

Rewriting Unwritten History:
Folklore, Nationalism, and the Ban of the Cretan Violin

Panayotis League

Historian Eric Hobsbawm defines “invented tradition” as “a set of practices... of a ritually symbolic nature” that “automatically implies continuity with... a suitable historic past.”¹ Sometimes the past – suitable or not - is there for the taking. This paper explores the interaction between fiction and reality in the musical culture of western Crete. Specifically, I focus on the state-controlled media ban of Cretan music played on the violin, which was orchestrated by folklorist Simon Karas in order to promote the lyra as the true carrier of Cretan musical tradition, and the efforts of Hania musicians to create and propagate a counter story in support of their local culture. The ban of the violin, a product of twentieth-century Greek nationalism and ethnocentrism which largely achieved its goal of rewriting the history of Cretan music in the latter half of the twentieth century, has resulted in a heated and antagonistic dialogue within Cretan music about authenticity and ownership of local tradition.

At the heart of this dialogue are competing myths about the lyra, the upright bowed fiddle that has come to dominate the music of the island. Karas' myth canonizes the lyra as the bearer of true Cretan and Hellenic identity. In contrast, Kostas Papadakis, the de facto leader of the violin community, dismisses the lyra as an inferior Turkish importation. Thus we have two men and their competing “truths,” both seeking to establish connections with an historic past suitable to particular ideological goals. The battle for control over the island’s musical identity was fought against the backdrop of a

¹ Hobsbawm, 1.

folklore rich in such variously suitable historic pasts, and was predicated to a large degree upon their manipulation.

The Violin in Western Crete

For at least the last few centuries, the violin has been the favored melody instrument of the traditional musicians of Hania province, with the exception of the Apokoronas region east of Hania town – an area bordering the lyra-dominated province of Rethymno and with cultural traditions more closely linked to the latter region of the island. The old-fashioned *lyraki* (a predecessor of the modern lyra) was certainly present in more isolated rural areas of Hania; the Swiss musicologist and Hellenist Samuel Baud-Bovy found several elderly players of the *lyraki* in villages such as Lousakies Kissamou during his travels throughout Crete in the early 1950s². However, the overwhelming historical predominance of the violin in the region is beyond reasonable doubt. Of the nearly 120 Haniot musicians profiled in Athanasios P. Deiktakis' book *Haniotes Laikoi Mousikoi*, which is devoted to folk musicians of the region who died before the turn of the 21st century, only 11 are lyra players; several of them were also known as violinists, and all but three died before 1950³. A similar list compiled by Haniot musician Kostas Papadakis includes 115 violinists and 23 lyra players⁴. The Herakleio native Manolis Papadakis' book *I Istoría tis Kritikis Mousikis ston Eikosto Aíona*, which examines the musicians considered by the author to be the most important contributors to the island's

² Baud-Bovy, 62-63 2006.

³ Deiktakis.

⁴ Leydi.

musical traditions in the twentieth century, mentions only one Haniot lyra player not from the Apokoronas region, while briefly profiling five Haniot violinists⁵.

Manolis Manioudakis, one of the last surviving Haniot violinists who was professionally active in the mid-20th century before the ban took effect, provided me over six months of interviews (December 2007-May 2008) with detailed accounts from his youth and adulthood of musical celebrations all over western Hania, often so large that each of the two to five cafés or taverns in the celebrating village would have its own contracted music group to entertain the revelers. Always meticulous in describing who was playing at the celebrations, he rarely mentioned a lyra player to me⁶. In an interview conducted by Vassiliki Yiakoumaki in 2003, Manioudakis gave an example from just such a multi-orchestra celebration in a Hania village in order to demonstrate the popularity of the violin compared to that of the lyra:

“There were three coffehouses; I was playing in one, Naftis (the violinist Kostas Papadakis) in another, and Plakianos (the lyra player Michalis Papadakis) in the third. Plakianos was there sitting with just a few old men, and I felt bad for him, since he was there by himself but they kept us playing until the morning. In those days it was very difficult for the lyres... people didn’t prefer them.”⁷

By the mid twentieth century the violin was not only the dominant instrument in the province of Hania, but also “the most popular instrument on the island as a whole, as

⁵ Papadakis, 45-68 2002.

