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*Pages on the Crisis of Representation:
Nostalgia for Being Otherwise*

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NATIONAL STEPS: CAN YOU BE GREEK IF YOU
CAN'T DANCE A *ZEBEKIKO*?

As an epigraph to his short story 'Father Dancing,'¹ Nick Papandreou uses a Celtic motto: 'Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.' The motto is not important here, but I will come back to it later. Meanwhile, to our story, in which the author describes coming downstairs at his house in King City, Ontario at the age of fifteen to discover a Greek party in full swing. He hears:

A raspy voice singing 'Cloudy Sunday/Like my heart'. Strangled bouzouki notes raced wildly between phrases... a number of men and one woman were clapping for a man who was dancing: my father... Head down, one hand behind his back, the other holding worry beads, my father moved slowly, with heavy, responsible steps. He swayed like someone drunk. He careened from one side to the other, as if about to fall, lifted himself from a bent position and spun, then crouched and slapped the parquet with both hands, back and forth as if he were sweeping the floor (1996:165).

The teenager is not entranced by the spectacle or the music:

The more they clapped, the more I rebelled against the music with its absurd beat, a music whose words by now seemed other-worldly. I was almost embarrassed that I knew enough Greek to understand the gruff voice coming from the stereo. The room was stuffy with sweat, romance of exile and maleness (166).

The young Papandreou finds a simple solution. He goes over to the record player and turns it off, but instantly regrets it and instead, turns up the volume. His father goes back to his passionate dancing. A year passes and the Greek Junta falls. Andreas Papandreou re-enters Greek politics as the head of his own Pan-Hellenic Socialist

Party (PASOK), and begins campaigning for the first elections of the post dictatorship era. On the campaign trail, Nick frequents the local bouzouki-houses with his father's campaign-workers. At first he is repulsed by the noise and crudeness of the experience, but his fellow-campaign-workers appear to be in ecstasy. What strikes the young Papandreou about the experience of the *rebetika* clubs is the contrast between his father's message of hope on the campaign trail, and the pessimism of the song-lyrics he hears in the noisy, low-class clubs. He realizes the songs are not revolutionary or political in any sense that he understands and yet they seem to have a powerful impact on the listeners.

Andreas Papandreou's party is soundly defeated in the elections, and he talks of returning to Canada, but the next night he takes his son and the inner circle of his followers to hear the legendary *rebetika* song-writer Vassilis Tsitsanis, who dedicates the song *Synefasmeni Kyriaki* [Cloudy Sunday] to him. His son is not expecting him to dance:

But my father rose and we rose with him. A burly man, apparently certain this song was for him, stepped on to the dance floor at the same time as my father. An awkward moment passed between them. They looked at each other – there are songs about those who have knifed one another for interfering in this solo dance – and suddenly the other man went down on one knee and joined our half-circle, ready to clap along (176).

Having faced down his competition in classic fashion, Papandreou père begins to dance his *zebekiko*:

...soon he was slapping the wooden stage with his hands, forehand and backhand, Legs kept tightly together like a slalom skier's, he held the creases of his trousers with two fingers, the way a woman lifts her skirt to cross a puddle. Tsitsanis leaned the bouzouki down in acknowledgement (Ibid.)

Not content with dancing one *zebekiko*, Andreas dances three in a row. Finally, he stands up, sweaty and exhausted, and returns to his table. As his son remembers 'My father never mentioned Canada again.'

Ten years go by. Nick enters military service, and one night outside the barracks of Trikala (there's no indication that he understands the significance of this particular

town, which happens to be the birthplace of Tsitsanis) he dances his own *zebekiko*. Now, he says:

the seven-eighths of the *zebekiko* has become part of my soul, the bouzouki rings inside me and stirs me like a cry in the middle of the night, the *eastern voices* seem inevitable, as if they had been a part of me all my life (178).²

Anyone who thinks a *zebekiko* is in 7/8 (it is in 9/8) may be in trouble as a dancer, but let me explain why I'm talking about 'Father Dancing' and how the story is related to Australia, to the *rebetika* and to images of Greekness in Greece and in the diaspora more generally.

It is more than thirty years since Andreas Papandreou visited Australia to speak to Greeks and Australians about the 1967-74 military dictatorship in his own country and how best to oppose it. As a member of the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy in Greece and a journalist, I was asked to help co-ordinate his visit to Sydney and together with such anti-dictatorship activists as Takis Kaldis, I spent a lot of time in Andreas Papandreou's company. When he heard I was interested in the *rebetika*, he said, 'I should talk to you. I must find out how to relate to that music. I don't know much about it, but my father did. He liked the bouzouki clubs and he even used to dance. He had the popular touch.' Two years later, it seems, Andreas had brushed up enough on the *rebetika* to dance a mean *zebekiko*, one that seemed to rise from the bottom of his Greek soul.

