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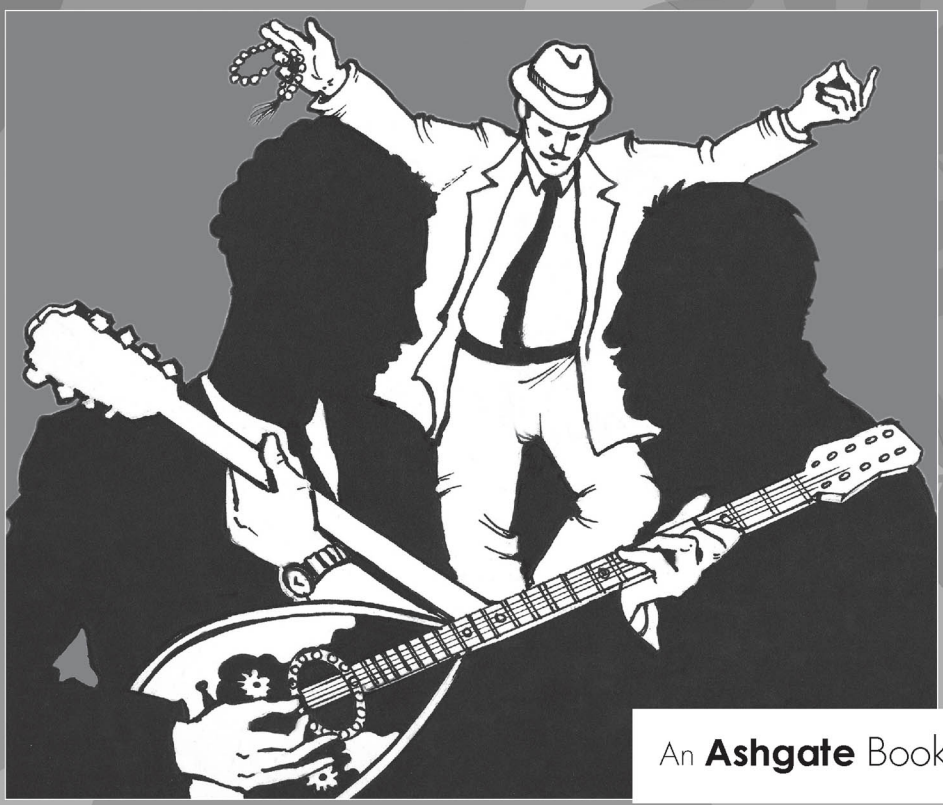
Greek Rebetiko from a Psychocultural Perspective

Same Songs Changing Minds

Daniel Koglin



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GREEK REBETIKO FROM A PSYCHOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Same Songs Changing Minds

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Note: Permission to reproduce the transcriptions of Songs 3–6 has been kindly granted by the heirs of the composers Markos Vamvakaris and Vasilis Tsitsanis.

Preface

When some years ago in a music bar in downtown Athens a young rebetiko fan asked bar owner and bandleader Pavlos Vasiliou (born 1952) why in the more than 25 years of his professional career he had not released a single recording, the buzuki veteran and rebetiko singer went into a passionate monologue on the cultural value of rebetiko and the supremacy of the original. Rerecording rebetiko songs, he concluded, 'is like entering a church, approaching an icon of Mother Mary and putting your autograph [*sic*] on it' (quoted in Stamatis 2011, 34). An extremist view? Perhaps, but one can hardly deny that today the yardstick for measuring the credibility of live rebetiko performances – not only their spontaneity and emotional sincerity, but also their 'authenticity' – are digital reissues of original recordings on 78 r.p.m. gramophone discs dating back to the first half of the twentieth century. In this sense, rebetiko songs have indeed become icons – objects of collective reference as well as reverence.

But then rebetiko, always being one thing *and* its opposite, is endowed with a rather protean kind of constancy. Hence the deliberately ambiguous subtitle '*Same* Songs Changing *Minds*'. Due to the glorification of early rebetiko composers as authentic representatives of Greek popular culture and the effective canonization of their songs since the 1970s, entire generations of Greeks have grown up listening to virtually the same songs played in roughly the same manner. What change are the minds these songs enter on their journey through space and time. Not only do songs move from one mind to another, they also affect and alter them. The minds of the audience, however, are manipulated in such a way as to harmonize with culture-specific ways of thinking and feeling – basically, minds become alike. Finally, in the course of this process, a bidirectional co-ordination takes place, for minds continuously adapt the acquired cognitive and affective orientations to an ever-changing environment. As a result, rebetiko songs *never* remain the same, no matter how exactly their interpreters try to adhere to historic prototypes.

This book, as one might anticipate from the foregoing, is about the relationship between music, culture and the mind. It views music as both the subject and the product of a public discourse – a highly complex and dynamic exchange of conflicting statements in various media that mingle experiential, observational and imaginative elements. As a consequence, the present study deals above all with *ideas* about or communicated through music. However, does this make it less of a study about *music*? As far as rebetiko is concerned, musical and verbal discourses, performing and commenting, are so closely intertwined that inspecting it from a strictly music-centred viewpoint would most probably not enable readers to get an idea of what makes this type of music so special for Greeks.

The study of rebetiko as a system of communication, with music being only one of its means, requires a multi-method approach. With regard to methodology, my thesis is therefore probably not a typical example of ethnomusicological research – which, precisely, might be its strength. I hope it proves that ethnomusicologists can benefit from statistically aided techniques of gathering data about the individual experience of music, as have been developed above all in the field of psychology – techniques which supplement and guide, but by no means replace, more classical forms of participant observation-style fieldwork.

In a sense, this book creates a microcosm of the enigmatic world of rebetiko. In an almost fractal-like manner, it represents the discourse around rebetiko in miniature while

being itself a part of this discourse. Having written a study that claims to deconstruct some of the myths surrounding a legendary part of Greek popular culture, I must confess that what seems now, I hope, a coherent description and analysis is only the end product of a long process of asking, reading, watching, listening, pondering, groping for words, revising, deleting, cutting and pasting (not necessarily in that order). In short, it is itself a *construction* intended to comply with the myth of systematic progress so fundamental to science. Just to mention one example, twelve years ago I began my doctoral research on rebetiko by writing an exposition of what I optimistically called my 'master plan' – first, because this gave me a sense, however false, of security as I ventured into unknown and difficult terrain; second, but perhaps more important, starting with a plan was what I was expected to do. Had I failed to submit a detailed proposal, I would, for instance, not have been granted a scholarship. (I gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Humboldt University of Berlin as well as the Greek Scholarship Foundation.) Needless to say, the 'plan' thus conceived was not really worthy of the name because more often than not my research activities deviated from it. As so often in science, reality was always one step ahead of theory.

