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UDK 78(495)
316.7(495)
DOI 10.5937/ZbAkU2614056D
Original scientific paper

Diverse Meanings of Greekness through (Pre-)Rebetiko Representations in Public Discourse[2]

Abstract: Rebetiko is commonly recognised as a Greek urban popular musical genre, yet shaped through the interplay among musical cultures associated with Turks, Italians, Jews, Armenians, Balkan peoples, and others. This study investigates how public discourses surrounding pre-rebetiko and rebetiko provided fertile ground for negotiating Greek identity from the late nineteenth century to the end of the interwar period. From a historical ethnomusicological perspective that moves beyond ethnocentric and hegemonic frameworks, I conduct a discourse analysis of (pre-)rebetikorep resentations articulated in the Greek-language press, particularly through music criticism and intellectual commentary. The analysis centres primarily on the voices of journalists, critics, and intellectuals rather than on those of performers, examining how *café aman* music, *amanes*, and the emergent rebetiko were discursively framed through dualisms such as East–West, tradition–modernity, urban–rural, and authenticity–decadence. Greek literati used (pre-)rebetiko to articulate competing conceptions of "proper" Greekness, variously configured in relation to perceived easternness, thereby nurturing the East–West dichotomy that structured their discourse. The debates – amid nationalist claims, the influx of Ottoman Greek refugees, the Greek–Turkish population exchange, and Metaxas-era censorship – reveal how rebetiko, alongside earlier musico-cultural formations, became a vehicle through which aesthetic, moral, socio-cultural, and political anxieties converged. Diverse, historically constructed meanings of Greekness that emerged through these ideological tensions, especially those associated with the East–West dichotomy, resonate in contemporary Greek discourse on music.

Keywords: (Pre-)Rebetiko, Greekness, East–West dualism, historical ethnomusicology, discourse analysis

Paper received on March 20, 2026
Paper accepted on August 5, 2026

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2 A preliminary version of this article was presented at the conference *The Birth of Contemporary Europe: World War I*, *Music and the Arts* (Athens, 2018). The study was substantially expanded and completed in 2026 with financial support from the *Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation*.

Introduction

Rebetiko is widely identified as an urban popular musical genre closely associated with Greek communities during the gramophone era and subsequently through various forms of revivalism. Yet its conceptualisation and periodisation have varied across academic and public discourse (see Anagnostou, 2018: 284–286; Delegos, 2024: 81–82), while its boundaries with pre-rebetiko culture remain porous. Nonetheless, their distinction is analytically useful: the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pertain to the pre-rebetiko context, whereas the main chronological frame for rebetiko itself lies in and around the interwar period. In this article, for analytical convenience, these two phases are captured under the single term (pre-)rebetiko.

Rebetiko generally falls within the category of Greek urban popular music, a discursive umbrella term that nevertheless embraces tunes and songs shaped through interplay with surrounding musical cultures associated with Turks, Italians, Jews, Armenians, Balkan peoples, and others (Delegos, 2024: 81–82). Accordingly, (pre-) rebetiko draws upon traditions connected to: a) major urban centres within the broader Greek area, alongside influences from rural soundscapes (for instance, repertoires in Athens influenced by the Aegean or Ionian islands); b) the Ottoman Empire (including Istanbul, Smyrna, and Salonika); c) locales in North Africa, particularly Egypt (Cairo, Alexandria, and Port Said); and d) the diaspora in the United States. In all these settings, Greek communities were musically active to varying degrees.

The development of rebetiko was significantly associated with materials and practices drawn from the broader Anatolian musico-cultural sphere, a process intensified through their deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in Greece amid the influx of Greek refugees from Asia Minor following the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and the compulsory population exchange formalised in 1923. These historical processes have informed narratives of Greek national identity, and (pre-)rebetiko – selectively framed as Eastern – has served as a vehicle for articulating ideological discourses across Greek modernity and into the present (Gauntlett, 2003: 248).

In this article, I investigate how discourses on (pre-)rebetiko constituted a contested arena for negotiating meanings of Greekness from the late nineteenth century to the interwar period (for related discussions, see Anagnostou, 2018; Gauntlett, 2003; Kokkonis, 2017: 97–131; Pappas, 1999; Pennanen, 1999: 10–16; Tragaki, 2007: 2–22; Vlisidis, 2004; Zaimakis, 2011). Drawing on a historical ethnomusicological approach (McCollum and Hebert, 2014) that seeks to move beyond ethnocentric and hegemonic frameworks, I conduct a discourse analysis of representations articulated in the Greek-language press, particularly through music criticism and intellectual commentary.

More specifically, I examine recurring discursive patterns, including descriptors, metaphors, evaluative language, classificatory labels, and binary oppositions, through which *café aman* music, *amanes*, and the emergent rebetiko were assigned aesthetic,

moral, socio-cultural, and political meanings, particularly in relation to their perceived associations with the East. Across the material, these patterns tend to crystallise around axes such as East–West, tradition–modernity, urban–rural, and authenticity–decadence, articulating competing notions of Greekness.

