

## **‘Ala Turka’ National and Ethnic Music and dance representations in YouTube**

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**Abstract:** the new technologies have changed dramatically human society, culture and communication. New phenomena appear and the new reality is a challenge on many levels. The mass expansion of the Internet, since the early 1990s, has brought new circumstances at the economic, social, and cultural level, as well as new forms of behaviour and expression. Primary aim of the present research is to contribute to the study of the central subject of the present volume, namely the relation between folk cultures in Greece and Turkey. The choice is not accidental. The national discourses on both sides and the representations of folk culture in the two neighbouring countries appear to be rather fluid and contradictory. Sometimes they project a sense of cultural affinity and proximity, while other times they are developed around a rigid and highly confrontational rhetoric. Certainly, however, this picture depends on the coincidence of cultural and historical circumstances each time. Reasonably, this deliberation raises further questions concerning the role of technology in shaping new forms of communication between ethnic and national discourses, individual and collective convictions about the familiar and the neighboring folk culture. For this reason, we examine the new phenomenon that appears through the transmission, broadcasting, commentary, and production on YouTube of amateur videos whose basic subject is folk performing arts (music and dance). And furthermore, through the complex procedures identified in the framework of YouTube: **a.** what are the new dimensions taken on by Greek and Turkish music and dance? **b.** and, in a more general framework.

**Keywords:** Greek folk music, Greek folk dance, Turkish folk music, Foklore, digital folkore, youtube

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### **Introduction**

#### **a. Folklore and Internet**

It is a commonly held assumption that the new technologies in particular have changed dramatically human society, culture and communication. New phenomena appear and the new reality is a challenge on many levels. The mass expansion of the Internet, since the early 1990s, has brought new circumstances at the economic, social and cultural level, as well as new forms of behaviour and expression. Various disciplines, such as Anthropology, Sociology and Communication Studies, responded early to the challenge of the new technological culture and all its associated manifestations (Blank:3). With very few exceptions (Baym 1993, Dorst 1990, Howard 1997, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 1996, Roush 1997), Folklore seems to be reluctant to get involved in the issue (Blank op. cit). This seems strange, considering that the leading American folklorist Alan Dundes points out, from early on, that technology does not threaten folklore with extermination but is an essential factor in its development, an exciting source of inspiration for producing forms of folk culture (Dundes 1980: 17). Possibly, the folklorists’ ‘negligence’ to include the Internet in their research interests is due to Folklore’s ‘inherent’ tendency to deal with vanishing cultures and traditions, and in general with the past and with things old (Blank op. cit.:4). The reasons may be sought also in Folklore’s low degree of participation in the wider interdisciplinary dialogue with other related social sciences and humanities on the phenomenon of the Internet (Blank op cit.). Of course, the abstract characteristics of the Internet themselves also provoke hesitancy among folklorists<sup>1</sup>.

Essentially, on the other side of the Atlantic, the picture only began to change in 2007, with the publication of the special electronic issue of *Folklore Forum* (vol. 37, no. 1), by graduate students at the University of Indiana, which is devoted to the relation between Folklore and the Internet. A very important contribution in this sector is the recently published collective volume *Folklore and the Internet. Vernacular Expression in a Digital World*, edited by Trevor J. Blank. This book opens new avenues for the study of folklore phenomena in the age of the World Wide Web. The authors of the individual chapters, as well as other folklorists, concur with Dundes, who argues that folk culture remains alive in the contemporary world, which

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#### **<sup>1</sup>Endnotes**

The situation in Greek Folklore is similar. What is encouraging is that some – very few – articles on folk culture have begun to appear also on the Internet. See Michail (2009) and Meraklis (2010).

fact is due in part to the increase in transmission via e-mail and the Internet (2005:406). It is no coincidence that from the initial stages of the Internet various aspects of folk culture (jokes, anecdotes<sup>2</sup>, fairytales, narratives, folk performing arts) constitute its 'raw material'. A new trend appears, which accords folk culture an important place in the Internet and communication via this, and which is clearly identifiable just as in the 'real' world (Blank op. cit.:2).

One basic concept for American, and not only, Folklore is that of communication. For this reason, one basic theoretical problem that arises is the satisfactory definition of the concept of communication in the framework of the Internet. In Blank's view (Blank op. cit.:5), McClelland simplifies the concept of folk culture, which he describes "communicative behavior whose primary characteristics . . . are that . . . it doesn't 'belong' to an individual or group . . . and in the modern context therefore transcends issues of intellectual property; and [that] . . . it is transmitted spontaneously, from one individual (or group of individuals) to another under certain conditions, frequently without regard for remuneration or return benefit. As it is transmitted, it often undergoes modification, according to the inclination of the retransmitter" (2000, 184).<sup>3</sup> For Ben-Amos too, the concept of communication has particular weight, since he defines the folk culture as an action that takes place at the moment of a communication event (1971:10), and notes that this is an 'artistic communication between small groups' (cf. Blank op. cit.:6). Blank (op. cit.) considers that this definition by Ben-Amos, as well as the analogous one by Oring (1998:335), who says that folk culture 'is about people – individuals and communities – and their aesthetic expression', are exceptionally useful and important. Nonetheless, he notes perceptively (Blank op. cit.) that: 'A reliance on *aesthetics* seems to place a stronger emphasis on tangibility as a measurement of what constitutes folklore than the terms *communication* and *transmission* might allow. Furthermore, it leaves room for prejudice—what one person may find beautiful or important conversely may seem ugly or frivolous to another. This is problematic'. Thus, Blank, identifying the limitations set by the aforesaid theoretical positions for studying folk culture in the framework of the Internet, proceeds to his own synthesis. In his view, 'folklore should be the outward expression of creativity—in myriad forms and interactions—by individuals and their communities. (Blank op. cit.). The aforesaid framing is the theoretical starting point for negotiating the subject in the present article.