⁶ Though his primary instrument is the violin, Manioudakis is also an accomplished lyra player and teaches both instruments to local children free of charge; he extols the virtues of both instruments, and is in no way a member of the “anti-lyra” camp.

⁷ Mediterranean Voices.

it was the most widespread in most areas of the provinces of Hania and Lasithi, in the eastern section of Herakleio and a part of Messara (Southern Herakleio)... in some areas, such as Apokoronas, Messara, and Ierapetra, the violin and the lyra were played together at celebrations”⁸. The Rethymniot lyra-player Thanasis Skordalos, a legendary figure in the history and development of Cretan music in the latter half of the twentieth century, stated in an interview that before 1947 the population of Herakleio entertained itself almost exclusively with the violin, rather than the lyra; and arguably the most famous Cretan singer of the twentieth century, Nikos Xylouris, notoriously claimed that when he first traveled to Herakleio from his mountain village of Anogeia, the lyra was essentially unknown to the locals⁹. Lambros Liavas, professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Athens, writes that in “the period after the war... the violin continued to be more widely disseminated and it was necessary for the lyra players to engage in a difficult struggle, with the aid of Simon Karas, to win back (i.e. to gain in the first place) the title of the national symbol of Cretan music”¹⁰.

Today the violin is mostly played in the western part of Hania province, including the area around the city of Hania, and in various parts of the eastern province of Lasithi; in both regions it co-exists with the lyra. The modern, violin-influenced lyra is played everywhere on the island, while the violin is virtually unrepresented as a traditional instrument in the west-central province of Rethymno and the east-central province of Herakleio, where the lyra reigns supreme. Considering the aforementioned statements by Skordalos and Xylouris, it would seem that the musical demographics of the island have

⁸ Tsouchlarakis.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Liavas 41.

changed considerably over the last half century, even taking into account the possibility that their statements referred to urban musical practices that were separate from those of the countryside. The point is that in the urban Rethymno or Herakleio of today, the lyra accounts for the majority of conspicuous musical sound, especially if one considers only native-produced music.

The Founding Myths of Hania Music

In setting the framework for a discussion of the competing musical myths constructed by Simon Karas and Kostas Papadakis, it is useful to briefly examine the role played by “mythologized” local history in the musical folklore of Hania. The dominant dance and music form in modern Cretan music, the *syrtos*, was developed in Hania province and spread to the rest of the island in the early twentieth century. Local tradition links the archetypical *syrtos* melody to a lament composed by Cretan soldiers returning from the failed defense of Constantinople against the Turks in 1453, then reworked by a legendary Hania violinist in the 18th century to accompany a dance – the *syrtos* – invented at a gathering of powerful local chieftains as a symbol of revolution against Ottoman rule. Another tradition claims that the *pentozali*, a popular pan-Cretan dance, was invented by the same violinist, based on an ancient warrior dance, and that its twelve melodies were composed to honor the twelve leaders of another rebellion. These stories are deeply embedded into the local consciousness, and through them the music and dance that they mythologize have become a way of cementing a very specific sense of identity, local history, and special place in the Greek world.

The degree to which these myths are present in Haniot folklore and held to be fact, or something close to it, is telling, and provides some insight into the importance of oral transmission of information in the community. I have heard each of them repeated with comparatively little variation many times in conversation in coffeehouses and taverns, primarily by older members of the community, although by younger ones of my own generation (roughly 30 years old) as well, and they are proudly presented as authentic local history in books and websites written and maintained by natives of Kissamos. The primary significance of these myths' authority in the local folklore is to show us the importance of storytelling and oral transmission of information in cementing a sense of identity and ideas of local history, both of which would be challenged and, from the Haniots' point of view, violated by Simon Karas' new version of history and the ban of the violin. In addition, the preeminence of this mythology was to give Kostas Papadakis – himself an ideological product of this mythological environment - ample material with which to create a counter-myth in response to Karas' efforts.