This story about three generations of Greek men and their relationship to the *zebekiko* dance as a stepping off point from some reflections on what *zebekiko* once meant and what it means now to Greeks in Greece and in the diaspora.

1. A SAVAGE ORIENTAL ZEBEKIKO

In her book *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*, (1990), Jane Cowan analyzes the *zebekiko* as a means of expressing individual manhood and *mangia*.³ In the village where she carried out her fieldwork in northern Greece, organizers of *horoesperidhes*, or social events centered around dancing, were reluctant to include *zeibekika* among the dances because of its exclusivity and potential for conflict (190:173). These two elements, exclusivity and potential for conflict are closely related, but what is interesting is that they remain a constant of the lore of *zebekiko*

despite the many changes that have taken place in the dance since it was introduced into Greece probably from the western coast of Turkey in the 19th century. One of the earliest accounts we have of the performance of the *zebekiko* is found in the short story 'Vassilis Arvanitis' by the writer Stratis Myrivilis, a native of Lesbos.⁴ He describes watching itinerant musicians from Turkey, probably gypsies,⁵ who would visit the villages of Lesbos bringing their drums and zurnas with them. Here is his description of something he witnessed in his childhood, i.e. at the end of the 19th century.

When the young men were in the mood – when their blood had caught fire and the lutes and the fiddles could not appease the unbearable ache in their hearts – then they would send for the Anatolian pipes and drums. I think it must have been the ancient blood which would awaken within them and desire those primitive rhythms: a forgotten keepsake from the prehistory of our race whose ancient motifs would be revived by these echoes

...the sound of this music made the young men lose themselves in Dionysian passion. Dark nostalgia would awake in their turbid souls and they would become serious and draw their daggers and draw their daggers to dance fearful Pyrrhic dances. 'Hep! Hep!' they'd shout and their sharp knives would flash in the sun.

Solemnly they would dance a slow zeybekiko, all together in a large circle which rotated majestically around the musicians. Though drunk to the point of madness, the rhythm of the music would control their ecstasy with its strict discipline. We children would watch the pointed blades passing over their throats, behind their necks, across their chests, and below their knees... Breathlessly we would wait of the *analyses* to begin.⁶ When their ecstasy had reached its peak they would raise their daggers and, with a shout, plunge them into their calves or their thighs. And they would continue their dancing (68-9)

Myrivilis remembered with awe: 'Sometimes there wouldn't be a drop of blood on the knives.'

I have analyzed *Vassilis Arvanitis* elsewhere⁷ because of its unique descriptions of dance. Here, what is interesting is that the dance is clearly both foreign and exotic to the children of the village on Lesbos where the author grew up, and this despite the fact that various *zebekiko* dances were performed on the island. The controlled 'ecstasy' of the dance is released in acts of self-mutilation that are fascinating to the

children. This awe-inspiring dance is quite different from the dances the children have witnessed at village festivals and weddings. Indeed, the *zebekiko* performed by the Asia Minor gypsies or zeybeks could be said to be the very opposite of social Greek dancing which is generally socially inclusive and convivial.

2. INITIATION ON THE BEACH

Myrivilis wrote his account of *zebekiko* dancing in 1943, many years after he first observed it. Although he makes no comment on the transformation, the *zebekiko* had, by 1943, become a pan-Greek dance associated with a new style of popular music, and had been so assimilated into the Greek psyche, that it was thought of as expressing something essential in the Greek character. In his *Life and Culture of Alexis Zorbas*, or *Zorba the Greek*, written in 1946, Nikos Kazantzakis gives us perhaps the most famous description of dance in Greek literature, an idealized portrait of the Dionysian dancer and the *zebekiko* he performs on a beach in Crete. The contrast of Zorba's dance with the dance the children of Myrivilis' story observe is striking. Zorba's ability to dance is part of his fascination for the narrator, who is a clumsy but willing student. Zorba is presented as a tongue-tied man of action, needing the release of the dance to express his deepest feelings. As he says: 'I have a lot to tell you, but my tongue won't get around it... So I'll dance it!' (343). The dance he chooses is the *zebekiko*, a dance he describes as 'fierce, *palikarisio*, (heroic) something the *komitaji* danced before a battle.' (1946:342), but which is presented as merely cathartic and rebellious in the novel. The narrator has a vision of Zorba

...as an old partisan archangel... Because this dance of Zorba's was all provocation, stubbornness and rebellion. You'd think he was calling out 'What can you do to me, Almighty? You can't do a thing to me, just kill me. Kill me, and I don't give a damn. I've had my revenge, I've said what I want to say. I managed to dance, and I don't need you any more' (1946: 343).

