

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

MED2017-0058

Athens, 24 April 2018

Sotiria Bellou, Her "Backward" Self: A Prolegomenon

Kathleen Dixon

Athens Institute for Education and Research

8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

ATINER's conference paper proceedings series are circulated to promote dialogue among academic scholars. All papers of this series have been blind reviewed and accepted for presentation at one of ATINER's annual conferences according to its acceptance policies (<http://www.atiner.gr/acceptance>).

© All rights reserved by authors.

ATINER's Conference Paper Proceedings Series

MED2017-0058

Athens, 24 April 2018

ISSN: 2529-167X

Kathleen Dixon, Professor of English, University of North Dakota, USA

Sotiria Bellou, Her "Backward" Self: A Prolegomenon

ABSTRACT

Recently, photovoltaic panels have become one of the main Distributed Energy How was it possible for the rebetissa Sotiria Bellou (1921-1997) to live the life of a sexual minority—and fairly openly, at that—and still become a Greek icon within a national discourse that actively disparaged homosexuality? This scholarly essay argues that the phenomenon is at least partially explained by Bellou's performance of her own gender that resonated within a particular gendering of Greek leftist nationalism of the mid- to late-twentieth century. The genres of rebetiko and entecho laiko for which she is known as a performer were also implicated in this gendering of Greekness, given the nationalist project of Bellou's better-known contemporary, composer and performer Mikis Theodorakis, the chief inventor of entecho laiko, himself a hero of the Civil War. Bellou's gender performance also plays upon the gendering of the main subject of rebetiko music, the mangas, originally a hashish-smoking, knife-wielding underworld figure who was an exile from Asia Minor. The paper will draw from the history of rebetiko and entecho laiko, from the biography of Bellou, and from recent work on Greek lesbianism in order to perform textual analyses to support its thesis.

Introduction

Sotiria Bellou was a celebrated singer of a form of music known as *rebetiko tragoudi*, "a popular song tradition that originally developed among the deprived urban groups in Greece during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is closely associated with the *bouzoùki* string instrument" (Tragaki, "Rebetiko"). Yiorgos Tsampras, a journalist specializing in popular music, describes Bellou on stage as "very special. She expressed the song in a unique way, the way she gave herself." He explains further:

In recent years, singers interact with the audience, laughing while singing or smiling during sad lyrics. Bellou was exactly the opposite. You could not think that the person on stage was actually having fun; most of the songs she sang were serious. Only rarely would she smile. Most often she would be singing in a world of her own--the world of the songs themselves.

This "world of her own" is also ours, a world where grave losses are buried under the promise of economic and technological progress. As Donna Haraway noted some time ago, the electronic age operates through metaphors of quickness and light (153). Our bodies, however, maintain their animal slowness, dragging us "backward," according to the discourses of modernity (Love 6). Song is the link between embodiment and abstract thought, emerging, as it does, from the diaphragm, and moving through the lungs and throat and mouth, as breath becomes word. The particular manner in which Sotiria Bellou transformed her breath into musical expression has made her, I will claim, one of the signal troubadours of modern loss.

Many Greeks will no doubt be pleased to join me in my claim about the value of Bellou's artistry. Her image even appeared on a 2010 postage stamp. However, another aspect of her embodiment, a central one, challenged the Greek social norms of her era (she was born in 1921 and died in 1997). For Bellou was also a woman who, during almost all of her adult life, "went with women" (Koutsomiha). What's more, her sexual orientation seems to have been rather widely known, certainly among *rebetiko* musicians and their fans (Adamidou; Tsampras; Yeorgouli). Meanwhile, Bellou's approved biography indicates a woman oscillating between non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality and more conventional ones (Adamidou 24, 195). Even when she "came out," she was equivocal. The work of my research must be to attempt an understanding of a very complicated woman whose performance of gender and sexuality was probably not separable from her artistry.

My research on Bellou will result in a critical biography that will present her life and art as illustrative of a particular time and place, one that is Greek, certainly, but also one that speaks to our human condition under modernity. My approach will combine the close reading of literary criticism with feminist and gender studies, cultural studies, and affect studies. It will be important to acknowledge the limits of these methods as I use them, born as they are of their own particular geographies and placements within the constellations of power.

The grand generalizing gestures of certain theories will sometimes require modification. I am nonetheless convinced that my approach will demonstrate the significance of Bellou to non-Greeks, and will return her to her fellow Greeks anew. I also wish to be clear that Sophia Adamidou's biography of Bellou, *Sometimes You Get Fours, Sometimes Sixes*, as well as her play, *My Name is Sotiria*, have been of immense assistance in my analysis of Bellou's life. Indeed, I could scarcely have proceeded without them.