One major challenge of Folklore, and of the social sciences generally<sup>4</sup>, is to investigate the appearance, projection, processing, creation, transmission and broadcasting of forms and manifestations of the performing arts (music, dance) via the Internet, such as: blogs, websites, e-mails and, most recently, the so-called social networks, such as facebook, twitter, myspace, et al. One such Internet platform is YouTube, with which we shall deal below. This new technological site is distinguished by ambivalent, abstract and vague dimensions, which also require further processing. For this reason, certain additional theoretical positions follow.

## **b. Folklore and YouTube**

YouTube was founded in 2005 by three young employees working on the commercial webpage of the PayPal company. It was so successful that it was bought by Google in 2006 for the sum of 1.65 billion dollars (Burgess & Green:I). Its innovation lies in the fact that a user, through a relatively simple<sup>5</sup> procedure, can upload a short-length video and share it with other users<sup>6</sup>. Some of the features that have made YouTube so popular are:

1. Ordinary visitors, not registered users, of YouTube can watch and download the videos.
2. Registered users of YouTube can create their own personal channel, on which they upload their own videos and interact with other registered users. Additionally, they enjoy certain other possibilities, such as:
  - a) registering on the channel whatever user they wish, sending him/her a 'friendship' request and communicating with him/her by personal message.
  - b) rating the videos by choosing 'Like'.

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<sup>2</sup> See Avdikos (1999), for the role of technological media in spreading and revitalizing anecdotes.

<sup>3</sup> For the enhancement of the concept of communication and its relation with folk culture, the contribution of Richard Bauman(1992) is very important.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bilalis (2000)

<sup>5</sup> This observation concerns 'electronically educated', that is initiates into the new technologies, to a greater or lesser degree. This observation sparks off the discussion on the parity participation and democraticness of the Internet.

<sup>6</sup> The article will focus on the uploading and creation of videos by amateur users (user created) of Youtube and not on videos origination from television, cinema, the music industry. For more on this distinction see the chapter 'The two YouTubes' in Burgess & Green: 41-47)

- c) posting a written comment on a user's videos. The comments appear below the video and are accessible to all users. The user who has uploaded a video also has the possibility of deleting a comment because of its content.
  - d) inserting a video in a separate file and defining it as 'favorite'.
  - e) attaching and reloading the relevant link of one video to another Internet space (facebook, blog, etc.)(hypertext)
3. Below the video, various quantitative statistical data appear, such as the total number of viewings, their geographical distribution and the age profile of visitors to it.

A first conclusion that emerges from the above is that YouTube users are an assemblage of people with peculiar traits. In the opinion of Rheingold (1993), the absence of physical presence does not cancel YouTube's function as a field of constituting virtual (or potential, according to others) communities. He notes: 'the virtual communities are social congregations that arise from the Internet, when several people continue to take part in these public discussions for a long interval, with a sufficient human feeling, to create webs of personal relations in cyberspace' (Rheingold 1993:5). Taking this line of thought, Rheingold approaches the virtual communities from a folklore perspective, since he has no hesitation in declaring that the virtual communities: 'perform the functions of the traditional community ... they are a folk site which anyone can visit to have a friendly discussion, to obtain information on a problem, to disagree on politics, to interact with other people who would otherwise remain strangers' (Rheingold 1993 in Jones 1997:40). This interactive and dynamic process between its community of users gives YouTube a sense of participatoriness and collectiveness. According to Meraklis, collectivity is basic criterion for contemporary folklore phenomena since it enhances a new form of popularity (Meraklis 1992: 147). Avdikos, influenced by contemporary American folklore and interdisciplinary discourse, has, unlike Meraklis, no qualms in defining this technological culture as popular culture, and does not place his study based on a sterile opposition between the two poles of the dyad folk/popular folk culture (2009:316-333), and certainly beyond the dichotomy rural/urban folk culture. This clarification is important if we consider that popular folk culture is involved directly in or even identified with mass culture, capitalism, and consumerism. In the new context, Avdikos contends that 'popularity is expressed now in the process of use – when this is not an ongoing folk creation. It is not only the creation which renders the popularity' (2009 op. cit.:363).