These materials are documented in publications by Hatzipantazis (1986), Liavas (2009), Panagiotou (1983: 34–37), and Vlisidis (2006), and were selected for their explicit engagement with (pre-)rebetiko and for the evaluative claims they make concerning musical origin, aesthetic and socio-cultural value, morality, politics, and national belonging. The article focuses primarily on the voices of journalists, critics, and intellectuals because it explores how normative representations of Greekness circulated in public discourse, with lived and musically performed experiences of Greek identity largely bracketed.[3] A statement reportedly attributed to a rebetiko composer is thus treated not as direct performer testimony but as a press-mediated representation.

Greek intellectuals employed pre-rebetiko and rebetiko cultures to articulate diverse understandings of what they regarded as proper Greekness, variously configuring it in relation to imagined Eastern affiliations and thereby reinforcing the East–West dipole that structured their discourse. Such ideologically driven positions often neglected or insufficiently engaged with aspects of musico-cultural amalgamation within contemporaneous Greek communities. In light of this, the analysis considers how these literati, as outsiders to (pre-)rebetiko and from socially and culturally hegemonic positions, represented the associated communities as quasi-'internal others' and mobilised these music cultures within public discourse as a vehicle for negotiating the appropriate constitution of Greek national identity. This phenomenon can be situated within broader processes of nation-state building and cultural boundary-making associated with modernity. In the Greek context, especially concerning rebetiko-related cultures, it was tied to the nationalisation of Ottoman popular musics (Pennanen, 2004), following the dissolution of a multi-ethnic empire wherein the long-standing co-existence and interplay of multiple ethnic groups had fostered forms of intercommunality, especially within the late Ottoman urban milieu (League, 2017: 33–40).

Vignette I: Pre-Rebetiko

The prehistory of rebetiko is partly linked to the multi-cultural café aman musical scene, a form of music café associated with the Greek world amid broader translocal musical exchanges within the Ottoman Empire (for café aman, see also Kokkonis, 2017: 97–131; Morris, 2018: 71–86; Pennanen, 2004).

3 For ethnographic approaches to lived and musically performed identities, see Stamatis (2011) on alternative Greekness in contemporary Athenian rebetiko performance, and League (2017) on relational Anatolian Greek identity in diaspora.

Hatzipantazis (1986: 25 n. 4, 67–69) notes that such venues emerged in Athens from the 1870s onwards, featuring a repertoire drawn from the musical traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean. The ensembles typically brought together musicians of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Greeks, Armenians, Turks, Jews, and others) from across the late Ottoman and wider Eastern Mediterranean worlds, including the Balkans and Egypt.

The *café-chantant* functioned as the counterpart to the café aman in Greece with European-influenced music. In this regard, both venues, the café aman and the café-chantant, came to express the East–West dipole according to the rhetoric of elite outsiders – more specifically, Greek literati and members of the upper urban classes of the period, who held direct access to the press. Expressions[4] such as "Eastern music cafés", "…the modernists, that is, the lovers of European music", "eastern melody", found in several newspaper articles (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 25 n. 4, 40, 43), reveal this ideological polarisation.

The amanes refers to a modal vocal improvisational form based on makams, the Greek counterpart of the Ottoman *gazel* (see also Pennanen, 2004: 10). During the 1870s, café aman music, with an emphasis on amanes, was favoured by Orthodox Church chantres, who opposed European music, whereas supporters of the European musical tendency took the opposite position. These competing tendencies came into conflict, each articulating a distinct meaning of Greekness.

On the one hand, supporting café aman music became equivalent to defending so-called Byzantine music and culture, and to advocating their integration into the national identity. Konstantinos Paparigopoulos (1815–1891), a notable Greek historian, was arguably among the proponents of this perspective (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 38).

On the other hand, in 1874, Ioannis Isidoridis Skelitsis (1819–1890) – a prominent intellectual and journalist of his time – reacted strongly against efforts to consolidate Byzantine music, characterising it as a barbaric amalgam of Judaic, Arabic, and Turkish borrowings and proposing its repudiation and replacement by European polyphonic melody. These views stem from a lecture delivered by Skilitsis at the *Varvakio School* in Athens in 1874, with related comments published in an accompanying article entitled "About Church Music" in the newspaper *Efimeris* (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 38 n.16).

Additionally, the newspaper *Efimeris* – one of the proponents of the European tendency in the press – linked café aman music to Arabic and Turkish musical instruments in an 1874 article (ibid., 36–37). Evidently, it was difficult for such commentators to accept that contemporary Greek music could bear an idiosyncratic connection with makam modality, even though a multitude of musical instruments within the local tradition, including the tambouras and various flutes such as the ney and kaval, were capable of producing microintervals and were used in makam-

4 All translations from Greek sources are my own.

based performance. In fact, they preferred the equal-tempered instruments and the corresponding European idiom, thereby assigning a European-oriented meaning to Greekness and nourishing, in a one-sided manner, the East–West dualism.