What became of Myrivilis's alien, exotic *zebekiko* in the years that elapsed between his childhood observations of the Asia Minor dancers and Kazantzakis's, whose travels with the character on whom his book is based took place in 1917 but whose *Zorba the Greek* was not completed until the mid-1940's.⁸ By then, the *zebekiko* had become strongly identified not only with the urban working class but, perhaps

because of the privations of the war years, with a broad cross-section of urban Greeks. Whether the Kazantzakis was remembering the real Zorba's dancing or imagining an archetypal dance that expressed the sort of abandon and ecstasy he so admired, Zorba's *zebekiko* is presented, in the novel, as an expression of the Greek working-class soul. As he dances, the narrator sees 'for the first time, the Daemonic revolt of man, defying weight and matter, the primal curse.' (343). Kazantzakis' fascination with the primitive (linked to the oriental)⁹ element in the Greek psyche, with the man of action whose body acts as his tongue, is literally embodied in the *zebekiko* danced on the beach.

Kazantzakis was not responsible for Zorba's dance turning into a tourist symbol, having been transformed, in Michael Cacoyiannis's film, from a *zebekiko* to a *syrtaki*. For Kazantzakis, the ability to dance a *zebekiko* was what separated the intellectual narrator from his earthy companion. At the end of the novel, as the narrator finally loses his inhibitions and asks Zorba to teach him to dance, the barriers of class and character between them fall, and the intellectual learns the language of the body, a language Zorba 'writes on the sand.' It is, in many ways, a classic scene of ritual initiation. Although Zorba dances his *zebekiko* alone and for himself, he happily initiates his young 'Boss' into the mysteries of the dance until the young man's heart 'takes wing.' Once he has shared the experience of the dance with him, Zorba confesses his love for the younger man and the two fall asleep in each other's arms. Camaraderie, homo-eroticism, whatever you choose call it, it is a scene of self-sufficient and exclusive masculinity, in which the *zebekiko* dance takes on the character of a Dionysian ritual for the younger man.

3. REFUGEES, REBETIKA, AND THE BIRTH OF THE BLUES

The elevation and inscription of the *zebekiko* as a national dance seems to have taken place at some time during the 1930's or 40's. It is closely tied to the rise of the *rebetika* music that both came with and grew out of the massive immigration of refugees from Asia Minor to Greece in the early 1920's following the Asia Minor War and the destruction of Smyrna. The *zebekiko* was an important dance associated with the genre and soon displaced other dances as the central dance of the *rebetika*. The music was performed in venues that ranged from underworld hashish dens to musical cafes. Mass immigration was the trigger for the expansion and development of new urban Greek music, music in which the newly arrived and destitute refugees played a

formative role. The music they performed was foreign to most Greeks, and not always accepted as representative of a Greek ethos. The 'oriental' character of certain forms of Greek music, particularly the *amané(s)*, an improvised vocal form often performed in the cafés frequented by refugees, was decried by many observers and critics as alien to Greece, and defended by others as being an ancient and true expression of the Greek spirit.¹⁰

A decade after the arrival of the refugees, a new style of music had evolved which incorporated elements of the popular music that the refugees had brought with them from Smyrna and Istanbul, but was purged of many of its 'oriental' elements. It was the bouzouki-baked music called *rebetika*.¹¹ As Dinos Christianopoulos wrote:

It was immigration... that established the *rebetika*. From then on, all that was needed was an internal cleansing: the foreign elements had to go so that the content of the songs could conform to more broadly popular themes, for the disgusting tendencies to disappear and the disparate voices to be absorbed so the *rebetika* could expand more broadly. (Holst 1977:158-63)

The song lyrics of the *rebetika* provide one of the best guides we have to the lore of the tough underworld characters known as the *manghes*, and the often violent milieu they inhabited. At what stage the space of the dance floor became inviolable, we do not know, but at least from the 1930's on, exclusivity seems to have been demanded and expected by the dancers. With some exceptions, especially that of female singers,¹² the world of the *rebetika* was a male world and its protagonists led a harsh, sometimes illegal life on the margins of society. Smoking hashish was a relief from the poverty and privations of that life, and the hashish dens of Piraeus were a popular gathering place for the *manghes* or tough-guys of the slums. A fair idea of the mentality associated with the world of the *rebetes* or *manghes* can be gleaned from the lyrics of a *zebekiko* written and recorded by the refugee composer Anestis Delias called 'The Koutsavakis'¹³:

Hey mangas, if you want to use that knife of yours. You'd better have the guts, show-off, the nerve to take it out.