Things become complicated when we refer to the practices developed by users of YouTube, as well as by the nature of the medium and the consequent frame of action this sets. We should not forget that the logo of YouTube, which has changed<sup>7</sup> in recent years, is 'broadcast yourself'. A direct summons to participation and self-action, and a latent invitation to active individual expression. Considering Blank's definition cited above, the question that arises is: Is there folk creation on YouTube or only consumption of cultural products? In my opinion, in the specific case, we could argue that a hybrid form of creativity is detected, which is clearly in continuous dialogue with the consumerist dimension of YouTube but is not limited only to the use. I believe this opinion is reinforced if we bear in mind that the amateur users of YouTube do not simply reproduce material originating from other media (cinema, television) but, through a multilevel and multifocal process, they synthesize, create and produce their own videos, using material (photographs, video, music, text) already existing in other electronic – and not – sources or from their own archive. All this material is (re)produced, commented on and rated thousands of times by other users, both on YouTube and in other Internet sites and social networks. This led the scholars who have studied YouTube, Burgess and Green, to the conviction that: 'on YouTube aesthetic values, cultural forms and creative arts are normalized through the collective activities and the judgements of the social network. Forming an informal and emergent "artistic world" specifically on YouTube' (Burgess & Green op. cit. :61).

This 'artistic world', beyond everything else, is articulated directly also with the consumerist dimension of YouTube. Its users 'aestheticize', share, publicize, publish, narrate, and communicate their cultural experiences, as well as their experiences as consumers (Burgess & Green: 48). In order to describe all this contradictory setting, Hartley (2008) introduces the term redaction<sup>8</sup>, which derives from the merging of the terms reduction and action, and refers to the production of new material through the procedure of processing/publishing already existing material (Hartley 2008:112). It would be rash for one to 'downgrade' the total of the above heteroclitics and practices ('uploading', producing a video, commenting, (re)commenting and rating its content) to the general category of use and consumption. Of course, the boundaries between folk/popular and production/consumption are blurred and vague and move between amateur production and

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<sup>7</sup> The initial one was 'your digital video repository'.

<sup>8</sup> Some time ago, Alvin Toffler (1970) tried to describe this situation, which is difficult to understand, by coining the neologisms prosumer, which derives from the terms producer and consumer.

creative consumption (Burgess & Green: 14). This viewpoint allows the partial freeing from the ‘depenalizing’ conceptualization of consumerism, which ‘should not necessarily be seen as the end point of the economic chain of production but as a dynamic field of innovation’ (Burgess & Green op. cit.:12). Dorst’s folklore view enhances also the historical dimension of the phenomenon: ‘The electronic inscription and reproduction of folklore forms merely epitomizes and makes especially visible the wholesale transformation of social and material relations that characterizes our historical moment (Dorst 1990: 183). It is commonly acknowledged that a very large number of videos whose subject is music, but also dance, circulates, is produced and is reproduced on YouTube. It is not fortuitous that these videos are the most popular and the most widely diffused. Important researchers in the domain of cultural studies consider that music<sup>9</sup> has a central role in the construction of post-modern individual and social identities (Frith 1996:110-11). Grossberg (1996,89) notes that there are no fully constituted, separate and discreet identities. He denies too the existence of authentic and model identities, which are based on a universal common origin or experience (op. cit.). Furthermore, he contends that identity is always a temporary and unstable result of relations that determine identities through differences. Stuart Hall defines identity as a structured representation (1991:21), a ‘production’ which is always evolving, is never completed and is always constituted through representation (Hall 1990:222). In line with the last observation, we can consider that, beyond the fact that dance and music constitute the cultural identity, they are, concurrently also the representation of this. Thus, through music and dance we have the opportunity of investigating issues concerning the relations between individuals and social groups, as well as the creative practices developed in the framework of YouTube. These practices are the ways and the fields in which users, producers and commentators articulate their various conceptions, and how these are ‘realized’, that is understood and become real (Cowan 1998:23).

Primary aim of the present research is to contribute to the study of the central subject of the present volume, namely the relation between folk cultures in Greece and Turkey. The choice is not accidental. The national discourses on both sides and the representations of folk culture in the two neighbouring countries appear to be rather fluid and contradictory. Sometimes they project a sense of cultural affinity and proximity, while other times they are developed around a rigid and highly confrontational rhetoric. Certainly, however, this picture depends on the coincidence of cultural and historical circumstances each time. Reasonably, this deliberation raises further questions concerning the role of technology in shaping new forms of communication between ethnic and national discourses, individual and collective convictions about the familiar and the neighboring folk culture. For this reason, we examine the new phenomenon that appears through the transmission, broadcasting, commentary, and production on YouTube of amateur videos whose basic subject is folk performing arts (music and dance). And furthermore, through the complex procedures identified in the framework of YouTube:

- a. what are the new dimensions taken on by Greek and Turkish music and dance?
- b. and, in a more general framework, what are the representations that are projected for the Greek and the Turkish folk culture, and what are the relations between them?