Thus, at this early stage, the debate was not only about musical preference but primarily about the symbolic positioning of Greekness between competing cultural orientations. Café aman and café-chantant functioned within the East–West binary as contrasting classificatory labels and discursive markers through which meanings of Greekness were aligned, respectively, with Byzantine musical continuity – perceived as Eastern – and European musical modernity.

On the same wavelength, in 1880, Alexandros Katakouzinos (1824–1892) – one of the directors of the Conservatoire of Athens – prematurely proclaimed the demise of amanes alongside the dawning of a form of church chant based on European polyphony (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 39–41; Liavas, 2009: 45–47). Moreover, he sought to glorify this development as a sign of modernity: on one level, he acknowledged the value of earlier popular music by recognising the importance of musical tradition; on another, his position reflected the tradition–modernity binary, leading to the celebration of European music as a dynamic innovation within Greek society. Nevertheless, in the years that followed, the "barbaric" and "nasal" amanes – in Katakouzinos's terms – continued to flourish for at least another decade. Thus, these evaluative descriptors cast amanes as a devalued remnant of an earlier musical tradition associated with cultural and aesthetic backwardness, while articulating a meaning of Greekness tied to notions of modernity and innovation within the broader Europeanist discursive climate of the period.

The decade of the 1880s signified important shifts in the perception of popular culture and tradition in Greece. A circle of literati cultivated a progressive tendency, with Nikos Politis (1852–1921) as one of its most prominent figures and the journal *Estia* as its intellectual base. Several of its members, such as Angelos Vlahos (1838–1920) and Yorgos Drosinis (1859–1951), pioneered this tendency through their passionate engagement with café aman music and popular culture in general (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 41–49).

Their approach can be understood as a form of internal orientalism:[5] café aman music was not treated solely as an external Eastern "other" but as a familiar element of Greek urban life, aestheticised through exoticising images that associated the East with sensuality, softness, and excess. Indicative phrases include (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 43, 47, 48–49): "Several times, I am touched by the eastern melody to the bottom of my heart" by Vlahos; "…that hedonistic, soft eastern melodies", "…all the secrets of the Asian palaces", and "…the lustful kisses of Uri" by Drosinis. Furthermore, "drawling oriental songs from Ioannina, Smyrna, Constantinople" is a characteristic verse from the poem *Anatoli* (meaning *East* in Greek), published in 1912 by the poet Kostis Palamas (1859–1943), who was likely inspired by the atmosphere of the 1880s (see also Gauntlett, 2003: 248–250). Such evaluative language did not merely praise easternness; it transformed

5 For internal orientalism as a representational form of cultural-political domination, formulated in relation to the Chinese context, see Schein (1997: 72–73).

it into an internal exotic object through which progressive literati could reimagine the popular as aesthetically valuable from a socially privileged, etic position.

From this point onwards, within the world of letters, the emerging tendency celebrated the popular as a positive cultural value, strengthening the Eastern pole of the East–West binary and creating the conditions for its integration into Greek national identity. During this period, café aman music, as a manifestation of easternness, came to carry strong connotations of progressivism and modernity. A key moment in bridging the gap between the European-leaning Greek urban class and the musical traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean occurred in 1883 with the arrival of an innovative Armenian opera troupe in Athens. Representative musical-theatrical works performed by the troupe included *Leplepitzis Hor-Hor Aga* (Figure 1), *Arif*, and *Zeimpekes* (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 49–50).

In effect, these works constituted a folkloristic construct: European-oriented music was "dressed" in Asian "costumes", occasionally accompanied by related musical instruments – such as santours/dulcimers and tambourines / defia – and performed in Turkish. This juxtaposition of Eastern- and Western-framed elements engendered an Easternising aesthetic that evoked an imagined Orient. Thus, the significance of the troupe's performances in Athens was largely discursive and representational rather than musically transformative: perceived Eastern signifiers were aestheticised, rendered publicly legible, and made more acceptable to European-leaning urban audiences. In this sense, the performances created the illusion of transcending the East–West dipole, with easternness expressed at the level of form and westernness at the level of content. However, they also contributed significantly to the subsequent influx of café aman musicians into Athenian nightlife during the following years (Hatzipantazis, 1986: 55).



Figure 1: Score covers from the opera *Leblepidji Hor-Hor Agha* (1880s) (Liavas, 2009: 54)

On the other hand, the tension between these competing tendencies persisted. On 25 September 1891, an article in the newspaper *Akropolis* vividly portrayed the negative perception of a café aman in Piraeus through expressions such as ”Piraeus is heading to the East…” and ”Oh, these eastern songs and dances! Vulgar to watch and even more so to listen to. A company of orientals from Smyrna… with their amanes…” (Liavas, 2009: 50–51).