Simon Karas and the Ban of the Violin

The ban on broadcasting traditional Cretan music played on the violin was essentially the result of one man's efforts to promote an idealized image of popular Greek folkloric culture. That man was the musicologist, educator, and ecclesiastical musician Simon Karas. Karas, who was born in 1902 and studied law at the University of Athens before entering the state radio service, was deeply influenced by the school of hellenocentric, nationalist thought that, like the analogous literary movement

characterized by the Generation of the 1930s, came to prominence in the aftermath of World War I and sought to remove the Greek state and society from what it perceived to be an unhealthy and destructive dependence on the West. Karas' background in and extensive research on Byzantine music and his systematic (if unconventional and outside the normal academic realm of musicology) study of the extant fragments of ancient Greek music decidedly colored his view of Greek folk music traditions, and, combined with his nationalist and hellenocentric leanings, resulted in the formation of an austere and idiosyncratic view of what should and should not be considered worthy of recognition as part of Greek tradition and culture. This was combined with his conviction that it is the responsibility of the state and of a state-regulated mass media to enforce this version of the truth and "protect" the citizenry from harmful foreign influences.

Like others of his generation political orientation, as well as many Greek folklorists since independence from the Ottoman Turks, Karas' gaze was firmly cast on Byzantium and Ancient Greece as the progenitors of and vibrantly relevant reference point for modern Greek culture - "a golden age since when the purity of the original Hellenic culture had suffered endless contamination and enfeeblement"¹¹. It is particularly telling that when Karas prepared and delivered a series of five radio addresses in 1946, with the expressed goal of educating and encouraging the public about Greek music, three of them were devoted to analysis of and reflections on the extant fragments of ancient Greek music. The living, contemporary expressions of the Hellenic muse - the folk music of modern Greece and Byzantine ecclesiastical music - were each treated but once.

¹¹ Herzfeld, 44.

Karas' written introduction to the published transcripts of these radio addresses sheds light on his motivations for pushing for the ban of the violin, as it demonstrates his belief in the importance of mass media and the necessity of controlling the content of programming in order to weed out material that might have an undesirable influence on the public. He states that "since the Greek state radio and television service was founded, the problem of whether it is an organization for the entertainment or the education of the public has not been solved", because "if it was the second (education), it would not leave them at the mercy of the tastes of people who play heinous foreign music that feminizes and stupefies the youth"¹². He further asserts that in the ideal, education-oriented model of the media, "there would be a fixed method of screening and presenting of material necessary and beneficial to the public and the homeland, and avoidance of all things harmful"¹³.

These statements clearly demonstrate Karas' explicit belief in the necessity of censorship in general, and of music in particular. While they are chiefly aimed at Western popular music and its perceived negative effect on the morals and character of the Greek youth, they illustrate his willingness to use the media to further ideology. As such, they foreshadow the ban of the violin, an action that was inspired by this type of ideology.

The policy of cultural purism adopted and promoted by Karas found in many ways its ideal expression in his attempt to stifle the Cretan violin tradition and build a new myth through the parallel promotion of the lyra as a national symbol. In the words of the ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman, "what becomes clear to us as we witness the return to musical nationalisms [...] is that music does

¹² Karas, 11.

¹³ Ibid., 11.

narrate histories. Music does point the way toward origins and beginnings"¹⁴. Karas, himself a musician steeped from an early age in Byzantine liturgical music, one of the most culturally and politically conservative forms of Greek artistic expression (and which by its very name implies an unbroken connection with the glorious past of the *ethnos*), was well aware of this. The violin, an instrument obviously imported from the West during the onerous Venetian occupation, was to be discarded as so much unwanted baggage, a relic of foreign oppression and cultural "pollution"; the lyra, known throughout the Greek world in various forms since Byzantine times and conveniently sharing its name with the unrelated ancient Greek instrument *par excellence*, to be promoted as a symbol of pure, unadulterated Greek culture.