Whatever the academic task, at whatever stage of tackling it we find ourselves, what is important is to understand when adhering to rules, scripts or schedules is sensible and when it is not. The habit of italicizing foreign words is a good example of how scientific texts – not so very different from myths – create as well as describe reality and thus demand a heightened awareness of the influence the conventions of an academic field have on the object of study. The change of format can be helpful, because readers immediately recognize they can look up a term in a glossary. However, it also tends to exoticize the foreign language, and thus would counteract this book's primary intention, which is to make readers more familiar with its subject matter. Therefore, I decided to italicize selectively. Greek and Turkish terms referring to musical instruments or having an entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* are not set in italics. All other Greek and Turkish words are italicized except in extended quotations: (1) only at their first occurrence if they appear at least 10 times in the text, (2) at every occurrence if they appear less frequently. If frequent and infrequent foreign terms are used within the same sentence, they are both italicized.

Last but not least, a note on reference style might be helpful. Since one of my main goals was to analyse the historical development of the public debate over rebetiko in Greece, parenthetical referencing using the author-date method seemed the most practical and informative solution (newspaper articles are referenced by the exact date of the issue containing them, with the month in roman numerals). For the same reason, the References section at the end of this volume is divided into primary sources (rebetiko-related Greek publications that serve as material for my discourse analysis) and secondary sources (Greek texts about topics other than rebetiko plus all non-Greek texts). In addition, the list of primary sources is sorted first by format (newspaper articles, journal articles, books and book chapters, audio and audio-visual media) and then by author, to make it more useful for those who wish to browse archival collections.

Introduction
The Discursive Construction of Rebetiko

On the evening of Sunday 9 August 1931 a large crowd of local residents has gathered on the trottoir opposite Mr Stravaridis's taverna at the end of the refugee settlement in Kaisariani, an eastern suburb of Athens. Glad to have avoided paying the entrance fee (as the Greek economy has begun to feel the full impact of the recession arising from the 1929 stock market crash in the USA), men and women of all ages listen with rapt attention to the music performed by a trio on a small stand inside the taverna, which is wafted along by the gentle breeze descending the slopes of Mount Hymettus. The trio (ud, violin and santur) is led by Hagop Stambulyan, in Greece better known as Agapios Tomboulis, once 'the first ud of Istanbul', now a star on the Anatolian music scene of Athens. Stambulyan is a well-dressed, stately man in his forties whose corpulent figure has earned him the nickname Tombul (Turkish 'plump, rotund'). A smile spreads across his kind, well-rounded face as he listens to the violinist moving through an ex tempore introduction with cascading notes and expressive glissandi. 'Aman, yallah', he exclaims enthusiastically, 'ya su dervísi mu!' (Turkish-Greek 'Yeah, go on – bravo, my dervish!'). Then he enters an old tune from Smyrna, the lost metropolis of Eastern Hellenism, singing in a 'rather ordinary voice, a little hoarse but imbued with the deepest passion of the Orient', as a reporter among the audience jots in his notebook:

> Each time I see you walking by and sweetly looking at me
> Just so you know, my pretty girl, right in the heart you stab me
> Oh, I'm gonna die at the café
> Sucking hash fumes from the nargileh
> Don't get angry with me, sweetheart, if I'm on a high
> I got hooked on hashish 'cause you make me lose my mind.[1]

Hagop Stambulyan was born in 1891 in the Pera district of Istanbul to an Armenian father and a Greek mother. Like many inhabitants of multi-ethnic Pera at the time, he had never attended school, but spoke Greek, Turkish and Armenian fluently. Very soon he acquired a local reputation as an excellent performer on the ud (a short-necked fretless lute). Legend has it that Sultan Abdul Hamid II, on a boat trip near Dolmabahçe Palace, his residence on the shores of the Bosporus, overheard the adolescent Hagop entertaining his friends by the waterside, whereupon he appointed him to the court orchestra. Stambulyan remained in this position under Abdul Hamid's brother Mehmed Reşat, who was proclaimed sultan in 1909. But life still held other surprises in store for him. The Ottoman Empire was defeated in the First World War, and in the autumn of 1918 Greek and Allied battleships anchored where

[1] Original lyrics: 'Όταν σε βλέπω κι έρχεσαι κι εμένα να κοιτάζεις | ξέρε το, βρε μικρούλα μου, μες στην καρδιά με σφάζεις | Άιντε θα πεθάνω μες στους καφενέδες | πίνοντας χασίσι απ' τους ναργιλέδες | Μη θυμώνεις, μάτια μου, κι είμαι ζαλισμένος | μ' έκαμες και το 'μαθα κι είμαι πια χαμένος' (as recorded in 1927 with Istanbul-born singer Theodotos Dimitriadis at a New York studio).

once Abdul Hamid's fateful boat trip had taken place. Stambulyan believed, as did most members of Istanbul's Greek community, that the day had come when their mother tongue would again become the official language in the city of Constantine the Great. Prospects for the future looked bright. In 1921 Stambulyan married his wife Alexandra, with whom he was to have three children. Their happiness, however, came to an untimely end. Soon after the defeat of the Greek army in Asia Minor in 1922, the situation in what henceforth became known as the 'Kemalist' Republic of Turkey deteriorated for citizens of Greek or Armenian origin. Two years later, the young couple decided to emigrate to Salonica. Until 1928 Stambulyan stayed in this cosmopolitan port city, performing at various cafés and tavernas, then moved on to Athens, where he embarked on a distinguished career as a recording artist. Yet the links to his birthplace had not been severed permanently. In 1954 the US label Balkan Phonograph Records contracted him, together with the renowned Turkish clarinettist Şükrü Tunar and several Greek musicians, to back the Jewish star singer Roza Eskenazy during studio sessions in Istanbul. Around forty 78 r.p.m. records with Greek rebetiko and folk songs as well as Turkish songs were the fruits of their common effort.[2]

Istanbul, nearly 50 years after this historic Greek-Armenian-Jewish-Turkish co-operation – notably, for a New York-based label whose owner was an Albanian. On Easter Sunday, 5 May 2002, a large group of friends, Greeks and Turks, locals as well as visitors, have gathered to celebrate their reunion at a small *meyhane* ('wine house') on the Balık Pazarı (fish market) in the heart of Beyoğlu, the Europeanized part of Istanbul's old town which Greeks still call by its old name 'Pera'. I was on a holiday trip in the Bosporus metropolis at that time, and an acquaintance of mine, a local Greek, invited me to come along. The entry in my diary for that day reads as follows:

> Muammer has brought his accordion, Stelios his buzuki. Someone is beating the darbuka. They play rebetiko songs to which gay conversation, bursts of laughter and the clinking of glasses form a constant drone. Many of the roughly thirty people present sing along with the musicians, clapping the beat with their hands. Some, intoxicated by the music, the convivial atmosphere and the raki they have been sipping at, rise from their chairs and dance close to each other among the tables that are stacked with bottles and dishes. Again others have a quiet cigarette, perhaps reminiscing about the past or simply taking in the event that is unfolding before their eyes.