The article shows how the aforementioned positive exoticisation of easternness coexisted with more explicitly hostile forms of internal orientalism. In this case, café aman songs and dances were not romanticised as picturesque popular culture; instead, through the pejorative descriptor “vulgar”, these performances were framed as aesthetically debased intrusions into the urban cultural and sonic landscape of Greek modernity. The performers themselves were simultaneously othered as “Orientals from Smyrna”, despite Smyrna’s close association with Greek communities during that period. With specific reference to amanes, this evaluative language devalued café aman performance in its entirety as both a visual display and, even more emphatically, an auditory experience.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, and especially after the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), which foreshadowed the outbreak of the Great War (1914–1918), national claims intensified. Rising nationalism contributed to the erosion of the empires’ multi-ethnic character and accelerated the consolidation of the modern nation-state system. In Greece, amanes once again became a central focus of ideological discourse. At the end of the so-called Greek National Schism (1914–1917) and only days before the formal entry of the Greek state into the Great War, the well-known author Zaharias Papantoniou (1877–1940) launched a judgmental and condescending attack on amanes in an article published in the newspaper *Empros* on 4 June 1917 (Kounadis, 2003: 273; Liavas, 2009: 237–238). In effect, from the privileged standpoint of the upper urban class, this intervention articulated a meaning of Greekness aligned with the imperatives of European belonging, highlighting the convergence of aesthetic, moral, class, and nationalist concerns.

The article was highly revealing in several respects. Papantoniou first acknowledged that amanes had infiltrated Greek popular tradition; nevertheless, he presented it as a potent popular expression articulated in an intensely Eastern manner – reminiscent of Arabic music – that had endured for nearly a century after the outbreak ofthe Greek War of Independence in 1821. Afterwards, while essentially recognising the positive valuation of rural folk culture promoted by contemporaneous folklore discourse, the author implicitly invoked a rural-urban binary by ironically questioning the musical expression of the “people of the cities”, especially the urban working class, thereby making their attachment to the Eastern musical idiom of amanes a principal target of his moralising rhetoric.

Here, it should be noted that folklore studies constituted a particularly influential academic discipline in Greece and across Europe during this period, providing an authoritative framework for a discourse that privileged rural traditions and celebrated them – effectively in homogenised and essentialised terms – as the highest expression of folk culture.[6] Moreover, the class dimension of Papantoniou's rhetoric is crucial: his critique targeted amanes not only as an Eastern musical idiom but also as a practice associated with urban popular entertainment and with the tastes, habits, and leisure spaces of the lower urban classes.

The author then juxtaposed a meaning of Greekness closely linked to Asia with one aligned with European belonging. Within this Europeanised conception of Greek identity, he articulated three parameters – "tastefulness", "decency", and "nationalism" – corresponding to aesthetics, morality, and politics, and situated them within the framework of European internationalism.

Moreover, Papantoniou emphasised the perceived danger posed by what he construed as a form of Turkishness – effectively equated with easternness – within the musical sphere of Greekness, additionally warning that " seven-tenths of the Greek working class are in Mekka when they go out" (Liavas, 2009: 237), thus metaphorically portraying working-class entertainment as culturally Eastern and alien to Europeanised Greekness. In the name of moral propriety, he urged the Greek authorities to impose taxes on what he sarcastically termed "Conservatoires of amanes" (Ωδεία του αμανέ) – phonographs, performers, instruments such as santours and violins, and even the popular shadow theatre of *Karagiozis* – in order to curb what he regarded as a Turkish-derived musical condition in Greece. Through this sarcastic and metaphorical classificatory label, Papantoniou cast the elements of this heterogeneous assemblage as agents in the reproduction of an undesirable musical culture. Furthermore, in a tirade, he demanded a ban on anything imported from Smyrna.

Finally, Papantoniou described this music as "passive", "barbaric", and infused with " inarticulate passion" (πάθος άναρθρον), which he presented as an expression of a "nomadic and fatalistic race" unable to articulate its suffering – discursive descriptors that cast amanes as embodying lethargy, cultural inferiority, and affective excess. In this sense, Papantoniou discursively racialised the genre, positioning it outside a Europeanised conception of Greekness. He then escalated his critique, declaring that the continued presence of amanes in Greece was not merely a matter of "racialism" or "tastefulness" but, above all, a matter of "public safety". Overall, his stance – predicated on moral, aesthetic, and political imperatives – constituted an ideological complex which, to a degree, drew upon earlier narratives, thereby illuminating both continuities and shifts in representations of pre-rebetiko music.

6 For broader discussions of the ideological role of folklore and related stereotypes in European nation-building, see Baycroft and Hopkin (2012).

Vignette II: Rebetiko

The interwar period, especially from the late 1920s onwards, represents the most emblematic phase of rebetiko. The much-discussed amanes entered its repertoire largely through the contribution of Ottoman Greeks from Anatolia, particularly in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922).



ΤΟ ΤΕΛΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΑΜΑΝΕ...

ΑΓΚΥΡΑ, 2 Νοεμβρίου. [Ἰδιαίτερον τηλεγράφημα]. — Κατόπιν τῆς διακηρύξεως τοῦ προέδρου τῆς δημοκρατίας ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἐξευρωπαϊσθῇ ἡ τουρκικὴ μουσική, ἀπηγορεύθη ἀπὸ σήμερον ἡ διαβίβασις διὰ τοῦ ραδιοσταθμοῦ Ἀγκύρας ἀνατολικῆς μουσικῆς—ἀμανέδων.