The theoretical deliberation presented above runs through the analysis of the two ethnographic examples that follow, namely two videos on YouTube. The first video is associated with music and the second with dance. The basic methodological choice was folklore and anthropological fieldwork. A maze of methodological and epistemological problems arises here, but these shall not concern us in the present study. I shall mention some issues in passing. The main issue of cyberethnography is the absence of physical communication, as well as the vagueries of the research field (Olwig και Hastrup 1997:3). Denise Carter, who studies the Internet, says that ‘cyberethnography is similar to conventional ethnography because the four main moral obligations of dealing with human subject research are the same: the principle of non-maleficence, the protection of anonymity, the confidentiality of data, and the obtaining of informed consent (Carter 2005:152 cited in Blank 2009:10). The specific ethnographic research commenced in December 2010 and is in progress. It is worth stressing that it was carried out entirely via electronic media of communication. The interviews, discussions and communication in general were conducted by telephone, by exchanging e-mails and, in real time, via the electronic platform skype<sup>10</sup>. Last. For a fuller picture of the special methodological and ethnographic convention that YouTube<sup>11</sup> shapes, I registered on YouTube, using a pseudonym, and have my own channel.

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<sup>9</sup> It is no commonplace to say that music and dance, as performative arts, display many affinities. For the purpose of this article, the positions formulated on music echo those on dance, and vice-versa.

<sup>10</sup> Beyond every convention, I wish to thank sincerely my two informants-users of YouTube for their help, contribution and enthusiasm during the course of this particular ethnographic project.

<sup>11</sup> An original and innovative ethnographic of YouTube is that by Michael Wesch <http://www.YouTube/DigitalEthnography> (Michael Wesch).

### 1. assault 84. Pop star ala Turka: Saleas and Hüsni

The first video<sup>12</sup> we deal with is of the joint appearance of two leading folk musicians and virtuosos on the clarinet (*klarino*): the Greek Vassilis Saleas and the Turk Hüsni Senlendirici. The specific collaboration of the two musicians took place in the framework of the popular Turkish television programme on Star channel, 'Popstar ala tourka'<sup>13</sup>, in which the competitors are accompanied by a large orchestra and perform in front of a live audience. The programme also hosts as guest stars well-known Turkish artists (musicians and singers), such as Halil Karadumanan, the trans-sexual Bülent Ersoy<sup>14</sup>, Ibrahim Tatlıses and others.

The video was uploaded by the user assault84<sup>15</sup> in July 2009, who titled it 'Vassilis Saleas & Hüsni Şenlendirici ~ Müzik Ziyafeti'. The term *ziyafeti* is familiar in both Greece and Turkey and has more or less the same meaning: making merry (*glendi*), eating and drinking, a meal enjoyed in an atmosphere of conviviality and in most cases accompanied by music and dance. The user assault84 was born in Germany, of Turkish immigrant parents, and lives there permanently. He is twenty-one years old and is studying meteorology in Hamburg, away from his family. Right from the outset, he declared to me and projected his particular ethnic identity, though without perceiving it as a concept that comes into conflict with his corresponding national identity as a Turk.

*'I'm not a "real" Turk<sup>16</sup>. I'm a Circassian. Historically, our ancestors escaped from the Russians and migrated to Turkey. But don't think that because I'm a Circassian I'm not a Turk. I always think of myself as a young Turk with Circassian roots, who was born and lives in Germany.'*

Whereas assault 84's narration concerns his ethnic and national identity, gradually the interest focuses on issues relating to folk culture. This narrative practice does not seem to be fortuitous, since in the informant's view the reference to the value and importance of folk culture comes as a self-evident and 'natural' consequence of the previous discussion on identity.

*'For the Circassians music and the folk culture<sup>17</sup> are exceptionally important, my dear friend. Before I came to Hamburg I was going for many years to a Circassian cultural association. We are all Circassians from Turkey but it is very important for us to keep our own culture alive. First and foremost, this meant learning our language, learning our traditional music and dance, and generally learning the norms of behaviour (for example: how to behave in front of old people).'*

The flow and the constitution of assault84's narratives *in toto* project the relationship between folk culture and identity almost as an equation. Somewhere here we are able to detect also certain of the motives which led assault84 to become actively involved with 'uploading' and creating music videos on YouTube. This fact is of nodal significance for him, as it is a personal emotional expression which simultaneously gives form and content to his ethnic and national identity.

*'As I told you, each one must act responsibly on issues regarding his culture. Through YouTube we share these lovely videos with more people and my ultimate aim is to show the whole world the greatness of the music of my country of origin. And I always hope that through this music I shall touch the hearts of some people: if not of all, at least those of the Turks.'*

As he himself admits, the strange thing is that he encountered Turkish music quite by chance. Not only did he know nothing about the music of his country of origin, but he also almost loathed it. Things changed dramatically from the moment he began watching the program 'Popstar Alaturka'. Prior to that, his musical preferences were pop melodies, slow ballads and in general what assault84 defines as American music. It is worth noting that this music program on Turkish television prompted assault84 to apply himself to improving his knowledge of Turkish, which he hardly spoke until then. From that point onward, he has been involved systematically with YouTube, creating his own channel, on which he uploads numerous videos with Turkish music. Some of these are reproductions of television shows, video clips and generally appearances of well-

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=R49oMvasvd0>

<sup>13</sup> At various times this programme has had different names, such as Popstar Türkiye, Türkstar, Popstar Alaturka.