It wasn't the first time I had been witness to such a scene of merriment. For no matter their age or social status, Greeks today love to spend an evening with friends at a taverna with live rebetiko. Istanbul's nightlife, too, has in the past few years been enriched by a number of bars offering the possibility to dance to the sound of rebetiko and similar types of Greek music. Yet the significance of rebetiko for audiences in Greece and Turkey is not restricted to its entertainment value. I have chosen to juxtapose two scenes depicting performances of rebetiko in 1930s Athens and present-day Istanbul to demonstrate how the vast array of musical styles commonly subsumed under the label 'rebetiko' provides a vital emotional link not only between generations – there are probably few other European countries where the same songs entertain young and old alike – but also between people of different (and in some respects antagonistic) cultures, nations and religions. To my mind,

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[2] Sources of biographical data: Goun. (12 VIII 1931); Th-s (30 XII 1937); Voulgaris (28 X 1972); Eskenazy (1982, 27); Petropoulos (1991, 267, 352f. and *passim*); Papadopoulos (2004, 148). Some of Eskenazy's Istanbul recordings have been digitally reissued in Tambouris (2002).

one of the most fascinating aspects of rebetiko songs is their perennial ability to instil a strong, almost conspiratorial sense of unity, be it among a few friends, a community of refugees or the citizens of an entire nation. And the night at the meyhane in Istanbul left me with the impression that, the effects of modern mass culture notwithstanding, this is a function rebetiko songs continue to fulfil.

To say 'function' implies that these songs have a special purpose which they are intended to achieve as part of a larger system. This book presents a view of rebetiko, not as a tradition or a set of songs, but as a collectively created and negotiated *concept* that operates within a system of communication or, more specifically, within a public *discourse*. I assume that the purpose of the concept 'rebetiko' is nothing else than the meaning it communicates in a given discursive context.

In contrast to other ways of acquiring knowledge, the scientific method demands that its practitioners begin an investigation by characterizing, defining or classifying their object of study on the basis of experience and observation. Although this view prevails also among musicologists, the present study shows that, as far as musical genres are concerned, characterization can often not be the *first* step in the research process – only its *outcome*. As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, rebetiko is a genre of music that has been shaped by and connects people across cultural, linguistic, geographical, generational and social boundaries – people whose musical backgrounds differ inevitably. As a consequence, it makes little sense to speculate *what* rebetiko may be without asking *whose* it is. This, however, is the problem. There is a profusion of rebetiko-centred collectivities which, at various times, have been formed by regularly interacting individuals. Do they have anything in common?

My suggestion is that these collectivities are perhaps best conceived of as 'sound groups' whose members are unified by 'a common musical language, together with common ideas about music and its use' (Blacking 1995, 232). I prefer a term as abstract and elastic as 'sound group' because it implies that members '*choose* a certain music mainly because they may identify themselves with the values they connect to that music'. As a consequence, 'the choice to belong to a particular sound group may become a powerful means for self-representation within a society and may conform to or contrast with the habits of a particular place, class, gender, etc.' (Magrini 2000, 239, emphasis added). In other words, sound groups are largely independent from both the demographical data and the place of residence of their members. Herein they differ from alternative concepts designating audiences of specific types of music such as 'subculture', 'scene' or 'the people'. Membership in sound groups is above all a matter of choice and meaning. Rather than being a pre-existent quality which can simply be recognized, sound group membership is created in an act of definition through which certain attributes are assigned to the individuals forming a particular sound group. Thus, if we attempt to study how a type of music is defined by the collectivities performing or consuming it, we need to ask who makes the respective definitions, what the underlying motives are, how the act of definition is accomplished, and what effects it has.

If there is any object at all that can be labelled as 'rebetiko' in a meaningful way, then it can only be a conceptual whole which has been formed by the members of specific sound groups – not necessarily only of pro-rebetiko ones, but also of groups whose members explicitly *disapprove* of this type of music while preferring and promoting other types. It is of great importance to emphasize from the start that although I will often refer to rebetiko (perhaps from force of habit) as if it was a thing in itself, I do not wish to study it as a *phenomenon* – a class of actually existing occurrences and happenings that are internally experienced. What is examined here under the label 'rebetiko' is a class of *ideas*, especially ideas about distinctions. What do these ideas distinguish? How are they acquired and communicated?

What can they tell us about the worldview and 'values' of the people using them? These are some of the central questions I have set out to answer. Needless to say, such a context-dependent, collectively developed subsystem of ideas – whose symbolic and emotional significance is only loosely connected with the observable characteristics of musical performances associated with it – can scarcely be defined in advance. Nonetheless, a brief survey of some widespread usages of the term 'rebetiko' might be desirable, even though it cannot by any means be called exhaustive.

The Concept of 'Rebetiko'

From the study of record labels we can infer with a certain confidence that by the beginning of the twentieth century the term 'rebetiko'[3] was already current among the Greek-speaking record-buying population of cities within the Ottoman Empire (see Kaliviotis 2002, 130; Savvopoulos 2006, 6f.), even if it remains unclear in which sense exactly it was used. Ever since those days, Greek journalists, musicians, scholars, record producers and other authorities have applied the term to songs differing considerably in terms of melodic properties, lyrics or manner of performance.

Musically, there is no single form typical of rebetiko, as with the twelve-bar blues form. Neither does one find a single rhythmic pattern running through the vast majority of the songs, as in tango or reggae; quite the contrary, there is a wide variety of metric structures. Rebetiko is not the label of a certain dance. Rebetiko's melodic modes and devices are shared by a multitude of genres, Greek as well as foreign. Nor are there instruments which are predominantly used to play rebetiko, as in the case of regional varieties of folk instruments (although the dissemination of rebetiko on record is usually thought to have been responsible for the popularization of the buzuki, with which it is generally associated). And many 'rebetiko' singers would interpret different kinds of song, often within the same evening and before the same audience. If one tried to give a one-size-fits-all description, one would probably not arrive at much more than the vague conclusion that, in a rather eclectic fashion, 'rebetiko' songs combine elements common to a wide range of musical traditions in the Eastern Mediterranean. This result would, of course, not be very satisfactory – and several influential debaters have actually suggested avoiding the term altogether.