I have read accounts of Bellou and have interviewed a number of those who knew her or had reason to study her closely. All agree that she was unique. She at least appears to have done what she wanted and pronounced it good no matter what anyone else thought. She was willing to upset the apple cart of social expectation. Yet her "choices" were not necessarily so freely made. She was plagued by serious and debilitating mental illnesses: bipolar disorder, alcoholism, and addiction to gambling, all of which went untreated. Nor was life as a homosexual a cakewalk. Even to be a woman born into a Greek village in 1921 who wanted to become a popular singer would have been challenge enough. Bellou reported to her biographer-friend Sophia Adamidou that her mother beat her for imitating the singer-actress Sophia Vembo, after the teenage Bellou had seen her in a film (Adamidou 46). Her own father called his daughter a whore, but to be fair, she had just finished serving prison time for flinging acid at her husband (Adamidou 70). In sum, Bellou lived a life like no other, one of strenuous resistance. Watching her perform, you can see it in her face.

I will argue that it is precisely Bellou's courage in facing life full on that makes her remarkable art possible. In Sara Ahmed's terms, Sotiria Bellou was an "affect alien," one of those who, under the pressure of modernity to feign a forced "happiness," remained recalcitrant. Ahmed references "feminist kill-joys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants" whose refusal to "reproduce" the "family...line" is seen as "the cause of unhappiness" (30). Ahmed writes from contemporary Britain. It isn't that her words aren't fitting for the Greece of Bellou's day, but they don't apply in exactly the same way. What, for example, did "happiness" mean in Bellou's time in twentieth-century Greece compared to what it did in twenty-first century Britain? What does it mean to "refuse" to "reproduce the family line" in contemporary Britain as compared to early twentieth century Greece--the Greece of the village, no less, where Bellou was born? Nonetheless, I feel that the suffering of Bellou, and to some extent, of Greece itself, makes legible the atmosphere prevailing under modernity. Ahmed writes, "[W]e might want to reread melancholic subjects, the ones who refuse to let go of suffering, who are even prepared to kill some forms of joy, as an alternative model to the social good" (50). My sense is that many Greeks already honor "those who refuse to let go of suffering." This is not to say that all Greeks are of one mind about this, or any, subject. Nor do I mean to imply that Greeks are not participants in the "positive" opportunities of modernity. Of course they are. Bellou left her village to pursue a career as a singer even though her family forbade it.

A Greek-American gay acquaintance of mine once described Bellou's musical form, *rebetika*, as "open your veins" (i.e., suicidal) music. Perhaps this was the "happy" American in him speaking, or the gay celebrant (for not all gays are unhappy, of course). His view was similar to that of Janet Maslin in her review of a film on *rebetika*. "Costas Ferris' "Rembetiko" has a firmer place in the annals of Greek musicology than it does in filmdom, since it is primarily an attempt to trace the origins of the dolorous, Eastern-influenced popular music for which it is named." But many people, and especially Greeks, adore *rebetika*. As Dafni Tragaki's excellent and ever-growing scholarship continues to show, *rebetika*, and maybe especially the form known as *aszeibekiko*, has come to represent Greece to itself and to the world (Papanikolaou; Tragaki). It provides for its fans a complex joy, one that can encompass pain and sorrow. In my longer work, I will argue that Bellou moves *rebetika* from a more communal form--represented in the Ferris film--to one that is intensely expressive of the suffering of the lone individual.

Greek *Kaimos* (Sorrow, Longing)

In Ahmed's critique of the discourse of happiness, she refers to "histories that hurt" (50). One might argue that modernity itself produces such hurt. Affect theories study the way that modernity makes people feel--both somatically and emotionally. Affect theories seek the links between the macro (e.g., modernity) and the micro (e.g., an individual body and its "interiorized self or subjectivity" Siegworth and Gregg 8). Philosophically, they derive from a number of sources (Siegworth and Gregg 6-9), but certainly from the entire critique of capitalism and Western metaphysics that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century. For the purposes of this essay we will consult just one major philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard, who argues that the modernity created by "the West" rests upon "the notion of progress" (Lyotard 30).