<sup>14</sup> For the specific artist and for the anthropological approach generally between gender and music see Panopoulos 2007.

<sup>15</sup> As the user himself informed me, he chose the pseudonym assault84 for two reasons. First, it is inspired by the homonymous Oscar-winning Dutch film. Second, because he wanted to present himself as older than his actual age. Research on the criteria on which Internet users choose their pseudonyms has shown that the numerical part is related to important dates, such as date of birth, date of first meeting someone, date of marriage, etc. See Giannakopoulos (2005:203-208).

<sup>16</sup> For the constitution of the concept of Turk and of Turkish identity in the post-Kemal period see Avdikos (2009:126-148). It is certain that in the frame of YouTube, assault84's discourse on his ethnic and national identity is based on new data which the specific technotopio sets.

<sup>17</sup> He uses the term folklore

known Turkish artists in the mass media. There is, however, another side to this process, which displays a greater degree of inspiration and creativity. This is the active involvement of assault84, as well as of many other YouTube users, with creating and synthesizing personal videos. The thread pulling this activity of assault84 is the lyrics of the songs. So, through a laborious procedure, he makes his own videos, through which he tries to render and to express the words of a song, based both on the music and the images he chooses to synthesize. In general, we observe that assault84's channel has many visitors and receives many praising comments. And assault84 is anything but indifferent to this. The reception of his work by the community of YouTube users (re)vitalizes his motive and (re)supplies his creativity, making him feel particularly proud of this activity of his.

He himself includes the video of the joint musical appearance of Saleas and Hüsni among the high-spots of his work, both for the excellent artistic level of this music performance and for the great appeal it had on YouTube. This is evident in the video's statistical data, since, until the time of writing this paper, it had been viewed some 122,000 times. Also, it has a very high rating from YouTube users, with 95 positive votes and only 5 negatives, while the total of comments is 66. As was expected, most users who saw the video were from Greece and Turkey, as well as from countries with a high number of immigrants from these two countries, such as Germany, United States of America and Australia. Assault84 feels extremely happy and proud of this video because it reveals a peculiar dynamic of the music phenomenon, which goes beyond geographical borders, overrides prejudices on both sides and, in the end, gives to music and folk culture in general a far wider perspective than that which national and ethnic ideologies propose. There were also comments that were more or less scathing and extreme, some of which assault84 deleted. Even so, the overwhelming majority of comments was very positive and enhanced a cultural familiarity between the folk cultures of the neighbouring countries, while at the same time they were distinguished by a critical stance towards the problems that national politics create.

*'Speaking of pride ... The video of Vassilis Saleas with Hüsni Senlendirici is probably the one for which users honoured me most. The fact that many Greeks and Turks congratulated me was very important for me. Truly, I am infuriated when people assume that there is an ancient animosity between Greece and Turkey. In this case I am ready to pull down the whole world, because I believe that there is a strong fraternity between the two peoples ... Although there are some who insulted one another, in the end humanity won and for me this is the great glory.'*

It is interesting to look briefly at the musicians who appear in the video. Vassilis Saleas was born in Mesolongi, Greece, in 1958<sup>18</sup>. A year later his family moved to Athens, seeking a better life. His father Nikolas and his uncle Vassilis were his first teachers on the clarinet. At the age of eleven, he appeared in a club in Patras and at fourteen he recorded his first singles disc (45 rpm). In his long career he has worked with top Greek composers, such as Mikis Theodorakis, Vangelis Papathanasiou, Stamatis Spanoudakis, Dionysis Savvopoulos and Mimis Plessas. In these collaborations Saleas did not limit himself to interpreting traditional melodies but experimented with contemporary compositions and improvisations, trying and testing the inexhaustible possibilities of the clarinet. He has earned many gold discs and has appeared in prestigious and capacious venues: the Athens Concert Hall, the Odeum of Herodes Atticus, the ancient theatres of Epidauros, Delphi, Kassandra in Chalkidiki, ancient Philippi, the Lycabettus theatre and the Roman Odeum of Patras. His superb interpretational skills and virtuosity have established him as one of the best-known Greek soloists and his fame has spread far beyond the borders of Greece. Saleas is particularly esteemed in Turkey, which he has visited often in recent years, playing on popular television shows and festivals, in collaboration with Turkish colleagues.

Hüsni Şenlendirici was born in Pergamon in 1976<sup>19</sup>. He too comes from a family of musicians, but his musical training differs from that of Saleas. Whereas Saleas learnt music through the family milieu and personal exposure, Hüsni, at the age of twelve was already attending classes at the Turkish State Music Conservatory in the Istanbul Technical University. He has collaborated with many artists performing Turkish music and has his own band, which is called Laço Tayfa. With this band, Hüsni has experimented in various musical idioms, mainly of the Balkans but also jazz. He has a rich discography to his credit, outstanding in which is his partnership with the well-known American group the Brooklyn Funk Essentials.

