

**Please Don't Forget My Country: The Political Significance of Popular Music in Greece**

**under the Military Junta**

**By**

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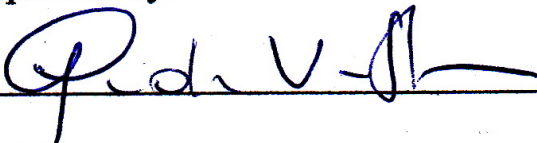
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**Approved by:**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gonda Van Steen", is written over a horizontal line.

**Professor Gonda Van Steen  
Classics**

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## Abstract:

In this paper I will be examining the military regime that ruled Greece from 1967 through 1974 and how popular music became the most important vocabulary of resistance against autocratic rule. The military junta ruled with a strict hand by banning and suppressing elements of Greek life that did not adhere to their philosophy. Beyond restricting the freedom of the press and the right of democracy, the military regime, oppressed certain genres of music and many key musicians. Throughout Greece's history, music had played a political role but by banning certain genres of music and certain musicians, the military regime politicized the entire art form even further. Thus every piece, whether or not intended to be political, was viewed by the military regime and listeners through a political lens. This created an atmosphere in which famous musicians had the ability to become political symbols, a phenomenon unprecedented in Greece. Another effect of this intense political music atmosphere was that space opened up for new songwriters and musicians who could oppose the military regime in an indirect manner, through new styles and disguised messages. During the reign of the military Junta, music emerged at the forefront of the political discussion and it is therefore essential in understanding the dynamics of this dark period in Greek history.

## I. Introduction

The 1969 French political thriller, "Z", directed by Costa Gavras and adapted from Vassilis Vassilikos' novel by the same title, ends with a shocking caption that lists the many authors, objects and subjects banned by the military regime which controlled Greece from 1967-1974. The caption states: "the military banned long hair on males; mini-skirts; Sophocles; Tolstoy; Euripides; smashing glasses after drinking toasts, labor strikes; Aristophanes; Ionesco; Sartre; Albee; Pinter; freedom of the press; sociology; Beckett; Dostoevsky; modern music; popular music; the new mathematics; and the letter "Z", which in ancient Greek

means 'He is alive'."<sup>1</sup> This caption is a powerful illustration of the harsh rule that the military brought to Greece for seven long years.

As the caption indicates, popular music and musicians were the recipients of many of the Junta's attacks. Throughout Greece's history, music had played a political role but by banning certain genres of music and certain musicians, the military regime politicized the entire art form even further. Thus every piece, whether or not intended to be political, was viewed by the military regime and listeners through a political lens, or a political headphone. This created an atmosphere in which famous musicians had the ability to become political leaders, or political symbols, a phenomenon unprecedented in Greece. Another effect of this intense political music atmosphere, which banned certain forms of music, was that space opened up for new songwriters and musicians who could oppose the military regime in an indirect manner, through new styles and disguised messages. During the reign of the military Junta, music emerged at the forefront of the political discussion and it is therefore essential in understanding the dynamics of this dark period in Greek history.

## II. The Arrival of the Military Regime

In the wee hours of the morning of April 21, 1967, Mikis Theodorakis, the world renowned composer, was called by a friend who told him the frightening news of tanks rolling through Syntagma Square; the dictatorship had arrived.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Z, DVD. Directed by Costa Gavras. Reganne Films, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Theodorakis, Mikis. *Journal of Resistance*. (New York: Cowad, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 9.

The dictatorship was formed by a military junta led by a group of right-wing colonels, who took control of the Greek government and shattered Greek democracy for the next seven years. The junta acted swiftly and, within five hours, “over 10,000 people were arrested by military squads.”<sup>3</sup> These political prisoners were subject to extreme torture and then sent through kangaroo military courts that sentenced them to long terms in prison. The military also dissolved all liberal organizations and arrested members of the left, including the Greek Communist Party (KKE).<sup>4</sup> The Junta also abolished the right of assembly and freedom of the press. The military swiftly took control of the entire country, destroyed all opposition, including the press, and ended democracy in Greece within a few short weeks.