This idea of progress is the outcome of the "scientific discourse" that provides the model of all legitimacy (27), whether scientific/technological or personal/political (27; 15). The hero of political narration under modernity is "the people": "The people debate among themselves about what is just or unjust in the same way that the scientific community debates about what is true or false" (30). The result is "a hero of knowledge or a hero of liberty" (31). These narratives of progress are intelligible within a comparative framework: "The very idea of development presupposes a horizon of non-development" (19). Even though all people operate through narratives, "civilized man" views the non-development narratives

as belonging to a different mentality: savage, underdeveloped, backward.... [such narratives are] "fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children. At best, attempts are made to throw some rays of light into this obscurantism, to civilize, educate, develop (27).

The resultant "unequal relationship" between the modern and non-modern peoples "is the entire history of the culture of imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization" (27).

Liotard's critique stands. But the pairing of modern and non-modern, developed and undeveloped, forward and backward, are not, in my view, adjectives that describe peoples or countries; they are elements of a dialectic within the larger discourse of modernity which has touched everyone the world over. Sometimes the movement of the dialectic is so extreme, propulsive, and erratic that people don't know where to find themselves. One way to understand modernity is as a continual, violently disorienting movement. This modernity has become a condition of humanity.

Let's consult the vernacular on one particular site of "histories that hurt," by attending to expressions that are heard commonly in Greece. "Etsi einai i zoi": That's life. "Etsi einai i Ellada": That's Greece. "Etsi einai i Valkanii": That's the Balkans. In these statements, we hear a wry fatalism. We also hear the narrative of progress known as nationalism. The Balkans are comprised of peoples with deep histories and competing claims on territory, divided by religion and long-standing antagonisms among themselves and between two continents. Within the purview of Europe, especially, the Balkans are often seen as "backward." Yet, their "backward"-looking antagonisms were deliberately fanned by Russia, the Austro-Hungarian and British Empires before, during, and after the removal of "the Ottoman yoke" under which much of the Balkans had existed for hundreds of years (Vasov; Katafyles). Indeed, nations become nations by making claims to specific histories and ethnicities, and becoming a nation is rarely accomplished without violence. In the case of the Balkans, fierce irredentist claims, betrayals, and massacres were repeatedly practiced. One might say that the Balkans were the price of European and European empire at the outset of the twentieth century. Rebecca West certainly did say it in her highly personal anti-Muslim tome, *Black Falcon, Grey Lamb*. The nation-states that emerged in the Balkans were kept deliberately small and relatively powerless within Europe, even if some remained powder kegs within the region.

In some ways, Greece escaped the worst of Balkan violence, although Cyprus (the island now uneasily shared with Turkey--see Mary N. Layoun, cited below) and "the Macedonian question" still have potency. Greeks refused to call one of the nations north of them "Macedonia"; instead, it is a country known by an acronym, FYROM (the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia). The expulsion and/or ethnic "conversion" of Bulgarians in Greek (non-FYROM) Macedonia has been described by Anastasia Karakasidou in *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood*. She received death threats after it was published in 1997. However, it must be remembered that Greeks did not invent, but rather, adopted, the European political philosophy of nationalism promulgated in the nineteenth century (Gellner). In the twentieth century, Western Europe, and later, the United States, have repeatedly intervened in central aspects of the governing of the supposedly sovereign Greek and Balkan nation-states.

Perhaps the most devastating foray into nation-state expansionism for Greece occurred during the Greco-Turkish War of 1922, when the Greeks, with

the support of Britain, attempted to realize "the Great Idea." This was a centuries-old irredentist dream of recapturing a portion of the Byzantine Empire, including "The City," aka, Istanbul, but still known by Greeks today as Constantinople. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 after the end of WWI, the dynamic and politically agile Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos proposed that Greece be awarded a ring of land including Macedonia, Thrace, and a large swath of the coast of Asia Minor (now Turkey). He at first seemed to win the day, but the new Turkish nationalist army would not abide by the European-Ottoman agreement. Greeks fought those Turks, fully expecting support from the British who had pledged it. However, in the event, British ships remained firmly anchored in the harbor while the Greek and Armenian portions of the ancient city of Smyrna burned to the ground. Then, mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne, came the pitiful, forced exodus of Orthodox Greeks from Asia Minor to mainland Greece, and Muslims (although not always ethnically Turk) from Greece to the new country of Turkey. More than a million Greek Orthodox were displaced. In the end, the population of the mainland Greek state swelled by 25%, the Asia Minor Greeks coming to their purported home as refugees. The population exchange is known by Greeks as "The Asia Minor Catastrophe." "For the Orthodox Christians the exchange was experienced as a harsh exile, and was expressed through decades of yearning for 'lost homelands' after their relocation to Greece" (Hirschon, "Unmixing," 9)