Both musicians are of Roma/gypsy origin and characteristic of their personal career in music is their ability to play in many different situations. On the one hand, they appear as 'traditional' musicians at weddings, feasts and other musical occasions that are the object of study by Folklore. Furthermore, what singles them out is their ability to play with admirable fullness the musical form known in both Greece and Turkey as *ala turca*<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.facebook.com/VassilisSaleas?sk=info#!/VassilisSaleas?sk=info> και [http://www.cricos.gr/saleas\\_bio.htm](http://www.cricos.gr/saleas_bio.htm)

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hüsni-Şenlendirici>

<sup>20</sup> In a strict musicological framework, the term *ala turca* refers to a mode of performance, which is based on serial scales and the *makam* system of classical Turkish music. In direct relation to the term *ala franga*, which

On the other hand, they become 'sophisticated' and are transformed into ethnic musicians, through a complicated process of their collaboration with well-known composers of Western music and their indulgence and wandering in new musical forms (Balkan, jazz, etc.), which are listened to by a much bigger audience and are a profitable investment for record companies specialized in so-called ethnic and world music. Obviously, they move comfortably between the two aspects of folk culture, the folk and the popular.

This fact is enhanced too by the melodies the two musicians choose to play, with no pause between them, on the specific Turkish television show. Initially they play, in dialogue, an improvisation in free rhythm, what is known in both Greece and Turkey as *taksim*. They then move on to the theme of Mikis Theodorakis's well-known tune «δακρυσμένα μάτια» (tearful eyes) and conclude with a dynamic and rhythmic *cifteteli*.

At stake here is the effect of the music on the users, which in the end leads to the overcoming – always in the framework of YouTube – of the borders and frontiers that national ideologies impose, mainly on issues of folk culture<sup>21</sup>. We realize that, despite the impersonal and consumerist character of YouTube, the music performance keeps certain crucial elements. That is, even in the case of the reproduction of a music performance in a technotopia such as YouTube, a non-place (Augé 1995), the glory of the music (the aura, as Benjamin calls it) is not removed. It may change form, content and meaning, but certainly it has an acute effect at an emotional level, an extremely important fact. Last, it should not go amiss that references to the Rom/gypsy ethnic origin of the instrument-players are nil. Saleas plays as a Greek and Hüsnü as a Turk.

## 2. romeikos2. Turcophone Cappadocians

The second case we shall consider is the video entitled 'Cappadocia Agirnas Kasik Karsilamas Larissa 88 - Dance Traditions of the Greeks of Anatolia 4'<sup>22</sup>. The video was uploaded by the user romeikos2 in June 2009, its showings number 8,600 and it is most popular in Greece and Turkey. Presented here is a group of villagers from Askites in Rhodopi, dancing on the Conference on Dance, organized by the International Organization of Folk Art and held in Larisa in 1988<sup>23</sup>. The members of this community have a particular ethnic identity, since they are Turcophone refugees from the village of Agirnas in the district of Kayseri in Cappadocia, and at the conference they sang in Turkish and danced two dances: the *koutalia* and the *karsilamas*<sup>24</sup>.

As in the case of the music video discussed above, here too most of the users who have seen, downloaded or commented on it were from Greece and Turkey, and their rating was equally high, with 25 positive votes and only one negative. The picture from users' comments is similar. There are, of course, extreme nationalistic

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correspondingly implies a European provenance and stylistic rendering, they constitute an antithetic pair which in each case has diverse and heterogeneous historical, ideological and symbolic roots and ramifications (cf. Kokkonis 2010). With whatever dangers this entails, we could say that today the term *ala turka* describes a musical form which, for a broad spectrum of its creators, performers, listeners, admirers, managers and consumers, is distinguished by and/or identified frequently with a 'free' and intensely emotional musical performance.

<sup>21</sup> For the case of the Balkans see Avdikos (2010).

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=wKLjgLh4D08>

<sup>23</sup> At this point it would, I think, be pertinent to note that the aforesaid conference was, at least in its initial phase, a forum that brought together various trends in the study of dance: from the scientific study of the social and historical background of dance, the study of movement per se to the use of dance as a product of cultural management. One important action of the conference, apart from the oral presentations and discussions, was the appearance of dance groups of inhabitants of various villages in Greece.