Yet there is no denying the widespread acceptance of the designation 'rebetiko', even if it does not refer to a limited entity of songs. Rather, its meaning and use in the context of indigenous discourses depend, among other things, upon 'the period and class the person giving it belongs to' (Damianakos 2001, 164, n.16). Analysing a larger sample of rebetiko-related

[3] The question of how to transcribe the term ρεμπέτικο (/rɛ'bɛtikɔ/ plural ρεμπέτικα) into the English language is nearly as thorny as that of how to define it. In Greek the word is neuter and can be used both as a noun and an adjective. It is usually transcribed as either 'rebetiko' or 'rembetiko'. I prefer the first form because the Greek pronunciation of the 'm' in the composite sound /mb/ is much weaker and shorter than that of an English speaker, often verging on inaudibility. Stathis Gauntlett rejects the spelling 'rembetiko' on the grounds that 'it is puristic and affected, and consequently it is ironic, given that the word denotes low-life songs' (1991a, 89, n.2). For the sake of completeness, I should add that the transliteration 'rempetiko' is also sometimes used, as well as the Latinized spelling 'rebetico'. To complicate matters, many writers denote the genre by adding the definite article, perhaps on the model of 'the blues', or use the plural form (rebetika, rembetika, etc.). All these options have their pros and cons. Throughout this book I refer to the genre in the singular, either by the label 'the rebetiko song' or by its no-article variant 'rebetiko', which I believe to reflect the most common usages in the Greek language.

writings in the Greek language, philologist Stathis Gauntlett (1985, 28–37) has been able to isolate a number of other factors which contribute to the semantic 'plasticity' of this designation:

- the sheer number of musical, choreographic, verbal, ideological and social criteria from which one may select any combination qualifying a song for genre membership;
- increasing social acceptability, popularization and stylization of rebetiko songs since the 1930s;
- an overlap of both the song traditions and the living spaces of the urban criminal underworld and the rest of Greek society;
- inconsistencies in the application of the term 'rebetiko' on record labels;
- popular confusion about the meaning of notions like 'folk', 'people', 'proletariat', 'underworld' etc. which are used to define rebetiko as a collective musical tradition;
- the strong ideological bias of many commentators on rebetiko, which often reflects the cultural and educational policies of major political parties.

By and large, Greek commentators seem to intuitively sense the difficulty of grasping rebetiko as a coherent generic concept. This might at least be one of the reasons why most attempts at defining the genre according to relatively invariable stylistic components, both in popular and scholarly media, are content with impressionistic, undocumented listings of general criteria such as asymmetric metrical structures (in particular the *zeybékiko* rhythm in $\frac{9}{4}$ time), *makam*-based melodic progressions, small ensembles of two to four instrumentalists, heterophony, microtonal embellishments, urbanized content and 'pessimistic' tone of lyrics, or the supposedly 'dark' and 'heavy' character of the music that is dominated by the sound of plucked instruments, especially the buzuki (Papaïoannou 1973, 294f.). It need hardly be mentioned that these characteristics are either too abstract, and do therefore apply to a multitude of other local musical genres throughout the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, or too subjective and ambiguous to be capable of defining rebetiko as a distinct type of Greek popular music.

Few scholarly observers have based their findings on thorough comparative analysis, and these are mostly concerned with the linguistic aspects of rebetiko songs (e.g. Damianakos 2001). Looking at rebetiko from a philologist's point of view, its stylistic features might be described as a combination of:

> thematic preoccupation with underworld activity (presented in a spontaneous, matter-of-fact, non-glamorising and often specific manner) and erotic rapports (many erotic verses being identical to those of folk songs); a high incidence of stylistic and prosodic devices similar to the stereotypes of folksong, traditional metres and strophic forms, desultory development of theme in a random overall format; predominantly popular, non-standard language with occasional elements of dialectal phonology and vocabulary, and archaic forms derived from the jargon of officialdom; variant performances and variants of individual verses. In view of its oral tradition and fluidity of form, one could consider the Rebetiko thus defined, to be a type of folksong (Dimotiko tragoudi) distinctive for its expression of low life. The high incidence of erotic folk-couplets among recorded Rebetika would therefore be quite natural, in view of their belonging to the same tradition. The remaining 'Rebetika' would then be seen as commercial derivatives of the Rebetiko, which ought properly be called *rebetoid* songs. (Gauntlett 1985, 191f.)

On condition that the existence of low life presupposes a degree of societal complexity which is achieved only in citified environments, we could then define rebetiko as 'Greek urban folk song' (as is sometimes done in the indigenous debate) – and run straight into trouble. For even though numerous elements of the orally transmitted folk song of rural Greece do appear in many classic rebetiko songs as well, most of the latter were recorded for the mass market and did not generate variants. Consequently, they lack one of the most basic characteristics of oral poetry: its being created, accepted, selected and modified *by the community* (see Jakobson and Bogatyrev 1980). On the other hand, labelling these songs as commercial derivatives, as 'rebetoid' rather than the real thing, simply on the basis that they were distributed on gramophone records, also seems inadequate. One should keep in mind that:

> the shaping of *one rebetiko tradition* has been the product of long and intense negotiations, both within and outside that particular field of music. What we call rebetiko is actually a palimpsest of styles, cultural practices, and musical idioms [which only] starts to be considered as one genre at the moment when urban popular music, whose development was based on paid entertainment and recorded music, decisively supersedes older (and more rural-based) folk traditions in the national imaginary', that is, during the 1950s and 1960s. (Papanikolaou 2007, 64, original emphasis)

In a sense, rebetiko *has* replaced the older folk songs from which it inherited many characteristics. But this does not alter the fact that rebetiko – both as a conglomerate of local musical traditions and a generic term – has been shaped according to different laws of production. These laws, often specified by epithets like 'commercialized' or 'market', have certainly not left rural folk song unaffected. They have done so, however, only *after* the music of the Greek countryside had been firmly established in people's minds as a conceptual entity.

Defining rebetiko as 'urban folk song' is therefore only partly appropriate, and obscures, rather than clarifies, what is specific about this genre. It suggests that the main difference between rebetiko and older types of indigenous music-making was one of environment, which is doubtful since commercial rebetiko songs very soon began to be heard in the provinces as well, both from gramophone horns and from the mouths of visiting and local musicians. It further implies that a clear distinction between the city and the country could be drawn. This is not the case, in particular not for Athens and Piraeus. These towns had still been quite provincial in character before the massive influx of refugees from Asia Minor in 1922–3 roughly doubled their population and led to an upsurge in commercial and industrial activity (Pallis 1929, 547; Pentzopoulos 2002, 166). After the Second World War, however, Greece experienced the fate of most Western nation states: the urbanization of society *as a whole*, in the course of which many differences between the capital and the countryside with regard to jurisdiction, production or way of life were extinguished (see Löw 2001, 44f.). It therefore seems as if, in the Greek context, 'urban' is no less nebulous a concept than 'rebetiko', and does not get us very far in our endeavour to comprehend the latter.