That stuff don't wash with me, so hide your blade
Because I'll get high, show-off, and come to your place.

Go somewhere else and strut your stuff
 Because I've smoked too, show-off, and I'm mighty high.

I told you to sit down nicely or I'll zap you
 I'll come with my pistol, show-off, and I'll straighten you out.¹⁴

The street-smart swagger of this song, with its talk of knives, guns, and hashish, is a far cry from Zorba. Its language is full of underworld slang, and seems to be addressed by one member of that milieu to another. And yet is it a commercial recording, made by a major record company. How can it be that such a shady song is being marketed to a broad audience? The answer, no doubt, has to do with immigration and urbanization.

Like flamenco, that grew out of the poor back streets of southern Spain in the late 19th century, and tango, which emerged in Buenos Aires the first decades of the 20th century in Argentina, the *rebetika* reflected a sudden growth in the Greek urban population caused by mass immigration.¹⁵ Concomitant with rapid urbanization was an increase in crime. The hybridization of musical styles that followed led to new musical forms that have links, at first to the underworld and to the most marginal groups within the city. All these forms could be termed 'urban Blues' and all have a strong basis in dance. The guitar, the bandoneon, and the bouzouki, at first regarded as low-class instruments associated with disreputable music become increasingly identified with the nation, and the dances associated with the music become popular.

In all three cases – tango, flamenco, and rebetika – there was an element of risk, a pleasurable *frisson* associated with frequenting the places where the music of the lower classes is performed, and in all three cases, they gradually became desirable destinations for the middle classes because of it. The record companies took advantage of the Athenian interest in tough-talking rebetika songs, and began recording songs about jails, drugs, and knife-fights.¹⁶ These proved popular with an audience much broader than the world of the manghes.

4. NOSTALGIA IN *KSENITIA*

Greeks who emigrated to America, Canada and Australia, many of them having first emigrated from Asia Minor or the islands of the Turkish Coast were mostly male, and in the clubs and cafes where they gathered they listened to or played music with other

Greeks and with fellow-refugees from the former Ottoman Empire. Decades after it had ceased to be popular in Athens, the style of music performed in the *café-aman* was still being performed and recorded in the United States, where the night-clubs of, for example, Eighth Avenue in Manhattan, most of them owned by Greeks, were frequented by Syrians, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians and Jews.¹⁷ Nostalgic for the music they had grown up with and isolated from the broader population, these former inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were united by a common musical culture. Despite the bitterness of the defeat in Asia Minor, singers like Marika Papaghika continued recording songs in Turkish, even after 1922.¹⁸ In fact the demand for Asia Minor music in America lasted for decades after it had ceased to be popular in Greece.¹⁹ Rebetika music was also popular in the immigrant communities. Numerous rebetika songs were written and performed by musicians from Greece, sometimes in Turkish, and sometimes an amusing mixture of languages that became known as ‘gringlish’.²⁰

5. WAR AND THE *ZEBEKIKO* AS RESISTANCE

World War II further changed the character of Greek music and the position the *zebekiko* in it. According to the novelist Kostas Tachtsis, writing in 1964, but looking back to the years of the German occupation, the *zebekiko* took on a broad national, rather than underworld, or lower-class character, during the period when Greece itself took on the appearance of a *teké* (or hashish den):²¹

Suddenly all Greeks, whether they were pick-pockets, or lower-middle-class or middle class, found themselves in a situation that put them on the same level, made them almost the same as, the pre-war underworld. There were no more starving and well-fed, no more masters and slaves; everyone was hungry, everyone felt the need to weep for their fate, something that, in any case, the Greeks came naturally to the Greeks from the time of the Romans. All the houses suddenly became ‘hashish dens’ – not literally, of course, but in essence. Everywhere the same atmosphere of illegality prevailed, constant fear, wretchedness, and death... The *zebekiko* found ground to develop, and it developed rapidly. Suddenly, it was no longer the dance of the underworld, but of a large number of Greeks, especially in the urban centers/ clubs. Many of the songs which were first heard just after the War were written during the Occupation, and differed quite obviously from the pre-war hashish songs (*hashiklidika*).