<sup>24</sup> It is meaningful here, I think, to cite my personal experience of the dance phenomenon among the Cappadocians settled in the area of Komotini. In the late 1980s, as a student, I was member of the dance group of the 'Basil the Great' Association of Cappadocians in the Prefecture of Rhodopi. Several members of the association's administrative committee and dance group originated from Askites. In this particular period, for obvious historical reasons, the presentation and performance of Cappadocian dances in the area of Komotini and of Thrace generally was accompanied by embarrassment, skepticism and doubt, mainly concerning the degree of their Greekness at the level of movement, music and costume. So, in most cases the dances were presented 'mute', without the accompaniment of song. The performance in Laris is probably the first, at local and supra-local scale, presentation on stage of the dances and the songs of Akites in their mother tongue (Turkish). This is a highly significant fact, since these particular dances were looked down on and ridiculed and characterized by many as non-Greek but Turkish. This situation has certainly not changed completely even today. Nonetheless, performances of dances of Cappadocia, on stage, television and now the Internet have constituted a new frame of reference in which vies on the concept of the Greekness of the dances are far removed from the stereotypes of the past.

comments on both sides. However, the majority of comments show an open-minded, humanistic and dynamic dimension of the folk culture of the two neighbouring countries and specifically of dance. The reference to their dance gives some users the opportunity to express, through a singular narrative discourse, their own experiences relating to their family origin, their traditions, their fate as refugees and, in the end, to recognize a deep cultural affinity between the two peoples, derivative of a long historical and social process. In a nutshell, they turn against a sterile and nationalistic view of the folk culture, which in the end removes the essence and the value of the folklore phenomena, such as dance, since it encases it in an impervious bipolarism: white/black, mine/yours.

Of great interest are the relevant – and in each case similar to the above – positions of the user romeikos2, who uploaded the specific video and has his own channel. First of all, his personal story and origin is of symbolic and ideological significance. Romeikos2, like his parents, was born and raised in the USA. His paternal grandparents emigrated to America from Italy in the early twentieth century. Correspondingly, his maternal grandparents originated from Saranda Ekklesies and Epivates, in Eastern Thrace. Indeed, his mother's mother had worked as a schoolteacher in Constantinople. Romeikos2's multicultural roots and influences are the axis around which he builds his personal viewpoint of dance and folk culture in general. Remarkably frank and telling is his answer to my question as to why he chose the specific username.

*'first because the term romeikos, romios, romiosyni is historical and covers a wide range of nationalities, such as: the (former) non-Greek-speaking Vlachs, the Arvanites [of Albanian origin], the Gagavus, the Karamanlis, the Haikorums, peoples of Slav origin, and others. Second, because the Romios (Rum) is referred to in the Ottoman period, during which aspects of Modern Greek culture were shaped. Last, because I am of Italian and Greek origin, that is a Romaios on both sides.'*

Romeikos2 studied history but has been working as a teacher of Greek traditional dances for many years. He is one of the best-known and most competent dance teachers in the whole of North America, but also very well known in Greece too for the recordings he has made all over the country. Since childhood, within the immediate milieu of family and relatives, he has been in contact with Greek dances, particularly those of Constantinople and Cappadocia. In the late 1960s he came to Greece for six months, in order to study Greek culture and history. There he got to know the Greek American Ted Petrides, who was teaching Greek dance and music in the same programme. Petrides encouraged his students to concentrate on and research the dances of one region. Romeikos2 decided to focus on the dances of Cappadocia. His research brought him into contact with the Farassiot refugees living in Athens and at Platy in Imathia. He conducted many interviews and made recordings of dances. He stresses that he quickly realized that there were profound kinetic, stylistic and musicological differences between the dance at the 'source' and the corresponding performance of Farassiot dances on stage by the Dora Stratou company.

In his opinion, even today the dances of Cappadocia and Greek dances generally suffer from the prejudices and practices of dance teachers and dance troupes. Furthermore, he notes that this situation has distanced the dance from its original form at a kinetic, stylistic and musical level, as well as at an emotional one. 'Dance troupes dance without soul', as he puts it. This was his basic motive for uploading on YouTube videos from his archive, which in his opinion record a 'correct' dance performance. In other words, he brings back to the fore a critical issue that preoccupies those who study dance and folk culture generally: that of authenticity. Obviously, this inquiry is dictated also by the user's professional status. However, the very nature of the electronic medium of projecting and performing dance, as well as its fluidity as a cultural form, leads us to confront these issues more attentively.

And I proceed by asking a series of questions: How authentic is the performance of the authentic Cappadocian dancers in the framework of a conference in a theatrical space? How authentic does the same performance appear, videoed and uploaded on YouTube? To what degree do the YouTube users who listen to, watch and comment on the specific video participate in and, in the end, shape the concept of authenticity?<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> For a further and thorough discussion of the concept of authenticity see Bendix (1997).

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I think that, once again, Benjamin (2007) is pertinent, since he considers that basic precondition for the concept of authenticity is the presence of the original. What is the original in this particular case? Will it be defined in historical, social, cultural and, in the case of YouTube, technological terms? Benjamin most perceptively illuminates this aspect of the problem by arguing that: technical reproduction displaces the authority of the original and removes the reproduced object (dance) from the territory of its jurisdiction. And he continues, precisely because authenticity cannot be reproduced, the appearance of specific techniques of reproduction (such as YouTube, I add) provides the means for the differentiation of the levels of authenticity. Or, according to Meraklis, 'every historical moment has its own authenticity, because life is continually flowing, continually changing'.