Theodorakis not only watched this happening but was personally involved. After the warning given to him by his friend, Theodorakis was able to flee from his house moments before the police knocked on his door to arrest him.<sup>5</sup> Music and musicians who did not adhere to the military officers’ ideal of Greece were immediately blacklisted, and Mikis Theodorakis was the music community’s most wanted. One of the first measures taken by the military junta was to target Mikis Theodorakis and his musical works. The military passed “a decree banning all Theodorakis’s music from public broadcasts and punishing any Greek who even

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Murtagh, *The Rape of Greece: The King, the Colonels and the Resistance*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 117

<sup>4</sup> Frangos, George D. *Greece under the Junta*, (New York: Facts on File, 1970), 23.

<sup>5</sup> Theodorakis, Mikis. *Journal of Resistance*. (New York: Cowad, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 11.

possessed his record.”<sup>6</sup> Mikis Theodorakis became the symbol for the persecution of music freedom as well as the freedoms of the Greek people as a whole.

It is interesting that the military junta responded to Mikis Theodorakis so harshly. On one hand, Theodorakis was an obvious target. During World War II, he had actively worked with the Greek Resistance movement as a member of a Reserve Unity of the Greek People’s Liberation Army (ELAS). ELAS was the military arm of the left wing political group, the National Liberation Front (EAM) . In the early sixties, Theodorakis also founded the political organization Lambrakis Democratic Youth, after the assassination of the Greek politician Grigoris Lambrakis in 1963.<sup>7</sup> In the crucial 1964 elections, Theodorakis won a seat in the Greek parliament as a member of the left wing party, the United Democratic Left (EDA). These bullets on Theodorakis’ resume cemented his status as a dangerous leftist.

Despite his leftist credentials, Theodorakis had emerged as an unofficial Greek ambassador to the world. In 1963, Greece found its way into many movie theaters internationally as Nikos Kazantzakis’ novel *Life and Adventures of Alexis Zorbas*, was adapted into a movie directed by Michael Cacoyiannis. The film, starring hellenophile Anthony Quinn, was accompanied by a score composed by Theodorakis. Zorba, his dance, and Theodorakis achieved a high profile in the international community. This world-wide acclaim for Theodorakis made him an

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<sup>6</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 93.

<sup>7</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 91.

unlikely candidate for harsh treatment, since the junta still needed to rely on American and international aid that had been flooding into Greece since 1947 with the advent of the influential Truman Doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

On the public stage, Mikis Theodorakis was a well-known and controversial figure, and his music was just as divisive. His utilization and promotion of the genre called *rembetika* became a target for the junta's attack against popular music. The *rembetika* represented the Greece that the junta despised: the poor, the underworld, the outcasts.<sup>9</sup> Therefore the beginning of any political discussion of Modern Greek music must start with the arrival and emergence of *rembetika* music in Greek culture in the early twentieth century.

### III. *Rembetika*: Turkish Origins

The roots of *rembetika* music lie in the Turkish port cities of Istanbul and Smyrna. In these large entrepôts, Greek communities were set up in the poor sectors, as they provided much of the hard labor required for maintaining and working the ports.<sup>10</sup> Although the Greeks in the cities strongly identified with their ethnic group, their proximity to Turkish culture facilitated an organic exchange of practices and ideas.<sup>11</sup> This cultural exchange is exhibited in *rembetika* music. In music clubs, called *tekedes*, the poor Greeks began to play a type of music that

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Murtagh, *The Rape of Greece: The King, The Colonels and the Resistance*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 117.

<sup>9</sup> Koglin, Daniel. "Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko," *Music and Politics* (2008):

<sup>10</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Koglin, Daniel. "Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko," *Music and Politics* (2008):

combined their traditional folksongs (*dimotika tragoudia*) and Turkish styles of music that incorporated lyrics that reflected the problems they faced. Problems with poverty, women, alcohol and drugs became the fodder for the new *rembetika* style. Papanikolaou argues that *rembetika* became “a site of intercultural communication and interpellation that eventually came to transmit the symbols and significance, values, habits and rules of behavior” within these Greek communities.<sup>12</sup>

In *tekedes* throughout Istanbul and Smyrna, the new *rembetiko* style quickly became popular. *Rembetes*, the *rembetika* musicians, personified and told the lifestyle of the *mangas*. A *mangas* was a streetwise character of “shady repute”.<sup>13</sup> *Rembetika* musicians utilized the *mangas* as the protagonist of their songs which lamented his problems with women, drugs, the law, money or even his wornout clothes.<sup>14</sup> The *mangas* and *rembetika* music quickly become synonymous with each other.