The young Sotiria Bellou remembers meeting some of these refugees in her village on the island of Evvia. She felt that they had influenced her personality (Adamidou 40). What is certainly the case is that the *rebetika* that was developed by Asia Minor refugees in the port towns of Greece, including Piraeus, Athen's port, included within its corpus numerous songs of the experience of the exile and of the lowly, often unemployed or underworld-employed, typically male, refugee. I very much admire her interpretation of "A Bum Died in the Park." In my longer work, I will be arguing that Bellou was adept at conveying *kaimos*, an emotion that combines sorrow and yearning. One of Bellou's favorite songs was "I Wandered as an Outcast" (103). Unlike the Asia Minor refugees, Bellou left the home of her youth deliberately. Her unusual insight into the feelings of the exile or outcast may be due in part to her desire for family, apparently unsustainable for a number of reasons. One of the reasons for her feeling an outcast--or the one left behind--or as someone who has left something behind--almost certainly, was her homosexuality.

In her book, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Heather Love asserts

If modernization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century aimed to move humanity forward, it did so in part by perfecting techniques for mapping and disciplining subjects considered to be lagging behind--and so seriously compromised the ability of these others ever to catch up. Not only sexual and gender deviants but also women, colonized people, the nonwhite, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness" (5-6).

Love's statement is a generalized truism, yet as one attempts to think carefully about the relation between the narrative of progress and the experience of the individual as it occurs in modern Greece, one is impressed by the complexity of "the mapping and disciplining [of] subjects" in twentieth century Greece.

In writing about the place of Greek gay men within contemporary Greek nationalism, Anna Apostolidou performs a kind of affect study, tracing the linkage between the discourses of the good Greek family and good citizenship to the positioning of gay men, who are "render[ed] as national exiles" (6). She quotes "a middle-aged woman" with a "typical" perspective who appeared on a television talk show: "I am a Greek and a Mother, and homosexuality constitutes an insult to both these identities" (6). To European and North American gay male travelers and tourists who seek a kindred spirit in modern Greece, Apostolidou shows how the "gay heroic history" of Englishmen, steeped in classical education and "Byronisms," may have indeed paved the way for homosexuality to "emerge as a positive *social identity*"--but for the British, not for Greeks (3). Much is changing in Greece, as the recent adoption of a civil union law attests. However, as Greekness continues to be linked to family ties, gay men can feel cast out.

If the exile, a person longing for a lost home, is the position of the male homosexual in Greece, what is the position for the homosexual woman? The pioneer of scholarship on modern Greek female homosexuality, Venetia Kantsa, performed fieldwork in Greece during the mid-1990s. Kantsa noticed that after 1989, articles in ephemeral publications were trotting out interviews with the same few women, "reproduc[ing] heterosexual stereotypes according to which a woman becomes a lesbian after she has been psychologically or sexually abused by a man" ("Vizibility" 214). Change was on the way, obviously, for homosexual women were showing up in public, and "stereotypes" about their genesis were appearing in public discourse. Nonetheless, Kantsa pointed out that an older discourse was perhaps even more prevalent:

According to Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis, the invisibility of female same-sex desires in Greece is to be attributed "to the linking of female sexuality, to a fertility which is so powerful that there can be no perceived need for women to 'express' their sexuality in contexts which cannot lead to procreation" (1991: 229).

In other words, female homosexuality is thought not to exist at all. "Not only is there no female counterpart to the poustis [male homosexual], but there is no common term for a woman who would wish to take a 'male' role, either" (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 229). Loizos and Papataxiarchis take this cultural logic further by drawing upon Robinette Kennedy's fieldwork in Crete: "she found no 'adult female homosexuality'" (229). This conclusion may well have been an accurate reflection of reality; however, I can imagine with what merriment it might have been received by the women depicted in Elisabeth Kirtsoglou's *For the Love of Women*. Kirtsoglou's fieldwork takes us inside a *parea* (company) of women who live secret lesbian lives right under everyone's

noses. Some of them are married with children. Kirtsoglou was able to locate and write about them because she was one of them.