Karas' personal involvement with mass media, specifically the radio, began in 1938, when he began to work at the national radio station in Athens, contributing to the founding of the Department of Folk Music. This is when he first had contact with the Haniot violinist Kostas Papadakis from Kasteli Kissamou, who began to give weekly broadcast performances the same year. Papadakis was also a frequent guest on the live Cretan music broadcast hosted by the musical Koutsourelis brothers Manolis and Stelios, also from Kissamos, a program that heavily featured the local violin-oriented music of their home region but also music and musicians from all over Crete, including lyra players such as Kostas Mountakis and others. According to Papadakis, Karas endeavored from the beginning to assume control of this broadcast in order to promote his own

¹⁴ Bohlman.

agenda in terms of the presentation of Cretan music, and only the unified efforts of the Haniot contingent at the station prevented him from doing so¹⁵. Whether or not this is patently true, what is certain is that soon after Stelios Koutsourelis ceased to be involved with the program and returned to Crete upon his brother's death, the program of Cretan music was taken over by Karas and was soon phased out completely.

Papadakis in the meantime had also returned to Hania, and like many other local violinists gave weekly performances on the local radio station. It was into the midst of this lively musical environment that the order banning the broadcast of the violin arrived at the Hania radio station on February 15, 1955¹⁶. Papadakis and the other local violinists learned of the ban only when they arrived at the station to play, and were told that as the violin had been judged a foreign instrument, it was no longer to be played during broadcasts of traditional music. They were free to perform, but only on other instruments. This excluded most of the violinists from participation in the broadcasts, as they were generally proficient only on the one instrument; the exceptionally talented Papadakis was one of the few who continued to perform during the initial stage of the ban, first on laouto, then on a modified lyra which he could play with violin technique, as he lowered the strings to the point where he could press down vertically on them with the fingertips rather than on the side with the nails¹⁷.

The ban understandably caused a tremendous amount of bewilderment and outrage in the wider community of Hania, as the local population had entertained itself musically by means of the violin for as long as anyone could remember. Papadakis, as one of the leading musicians of his generation and an outspoken defender of local

¹⁵ Papadakis, 43 1989.

¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷ M. Manousakis, personal communication, February 12, 2008.

traditions in general, took it upon himself to mobilize the community in defense of the violin. He spent the next eight months gathering documentation and evidence of the violin's central role in the traditional music of Hania, including a list of all the active violinists of the region with their signatures as well as the signatures of hundreds of other Hania residents, and carried on a decades-long attempt to repeal the ban through fruitless correspondence with various government agencies.

Losing faith in the efficiency of making his case through official channels, Papadakis ultimately decided to compile all of the historical documents he had collected over a lifetime of research, along with his own thoughts on and versions of the history of the ban and Cretan music in general, in a book, which he brought out in 1989. The volume, entitled "*Kritiki Lyra – Enas Mythos* ("Cretan" Lyra – A Myth), is a curious mixture of wide-ranging scholarship and unbridled polemic. While systematically setting forth a well-documented history of the use of violin in Western Crete and of the ban, with all the names, dates, places, and numbers of government decrees painstakingly presented with the appropriate references, he uses extremely strong language in accusing Karas (who he calls "that persecutor and musical murderer of Cretan tradition") and his "clique" of students and associates (which includes the musicians, folklorists, and media personalities Domna Samiou, Dora Stratou, Panayiotis Mylonas, and others) of attempting to rewrite the history of Cretan music out of spite and malice. He also lays a large part of the blame on the musicians as well as the directors and members of the various Cretan dance groups who went along with the promotion of the lyra as the national instrument of Crete, "though they knew the truth"¹⁸.

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

In addition to this, Papadakis spills a good deal of ink trying to prove that the Cretan lyra (which he consistently refers to as “REBAB” or “REBEC”, Arabic terms for similar instruments) has no historical relationship to Cretan culture, did not appear in Crete before the coming of the Muslim Laz and Karamanli mercenaries in 1723, and was exclusively played in Crete by Muslim Turks until the late nineteenth century - claims rendered somewhat doubtful by modern scholarship¹⁹. He also states in many places his opinion that the modern lyra is essentially a “primitive”, inferior instrument that, due to what he terms its “extremely limited musical possibilities”, has resulted even in the hands of talented musicians in the oversimplification and homogenization of Cretan music (which, in his view, can only be properly rendered with the violin).