#### IV. *Rembetika*: Breakthrough in Greece

Although by the end of World War I the *rembetika* genre was gaining popularity in these cities, it was still a Turkish phenomenon and had not truly arrived yet in Greece. This changed with a major political event that had huge

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<sup>12</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 64.

<sup>13</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 66.

<sup>14</sup> Koglin, Daniel. “Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko,” *Music and Politics* (2008):



cultural ramifications, the Greek-Turkish War. The Greek-Turkish War lasted from 1919 through 1922. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the Greek government decided to monopolize and exploit the weakness of the Ottomans. Since the formation of the Greek constitution, many politicians in Greece professed a theory known as the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea). The *Megali Idea* was the ideal to claim and gain control of all lands that had historically been settled by Greek peoples. Eleftherios Venizelos, known as the father of modern Greece, utilized this philosophy and doubled the area and population of Greece in the Balkan Wars by liberating Macedonia, parts of Epirus, and many islands in the Aegean.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Greece's great territorial gains of the Balkan Wars, the ultimate goal was to liberate Constantinople, the old capital of the Byzantine Empire and the center of the Greek Orthodox religion. Greece invaded Turkey in 1919 after gaining assurances from the Great Powers that they would acknowledge the Greek right to Constantinople. The Greeks set out with great success and gained control of both Constantinople and Smyrna. The Turks were eventually able to regroup, under their new leader Mustafa Kemal, and repel the Greek military back into the sea. This Greek defeat prompted a set of negotiations and treaties. The Lausanne Conference in late 1922 recognized Turkish sovereignty over the disputed territories and also included an exchange of populations.<sup>16</sup> All Greeks

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<sup>15</sup> Cleveland, William. *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), 138.

<sup>16</sup> Cleveland, William, *A History of the Modern Middle East*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2004), 179.

living within Turkish borders were forced to leave their ancestral homeland and to move to the Greek mainland, also known as Free Greece.

In this modern Mediterranean tragedy, the Greek immigrants from Turkey replaced their homes of Smyrna and Istanbul with the Greek port cities of Thessaloniki and Athens. Once in their new homes, these displaced Greeks congregated in ghettos and, in the eyes of the cities' natives, they wore the stink of Turkey. Along with the few personal belongings that they were able to bring to Greece, the immigrants brought *rembetika* and discovered that their strife still continued in their new home.<sup>17</sup> *Rembetes* once again congregated in *tekedes* and played their songs of loss, strife, and drugs. Now in Greece, the *rembetika* music of Turkey came into contact with the marginal songs of the Greek ports and underworld, which revitalized the genre. Artists such as Yiannis Papaioannou, a refugee from Asia Minor, performed *rembetika* that personified this hybrid of Turkish underground music and the music of the Greek outcast. Markos Vamvakaris, a native of the Cycladic island of Syros, also helped to popularize the genre with his song *Frangosiriani* (The Catholic Girl from Syros). This marriage of musical styles spurred a period commonly referred to as the golden age of *rembetika*, which lasted from 1929 through 1936.<sup>18</sup>

## V. Rembetika: Government Intervention and Vassilis Tsitsanis

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<sup>17</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 66.

<sup>18</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 68.

As more people became aware of the cultural explosion of *rembetika* music, so did the government. The Metaxas dictatorship, which lasted from 1936 through 1940, stressed the glory that was Greece and believed that the country should pick up where the Byzantine emperors left off. *Rembetika* did not fit this mold for conveying the problems of Greece, not its greatness. Beginning in 1936, the Greek government maintained a harsh stance on *rembetika* music. Upholding a belief in a “Third Hellenic Civilization”, an idea which was consciously based on Hitler’s Third Reich, Ioannis Metaxas shutdown *tekedes* and *rembetika* hashish dens.<sup>19</sup> He also imprisoned and exiled many *rembetes*, to islands such as Makronisos. This prompted a series of new censorship restrictions, which the Metaxas dictatorship imposed to suppress the *rembetika* style.<sup>20</sup> In response to these new censorship laws, Vassilis Tsitsanis helped to reform the genre within the constraints of the censorship legislation.

Tsitsanis is often hailed as the “modernizer” of *rembetika* music and can be seen as the link between the hashish den version of *rembetika* and the “high art” version that Mikis Theodorakis popularized. In contrast to the poor and disenfranchised that formed the original group of *rembetes*, Vassilis Tsitsanis was far from being an outsider or a member of the underworld. In fact, Tsitsanis originally left his home in Trikala, located in central Greece, to travel to Athens to study law, where he was attracted to the profound and emotional laments of

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<sup>19</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. “Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 9.