The *parea* Kirtsoglou writes of thrives on the very invisibility that Kantsa is attempting to correct. Kantsa has her reasons. What was revealed to her by her fieldwork is the silent suffering of female homosexuals who are living outside the protections of heterosexuality at the close of twentieth century Greece, just as Bellou's life was also coming to a close. Kantsa had interviewed 30 women for her doctoral dissertation, "Daughters Who Won't Speak, Mothers Who Won't Listen" (71). Many poignant stories are offered to the researcher, including this one about a lesbian coming out to her mother:

decided that I did not want to hide it from her anymore. And so I told her. For three whole days we kept a distance from each other. Of course, we continued to do things together, to go to the cemetery. But our relationship was suffering a lot. I still remember when she said to me, "And I cannot tell anyone about it!". The poor woman! With whom could she share her bitterness? (203)

Little wonder that a play named *Lesbian Blues* was performed in Athens in 1998. Elisabet Pakis studied what she termed "a collective grassroots theater performance" in which "women drew from their lives to devise and create material for the play." Pakis claims that the play arises out of "an unspeakable social experience and an uninscribed history" (218) that attains voice through the play. What emerges is "the blues," that riff "on melancholic and ghostly landscapes in a Greek order of gendered belonging" (217).

Pakis writes of the "unspeakable" that nevertheless gets spoken; Kantsa writes of the "invisible" that nonetheless becomes visible. Change is on the wing regarding female homosexuality in Greece at the end of twentieth century. Perhaps it's not surprising that at least one prominent reader of the 1998 Adamidou biography, popular musician-composer (and Bellou collaborator) Dionysus Savvopoulos, wondered why Bellou's homosexuality wasn't addressed. Adamidou was mystified by his response; she thought the biography treated the subject forthrightly (Interview). However, a number of discourses were in circulation at the time, each one yielding a different "answer" to the question of Bellou's sexuality. Was she a homosexual who "came out" after she ended her marriage and established her career in Athens? Under conditions of social disapprobation, it is not unusual for homosexual women--or men, for that matter--to embrace their orientation later in life than heterosexuals generally do (Knauer 2010, 47). On the other hand, Bellou might have been a bisexual, who just happened to spend almost all of her adult love life with women. Then again, perhaps she was a damaged heterosexual who turned to women merely for solace.

Part of the confusion may have been sown deliberately by Bellou. In the biography, she makes use of the very "heterosexual stereotypes" Kantsa found in the tabloids. Of her life after she had made her way to Athens, Bellou says:

she could not easily ignore the need for human contact, for a partner, for affection and communication.... She must find a solution to loneliness. She does not trust men anymore. They have been cruel to her. She does not appreciate them, even if she accepts or chooses them as “pals” and collaborators. From now on she seeks shelter in relationships that will offer her affection, female affection and understanding. (Adamidou 108)

Later in the biography, as Bellou was dying of throat cancer, she returned to the theme of procreation, crying out while in a fever that someone stole her baby (Adamidou 24). The story about the baby is offered by Bellou's friend, Yeorgia. Yeorgia told me in a recent interview that she was responsible for reuniting Bellou with her birth family, after Bellou's live-in lover Tasia had estranged them. The interests of several participants are represented by just this small portion of the biography. Each participant weaves together the available discourses on sexuality to achieve her desired goal. Part of the work of a critical biography will be to parse out these discourses as well as the rhetorical goals of each narrator.

Bellou's coyness can be hard to square with the straight-forward, heroic character that she also imparts throughout the biography. It seems that at least some homosexual women read her as gay, courageously so. Nina Rapi claims that Bellou was a "lesbian icon" who had "donned a classic butch image of slicked backed hair, dark glasses, and *magia* for decades" (171). Rapi glosses *magia* as "being tough, streetwise, and having a code of honor" (170). There are other ways of reading Bellou's appearance, including one associated with religion and presumed asexuality (Makri-Tsilipakou). Bellou herself gendered her manner as "andrikeos". This word can be defined as *outspoken, direct, straight-forward, and honest*. Yet it derives from *andras* (man or husband) and can also be translated as *mannish* or *masculine*. Indeed, when used with *yinaika* (woman) that is its usual meaning. Bellou employs this word to explain why her fellow *rebetiko* musician Mihalis Yenitsaris "insulted her." She claims that "men could not tolerate a woman who behaved in a manful (*andrikeos*) way." She further claims that she was "not afraid" of what anyone thought. Yet the way she moves into the Yenitsaris recollection is telling, "One evening that I do not want to remember I was very wild with Yenitsaris." (Adamidou 116). This language is suggestive of the point of view offered by Bellou's friend Yeorgia, "She was a lonely person. She was afraid of people. She pretended to be a tough person but she was sensitive" (Interview).