Tachtsis explains the rise in popularity of the *zebekiko* as a function of the miserable conditions that prevailed in wartime Athens. Tangos and waltzes were, he said, still around, but because they were all ‘milk and honey’ they were out of character with the times. It was not uncommon for the Germans, he remembered, to drive around the poorer neighborhoods of the city, waking the inhabitants with ‘light’ songs about love, flowers, and moons blaring from their vehicles. The traumatized inhabitants reacted by embracing the *zeibekika* and the *rebetika* as a whole as symbols of resistance. Tachtsis was quick to note that there was nothing official about the songs as resistance. On the contrary, the Left-wing resistance fighters were singing Russian songs, even German tunes to which they had attached heroic Greek words. No, there was nothing heroic about the *rebetika*, but in the underground tavernas of Athens, when they’d drunk some wine or smoked some hashish (according to Tachtsis, despite the absence of food, wine and hashish were freely available during the Occupation), the ordinary Greeks sang the *rebetika* and among the *rebetika*, mostly the *zeibekika* (op. cit. 206). The reason for this, in Tachtsis’s opinion, was that these songs spoke of the ‘poison of life.’

Some support for the widespread popularity of *zebekiko/rebetiko* in the 1940’s comes from Cowan’s study of a village in Macedonia. She notes that ‘Rebetika songs, including *zeibekika*, have been heard in Sohoh [the fictional name for the village where she worked] since the wartime era of the 1940’s (1990:176).

6. POST-WAR PAN-GREEK ZEIBEKIKI

By the time Manos Hadzidakis gave his famous encomium and presentation of the *rebetika* at Teatro Technis in Athens in 1949, Tachtsis was sufficiently aware of the music and had already recognized its worth. It is interesting that in his long essay on the phenomenon, it is the *zebekiko* that he talks about rather than the *hasapiko* or *tisfieteli*. It is the *zebekiko*, in his opinion, that had a ‘revolutionary’ quality that made it symbolic of the urban Greek resistance to the foreign Occupation. When the war ended, despite the re-emergence of popular European dance music like tango and waltz, the *zeibekika* continued to be popular and began to be played constantly on the radio. In Tachtsis’ opinion, the commercialization of the music, combined with the use of *rebetika* elements by song writers from a different social milieu led to the complete degradation of the *zebekiko/rebetiko*:

A splendid robbery took place before our very eyes: the right of the people at least to bewail their fate. The *zeibekika* became things of the establishment, they were cleaned up, they lost their bite/point, their meaning, and became, in their turn, the Occupation tango of the times (208).

Tachtsis is writing of a time when the *arhondorebetes* (bouzouki virtuosi) were in vogue and conspicuous consumption at the *bouzoukia* was at its height, but although the middle classes of both sexes may have participated in the gentrification of the *rebetika*, there was still an element of the disreputable and even the dangerous about bouzouki clubs, especially as they became stratified into the cheaper bouzouki-houses and the more expensive ones where established stars performed. Drinking had long since replaced hashish-smoking as the stimulant used to produce *kefi*, or high spirits, and was known by the frequenters of bouzouki-houses to make patrons more aggressive.

The aficionados of *rebetika*, like those of any musical style which is regarded as raw, authentic, and shady (flamenco, fado, tango, blues) tend to privilege the time they first heard the music as the 'pure' phase of the music. They ignore the fact that all such styles are all hybrids and by virtue of the fact that they were being performed for an audience, most were already commercial when they heard them.²² This is not to say that Tachtsis was wrong in equating the *zeibekika* of the Occupation with a symbolic form of resistance, but it should make us skeptical about his reaction to the music and dance of the post-war years. In fact the 1950's produced a new kind of *rebetika*-inspired music in which the *zebekiko* retained a prominent place. According to where it was presented and who was speaking about it, the music was called *laiki* (popular music – sometimes distinguished from the lighter popular music by the term 'heavy'), or *rebetiko*, but it had a special appeal for emigrants to Australia, Canada and Germany. Stelios Kazantzidhis was its leading interpreter, and wrote songs that included the theme of emigration and the pain of being in a foreign place (*ksenitia*). The songs of Kazantzidhis were understandably popular among the Greeks who went to Germany to work and those who emigrated to Australia.²³ The music made them 'ache to dance *zebekiko*, a dance in which all their pain and sorrow can be physically expressed' (Cowan 1990:176). Kazantzidhis' style of performance was very different from that of the artists of the 1930's and 40's. He made use of vocal ornamentation and vibrato in a way that had not been fashionable since the pre-war days, and he continued to write *zeibekika* that were popular with working-class

Greeks both in Greece and abroad. In fact, as Petropoulos (1972), Petrides (1972) and other observers make clear, however well the bourgeois Greek learned to dance a *zebekiko*, it was one skill in which the working-class Greek had the upper hand. By initiating his 'boss' into the pleasure of the *zebekiko*, Zorba reversed their status, making himself the dominant male. According to Cowan, the working-class members of a northern Greek town were still able, in the 1980's, to use the dance to challenge 'the dominant model of masculinity, that of the patriarch.'²⁴

