michalis Tterlikkas's group in the previous decade could identify with these performers, several younger people could not. By contrast, many people in their twenties and thirties can now identify with the three young men who make up Monsieur Doumani. The three talk like many from within their younger audience, dress like them, and often look like them (in terms of, for example, their hairdos).

So part of the group's popularity relates to the fact that through othering, exoticizing, world music-ing, and re-appropriating, younger people can now enjoy this music without the fear of being branded as *horkatoi,* that is, as 'peasants' in the sense of *horkatiko* mentioned above. Conveniently, Monsieur Doumani's arrival and success have coincided with a more generalized turn towards 'all things traditional', a revival of sorts, and a rediscovery of 'Cypriotness'.[43] What is more, that their music has been positively received outside Cyprus grants the external validation that many in Cyprus, as in other postcolonial contexts, still seek.[44] If others, meaning foreigners – or more precisely, western Europeans – enjoy Monsieur Doumani and their music, then 'we' (i.e., Cypriots) can like them too. Through this external validation, this music further becomes guiltless, acceptable, and 'in'.

Back at our interview, Monsieur Doumani tried to explain to me their popularity in a different way. They said that they realized that to make people like themselves *want* to listen to traditional music, or music influenced by traditional sounds, once more they had to make it relevant to their own life, be it in the way they handled instruments and sounds; their newly-invented lyrics, written in the island's dialect; or even in the way that they presented themselves aesthetically. However, as they recognize, their life is not defined as straightforwardly as that of their parents and grandparents. It is much more ambiguous and complex. While they live and create in Nicosia, they are, they said, in constant conversation with the world at large. 'Our day-to-day life is no longer influenced only by Cypriot reality', Ionas told me. Antoniou agreed and continued. 'Older people composing a song […] were referring to their land [*ston topo tous* …] which could have been their village or […] their three neighbouring villages. […] Now […] our land is the whole world'.

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41 Demetriou, 'Kyriakou Pelagia', 122-4

42 Demetriou, 'Kyriakou Pelagia', 122-4.

43 See Demetriou, 'Appropriating Culture', 69-73.

44 For the response of Cypriots as postcolonial subjects, see Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity*, especially 170–83.

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Abstract

Performers of Cypriot traditional music are often involved in discussions – and, not infrequently, arguments – on the dichotomy between 'tradition' and 'modernity', or 'preservation' and 'renewal' in Cypriot traditional music. Traditionalists have seen their role as one of preserving what has been passed on to them by previous generations, while modernists have argued for the revitalization of Cypriot music through the renewal of, for example, the instrumentations customarily used in traditional music. Taking the cue from this discussion and using material from recent ethnographic research, this paper focuses on Monsieur Doumani, a group of Nicosia-based young musicians who experiment with traditional music, seeking to challenge what they call its 'sacred' status. It looks at the group's music and marketing choices, and its audience's fascination with it. Reflecting on issues relating to the exoticization of local traditions, the paper concludes with a discussion of tradition *as* modernity, as well as with the issue of 'world music-ing' Cypriot traditional music.

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