Papadakis’ book was by no means a best seller, and most of his more virulent polemic was seen for what it was by most people; but he was an important figure in the musical and cultural life of Hania until his death, and never wasted an opportunity to espouse his views on the subject of Cretan musical traditions and particularly to call attention to the ban. He was frequently interviewed by local publications such as *Stigmes* (a magazine devoted to Cretan culture) and *Kontylies* (the largest Cretan music magazine), as well as on local television and radio in Kissamos and Hania. In these interviews he never failed to criticize whomever he felt had contributed to the misrepresentation of the local traditions of the island, and always presented with conviction the evidence he had gathered to support his beliefs. Most importantly, he remained an active leader of the local music community, and his views gradually became part of the local consciousness about traditional music, at least to some degree; I have heard Simon Karas’ name vilified on multiple occasions by older Haniot musicians.

¹⁹ Rigioniotis.

It is important to bear in mind that at the time the ban came into effect in 1955, for most people in rural Hania the distinction between “traditional” music (i.e. the folk music native to or assimilated by the immediate local area) and “non-traditional” music was not the same as today. For most people in Hania at this time, “music” meant either the Byzantine ecclesiastical music heard in church or whatever the local violinists and laouto players played. The repertoire of traditional musicians in the post-WWII period was not confined strictly to the native dance and music forms such as the syrtos and pentozali, but included European waltzes, polkas, and tangos, as well as pan-Hellenic and pan-Balkan pieces common to folk musicians throughout the Near East²⁰. The local musicians adapted these pieces to their stylistic vocabulary and instruments (violin and laouto), and played them interchangeably with the native pieces at dances and celebrations, according to the public’s requests. Therefore, the ban of the violin and the reasoning behind it were understandably interpreted by the locals as a condemnation and devaluation of their entire system of entertainment, and by extension their traditional culture.

As the Haniots saw their neighbors and perennial rivals from Rethymno directly benefiting from the ban while they suffered, pre-existing feelings of mistrust and competition were severely exacerbated. This negative situation was made worse by the public statements of various lyra players claiming that only the lyra and laouto are used in traditional Cretan music. The result, unsurprisingly, was open hostility between many musicians representing the two, now “opposing” musical traditions.

The violin’s prolonged absence from the airwaves continued until 1983, when the Hania radio station resumed broadcasts of traditional music on the violin – though the

²⁰ M. Manousakis and S. Kantilierakis, personal communication, March 11, 2008.

ban officially continues to this day²¹. It is singularly inexplicable that the order has never been repealed, even more so considering the fact that Simon Karas himself admitted at the end of his life to his student the ethnomusicologist Nikos Dionysopoulos that the ban was a mistake²². The authorities are strangely silent on the matter: Antonis Bouzakis, current secretary of the Traditional Musicians' Association of Hania "Charchalis", claims that during his tenure he himself has sent three separate letters to Panayiotis Mylonas at EPT requesting an official repeal of the ban, without receiving a single reply²³. Regardless, radio and television broadcasts of Cretan music played by violinists continue today, primarily on local stations in Hania and Kissamos.

Mass Media and Cretan Music Today

With the Greek parliament's passing of a bill legalizing privately owned television stations in 1989, a plethora of independent networks gradually sprang up around the country. Today there are six channels broadcasting from Hania alone, some of which (particularly TV Kissamou) regularly show historical footage of local violinists (much of it in the form of amateur home movies from the time when the ban was in practice) as well as live performances of contemporary violinists. Local radio stations, particularly those based in and around Kissamos, also play Haniot violin music, but the overall programming is heavily weighted towards lyra music.

The average modern Cretan has grown up for generations now with at least as much (and in most cases a great deal more) exposure to traditional music through

²¹ Konstas.

²² Tsouchlarakis.