The use of the label 'rebetiko' in native discourses is, of course, not completely arbitrary, but shows some regularities. Most debaters assume that the musical production of the lower classes of Greek urban society in the first half of the twentieth century can be divided roughly into two main categories: one comprising songs that are 'universally accepted' among ordinary people, thus forming the musical *mainstream* of their time (M), and another which is variously termed 'marginal', 'peripheral' or 'subcultural' owing to its association with urban *low life* (L) – i.e. it includes songs about poverty, drug use,

prostitution, gambling, incarceration and similar subjects. However, not a little confusion has been created by the fact that different commentators use and label these categories in different and sometimes contradictory ways. Numerous debaters assert that the sets M and L each consisted mostly of elements or songs having a shared quality which the elements of the other set lacked. Usually, it is the L-type songs that are labelled 'rebetiko', whereas songs of the M type are given the epithet *laïkó* (popular, folk). On the other hand, there are several authors (e.g. Anoyanakis 1961; Papadimitriou 1961; Dragoumis 1983; Virvos 1996; Liavas 1996; Kounadis 1998; Hadjidakis 2002) who deny that set L was distinct from M, but view it as a subcategory thereof. In other words, they believe that low-life songs, albeit perhaps not accepted by everybody, are 'songs of the Greek people' nevertheless. No wonder this has provoked angry responses from members of the opposing camp, who find the equation of 'rebetiko' (which, in their opinion, is the song of pimps and potheads) with 'the Greek popular song' rather uncomplimentary for the latter.

If we adopt Franco Fabbri's typology of rules for genre classification, then it seems difficult, perhaps impossible, to define rebetiko according to formal, technical, behavioural, social, ideological or economic characteristics, as these are too variable, largely as a result of the rapid social, cultural and economic transformation of Greek society in the twentieth century. Instead, it seems that some of its *semiotic* components (Fabbri 1982, 56f.) – i.e. abstract concepts that are communicated (e.g. emotions, attitudes or social values) and dominant communicative functions (such as emotive, phatic or descriptive) could provide a somewhat more stable basis for definition. The characteristic 'emotive style' of rebetiko, for instance, has been convincingly described by journalist and essayist Petros Fotinos (1892–1958). In his sensitive portrait of a plebeian taverna during the years following the Second World War, Fotinos divides the music of the Greek people into two main types, the first of which is the traditional folk song of rural provenance. Apart from this, however:

> there is also another [type of] folk music, the drunken music of the *mánges*, of the old tavernas, music drenched with ouzo, with a certain Anatolian touch, with sounds from the harbours of Constantinople and Smyrna, as well as the nostalgic music of the prisons, full of pain and bravery. This second [type of] music is always surrounded by a hazy atmosphere of drunkenness, as the head begins to grow heavy and the eyes misty, taking on a beautifully ironic look. In this place, one couldn't make out those colourless petit-bourgeois types who always have something shabby and reserved about them. From one end to the other there was 'populace'. Coquettes knowing how to sing and paint the town red, hardworking young men, ordinarily handsome, with a slightly languid and tired beauty suggestive of Asia Minor. These places have, of course, nothing in common with the making up and the music of the famous tavernas in the Plaka district, which smell of retsina, are romantic and fond of old sentimentalities, of Almond Trees in Blossom [a song title]. Here everything is anti-romantic, violent and intense. It is passion that springs forth from the deep confusion of desire. And that's why they are so characteristically handsome: the drunken guys, with that exhausted beauty of intoxication which tends to render them immaterial. This is what makes so interesting, at times overwhelmingly charming, the women who applaud the sadness of the music and the indecencies of the lyrics. After the third glass, it was as if in this place we left our age with its machines and its propaganda, as if we went to a distant homeland which we had forgotten a little but where we had found our lost souls. (Fotinos 14 IX 1948)

Adjectives like 'passionate', 'sad', 'violent', 'ironic' and 'indecent' might express the essence of rebetiko (if such a thing exists) more accurately than any list of observable

facts, however well-documented, could. But despite the author's attempt to capture the 'anti-romantic' atmosphere of the scene, the nostalgic, even otherworldly, undertones of his account are unlikely to escape the notice of present-day readers. They remind us that the semiotic components of a generic term like 'rebetiko' are necessarily communicated in a language, verbal or otherwise, whose meaning partly depends upon the motives, intentions, habits, attitudes etc. of the person using it.

Hence it seems futile to search for a unique and invariable set of characteristics that is both sufficient and necessary for a song to be classified as 'rebetiko'. Each of the typical features – or, to adopt Nelson Goodman's (1976) more appropriate terminology, *symptoms* – of rebetiko may be found to varying degrees, for certain historical periods and in certain contexts, while neither the presence nor the absence of any of them is constitutive for the genre as a whole. It is reasonable to assume that in the case of ill-defined conceptual categories – and musical genres are among these – most individuals identify category membership of items, not by analysing them according to abstract rules, but by comparing them to familiar characteristic examples of the category and by taking contextual factors into account (see Medin and Schaffer 1978).

In the natural sciences, an analogous approach to classification is called *polythetic*. Unlike classical taxonomy, a polythetic arrangement 'places together organisms that have the greatest number of shared features, and no single feature is either essential to group membership or is sufficient to make an organism a member of the group' (Sokal and Sneath 1963, 14). An important implication of this approach is that there is no objective method by which one can reliably decide whether or not membership applies. Not only is there no definite set of features which would permit classification, it is also, as Needham (1975) has pointed out, sometimes quite impossible to determine whether a specific feature is definitely present or not. Polythetic 'definitions' are, to a certain extent, indefinite, vague and probabilistic, and the classes they designate are not mutually exclusive.

Those who wish to apply a quasi-polythetic approach to the study of musical genres should, however, not be content with naming frequently occurring symptoms or typical items which exemplify the genre. In addition, they would be well advised to look for genre-specific *core metaphors* that suggest (rather than define) membership of a wide variety of musical phenomena perhaps bearing little resemblance, if even that, to one another. In the present case, these metaphors generally have the form 'rebetiko is …' followed by a distinct concept such as 'the Greek blues' or, to take a less commonplace example, 'the soundtrack of the adventures of a nation' (Capossela 2014, 15). Asserting that both sides shared some basic commonalities, such images give rise to numerous metaphorical descriptions of rebetiko.

In the following chapters I will try to demonstrate that it is often exactly these highly adaptable core metaphors, rather than any more or less stable set of taxonomic criteria or archetypal songs, which guide native thinking about rebetiko. An assumption underlying the whole study is that the truly distinctive characteristics of the genre rebetiko are not simply inherent in the songs thus labelled, but are *ascribed* to them through verbal discourse which is often accompanied by gestures, audio-visual material and other forms of symbolic expression. More precisely, 'rebetiko' is an ambiguous term which may *describe* a song – either thematically ('this song is about low life') or formally ('this is a Greek urban popular song') or both – as well as *declare* (or suggest or promise, e.g. on record labels) that a song exemplifies this genre.