<sup>20</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 67.

*rembetika* performers.<sup>21</sup> Tsitsanis was able to bring *rembetika* into the mainstream by utilizing Western major and minor scales, instead of the original eastern modes (*maqam* and *tropoi*), and by making lyrics about love instead of jobs and *manges*.<sup>22</sup> In 1948, Vassilis Tsitsanis released his song *Sinnefiasmeni Kiriaki* (Cloudy Sunday), which was embraced by many Greeks as something close to an unofficial national anthem.<sup>23</sup> The song can still be recited by many Greeks today. By the 1950's *rembetika* and *bouzouki* virtuosos were becoming extremely popular. Manolis Hiotis and Giorgos Zambetas became the selling points of *tavernas*, music clubs, and even popular feature films.<sup>24</sup> The transformation of the genre was being called *laika*, literally meaning "popular music".

Even though Tsitsanis and other *rembetika* and *laika* performers gained immense popularity, *rembetika* music continued to have a contentious and complicated relationship with the government and the political parties, even before the junta took control of Greece in 1967. This contentious relationship prompted Papanikolaou to argue that *rembetika* was simultaneously existent and invisible.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, although publicly Metaxas reacted harshly against *rembetika*, his government utilized the music to its advantage. Papanikolaou notes that the government played *rembetika* music on military radios due to its

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<sup>21</sup> Koglin, Daniel. "Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko," *Music and Politics* (2008): 10.

<sup>22</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 67.

<sup>23</sup> Koglin, Daniel. "Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko," *Music and Politics* (2008): 10.

<sup>24</sup> Koglin, Daniel. "Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko," *Music and Politics* (2008): 13.

<sup>25</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets; Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 70.

popularity with the troops during World War II and during the bloody Civil War that followed.<sup>26</sup> The government even played *rembetika* music in the prison camps that housed political prisoners.<sup>27</sup> The government understood that, although *rembetika* did not adhere to its cultural philosophy of Greece, the genre was a valuable tool since it appealed to the people.

The left-wing political parties and theorists also had a complicated relationship with *rembetika*. Ideologically, communist and leftist officials and intellectuals found *rembetika* and *rembetiko* culture problematic. One leftist intellectual even wrote that *rembetika* “seeks to detach the Greek people from their national traditions, to distract them from engaging in class struggle and to entangle them with *rembetiko*, drink and hashish.”<sup>28</sup> *Rembetika* music contradicted communist philosophy. Marxist thinkers viewed *rembetika* as “a degenerate expression of social and moral responsibility.”<sup>29</sup> The Communist Party exemplified its attitudes towards *rembetika* by raiding *tekedes* and hashish dens throughout the country.

Even Mikis Theodorakis had his doubts about *rembetika* because of the genre’s association with the underworld and its lyrics that expressed a passive acceptance of the status quo. This changed after Theodorakis was arrested and sent to the Greek island of Ikaria in 1947. There he heard the music being played constantly over the Armed Forces Radio. On the island, surrounded by prisoners,

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<sup>26</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets; Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 75.

<sup>27</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. “Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 9.

<sup>28</sup> Koglin, Daniel. “Marginality; A Key Concept to Understanding the Resurgence of Rebetiko,” *Music and Politics* (2008):

<sup>29</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. “Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 10.

Mikis Theodorakis, was able to experience how people identified with the music. He soon began notating the melodies “of rembetika songs, aware that they might form the raw material for a new sort of popular music, one that would cross boundaries of class and education and appeal to all Greeks.”<sup>30</sup>

## VI. Theodorakis vs. Hadzidakis: The *Epitafios* Debate

The future of *rembetika* music arrived in 1949 when Greece’s second great composer, Manos Hadzidakis, began the debate over *rembetika* in the intellectual sphere. Hadzidakis wrote of *rembetika* as “our popular music”.<sup>31</sup> The journal *Ellenike Demiourgia*, which published the transcript of his rembetika lecture, noticed that Hadzidakis had supported the cultural importance of “*rembetika*, *zeimbekika* and *hasapika* songs and dances so decisively, and his persistent effort to empower them with as much support as he could gather from the personal emotion triggered by his love.”<sup>32</sup> Hadzidakis’ lecture on *rembetika* music sparked a wide debate that clearly made the genre visible. Although Hadzidakis viewed *rembetika* as a valid and precious popular art form, many other commentators questioned its value. Hadzidakis’ most fervent critics

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<sup>30</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. “Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 10.