7. I WON'T DANCE, DON'T ASK ME

The creation of a new style of music based on *rebetika*, and using interpreters from that milieu was a phenomenon of the 1960's, and was initiated by the composers Manos Hadzidakis and Mikis Theodorakis. Listening to the songs they wrote in the early sixties, and to some of the songs written by 'popular' composers like Stelios Kazantzidhis and Vassilis Tsitanis, it is not clear where the line between working class music and more ambitious 'art song' can be drawn. Songs like Theodorakis' *Drapetsona* or *Savvatovradho* (both with lyrics by the poet Tassos Leivaditis) are perhaps more self-conscious in their depictions of the hardship of working class life, but performed by Kazantzides himself or by Grigoris Bithikotsis, they become fine examples of the contemporary style of neo-rebetika. Who was dancing to them?

The dancing of a *zebekiko* was not something Theodorakis and his audience were expected to do. These songs were to be listened to in nightclubs, cinemas, even football stadiums, and appreciating the words of the songs was more important than dancing to them. The use of poetry as an inspiration for songs made it imperative for audiences to focus their attention on the lyrics. Despite his desire to attract a working class audience for his music, and his success in doing so, Theodorakis never wrote music for people to dance to. This differentiated him from the popular *rebetika* song-writers like Tsitanis who, when he wrote a *zebekiko*, knew it would be danced to.

The revival of the *rebetika* during the 1967-74 dictatorship was a nostalgic one, begun by an educated group of young people, many of them students, and aimed at recreating the pre-war *rebetika* scene in small Athenian clubs and on LP recordings. Old musicians were resurrected to perform their former successes, young musicians learned to play and sing in the pre-war style, and the venues were generally small clubs in central Athens where customers listened and no-one danced. Because these venues were what generated so much of the interest in *rebetika* and the writing about

rebetika that took place in the 1970s and 80s by foreign observers and Greeks,²⁵ we tend to think of them as central to the rebetika scene. It is unlikely that veterans of the pre-war *rebetika* world like Tsitsanis and Sotiria Bellou, who were still performing regularly in an outer suburb of Athens, saw them as particularly interesting, or that they influenced the music played in dozens of bouzouki clubs, some of them low-class ‘dog-houses,’ some very expensive, in every urban center in Greece. These were places where Greeks went to dance, and where *zebekiko* was still the dance in which a man showed off not his skill in the dance as much as his ability to embody an intense, masculine self-expression. For the privilege of doing so, and doing so in a space that was his alone, a man was willing to pay a substantial amount of money to the musicians. It was not in Plaka that the lore of the *zebekiko* was preserved, but in the bouzouki clubs of Kavala, Corinth, Salonika and the Mesogeion.

8. ECSTASY, PROVOCATION AND NIKOS AS HERO

Why should the *zebekiko* be a solo? Perhaps because the dance has always been an expression of something wild and aggressive, some Myrivilis observed as a child with fascination. To dance a *zebekiko* the dancer requires the dance-floor to himself, a song that has a special meaning for him, and friends to admire and encourage him. He may ignore them, but he is always aware of them, and it is customary for them to crouch and clap as he dances. In the case of a fight in a club over violations of the dance space, these friends can be counted on to support the rights of the dancer who made the *parangelia* (the order for the dance). The case of Nikos Kouyioumdzis caught the public imagination in Greece because it the police broke the rules of the *zebekiko*.²⁶ A petty criminal, long harassed by the police, went to a cheap bouzouki club and ordered a *zebekiko* for his younger brother. When the young man began to dance, two policemen deliberately provoked him by staying on the dance-floor and when the young man objected, pushed him to the floor. His older brother charged onto the floor, stabbed the policemen and managed to escape. He was caught, beaten and tried for murder, in what appeared to be sensational case on the margins of society.

But because his trial followed years of dictatorship in which the police had repeatedly tortured and even killed innocent people, the case of mayhem on a cheap bouzouki-club dance-floor became a sensation. The first to enshrine it in folklore was Dionysios Savvopoulos in a song he entitled ‘Long *Zebekiko* for Nikos’ (1981).

Telling the dismal story of Nikos's life in a sort of outlaw ballad, Savvopoulos imagined Nikos setting out for the bouzouki-club where 'ecstasy still lives.'²⁷ The song ends with a vision of the martyred hero in his cell 'like a divinity unleashing its/her panic.' To Savvopoulos, Nikos's crime has a redemptive quality. He becomes a hero because of his belief in, or participation in music and dance, specifically the *zebekiko*. Like the idealized victim of Savvopoulos' song, the protagonist of Nikos Koundouros's film *Parangelia*, is exonerated of his crime by the villainy of the police and the lore of the dance, which they so clearly violated. The film ends with a strange Bacchanalian chorus in which dozens of dancers perform a *zebekiko* together.