Summarizing all the above, I propose that instead of discarding the label 'rebetiko' as utterly subjective or even meaningless, we regard it as a quite abstract and polysemous *concept* that individuals (whether experts or laypersons) internalize under specific circumstances,

which each of them uses in a specific context and for a particular purpose. Concepts like 'rebetiko' seem to be best understood as interrelated and overlapping complexes of criteria, core metaphors and mental representations of archetypes which are constantly being negotiated and redefined and whose application is not based on 'rules' in the strict sense. They do not prescribe but, at best, influence human classification procedures, and they also serve to *de*scribe these procedures. Such concepts are, in Geertzian terms, both models *for* and *of* behaviour – they are continually adapted to the way (competent) individuals actually classify musical pieces, and therefore always retain a certain degree of ambiguity.

What we have to do, then, is to ask how the concept 'rebetiko' functions within the changing parameters that are set by personal dispositions, public discourses, socio-economic conditions, political ideologies, cultural traditions and so forth. Studying the debate on rebetiko in the Greek press – a medium combining adaptability to quick changes and polyphony of opinions with easy accessibility thanks to archives and data bases – seems a suitable approach to this problem.

The Greek Rebetiko Debate

Now that we have a rough idea of what is being 'collectively constructed' when people debate rebetiko, we can proceed to the question of how this construction is accomplished. I will again begin with a characteristic example. A few years ago, Greek record shops and music magazines advertised a new four-DVD set which on the back of its slipcase proudly claimed to contain the 'history of the rebetiko song from Homer up to Vamvakaris', packed into 'eight hours of delightful revelation of the secrets of the most important cultural creation [since the establishment] of the Greek state' (Ferris and Panayotou 2006). The main author of this publication, Kostas Ferris, is well known in Greece for being the maker of a very popular motion picture about the life of a rebetiko singer (*Rembetiko*, 1983). Once again it proves true, one might conclude, that 'myth and history intersect and interact wherever we search in the Mediterranean, and they are perpetually being interwoven with music and music-making' (Bohlman 1997).

It is not up to me to decide whether Homeric poetry was indeed a forerunner of rebetiko lyrics. For the time being, let us content ourselves with the observation that they are *considered* to be causally related – at least by the producers of the above audio-visual history. What can be said with certainty, however, is that the history of rebetiko did not end with the death of Markos Vamvakaris (1905–1972), the so-called 'patriarch of rebetiko' who is generally held to be the most characteristic and influential exponent of this type of music. Amateur music-making in the company of friends, often in conventional tavernas, is an important reason for the ongoing popularity of rebetiko in the age of music downloads. Elevated by many native commentators into an expression of resistance to the alienating effects of globalized mass entertainment, this 'timeless', profoundly 'Greek' and highly value-laden form of collective do-it-yourself entertainment today enjoys little short of cult status.

Consequently, rebetiko figures prominently in public discourses on Greek popular culture; and it is characteristic that songs labelled as 'rebetiko' are not only the subject, but also a part of these discourses. Advocates as well as opponents of the genre often quote – and, if need be, sometimes even invent (see Evangelidis 4 XII 1937) – song lyrics in order to support their arguments, thereby at times turning their contributions into a kind of meta-recital. The 'annotated anthologies' of rebetiko songs by the Cypriot writer Nearchos Georgiadis (e.g. 1996, 1999) are among the most characteristic examples of this discursive style.

But it is perhaps Markos Vamvakaris's autobiography (1978), bristling as it does with the verses of its protagonist, where the difference between narrative and performance becomes smaller than in any other rebetiko-related publication.

Musical presentations of rebetiko songs, on the other hand, are no less frequently accompanied by verbal comment (by presenters of live performances, radio or TV shows, by audience members, writers of liner notes etc.). Just how much talking about and making music can interpenetrate each other is illustrated by an incident I witnessed while performing with an amateur rebetiko group at a small music bar in Athens in late October 2005. We had just finished a lively *chasaposérviko* tune by Vamvakaris when one of the customers – a middle-aged man whom I knew to be the producer and frontman of several public television programmes about rebetiko – exclaimed this song was 'pure blues'. Evidently, he had touched on a contentious issue. Comparing rebetiko to the blues, another male customer retorted snappily, was an 'ideologically motivated' misrepresentation of the genre. I will not comment on this episode. Yet it indicates clearly enough that the rebetiko debate is actually held in various forums, the print media being only one of them.

In order to understand the meaning of the concept 'rebetiko', it is thus necessary to take account of symbolic expressions which produce meaning, not via language, but through arrangements of physical objects, sounds, gestures, illustrations etc. And even written contributions to the debate contain a good deal of ambiguity, allusion and tacit knowledge which is more characteristic of mythical-narrative thinking than of discursive reasoning. This suggests that the discourse on rebetiko has to be understood not simply as a sum of *texts*, but as a combination of oral, literal and performative *practices*. I would therefore go so far as to say that performing rebetiko songs is simply one particular way or 'format' in which statements about them can be put in circulation. In other words, sound progressions contribute to the debate as much as do verbal comments, since both convey information about how the genre rebetiko is conceived.

Put simply, the concept 'rebetiko' evolves through the interaction between performances of particular songs and other ways of making statements about them. But is it proper to give *one* name to that tangled web of (often contradictory) stereotypes, anecdotes, images, postulates, perceptions, opinions and connotations which has been thus created over the course of more than a century? How difficult it is to unambiguously assign the term 'rebetiko' to a specific type of music is very impressively demonstrated by the controversy in Greek newspapers and popular magazines which gathered momentum during the 1930s and continues, at varying levels of intensity, until today. Among the central areas of contention are, for instance, the historical periodization of the development of rebetiko, the question of whether it belongs to traditional folk music or commercial popular music, the etymology of the term 'rebetiko', and the ethical and cultural value of rebetiko as a 'music of the Greek people'. Not infrequently, these texts are written in polemical language that makes inconsistent use of terminology, argues between the lines and, sometimes, has strong political overtones.