<sup>31</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. “Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 10.

<sup>32</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 75.

claimed that the genre posed a risk as it “poisons the people and especially the youth.”<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fervent criticism of his belief in the genre, Hadzidakis professed that the *rembetika* musical vocabulary should be incorporated into the modern musical discourse of Greece in order to create an art form that effectively and accurately represented the artistic qualities of Greek music. Mikis Theodorakis responded to this challenge and wrote a song cycle for the poem *Epitafios*, written by Yiannis Ritsos, while upholding the characteristics of the *rembetika* music style.

As an influential composer, Theodorakis’ embrace of the *rembetika* style was a profound political statement but using Ritsos’ poem, politicized his work even further. Yiannis Ritsos’ poetry had political implications in the past. In 1936, his poem, *Epitafios*, was publicly burned in front of the Acropolis by the Metaxas regime. Ritsos also was known to be a supporter of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and fought as a guerrilla during World War II. During the Greek Civil War, Ritsos was imprisoned in numerous detention camps for political “rehabilitation”. The political significance of Ritsos’ poem, *Epitafios*, only intensified the *rembetika* debate.

After receiving Theodorakis’ composition, Hadzidakis recorded a version which featured the classically trained singer, Nana Mouskouri, and conspicuously omitting *bouzoukia* from his orchestral arrangement.<sup>34</sup> Feeling that the message

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<sup>33</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 73.

had been lost in Hadzidakis' version, Theodorakis quickly responded with his own recording.<sup>35</sup> In his version of *Epitafios*, Theodorakis filled his recording with *bouzoukia* and showcased the vocals of the brilliant yet not classically trained *rembetika* singer, Grigoris Bithikotsis.<sup>36</sup> Theodorakis' version had strong political implications. Bithikotsis was born into a poor family in Peristeri, Athens, where he was exposed to the *rembetika*. Like most *rembetika* musicians he learned by ear and did not receive any formal training. Similar to Theodorakis and Ritsos, he was imprisoned in detention camps in the Aegean, following the Greek Civil War because of his support of the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Due to his poor upbringing, his lack of classical training and his known radical political views, Grigoris Bithikotsis' centrality to Theodorakis' piece of "high-art" was scandalous and surprising to many critics.<sup>37</sup>

In response to both Hadzidakis' and Theodorakis' recordings, the intellectual community became divided in a debate which had implications beyond the direction of Modern Greek art. The *Epitafios* song cycles posed questions concerning the direction of the country as a whole; should Greece be formed based upon the idealized version that stresses the glory that was Greece or should the country accurately reflect the characteristics and qualities of the Greek peoples? In college classrooms, political forums, and coffeehouses (*kafeneia*), the debate raged and *rembetika* popular music was at the forefront of the political discussion.

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<sup>35</sup> Theodorakis, Mikis. *Journal of Resistance*. (New York: Cowad, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 303.

<sup>36</sup> Holst-Warhaft, Gail. "Politics and Popular Music in Modern Greece," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* (2002): 11.

<sup>37</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 75.



## VII. Theodorakis: *Romiossini*, *Axion Esti* and Other Works

In the period following his release of *Epitafios* until the arrival of the military Junta in 1967, Theodorakis explored the *rembetika* genre and its ability to resonate with the Greek people further through new musical compositions. These works are important since during the military regime, it would be his only works that could be consumed by the people, albeit secretly. These were the works that would represent the resistance to the Junta. Theodorakis wrote new compositions, featuring his tradition of utilizing popular musicians, instruments and song structure.<sup>38</sup> The works include *Archipelagos*, *Politia A + B*, *Epiphania*, *Mauthausen*, *Romiossini* and *Axion Esti*. With *Romiossini*, Theodorakis once again composed music to the poems of Ritsos. The central theme of the work is “resistance — *Romiossini*, the independent Greek spirit — from the time of Digenis Akritas, through the Klephts and the War of Independence to the resistance fighters of World War II and the Civil War.”<sup>39</sup> The language used by Ritsos is similar to the folk poetry of Greece and thus Theodorakis uses a musical vocabulary which was just as familiar and accessible to listeners.