It would be hard to believe that Bellou wasn't affected by the image of the *mangas*, "the legendary transgressive male hero of the *rebetiko* song stories" (Tragaki, "Rebetiko" 2). Bellou began singing during the second generation of *rebetiko* composers (her band-leader, Tsistanis was the greatest practitioner during this era) when the old culture of the *rebetiko* of the *tekes* (hashish dens) had transitioned into something that ultimately would achieve "broader acceptance in Greek society" (Tragaki, "Rebetiko" 7), even becoming family entertainment (Makri-Tsilipakou). However, even during those later days, the old songs were sung. In my longer work, I expect to argue that Bellou most likely did draw

from the *mangas* character in her own gendering process. A good deal of her young adult life was spent, after all, in the *magazi* or *taverna*, the locale of *rebetiko* music during the Tsitsanis generation of composers.

If the first generation of *rebetika* is often associated with The Asia Minor Catastrophe and the influx of large numbers of Asia Minor refugees, the second generation had its own tribulations. The Metaxas dictatorship of the 1930s censored *rebetiko* as an unwholesome "symbol" (Tragaki, "Rebetiko" 6). Tsitsanis steered clear of the censors and kept a low political profile throughout his career (Michael). Next came World War II during which the rapacity of the German occupiers drove many Greeks to starvation (Mazower 4). Bellou herself recalls stealing bread from a German truck during her first years in Athens; thus, her narrative shows her sharing in the widespread Greek suffering. Likewise, during the Civil War that followed WWII, she represents herself as striking an heroic pose on the side of the partisans when a group of right-wing royalist hecklers demanded that the Tsitsanis orchestra play one of their favorite tunes, "The Son of an Eagle" (105). She refused to sing it, and took a beating; she blamed Tsitsanis and the rest of the orchestra for not defending her (105). Other than the episode with the royalists, Adamidou says that Bellou didn't fight with the Leftists but strongly supported them. The Communists today still claim Bellou as their own while avoiding her non-normative "bourgeois" sexual orientation (Anonymous; Danelli). My guess is that Bellou's attachment was less to a political philosophy or party than to her sense that the Left stood for the ordinary Greek people, of the sort with whom she identified, and eventually sang of, in Ilias Andriopoulos' "Don't Cry."

The loss of the Left in the Civil War, accomplished in no small measure by the British and United States' intervention as a part of its Cold War strategy; Leftists remained popular, however (Mazower 6). They inspired a new type of popular music, *entechno laiko*, art-popular music. Perhaps the most prominent of its inventors was the extravagantly talented composer, activist, and intellectual, Mikis Theodorakis, who twice was nearly killed for his beloved Greece. He meant to devise a Gramscian "national popular" music to reunite Greece after the devastation of World War II and the Civil War. The idea was to "elevate" and speak for "the Greek people" (Tragaki, "Humanizing," 58). Theodorakis decided to set to music the poems of the internationally-renowned modernist Greek poets of the 1930s, including Yiannis Ritsos, Odysseas Elytis, and Yiorgos Seferis (Papanikolaou 68; 81). These men bespoke the national contemporary Greek spirit. But what of the music? *Rebetika*, in the form of the *zeibekiko*--"an improvisatory, originally exclusively male, solo dance" in 9/8 (Tragaki, "Rebetiko" 14) -- suddenly occurred to him, as he was one day was trying to match the meter of a poem (Papanikolaou 82).

However, making use of *rebetika* as a national music was tricky for Theodorakis. It did have to be "cleans[ed]...from its unhealthy, impure elements, namely the Anatolian association, Turkish motifs and melodies, and underworld themes" (Zaimakis, "Forbidden Fruits," 9). *Rebetika* was originally, in the nomenclature of the affect theory of Ahmed and Love, too "backward" for Theodorakis, the Communist modernist. Not only did the criminality implied in

some of the lyrics unfit an unrevised *rebetika* for Marxist use (criminals don't exist in a classless society); "the Anatolian association" does two things: 1) it reminds Greeks of their servitude under the Ottomans (Tragaki, "Humanizing" 57), and 2) of the "backward" orientation that the East is awarded by the "progressive" West (Said xv). In the end, the *zeibekiko* was united with the approved poetry, and the first recording of Theodorakis' new music, *Epitafios*, featured a deep-voiced *rebetiko* singer, Grigoris Bithikotsis, whom Tragaki says was meant to stand for "the common man" (Tragaki "Humanizing" 51). Bellou followed this development closely, and had wished Theodorakis had chosen her. Adamidou mentioned this in my interview with her, and offered her own view that Bellou's voice, "neither female nor male," could have made the songs "more universal." Indeed, gender was an important component in the creation of *entechno laiko*, as it was (and remains) in the continual formation of Greek nationalism (Halkias; Layoun).