The dance phenomenon is identified and appears today as 'tradition' in a host of social and cultural domains: in local communities, in dance troupes, in management agents, in academic and educational organizations, and, what interests us today, on the Internet as a cultural form with diverse dimensions. It covers needs of expression, creativity, entertainment, information, social inclusion and who knows how many others. Despite their inherent differences, these two 'traditions' do not move independently of each other but, very often, are intertwined and intersect.

### Epilogue

The expression *ala turka* in the title of this study is a representation through which an attempt is made, in a poetic manner, to raise its basic issues. On the one hand, it refers to a form of musical performance known and loved in both Greece and Turkey. On the other, apart from its classificatory content, it has ambiguous and multidimensional symbolic and ideological ramifications. These are detected in the two videos, which are the ethnographic material of the research.

Notwithstanding the individual differences between the two videos, we observe certain affinities, which are summarized as follows:

- a. In general terms, both users are of Turkish (assault84) and Greek (romeikos2) national origin (and not only), but do not live within the boundaries of the corresponding nation states. At the same time, they do not face as a problem their inclusion also in a particular ethnic group. The users' basic motive is communication with a larger collectivity, through which they will have the opportunity of airing their views and feelings and giving their own interpretation of the music and dance, as well as of determining their relation with the cultural identity. Their involvement with YouTube facilitates their fulfillment of this desire, through the creative practice of 'uploading' and producing videos. Levis-Strauss's concept of bricolage comes to mind. The users, relying on music and dance, build a peculiar form of 'digital do it yourself', which is determined as one outcome of a compromise between the structure of the toolkit (videos) and the structure of the design (YouTube) (Levis-Strauss 1962:14). The creative actions of the two users and the relations that develop in the framework of YouTube transcend the boundaries of national states and constitute a new type of cultural nationality/citizenship' (Hermes 2005:4, Urrichio 2004:148). This is facilitated also by the absence of interpersonal communication, as well as by the security that the anonymity and concealed identity of the users offers. By extension, we would say that the concept of identity on YouTube acquires new form and content. Essentially, the practices and the views that users promote through their videos are transformed from personal positions and opinions into political and cultural questions (Lange 2007c). Some researchers see the technology as an opportunity for enriching public discourse, mainly on uncomfortable, unpleasant, and difficult issues (such as national and ethnic identity), which would be difficult to express via other forms and methods of communication (Lange op. cit.)
- b. The result of the interactive process is the forging of a conception that does not attribute homogeneous and static characteristics to music, dance, and folk culture, but historical, dynamic and fluid categories. They determine a space without bounds, they are games without borders (Frith 1996:125). They test the durability and the permeability of the borders (Papakostas 2008), which are repositioned in relation to the different reference points (Hall 1990:227). Similar is the picture cultivated around the concept of identity. For the two specific YouTube users, the ethnic and the national identity are not a 'frozen' monolithic concept but a construction that is founded in history. Specifically in the case of Greece and Turkey, the concept of identity has suffered from national and supra-national policies, and has been trapped in prejudices and stereotypes (For more see Avdikos 2009).
- c. If the above are true, then we can conclude that the users' positions and attitudes on folk culture and identity are at odds with the corresponding national and nationalistic rhetorics. Is this a non-conscious practice of cultural resistance 'from below'? Stuart Hall notes that popular culture is one of the fields of consensus with and resistance to the dominant culture (Hall 1981:239). The question remains open, but it begs us to re-examine the concept of social construction. This is not an aim of the study here. Ambitious and audacious perhaps. Nonetheless, the involvement with the specific issue is most interesting. The study of the folk

culture in Greece and Turkey was based mostly on the theory of social construction. Perhaps the special features of YouTube test the limits of this particular theory. Even if we accept that, to a large degree, Greek and Turkish folk culture are constructions which appeared in the framework of constituting the national states, we cannot ignore the fact that the acting objects, the users, commentators, producers of the two videos create new situations and frames of interpretation. It seems that for reasons that we should investigate, the social actors of YouTube refute, reconstruct and 'play' with the construction.

Shifting the focus to a more general frame, we should wonder also about the new dynamic that the two folk performing arts present as objects of the Internet. Manuel Castells, the important intellectual who has studied the Internet, considers that in the age of the real virtuality of the World Wide Web, art in general can have a role of vital importance. He observes in relation: 'In fact, art was always a tool for building bridges between men from different countries, different cultures, different classes and ethnic groups, different genders and different positions of power ... Art is a protocol of communication to reinstate the unity of the human experience beyond oppression, difference and conflict ... More than ever, this could be its role in a civilization characterized by fragmentation and the potential inability of communicating codes, in which the multiplicity of expressions may in reality undermine the common expression ... Art (music and dance, I add) more and more hybrid expression of virtual and physical materials, can be a fundamental cultural bridge between the Internet and ourselves' (Castells2005:240-241).

In conclusion, I should like to point out that the study concurs with all those approaches to the Internet, which see it as a first-class opportunity for renewing the discipline of Folklore by giving it a contemporary (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995) and interdisciplinary prospect (Bendix 1998: 237, cf. Avdikos 2009). Through a dialogue on equal terms with related social sciences, a composed and generalized review and synthesis of its theoretical and methodological equipment is possible.

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