Similar to *Epitafios* and *Romiossini*, *Axion Esti* was inspired by a Modern Greek poem by the Nobel Prize laureate Odysseas Elytis. *Axion Esti* was Theodorakis’ biggest selling album and its recognition was unprecedented in

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<sup>38</sup> . Holst- Warhaft, Gail. *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1980) p. 82.

<sup>39</sup> Holst- Warhaft, Gail. *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1980) p. 112.

Modern Greek music. Gail Warhaft-Holst argues that with Axion Esti, Theodorakis reached musical maturity.<sup>40</sup> The record hosted famous songs such as *Ena to Xelidoni* and *Tis Dikeosinis Ilie*, which exhibit a “synthesis of popular form with classical western technique that transformed complex intellectual expression into music that was, and still is, sung in the streets.”<sup>41</sup> The consumption of Axion Esti was widespread, people from different regions, generations and political ideologies found the music representative of their experience.

Theodorakis’ ability to resonate with a wide audience increased his political importance. By fashioning the poems of Yiannis Ritsos, Odysseas Elytis and Giorgios Seferis as musical works, many Greeks who never read poetry found the poets’ ideas accessible. Despite the leftist philosophy of Theodorakis and the poets, the central theme of his work stresses the beauty of Greece and its people. After being asked what he wanted to convey to the Greek people through his music, Theodorakis responded, “My people have been told that they are nothing. Through my music I tell them that our country is great and beautiful, and that we can do anything. Greece can live happily.”<sup>42</sup> This quality of his music presents a unique political characteristic. The music of Theodorakis transcended the confines of political parties and embodied the cause of the Greeks as a whole. The work of Mikis Theodorakis, when it does not look like it is political at times, still strikes a social chord. His songs gain strength and popularity by speaking for

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<sup>40</sup> Holst- Warhaft, Gail. *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1980) p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Holst- Warhaft, Gail. *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1980) p. 85.

<sup>42</sup>Theodorakis, Mikis. *Journal of Resistance*. (New York: Cowad, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), 304.

the common people and the poorer classes and expressing their hopes for much needed social reform.

### VIII. The Junta and The Music

Once the junta regime had installed itself, it announced the crushing Army Order No.13, which stated that it was forbidden "to reproduce or play the music and songs of the composer Mikis Theodorakis, the former leader of the now dissolved communist organization, the Lambrakis Youth because this music is in the service of communism".<sup>43</sup> In August of 1967, after going underground, Theodorakis was arrested by the Junta. Through Army Order No. 13, and his arrest, imprisonment and exile, the military regime attempted to silence the message of Theodorakis. To its dismay, Theodorakis and his music became a popular and symbolic form of resistance against the regime. College students would gather to listen to Theodorakis records which they hid in the sleeves of Yiannis Kalatzis or other accepted musicians' records. In *kafeneia* throughout Greece, a brave individual might begin humming the melody of *Oti Sfiggoun to Xeri*. The vocabulary of Theodorakis' music became the political vocabulary of resistance to the military regime.

The wide-spread use of Theodorakis as a medium of resistance is portrayed in the 1976 movie, *O Thanasis sti Hora tis Sfaliaras*. The movie stars the famous Greek comedian Thanasis Veggos and takes place during the reign of the military junta. In one scene, driving in a car that has loud-speakers outside,

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<sup>43</sup> Theodorakis, Mikis. *Journal of Resistance*. (New York: Cowad, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973),

unbeknownst to Thanasis, he plays a banned work of Theodorakis, *Tha Simanoun Oi Kabanis*. In the next village, a member of the regime is speaking to a crowd and even though Thanasis cannot be seen, the music is heard and everyone, including the official, knows exactly what is being played. Beyond exhibiting the great comedic talents of Veggos, the scene illustrates the great political significance of Theodorakis music. His music was immediately recognizable to the Greek people which allowed it to become a universal symbol of resistance in Greece. The revolutionary work of Theodorakis cleared the path for a new generation of Greek musicians who could oppose the Junta in new and indirect manners.

#### IX. New Musical Resistance

Although the junta had silenced Theodorakis, his presence and message were still felt. His absence did allow for the consumption of musicians who utilized new methods to oppose the military regime. Although a wide array of musical artists opposed the Junta, Apostolos Nikolaidis and Dionysis Savvopoulos adequately represent the trajectory of the political resistance of popular Greek music. These artists also provide insight in the manner in which artists began to oppose the Junta after the rise of Theodorakis.