Figure 2: "The end of the amanes...", newspaper *Eleftheron Vima*, 3 November, 1934.

In November 1934, under the striking title "The end of the amanes…", the Greek press reported that, following the Turkish president's declaration that Turkish music had to be Europeanised, broadcasts of what it termed "Eastern music-amanes" had been prohibited on Ankara Radio (Figure 2). In practice, this referred to the removal of *alaturka* music from Turkish radio programmes, introduced after Kemal Atatürk's call for musical reform (Tekelioğlu, 2001: 105). *Alaturka* was a broad stylistic category conventionally contrasted with *alafranga*, that is, a more European-oriented musical aesthetic (see O'Connell, 2013). Therefore, the measure was neither a nationwide legal ban nor a prohibition specifically targeting the amanes as a distinct genre, but a restriction on radio broadcasting. Nevertheless, the amanes as the close counterpart of the Ottoman-Turkish gazel clearly belonged to the broader alaturka aesthetic.

This news triggered a public debate within the Greek context among renowned literary figures. Once again, the amanes was placed in the spotlight, as the Turkish radio restriction, although presented as a ban, created an exceptional opportunity for Greek intellectuals to voice reservation, anxiety, or hostility towards this genre. The debate contributed to the articulation of a wide array of meanings regarding the appropriate configuration of Greekness.

An article on amanes by the chronicler Pavlos Palaiologou (1895–1984), published in the newspaper *Athinaika Nea* on 7 November 1934, served to bring a multitude of viewpoints to the fore in the same publication (Liavas, 2009: 240–242; Panagiotou, 1983: 34–37; Vlisidis, 2004: 17); all of these standpoints essentially sought to promote their respective conceptions of the proper Greekness.

Palaiologou first acknowledged the positive implications for Greek–Turkish relations of the commercial success of amanes and other East-oriented melodies in the Greek market; however, he expressed concern about whether this trend could benefit the musical development of Greek society (Panagiotou, 1983: 35). Notably, he sought to define the parameters of this phenomenon without entirely repudiating it, characterising the amanes as the "last refugee" (τελευταίος πρόσφυξ) and as one of the last "exchangeable" (ανταλλάξιμος) musical forms, despite the genre's alleged "death" in what he regarded as its homeland, Turkey. Although Palaiologou appeared to frame the matter as a form of acculturation – treating the incorporation of the amanes into 'popular Greekness' as unavoidable – he ultimately conveyed a largely sceptical view of its contribution to Greek society.

Adopting a more explicitly polemical stance on 10 November 1934, the musicologist and critic Sofia Spanoudi (1879–1952) – drawing on arguments hitherto advanced against the amanes and so-called Eastern music – emphasised the notion of "musical corruption" (μουσική διαφθορά) as detrimental to Greeks in terms of aesthetics, morality, and national identity. Further evidence of the breadth of her critique is that Spanoudi discerned the same corrosive impact on Greek society in vaudeville shows and even in popular novels and magazines. In her opinion, such music was "vulgar" (χυδαία), "base" (γαιώδη), and fell into the lowest category of the "carnal musical rhyparography" (σαρκική μουσική ρυπαρογραφία). In a spirit of conservative elitism and a broader repudiation of any musical form associated with non-Greek easternness, she even proposed a campaign for the purification of music through the imposition of heavy taxation and fines on records containing amanes and music perceived as Asian in origin. Thus, Spanoudi's purificationist understanding of Greekness could not accommodate such corruptive elements tied to perceived easternness, whether connoting Turkishness, non-Europeanism, or merely decadence.

Conversely, on 9 November 1934, Manolis Kalomiris (1883–1962) (Panagiotou, 1983: 35–36) – the founder of the Greek National School of Music – had drawn attention to the nostalgia felt by Greeks for Eastern music, a sentiment he believed confirmed their 'popular roots.' Additionally, he claimed that rural folk music (Δημοτική μουσική) was routinely neglected, thereby implicitly reaffirming, once again, the urban–rural dichotomy.

Confronted with the dilemma of whether to replace the amanes with the *foxtrot*,[7] Kalomiris firmly opted for the former, invoking the Eastern soul of the amanes as an expression of authentic easternness, while construing the Black origins of the foxtrot as a marker of inferiority. More generally, he opposed the composers of westernised Greek popular music, especially those associated with the so-called *light* song (ελαφρύ τραγούδι), a repertoire which largely imitated European melodic models (for light song, see Liavas, 2009: 145–203).

Kalomiris further claimed that, in fact, Kemal demanded the development of the amanes through its purification, following the example of countries such as Russia or Hungary, which had shaped their national music in a similar way, without forfeiting the essential musical character and colour of their culture. He also argued that Eastern music may have been influenced by both ancient Greek and Byzantine traditions, while conceding that the latter might also have absorbed elements from the East. This position indicates that, for him, so-called Eastern music was not in itself regarded as part of Greek musical identity. Nevertheless, he advocated the further refinement and cultivation of Eastern music within a Greek national context: "Oriental music has many aspects with potential for development" (Panagiotou, 1983: 35).