There was, in addition to Theodorakis, another brilliant composer, a musician who focussed on modernist aesthetics rather than politics, Manos Hadjidakis, who used the inspiration of *rebetika* to compose *entechno laiko*. He had also recorded a version of Theodorakis' *Epitafios* that came out just before Theodorakis'. Hadjidakis had chosen a female singer, Nana Mouskouri, in a version of the song cycle that was said by leftist reviewers to result in "an emotional cry" (Papanikolaou 81). Theodorakis' own recording, released only weeks after Hadjidakis', was considered "an epic" (81). Hadjidakis complained, "The left-wingers...preferred whatever was conducted by Theodorakis and found my version of *Epitaphios* sentimental but not 'manly'. As if sensibility were a characteristic of womanliness" (qtd in Papanikolaou 81-2). Papanikolaou furthers the analysis:

In...public discussions, Bithikotsis's 'rough singing' and the use of the bouzouki, both evocative of the world of *rebetiko*, made Theodorakis's version the undisputed favorite. In this context, Hadjidakis's version was considered 'Westernized' and 'compromised'--if not 'feminine'; Theodorakis's was seen as "explosive", 'liberating', 'true to the people's psyche'" (82).

Those who had originally preferred the Hadjidakis version were seen by the music critics as "bourgeois;" these same Leftist critics, who thought of themselves as speaking for the "working class," preferred Theodorakis' own recording of *Epitaphios* that managed to escape the taint of Turkishness as well as that of the East's "feminine" associations (Zamaikis 7). Presumably, at least some of these Leftist critics were aware of Hadjidakis' homosexuality, as well. Apostolidou also notes that Greeks refer to gay male sexuality as "Ottoman style" (*othomaniko*) (4), a feminine, or passive, attribute. Bellou herself seems to have adopted some of this discourse, as she declared that "[r]*ebetiko* roots are to be found in the East, but in the Greeks of the East" (Adamidou 112). There is a great deal more to be said about the complex conjunction of nationality, class, gender, and sexuality in regards to both *rebetiko* and *entechno laiko*--and all of these in relation to the "backward East" and "progressive West" formation.

In any case, it must be said that Hadjidakis was the one to introduce *rebetika* to the educated elite in Greece in 1949. He gave a lecture on the subject, and invited two *rebetiko* musicians to perform, Markos Vamvakaris, a composer and instrumentalist from the first generation of *rebetika*, and, as singer, Sotiria Bellou. Although there was a fallow decade between this introduction and the First Rebetiko Revival (Tragaki, "Rebetiko," 9), Hadjidakis' appreciation of Bellou created new possibilities for her. Not only was *rebetiko* revived in the 1960s; Bellou's own faltering career was likewise revived. She was recorded as a solo *rebetiko* artist, and she began to be invited to sing the *entechno laiko* of a number of prominent composers from Savvopoulos to Dimos Moutsis. She was sought after as a valued interpreter of the music and its history and culture. During the twentieth century, *rebetika* changed from a musical form performed live and known only to a small segment of urban society to one that addressed mass audiences, both in live performances and recordings. *Rebetika* became steadily more commercialized. Bellou's career spanned this change in *rebetika*. Her voice deepened and her expression matured as she was granted the opportunity to record and perform with many talented composers and musicians. I will argue that Bellou's later work results from a dialectic of folk artistry and commercialism.

"[*Rebetiko*] is *laiko* [of the people]. Its roots are in the yearning/sorrow (*kaimos*) of the Greek people who have suffered so much" (Adamidou 112). These are Bellou's words. Her musical genius flourished in its continual rotation through the feeling-state of *kaimos*. The singers of the Turkish wailing songs (*amanedes*) accomplished the expression of loss in one way. The communal singers of *rebetika*, like those in Vamvakaris and Tsitsanis' bands, did so in another. Sometimes one comes across contemporary *laiko* soloists who wring the heart too much. To my ear, Bellou has no peers in her ability to unite a steely discipline with great tenderness. Perhaps Adamidou was right: Bellou combines the qualities of the two sexes--for in the Greece of Bellou's time, there are two sexes and two genders--in a perfect balance. Maybe in this way Bellou is expressing "the suffering of the Greeks." Maybe she is expressing the suffering of homosexuals. Maybe she is expressing the suffering of depressives or alcoholics, or the pain of any of us moderns who cannot or will not wear the mantle of happiness to cloak the losses around us and in us. Mary N. Layoun writes of the way that the modern nation-state calls up in the exile an image of "some mythic past of oneness and purity" (174). "[T]he aching desire for return, for home, is not satisfied. It is not satisfiable. But neither is it denied and repressed. It persists" (178). I am reminded of a line from the Adamidou biography in which Bellou is represented as favoring one of Tsitsanis' songs from the 1940s, "San Apokliros Yirizo" (I Wander as an Outcast). According to the biography, "It was the song she loved the most, and every time she sang it, she remembered her mother" (103).