²³ Mediterranean Voices.

commercial recordings, radio, and television, precisely the media from which the violin was conspicuously absent for three decades. Therefore the idea of what “Cretan music” *is* in the minds of most consumers has very little to do with the idiosyncratic, complex, unhurried music of the old Haniot violinists. On the contrary, it has everything to do with the media-promoted sound and image of the lyra, which has ceased to be simply a regional musical instrument played primarily in the mountain villages of central Crete and has become a nationalist symbol, an identity marker representing everything the modern-day Cretan wishes to believe about himself and his culture. This state of affairs has progressed to the point that many Cretans aren’t even aware that somewhere on their island, the violin is the dominant instrument. Manolis Manioudakis of Hania relates many stories of being invited to perform at Cretan cultural events elsewhere in Greece and, upon producing his violin, being asked, “Where’s your lyra?”²⁴. Furthermore, the attempt to reject and remove the Haniot violin tradition from the public consciousness constitutes an ironic erasure of a vital part of the history of modern Cretan music as a whole, not merely that of Hania. As we have seen, the dominant dance and music form of the island, the syrtos, and another of the most popular dances, the pentozali, were created and developed in Hania by violinists over the last several centuries before spreading to the rest of the island relatively recently.

The degree to which the promotion of this new version of Cretan music history orchestrated by Karas achieved its goals is apparent from an examination of relevant documents from the post-1955 period until today. These range from pamphlets and small books of topical interest to works by folklorists, ethnologists, and scholars, Cretan and Greek, as well as numerous websites. The lyra is presented as “The National Instrument

²⁴ Mediterranean Voices.

of Crete” in any number of publications²⁵, and is frequently given nationalistic and patriotic connotations; M. G. Meraklis, for example, writes that “The main instrument that accompanies Cretan music and dance is the lyra. During the 1821 revolution, the Cretans took the lyra with them, and played and danced after battles”²⁶. Meraklis gives no references for either of these statements. The 25-volume encyclopedia of Cretan history, folklore, and culture edited by Stavros Panousopoulos, *Kriti: To Aferoma*, which was published in 1985, states in the volume dedicated to Cretan music that the lyra is “the primary and best known instrument of the island... of the other stringed instruments, it is worth mentioning the tambouras... the laouto is also a stringed instrument and is used to accompany the lyra.” The article goes on to mention the rural wind instruments as well, but there is not one word about the violin²⁷.

These one-sided versions of the story are also present on today’s most frequently accessed source of information – the Internet. Websites offering “an introduction to Cretan music” and “the history of Cretan music” abound, some of which completely ignore the existence of the violin or place almost exclusive emphasis on the lyra²⁸, and the lyra is used as an audio or visual symbol to advertise the “authenticity” of Cretan

²⁵ Mathioudakis, 33.

²⁶ Meraklis, 23.

²⁷ Panousopoulos 295.

²⁸ An interesting example of this can be seen in the article by Antonis Liatsikas, “The Greatness of Cretan Music” on the English version of the Cretan magazine *Stigmes* website, available at http://stigmes.gr/br/brpages/articles/cretan_music.htm. While the author mentions the violin as a Venetian import and says that it was “destined to play a major role in Cretan music in the years that followed”, he says nothing specific about this role other than the influence the violin exerted on the modern form of the lyra. Further, he doesn’t mention anything at all about the ban of the violin, though he states that “during the first couple of decades after the (Second World) war, radio broadcasting was firmly established on the island...Crete reverberated in (sic) the sounds of the lyre and accompanying instruments. *As a matter of fact it was then that Cretan music was working its way towards becoming one with everything that the island of Crete symbolized.*” (Italics mine)

products and services on the radio, television, and in print in all regions of the island as well as in Cretan diaspora communities. One website devoted to the people and culture of Crete even features a composite image of a young musician holding a Cretan lyra, against the backdrop of a historical painting of a musician holding the ancient Greek lyre (an unrelated instrument). As Tullia Magrini points out, “This juxtaposition too easily joins past and present to imply a continuity that should be considered with more caution”²⁹.

Of course, those who benefited from the promotion of the lyra as the national instrument of Crete had a vested interest in propagating this myth. Rethymniot lyra player Thanasis Skordalos, the same musician who testified in 1986 that before 1947 the population of Herakleio entertained itself with the violin, was heard to say in a radio interview before his death that Cretan music can only be played with the lyra and laouto, and no other instrument³⁰ - a statement that devalues not only the violin, but other instruments with a long history and wide use on the island, such as the *hamboli*, *askomantoura* and *mantoura* (wind instruments), mandolin, and *daoulaki* (a small drum). Significantly, the cover of Manolis Papadakis’ aforementioned book telling the author’s version of the story of Cretan music in the twentieth century is adorned with a photograph of a single lyra – the instrument that for many has become the *whole* story.