By the late 1970s, the *rebetika* had become a two-tiered phenomenon. On the one hand they were now a fashionable subject of intellectual discussion and purist revival preformed in Athenian nightclubs where no-one danced. The composer most popular with the intelligentsia of Greece (Dionysios Savvopoulos) was writing neo-rebetic songs, proclaiming himself the heir of such pre-war stars as Batis and Tsitsanis, and lamenting the fate of a man whose rights to dance a *zebekiko* had been violated. On the other, they were (if the songs performed in the bouzouki-houses frequented by the likes of Nikos Kouyioundzis can be call *rebetika* rather than *skiladhika*²⁸) still a low-class phenomenon. What separated the two was, in part, that people went to the bouzouki-houses to dance.

9. THE POLITICS OF ZEBEKIKO IN THE 1980s–2000

The use of *rebetika*, specifically the *zebekiko* by PASOK and its leader, Andreas Papandreou, have been analyzed elsewhere (see Gauntlett 1991:85-91). Papandreou's adoption of a nationalist, anti-American stance included an emphasis on the 'roots' of modern Greek culture, and stangely, dancing a *zebekiko* became an expression of those roots. In an astonishing reversal of attitudes to *rebetika*, it became a common sight to see members of the Greek government not merely slumming it at a bouzouki club, but dancing a *zebekiko* at official functions. 'Father Dancing' is a story of initiation through the ritual of the *zebekiko* dance. The foreign-born son of Andreas Papandreou, like the narrator of *Zorba the Greek*, learned to dance the *zebekiko* not only because he watched his father dance but because his fellow-campaign-workers, locals who belonged to a different social class from himself, took him to the bouzouki-clubs. And as it was for the narrator of *Zorba*, it is this process of learning to dance a *zebekiko* that made the young Papandreou feel as if he had become an embodied and emboldened Greek.

We begin to understand the significance of the Celtic motto Nick Papandreou used at the beginning of his story: 'Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.' The Irish, who knew the sorrows of poverty and emigration as well as the Greeks, believed just as fiercely as in the importance of dance. A story that was often told in my house was about my great-grandmother, who emigrated, because of the Irish famine, to Australia. She summoned my fourteen-year-old grandfather to come from Melbourne with his accordion and play for an Irish country dance that had lasted for two days and exhausted all the available musicians, but not the dancers who refused to stop. A Canadian novelist, Jane Urquart, has a great deal to say about the importance of dance to the Irish as she describes the struggle of a group of emigrants from the same famine make a life for themselves in a town called Port Hope. The immigrants in *Away* continue to take an active interest in Irish politics. In one scene, a newly-arrived young Irishman enthralls the community with his dancing:

He skidded to a momentary stop in the center of the floor, then exploded into a jig that was at once an expression of vehement gaiety and furious lament... it was as if Aidan Lanighan were at once creating and annihilating the room, taking it with him into his own space... In a miracle of tone, stress, time, pause, tempo, silence, and thrust, the histories of courtship, marriage, the funeral, famine, and harvest were present in the inn. (248)

The dancer refuses to speak, yet he is the man the community chooses to represent them as they make a plea to a visiting Irish politician. A local girl, Eileen, who is entranced by the dancer, is mystified as to how the taciturn Lanighan can represent them. The Irish 'captains' reply: 'Haven't you been watching? He'll dance. It's what he's been practicing here all week... his petition to McGee.'

Again, Eileen is baffled. The captains respond, with scornful confidence: 'A true Irishman always understands what a dancer is saying.' (1993:257).

Whether the Greeks can or ever could read the *zebekiko* as confidently as the Irish, there is a sense, in literary and non-literary descriptions of the *zebekiko*, that the dance has some deep, important message to impart. It has evolved from an alien, exotic dance to a national mode of expression that embodies Greek masculinity. As a male ritual, it is learned as a right of passage. (despite the fact that women now dance it, they are not usually thought of dancing in a serious way)²⁹. The ability to dance a *zebekiko* is something that Greeks carry with them to the communities where