Another of Kalomiris's contributions to this ideologically charged debate was to foreground nostalgia as a key to understanding what he conceived in essentialist terms as a unified Greek attitude. In this regard, his reasoning appeared, in a sense, progressive in that it sought to move beyond a naive acceptance–rejection dualism surrounding Eastern music. Thus, in a distinctly dialectical manner, he articulated a different conception of Greekness in which the cultivation of Eastern music served as a means of shifting from outright rejection towards an intermediate position of conditional inclusion.

This logic of selective cultivation aligned with the tenets of the Greek National School and with nineteenth-century Romantic European national-school models, whereby traditional materials were incorporated into art music as markers of nationhood (Sakallieros, 2023: 40; Siopsi, 2011: 18; Tsetsos, 2011: 85). Finally, from a hegemonic European/Western standpoint, his argument exhibited a form of elitism and exoticism – even conveying a sense of racialism – since those he situated outside European culture – whether Easterners or Black people – appeared to him as "barbaric".

The renowned musicologist Konstantinos Psahos (1869–1949), in the same issue (Panagiotou, 1983: 36), endeavoured to reframe the debate by suggesting that amanes had a distinctly ancient Greek origin, deriving specifically from *skolia*. The *skolion* was a symptotic drinking-song rooted in non-elite cultural traditions in ancient Greece (see Jones, 2014). In this respect, amanes could be integrated into his own conception of Greekness, provided that its performance would not lapse into parody, as he believed was the case with most contemporary gramophone recordings. Thus, irrespective of the

7 A popular dance-music form in fashion in the USA during that period.

reliability of his claim, Psahos foregrounded authenticity as a condition for the genre's inclusion within Greekness.

Konstantinos Sfakianakis (1890–1946), one of the composers of the Greek National School, viewed the amanes as an ancient Eastern legacy – more precisely, as a cultural product stemming from the ancient Phoenicians. According to his argument, the amanes had infiltrated Greece thousands of years earlier, and, on that basis, he argued that it would be difficult for the law to halt its spread in modern Greece.

The two aforementioned viewpoints mobilised antiquity as a strategy of legitimisation, treating the amanes as a legacy of an ancient past – whether from ancient Greece or from Phoenicia – thus enabling its conditional inclusion within their respective conceptions of Greekness. Therefore, in both cases, a different understanding of Greekness, one that embraced a veiled form of easternness, appeared acceptable insofar as antiquity rendered the genre culturally legitimate: either by Hellenising its origin or by recasting its easternness as an essentialised ancient legacy. In conjunction with Kalomiris's stance on a possible Byzantine influence on Eastern music, these positions suggest that the narrative of cultural continuity (Ancient Greece → Byzantium → Modern Greece)[8] had, to a significant extent, nourished this public ideological discourse.

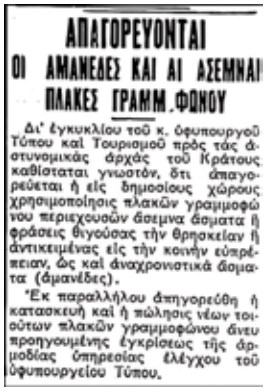
The famous conductor Dimitris Mitropoulos (1896–1960) – a few years before settling in the USA – also took part in this newspaper debate on 11 November 1934 (Panagiotou, 1983: 36). He declared the inevitable presence of the amanes in the Greek context, attributing it to Greece's belonging to the East. Equal in value to jazz, the amanes was, in Mitropoulos's view, an authentic expression of easternness and an inescapable aspect of Greekness, a position that extended beyond the prevailing ideological boundaries of the period. In other words, by interpreting the phenomenon in a deterministic manner, he did not so much transcend the East–West dipole as reposition Greekness within this binary by aligning it with the East.

To sum up, the debate articulated three broad discursive tendencies: purificationist exclusion, represented most clearly by Spanoudi; conditional inclusion, evident in Palaiologou's reluctant incorporation and Kalomiris's selective cultivation; and legitimation, which assumed either a historicist form, situating the genre within ancient Greek or ancient Eastern genealogies, as in Psahos and Sfakianakis, or a deterministic geocultural form, grounding its acceptance in Greece's Eastern belonging, as in Mitropoulos. Through these positions, the broader field of Eastern-framed popular music, with the amanes at its centre, became a symbolic site where competing meanings of Greekness were negotiated, particularly around the question of whether – and on what terms – such music could be accommodated within what was construed as legitimate Greek culture.

8 For this narrative, see Pennanen, 1999: 11, 2004: 14; for its construction within the field of archaeology, see Hamilakis, 2007.

In his concluding article, Palaiologou referred to Kalomiris, Psahos, Sfakianakis, and Mitropoulos as belonging to what he termed "the network of the advocates of the amanes" (Panagiotou, 1983: 36). His interpretation appears reductive, as these figures took positions ranging from marked wariness to qualified acceptance of the amanes and so-called Eastern music, while the grounds for and extent of their acceptance varied considerably; Spanoudi was the only rejectionist voice.