One of the most important new artists to resist the military regime was Savvopoulos, who fashioned himself as a singer-songwriter similar to France's

Georges Brassens and America's Bob Dylan.<sup>44</sup> Scholar Papanikolaou argues that Savvopoulos is “largely perceived as the ‘bard of the 1960s generation’” and “an undisputedly central figure in 1960s Greece”.<sup>45</sup> Similar to Theodorakis, Savvopoulos relied upon poetry but not on the works of others. Savvopoulos’ lyrics dealt with the problems that individuals faced on a personal level. His lyrics were heavily coded and had deep political significance. In his album *Vromiko Psomi*, the first track is entitled *Elsa se Fovame*, which means “Elsa You Scare Me”. The song sounds like a lament about a bad girlfriend, but Elsa is a covert reference to the ‘**E**lliniki **S**tratiotiki **A**stynomia’, the military police force which arrested and tortured those suspected of being dissenters and opponents to the Junta. As Theodorakis used the accessible language of traditional folk songs, Savvopoulos acted in a similar manner. Savvopoulos appealed to the Greek youth of the 1960’s by appropriating the styles and vocabulary of the American, British, French and Italian rock musicians that were popular among the younger Greek music listeners.<sup>46</sup>

Another important popular musician in Greece during the reign of the military junta was Apostolos Nikolaidis. Nikolaidis has been hailed as the leader of the *rembetika* revival. Unlike Hadzidakis and Theodorakis who incorporated *rembetika* to create a “high-art” popular music, Nikolaidis played the music in the manner the *rembetes* intended it to be played. Through his performances and

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<sup>44</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets; Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 102.

<sup>45</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets; Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 103.

<sup>46</sup> Papanikolaou, Dimitris, *Singing Poets; Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (London: Legenda, 2007), 110.

work as a musician in night clubs and *tavernas* throughout Greece, Nikolaidis came in contact with the great *rembetes* from the “Golden Age of *Rembetika*”. *Rembetes* such as Markos Vamvakaris, Yiannis Papaioannou, Giorgios Lafkas and Vassilis Tsitsanis, who were now largely discarded and neglected by the public, taught him the original *rembetika* songs with their original lyrics. Many times the real lyrics of the *rembetika* songs had never been recorded due to the stringent censorship legislation of the Metaxas dictatorship.

The military regime targeted Nikolaidis, who wanted to create a full album of authentic *rembetika* songs, but the genre remained banned. In response, Nikolaidis moved to America to record his music. From the advent of the genre, America has played a great role in the preservation and recording of *rembetika* music. *Rembetika* arrived at Ellis Island at about the same time that the music was being exposed to the *tekedes* of Athens.<sup>47</sup> Greek immigrants brought the style to America, and the American recording companies such as Columbia Records, recorded the music. Due to the tough laws concerning *rembetika* in Greece, many of Greece’s *rembetika* records were imported from America. This tradition continued during the military regime.

Nikolaidis’ decision to record his *rembetika* in America reflects a long tradition of *rembetika* recordings in the country. In 1969, Nikolaidis released his first LP entitled, *O Gialinos Kosmos*. The album contained the song *Otan Kapnizei O Loulas* which translates to “when the hookah smokes”. The song contains overt references to smoking hashish and of the experience under the influence of the drug.

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<sup>47</sup> Petropoulos, Elias. *Songs of the Greek Underworld: The Rembetika Tradition* (Saqi Books, 2000).

The work of Nikolaidis is significant because he represents the ability of Greek musicians to create their music within the constraints of the military regime. Forced to come to America to record his *rembetika*, Nikolaidis' music gained greater authenticity and quality compared to his earlier works in Greece. The measures that the military regime took against the *rembetika* music and musicians ironically helped to revitalize the diminishing art form.

## X. Conclusion

The volatile political climate in Greece, during the twentieth century, allowed art, especially music, to become the forum for political discourse. As the *Epitafios* debate illustrates, the discussion of music easily changed into a discussion of the state of the country itself. This politicization of music enabled Theodorakis and many new artists to oppose the Junta and its methods through a medium that allowed for mass consumption, which only gave the art form even greater power. The study of popular music during the military regime is important because it shows the ability of cultural figures to become political leaders and symbols of resistance. Ultimately the words of Theodorakis' song *Tis Dikeosinis Ilie*, "Please don't forget my country", remind us that Greece has been and always be for the Greek people.