With all this considered, I decided it was best to delineate the evolution of the concept 'rebetiko' by means of a systematic – i.e. rule-guided and thus verifiable – and qualitative content analysis of a selected sample of journalistic writings. By 'qualitative' is meant a hermeneutic approach to exploring texts that culminates in a theory derived inductively from the data. The resulting 'theory', as the term is used here, is an analytic, interpretative description of a limited set of texts in the shape of a complex network of categories which summarizes these texts and groups them according to various thematic aspects. This method has a double advantage. First, texts falling into the same category can be used

to complement and explain each other. Second, the system of categories itself reflects the thematic structure of the material and can help reveal its central concepts, subjects, distinctions, problems, lines of argument, schools of thought etc.[4]

In order to select a sample of what seemed to be the most characteristic and influential texts and to guarantee a minimum of representativeness in spite of the inevitable subjectivity of my method, I systematically evaluated a large number of articles covering the time span from the 1920s to the present according to the following five interdependent criteria:[5]

- *Relevance and substance* – Texts containing only a few rebetiko-related statements and themes (e.g. short letters or reviews) were not included in the sample, especially if similar statements or themes were already contained in other more substantial articles to which they were chronologically proximate.
- *Variety* – For the sake of variety of opinions and perspectives, only one complete article per author (no matter whether published as a whole or in parts) was chosen from each decade. Priority was given to contributions by individuals representing minorities within the journalistic profession, such as women or musicologists. In addition, at least eight texts per decade were included in the sample.
- *Relatedness* – Discussions involving several authors who expressed conflicting opinions on a common topic in consecutive issues of the same newspaper or magazine, were included in the sample in their entirety.
- *Prominence versus anonymity* – Contributions by prominent authors were prioritized, for they arguably have a stronger influence on public opinion than texts by unknown or anonymous writers.
- *Circulation* – Care was taken that the texts in the sample should address as broad a readership as possible. For this reason, some otherwise relevant articles were dropped on the grounds that they had been published in newspapers or magazines of limited circulation (e.g. regional dailies or student newspapers).

In the end, I had singled out 143 articles published between 1929 and 2002 for in-depth analysis. These articles had been written by 97 individuals, of whom 85 could be identified as men and 10 as women, the rest being anonymous authors. Quantitatively speaking, this

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[4] Well established in the social sciences (cf. Kelle 1994; Mayring 2003), qualitative content analysis has already proved capable of yielding fascinating insights into music-related discourses, notably in Karsten Mackensen's (2000) minute examination of the development of the conceptual category 'simplicity' in eighteenth-century treatises, essays, reviews and encyclopaedia entries on the aesthetics of music.

[5] I was fortunate enough to have at my disposal an invaluable tool for selecting a representative text sample: Kostas Vlisidis's (2002) extensive bibliography of rebetiko-related writings from the period 1873–2001. Out of its 2,396 entries, I took only those texts into account that had been written in the Greek language and published in newspapers or magazines in Greece. Books or articles in books thus remained outside the scope of my analysis, as did, for instance, Greek newspapers in other parts of the world. This formal selection criterion was introduced in order to obtain a sample space of manageable size which reflected common thought on rebetiko among a geographically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous population. This methodological decision resulted from my conviction that texts destined for consumption by a broad contemporary readership will reflect current usage of words better than the cream of scholarly publications which are much more strongly inspired by the ideal of timeless validity. (This has, however, not precluded me from consulting written sources which, by the above criteria, were excluded from the content analysis, if their significance compelled me to do so.)

sample is certainly just the tip of the iceberg. In terms of content, however, it should provide a representative cross-section of the rebetiko debate in the Greek press.

I classified the texts – according to formal, stylistic and functional criteria – into the following six categories:

1. articles expressing strong opinions and value judgements:
   a. polemics;
   b. interviews (which as a rule are polemical in tone, too, since most interviewers used the tactic of encouraging their partners, usually some prominent person, to comment on, criticize or evaluate something that was generally being disputed at the time);
2. articles informing about current trends or events:
   a. *reviews* of books, records, films, research etc.;
   b. *reports* on events, individuals or venues;
3. essays on a particular subject whose overall tone is rather neutral:
   a. *historical* essays;
   b. '*theoretical*' essays (essays that are not primarily concerned with the history of rebetiko, but view their subject from, say, a folkloristic, linguistic, musicological, sociological, anthropological or psychological perspective).

One can observe that these categories are roughly sorted by ascending objectivity. Polemics, interviews and, in no small measure, reviews usually present an *argument* for or against something on the basis of personal ideas and opinions; the main objective of reviews and reports, however, is to *inform* about something by presenting facts or details about it; while essays are basically written to *analyse* topics of general concern and achieve an objective assessment thereof. Table I.1 summarizes the results of the classification procedure.

Table I.1 Chronological distribution of journalistic writings on rebetiko

		1929	**1935**	**1945**	**1950**	**1955**	**1960**	**1965**	**1970**	**1975**	**1980**	**1985**	**1990**	**1995**	**2000**	**Total**
Subjective	Polemic	1	9	6	11	3	2	1	2	6	3	–	–	1	3	48
	Interview	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1	4	2	3	1	2	14
	Review	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	5	1	1	6	1	17
	Report	–	1	1	–	–	–	1	–	–	1	–	6	2	2	14
	Essay, historical	–	–	–	–	–	2	2	2	3	4	1	1	8	3	26
Objective	Essay, theoretical	1	–	–	1	1	2	–	1	1	3	2	2	9	1	24
	Total	2	10	7	12	4	6	4	6	14	20	6	13	27	12	143

Since my text sample was not randomly selected, the figures in Table I.1 should be treated with caution. Still, I believe they can tell us something about central trends in the wider debate around rebetiko. To begin with, the sampled articles are more often polemical than informative or analytical, especially during the first three decades and in the second half of the 1970s (the early changeover period after the fall of the military junta), when critical comments on rebetiko are still in the majority. Only since the mid-1980s is there a preponderance of pro-rebetiko polemics. The sample comprises 62 polemical articles in total, 29 of which express a negative attitude towards rebetiko, 23 a positive one. The remaining 10 articles could not be assigned to one side or the other because they contained arguments both for and against rebetiko.

Another important shift in perspective seems to have occurred around 1960, when debaters began to deal explicitly with the history of rebetiko. Presumably the awareness of rebetiko as a cultural product belonging to the past is connected with the revival movement which set in at about the same time. Fifteen years later, the revivalist activities had translated into enough books and reissues of older recordings on LP that reviews became a constituent element of the press discourse on rebetiko. (The fact that the interview, as a format, made its appearance in the 1970s, too, seems to point to changes in journalistic conventions rather than in thinking about rebetiko.)

The 1970s witnessed a whole series of lectures and publications intended to be at least preliminaries to 'a comprehensive scientific study' of rebetiko, as Tasos Schorelis claimed in the introduction to the first volume of his *Anthologia rebetica* (published in 1977). Schorelis's monumental work had been preceded by the first edition of Vamvakaris's autobiography and the foundation of the Athens-based Society for the Preservation and Study of Rebetiko Songs (both in 1973), by some musicological essays (Papaïoannou 1973; Dragoumis 1975; Xanthoudakis 1975), by two introductory works in the English language (Holst 1975; Butterworth and Schneider 1975) and by Stathis Damianakos's momentous *Sociology of Rebetiko* (2001, first published in 1976). At this time music historian Katy Romanou noticed a 'shift of the general interest in rebetiko towards its scientific study'. 'It's the first time in [the history of] Greek music', she wrote, 'that this kind of scholarly interest in a [particular] area originates in Greece and has not been imported from the West unlike the study of Byzantine music, folk song and […] ancient Greek music' (4 I 1976). This novel situation was seen as 'evidence that the younger generations feel intellectually much more independent of [Western] Europe than the older ones' (Romanou 4 I 1976). Towards the end of the decade, the first annotated bibliography of earlier writings on rebetiko (Christianopoulos 1979) and the much enlarged second edition of Elias Petropoulos's groundbreaking anthology *Rebetiko Songs* (1991, first published in 1968) saw the light of day.