George A. Panagiotou (1983: 34) was the journalist who brought all these articles to light approximately five decades later in *Ntefi*, a music magazine associated with the cultural climate of Greece's post-1974 restoration of democracy (the *Metapolitefsi*) and the rebetiko revival. He seemed to interpret this debate primarily as a clear defence of the amanes, as indicated by the title: "Unexpected support for it [amanes] in 1934 by Mitropoulos, Psahos, Kalomiris and Sfakianakis." This position can be understood in light of the socio-cultural circumstances surrounding the amanes and the broader field of music framed as Eastern, including rebetiko, in early-1980s Greece. A perceived need for legitimisation and integration of these musico-cultural products within contemporary meanings of Greekness could provide a plausible explanation. The first half of the 1980s saw a series of reforms in the context of the so-called *allagi* (*change*), undertaken by *PaSoK*, the ruling political party (Pennanen, 1999: 152; 2004: 14).



ΑΠΑΓΟΡΕΥΟΝΤΑΙ
ΟΙ ΑΜΑΝΕΔΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΙ ΑΣΕΜΝΑΙ
ΠΛΑΚΕΣ ΓΡΑΜΜ. ΦΩΝΟΥ

Δι' ἐγκυκλίου τοῦ κ. ὑφυπουργοῦ Τύπου καὶ Τουρισμοῦ πρὸς τὰς ἀστυνομικὰς ἀρχὰς τοῦ Κράτους καθίσταται γνωστόν, ὅτι ἀπαγορεύεται ἡ εἰς δημοσίους χώρους χρησιμοποίησις πλακῶν γραμμοφώνου περιεχουσῶν ἄσεμνα ἄσματα ἢ φράσεις θιγούσας τὴν θρησκείαν ἢ ἀντικειμένας εἰς τὴν κοινὴν εὐπρέπειαν, ὡς καὶ ἀναχρονιστικὰ ἄσματα (ἀμανέδες).

Ἐκ παραλλήλου ἀπηγορεύθη ἡ κατασκευὴ καὶ ἡ πώλησις νέων τοιούτων πλακῶν γραμμοφώνου ἄνευ προηγουμένης ἐγκρίσεως τῆς ἁρμοδίας ὑπηρεσίας ἐλέγχου τοῦ ὑφυπουργείου Τύπου.

Figure 3: "Amanes and the indecent gramophone records are forbidden," newspaper *Ethnos*, 29 November 1937 (Rebetiko Forum)

During Metaxas's regime (1936–1941), the condemnatory tendency towards the amanes and a significant part of rebetiko intensified and was legitimised through the imposition of censorship (Figure 3; see also Pennanen, 2003). The signifiers of easternness in musical expression (e.g. arrangements featuring the oud, kanun, and Constantinopolitan lyre/kemençe) and those of illegality in lyrics (e.g. hashish and prison

songs) fell within the scope of penal law and came under the strict control of the regime. A plethora of articles advocated, clearly and without any hesitation, the purification of Greek music and the repudiation of any form of easternness. Makams, makam-oriented modes such as *dromoi* (see Delegos, 2024: 97), and microintervals were to be avoided in compositions of urban popular music, but comparable modal and intervallic features remained acceptable in so-called Byzantine music, that is, Greek Orthodox ecclesiastical music as practised from the Ottoman period onwards. This distinction was evidently ideological rather than strictly musical: such features were legitimised and characterised as national when coded as Byzantine, but rejected as Eastern when encountered in makam-based urban popular music (cf. Vlisidis, 2004: 26). The contemporaneous political cartoon below is highly representative of this ideological distinction (Figure 4):



Figure 4: "Misunderstanding", newspaper *Proia*, 7 December 1937 (Rebetiko Forum)

Subsequently, a large part of rebetiko was relegated to the sphere of low symbolic capital, and only controlled and censored music could be incorporated into the 'pure national music' promoted by Metaxas'sprimary ideological vision, the *Third Greek Civilisation,* a project guided by the *Hellenic Idea*. This project envisaged the continuation and combination of the two preceding civilisations that the regime construed as Greek – Ancient Greece and Byzantium – while contemporary European civilisation was also viewed as a successor to Ancient Greece (Pennanen, 2003: 104–105). This ideology lay within the broader narrative of historical and cultural continuity (see fn.8) and articulated a meaning of Greekness as a purified national identity defined against the perceived lyrical illegality and musical easternness of rebetiko, while simultaneously integrating Byzantine music within the national framework.

In 1937, a laconic yet substantial statement purportedly attributed to the rebetiko composer and bouzouki performer Ioannis Papaioannou (1914–1972) appeared in the press. Since the statement is preserved through a journalist's account rather than as a directly documented statement or interview, it is treated here as a press-mediated attribution, not as unmediated performer testimony. In particular, the source is an article in the Piraeus newspaper *Tharros* by a journalist writing under the initials G. V-s (Γ. Β-ς) (Vlisidis, 2006: 68–69). According to the journalist, Papaioannou characterised his first recorded song, *Faliriotissa* (1937)[9] – a notable commercial success at the time – as "European-rebetiko" (ευρωπαϊκορεμπέτικο). In an earlier article on Papaioannou (ibid.: 63–64), the same journalist further noted that a number of the composer's songs "approach the kantada [style]".