they emigrate but cannot easily share with non-Greeks. Like the inviolable space of the dance-floor once a *parangelia* has been made, the *zebekiko* both attracts and excludes the other. Although it is the only solo dance in the Greek repertoire, and in other ways untypical of Greek dance, it has come to stand for all Greek dance. If you cannot dance a *zebekiko*, as Andreas Papandreou understood from his father, Yorgos, and Nick understood from his, you risk not being handed a sword to fight with.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Title story of *Father Dancing*, p.163.
- 2 Itals mine. Despite the insistence on the quintessential Greekness of the *zebekiko* in this story, the 'eastern voices' suggest a quality that is initially foreign to the Canadian-raised narrator. The perceived 'oriental' quality of rebetika music is discussed below.
- 3 *Magia* (and *mangia*): the quality of being like a *mangas*, i.e. the tough street-wise, tough man often idealized in the rebetika songs.
- 4 The translation I use here is by Pavlos Andronikos (1983).
- 5 Myrivilis says they called them gypsies 'partly out of contempt for their darker skins' (1943:67) but given the combination of instruments they played it is very likely that they were, in fact, Roma musicians.
- 6 The term *analyses* is used for the trance-like acts of self-mutilation that have no apparent consequence on the dancers.
- 7 2004, 307-320.
- 8 The novel was begun in 1941. A second draft of the novel was completed in 1943, and the book was published in 1946 (Bien, 1989: xxii-xxiii).
- 9 Kazantzakis strongly believed that it was the oriental side of Greeks that expressed their deepest, most passionate feelings [see, *inter alia*, 'Journey to the Morea' (*O Moreas*). In *Journeys (Taxidevontas)* 1965:325-6].
- 10 For detailed discussion on the controversy over the *amanedhes* and the *café-aman* style, see Holst-Warhaft (2000, 2003), Hatzipantazis (1986) and Gauntlett (1987, 1989).
- 11 Although songs labeled 'rebetika' were recorded from as early as 1915, the mature style of bouzouki-based rebetika did not become firmly established until the 1930's.
- 12 See Holst-Warhaft, 2003c on women singers in the rebetika.

- 13 *Koutsavakis* is another name for a tough-guy of the back streets. The song is also known as, *O Figouradzis* (The Poser).
- 14 Anestis Delias, 1935. My translation.
- 15 On the common features between these styles and their relation to immigration and urbanization, see Washabaugh, 1996, 1998.
- 16 Asia Minor style songs had been recorded and distributed in Istanbul, Greece and the US in the 1920's but Columbia Records moved into Greece and immediately begun making recordings of rebetika stars like Markos Vamvakaris. In his autobiography, Markos expresses surprise that he is being asked to sing. His voice is not good enough, he protests, but by that date there must already have been a taste for the earthy, rough quality of rebetika. Not only was he persuaded to sing, but his songs, which described the life of the back streets of Piraeus, apparently appealed to the record company and their customers. (See Holst-Warhaft, 2003, Vamvakaris-Keil, 1973.)
- 17 The clubs of 8th Avenue in New York, or Greek Town in Chicago, according to Frangos (1994:43-63) catered to an audience of Armenians, Egyptians, Syrians Bulgarians and Jews with a few Turks.
- 18 See Spottswood, 1990.
- 19 Holst-Warhaft, 2000.
- 20 The most prolific artist of the US rebetika composer was song-writer and guitarist Yorgos Katsaros, but artists like Marika Papakika, Amalia Baka, Victoria Hazan and Kyria Koula were some of the female vocalists who kept the Asia Minor style alive in the US. (Holst-Warhaft, 2000.)
- 21 In Holst, 1977: 202-209.
- 22 See Steingress, 2000, 2003.
- 23 Cowan (op. cit.: 176) notes that in her northern Greek village, 'Men of late middle age remember listening to phonograph recordings of Kazantzidis' *zeibekika* in the local *kafenía*, and sometimes dancing to them. Some who suffered during the war and others who spent years as immigrant workers in Germany respond with special pathos to these songs.'
- 24 Op.cit. p. 180.
- 25 Ilias Petropoulos's *Rebetika Tragoudia* (1972) was the first book-length study of the rebetika. It was followed by Vamkaris's autobiography as told to Angheliki Keil (1973), Holst (1975), Butterworth and Schneider (1975), Damianakos (1976) and Schorelis (1977-81).
- 26 Holst-Warhaft 2004: 316-317.
- 27 *Reserava*, The lyrics can be found in Savvopoulos, 1981.
- 28 The term *skiladhika*, or dog-house (perhaps more correctly 'bitch-house') music is used to refer to the sentimental songs performed in the cheap bouzouki-clubs.
- 29 I have heard complaints about the way women dance the *zeibekiko* from number of musicians. Annoyed by the 'feminine' *zeibekiko* two young girls were dancing in a club where she was performing, the Salonika rebetika singer Maryo said to them: 'If you're going to dance a *zeibekiko*, dance it like a man!'