Works Cited

- Adamidou, Sophia. Sotiria Bellou: *Pote Dortia, Pote Exares*. [Sotiria Bellou: Sometimes You Roll Fours, Sometimes You Roll Sixes]. Athens: A. A. Livani, 1998.
- Ahmed, Sara. "Happy Objects." in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010: 29-51.
- Anonymous. http://kokkinosfakelos.blogspot.com/2012/01/blog-post_28.html
- Apostolidou, Anna. "Greek Nationhood and Greek Love: Sexualizing the Nation and Multiple Readings of the Glorious Greek Past." *Nations and Nationalism* (2016): 1-19.
- Danelli, Titina. "Biography of Sotiria Bellou." *Rizospastis*. May 12, 1998. <http://www.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=3726629>
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. 2nd ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York; Routledge, 1991), pp.149-181.
- Hirschon, Renee. "'Unmixing Peoples' in the Aegean Region." In *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece Turkey*. Ed. Renee Hirschon. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003: 3-12.
- Kantsa, Venetia. *Daughters Who Do Not Speak, Mothers Who Do Not Listen. Erotic Relationships Among Women in Contemporary Greece*. London: London School of Economics, PhD thesis, 2000.
- Kantsa, Venetia. "'Vizibility': Women, Same-Sex Sexualities, and the Subversion of Gender." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* (2010): 18.2: 213-240.
- Katafytes, Evangelos. "Ottoman Yoke." *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Orthodox Christianity*. Reference Online. Ed. John Anthony McGuckin. Hoboken: Blackwell, 2011. http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405185394_chunk_g978140518539417_ss1-10
- Kirtsoglou, Elisabeth. *For the Love of Women: Gender, Identity, and Same-Sex Relations in a Greek Provincial Town*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Knauer, Nancy J. *Gay and Lesbian Elders: History, Law, and Identity Politics in the United States*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.
- Koutsomiha, Damiana. Conversation. May 18, 2017.
- Layoun, Mary N. *Wedded to the Land? Gender, Boundaries, and Nationalism in Crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Loizos, Peter and Evthymios Papataxiarchis. "Gender, Sexuality, and the Person in Greek Culture." In *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*. Ed. Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991: 221-234.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Makri-Tsilipakou, Marianthi. Conversation. May 19, 2017.
- Maslin, Janet. "Screen: 'Rebetiko'." *New York Times*. May 10, 1985. Accessed online June 20, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9905E3D7143BF933A25756C0A963948260&mcubz=1>
- Michael, Despina. "Tsitsanis and the Birth of the 'New' *Laiko Tragoudi*." *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 4 (1996): 55-95. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/MGST/article/view/6545/7192>

- Pakis, Elisavet. "Playing in the Dark: Staging *Lesbian Blues*, Questioning Gendered Belonging." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 31.2 (October 2013): 217-247.
- Panayioti, Yeorgia. Interview. May 12, 2017.
- Papanikolaou, Dimitris. *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece*. London: LEGENDA (Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing), 2007.
- Rapi, Nina. "'Real' Compared to What? Butch and Femme Contradictions in Greek Culture." In *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*. Ed. Sally R. Munt, London: Cassell, 1997: 170-176.
- Tragaki, Dafni. "'Humanizing the Masses': Enlightening Intellectuals and the Music of the People." In *The Mediterranean in Music: Critical Perspectives, Common Concerns, Cultural Differences*, eds. David Cooper and Kevin Dawe. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005.
- Tragaki, Dafni. "Rebetiko," *Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, Vol. 12, "Genres: Europe." Eds. John Horn and John Shepherd. Forthcoming.
- Tsampras, Yiorgos. Interview. February 4, 2015.
- Vasov, Ivan. *Under the Yoke*. Great Britain: JiaHu Books, 2015 (1893).
- West, Rebecca. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*. New York: Penguin Books, 1941.
- Yeorgouli, Alik. *Apo Ton Lenin Ston Versatse*. (From Lenin to Versace). Kaktos: Athens, 1995.
- Zaimakis, Yiannis. "'Bawdy Songs and Virtuous Politics: Ambivalence and Controversy in the Discourse of the Greek Left on Rebetiko.'" *History and Anthropology* 20.1 (March 2009): 15-36.