The recording seems to have marked the emergence of the bouzouki-based *kantada*[10] in rebetiko. In general, this style flourished from 1937 onwards and was closely associated with the pronounced westernising tendencies in the cultural policies implemented by Metaxas's regime (Pennanen, 1999: 103). As such, pieces like Papaioannou's song, with its two-voice polyphony (see Delegos, 2021: 348–349) – the so-called *primo-secondo* in Greek – served, whether consciously or not, as musical symbols of a desired westernised Greekness articulated through the relevant journalistic and intellectual discourse.

In view of the above, the statement ascribed to Papaioannou contributed indirectly to the aforementioned meaning of Greekness. In a sense, the press portrayal presented the composer as approaching rebetiko in a more Europeanised manner, implying practices such as two-voice polyphony and pointing to a new tendency within the genre that nourished the Western pole of the typical East–West dipole in Greek public discourse. Thus, through the neologism "European-rebetiko", this press-mediated attribution articulated a Europeanised perspective of Greekness.

Conclusion

This article shows how representations of pre-rebetiko and rebetiko within Greek public discourse – from debates on the amanes and café aman repertoires to the emergence of rebetiko – became central to negotiating diverse meanings of Greekness. Through the voices of journalists, critics and intellectuals, and through a press-mediated attribution to a rebetiko composer, these musics were discursively mobilised to articulate ideological dichotomies such as East–West, tradition–modernity, urban–rural, and authenticity–decadence; the East–West dipole functioned as the primary framework for defining Greek cultural belonging. By focusing on public representations rather than on

9 For the recording, see Fakirisa, 2021.

10 For kantada, see Pennanen, 1999: 58–59.

musical texts alone, the discourse analysis reveals how such meanings of Greekness were articulated through descriptors, evaluative language, classificatory labels, metaphors, and binary oppositions.

Expressing aesthetic, moral, socio-cultural, and political anxieties, these discourses positioned (pre-)rebetiko as a symbolic arena wherein meanings of Greekness were variously configured in relation to imagined Eastern affiliations, while simultaneously revealing the discursive vacillation of Greek cultural identity between Europeanising aspirations and perceived Eastern cultural belonging. In this sense, the ideological tensions surrounding (pre-)rebetiko reflected broader nation-building dynamics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The recurrence of historically constructed meanings of Greekness in contemporary discussions of Greek musical culture, particularly through the East–West dichotomy, suggests continuing resonance and highlights the ongoing relevance of viewing (pre-)rebetiko as a fertile ground on which Greek identity continues to be negotiated and contested.

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Različita značenja grčkosti kroz prikaze (pred)rebetika u javnom diskursu

Apstrakt: Rebetiko se najčešće prepoznaje kao grčki urbani popularni muzički žanr, iako je oblikovan kroz međudelovanje muzičkih tradicija povezanih s Turcima, Italijanima, Jevrejima, Jermenima, balkanskim i drugim narodima. Ova studija istražuje na koji su način diskursi o predrebetiko i rebetiko žanrovima postali plodno tlo za oblikovanje grčkog identiteta od kraja 19. veka do međuratnog perioda. Iz perspektive istorijske etnomuzikologije, koja prevazilazi etnocentrične i hegemonijske okvire, analiziram načine na koje se (pred)rebetiko prikazuje u štampi na grčkom jeziku, naročito u muzičkoj kritici i komentarima intelektualaca. Analiza je prvenstveno usmerena na stavove novinara, kritičara i intelektualaca, a ne izvođača, i ispituje kako su *café aman* muzika, *amanes* i rebetiko u nastajanju bili sagledavani kroz dualizme kao što su Istok–Zapad, tradicija–modernost, urbano–ruralno i autentičnost–dekadencija. Grčki intelektualci su koristili (pred)rebetiko da izraze suprotstavljena shvatanja „prave" grčkosti, koja su na različite načine određivali u odnosu na ono što su doživljavali kao istočnjačko, čime su dodatno učvršćivali dihotomiju Istok–Zapad na kojoj se zasnivao njihov diskurs. Ove rasprave, vođene u kontekstu nacionalističkih težnji, priliva grčkih izbeglica iz Osmanskog carstva, razmene stanovništva između Grčke i Turske i cenzure u Metaksasovo doba, otkrivaju kako je rebetiko, zajedno s ranijim muzičko-kulturnim pojavama, postao sredstvo ukrštanja estetskih, moralnih, socio-kulturnih i političkih strepnji. Različita, istorijski konstruisana značenja grčkosti koja su proistekla iz ovih kulturnih napetosti i danas nastavljaju da prožimaju grčki diskurs.

Ključne reči: (pred)rebetiko, grčkost, dihotomija Istok–Zapad, istorijska etnomuzikologija, analiza diskursa.