The overall tendency of the sample, and by implication of the entire journalistic debate, is towards both a more *objective* style of writing and a more *positive* presentation of rebetiko. Yet it is interesting to note that the notion of impartial press coverage was never completely unknown to journalists writing about this type of music, as reports and theoretical essays (mostly folkloristic ones) were published quite regularly from the very beginning of the debate.

If rebetiko is – as we have seen – still a subject of considerable debate, then there must be something which makes it worthwhile for debaters to endlessly discuss this music, apart from the pleasure they might derive from sharing their ideas and experiences with others. The working hypothesis of this study is that the discourse upon rebetiko is a means of communicating and associating certain ideas that are of vital importance for the common understanding of what it means to belong to specific sound groups, especially to 'us Greeks'.

Beneath a turbulent surface of clashing theories and conflicting emotions flows a steady undertow of tacit assumptions which most disputants not only allow to go unchallenged, but which they may not even really be aware of. Let me call this subliminal current of elemental 'truths' the *mythology* of rebetiko. Let us further assume, with reference to Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 87–96), that this mythology is 'objectified' in the written, oral, musical, pictorial, bodily etc. discourse in such a way that those who partake in it are likely to agree, albeit unintentionally, with each other on specific perceptions and interpretations of, as well as appropriate behaviour within, an essentially polyvalent reality.

It is precisely these unspoken conceptual underpinnings of the Greek discourse on rebetiko the present study seeks to uncover. As a first step in this endeavour, I wish to suggest a model which shows how concepts like 'rebetiko' might fit into the broader organizational structure of the discourse about them (Figure I.1).

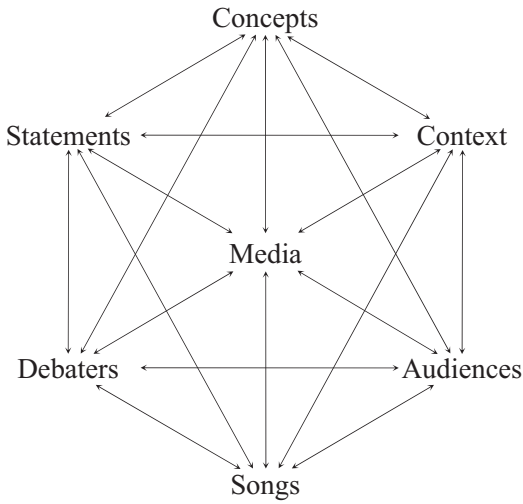

Figure I.1 Main analytical aspects on the rebetiko discourse

Summarizing the foregoing discussion, I define *concepts* briefly as mental representations of a complex of attributes by means of which certain events or objects – e.g. sequences of sung words – are identifiable as exemplifications of that concept. Concepts, in the sense I use the term, are not necessarily connected with something abstract. They are regarded as being collectively formed and negotiated, but individually acquired, identified and used. A larger set of interrelated concepts forms the conceptual framework within which rebetiko is discussed.

The discourse itself is made up of myriads of *statements*, by which is meant any expression that relates objects, events and concepts (or their symbolic representations) with each other using specific cultural practices. The term 'statement' is, in the context of this study, not limited to verbal utterances. Any expression in any *medium* (such as television, radio, cinema, commercial recordings, exhibitions, censorship laws or university lectures, not forgetting live music and dance) can count as a statement on rebetiko. Hence not all contributions to the discourse – i.e. complex messages consisting of several statements – are 'texts', not even in a metaphorical sense. Some of them include, or even entirely consist of,

performative statements (music, dance, bodily gestures, ritual practices). This suggests that the discourse might be better viewed not in the sense of Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology as a sum of texts, but as a grand, polyphonic *performance*, an interactive process to which each debater contributes in their own particular way.

The author of a statement is designated by the term *debater*, which underlines that the views of different authors are often in conflict with each other. Those who read, watch, hear or otherwise perceive an author's statements form his or her *audience*. It should, however, be noted that there is no clear division of sender–recipient roles, since in a debate every participant is both addressing and addressed by other participants. Furthermore, there might be ambiguities as regards both the authorship of statements – e.g. in the case of quotations or interviews – and the identity of their audiences. The extraordinary social mobility of rebetiko often makes it hard to distinguish between intended, assumed and actual audiences; and those who publicly discuss rebetiko come all too often from a different social background than both its producers and its consumers.

Apart from concepts, it is also objects and events that debaters connect through their statements. In an analysis of the rebetiko debate, the focus is naturally on *songs*, or rather on any kind of object-event (sung words, written lyrics, melodic motives, printed scores or simply song titles) which evokes the acquired mental representation or 'concept' of a particular song.

All of this takes place in a specific *context*. Admittedly, this is an umbrella term for a great variety of situational factors which are thought to affect the way statements are formulated and understood. One particularly interesting subset of the context is the intermediary zone between a text and what lies outside it, for which the literary theorist Gérard Genette coined the term *paratext*. The paratext consists of 'a heterogeneous group of practices and discourses of all kinds and dating from all periods', which are intended to influence the reading of a text and are 'characterized by an authorial intention and assumption of responsibility' (Genette 1997, 2f.). In the context of the rebetiko debate in the Greek press, the paratext of an article might include, among other things, its layout, the name of its author, the name and ideological orientation of the newspaper or magazine publishing it, the position of the article therein (only very important topics have a chance of making the front page), the title of the column or supplement in which it appears, headlines, subheadings, various forms of summary statements and abstracts, photographs, caricatures and their captions, perhaps the editorial, and last but not least, later texts by the same writer in which references to that article are made (cf. Frandsen 1992).

About this Study

The widespread feelings of frustration and disappointment evoked by the deep economic crisis Greek society is going through at the time of writing are only two among several indications that the era of the Greek national myth has come to a rather disillusioning end. The country can now look back on more than 40 years of peace, self-rule, political stability and relative prosperity – time enough for the oft-invoked genius of the Greek *ethnos* to reappear and work miracles. This, however, has so far not happened. Greece continues to lead, economically, intellectually and politically speaking, an existence on the margins of Europe, so there are not a few individuals who have grown suspicious of the time-honoured tale about the inherent superiority of Hellenism. Not surprisingly, then, throwing national myths and heroes into question has lately become a major concern of Greek scholarship