Nowhere is the post-World War II triumph of the lyra more obvious – and for more obvious reasons - than on Cretan radio and television. There are numerous radio stations based in Crete that are dedicated to broadcasting traditional and modern Cretan music, many of them 24 hours a day. In addition to large stations with the funding to support non-stop programming, there are countless smaller stations that play mostly

²⁹ Magrini.

³⁰ Tsouchlarakis.

Cretan music and Cretan music programs on stations of more general interest. Nearly all the music played on these stations features the lyra, with violin music comprising a miniscule percentage of airtime, even on stations based in Hania.

Cretan television presents a similar picture. Violinists are almost entirely absent from the regular music programming on the two pan-Cretan television stations, and of the local ones only TV Kissamou displays any evidence of a firm commitment to promoting the local violin tradition. Because of the lack of high-quality historical films of local violinists – there was no point of making any, since they couldn't be broadcast in Greece until 1989 – most of what is shown is either of recent vintage, filmed by an amateur at a local celebration, or of relatively poor sound and image quality, appealing primarily to those who already have a fully-developed interest in the music and its history. This is far from Kriti TV's slickly packaged studio tapes of lyra players wearing designer clothes, stage makeup, and professionally styled hair, chatting with talk show hosts in between performances of their latest single.

This overwhelming dominance of the lyra on Cretan radio and television is easily explained by the fact that the promotion of the lyra during the ban of the violin resulted in at least two generations of Cretans who grew up with essentially no exposure to the latter instrument in a traditional context. Older carriers of the violin tradition stopped playing because of age and restricted opportunities, and few young musicians stepped up to take their place, as prestige and demand had been transferred to the lyra. The explosion of the postwar recording industry in Greece coincided with the first full decade of the ban (the 1960s), and naturally the lyra played the dominant, if not to say exclusive, role in the commercialization of Cretan music. This state of affairs continued over the next four

decades, with the violin receding ever farther to the periphery. A casual browsing through the catalogs of the main Cretan record labels – Aerakis Seistron, Cretaphon, Faistos, and others – demonstrates near exclusivity of recordings by lyra players over the last several decades.

This one-sided telling of the rewritten musical history of the island through mass media perhaps reached its peak in 1977 with the episode of the EPT program *Mousiko Odoiporiko me ti Domna Samiou: Ditiki Kriti* (“Musical Journey with Domna Samiou: Western Crete”), focusing exclusively on the province of Hania. Samiou, perhaps the best known of Karas’ protégés, hosts the program, interviews musicians, and occasionally sings their local songs with them, all the while emphasizing the investigative nature of the enterprise. Over forty-one and a half minutes, the program features, aside from various singers, performing unaccompanied *rizitika* songs from the Sfakia region of Hania as well as some historical ballads, exclusively lyra and laouto players, both from Hania town and various villages of the province. Not a single violinist is presented, despite many of Hania’s greatest violinists being in their prime at the time of filming. In fact, Samiou seems to go out of her way to present the lyra as the one and only instrumental voice of the region: of the many lyra players shown, one is a ten year old boy making his first tentative musical steps; one is a foreigner learning the music (the now famous Anglo-Irishman Ross Daly); and one is a woman, Aspasia Papadaki, who is also a violinist (though this is not mentioned in the film).

Conclusions

The ban of the Cretan violin on mass media in Greece was clearly the product of nationalistic ethno-centrism, an attempt to retell the history of an integral part of the Greek world through the construction and propagation of a myth designed to use music to assert the Hellenic “purity” of Cretan, and by extension of Greek, culture. The marginalization of the violin – viewed by Simon Karas and his allies among the Greek artistic and intellectual elite as a symbol of Western cultural “pollution” – and its exclusion as a traditional instrument from the public eye and ear was deemed necessary as a step to forging a purified Greek identity in Crete, an island whose history and culture presented a plethora of “undesirable” influences from both West and East.

By exploiting the rich and malleable tradition of oral history in Crete, the makers of this new myth were able to employ various fragments of historical fact and half-truths to elevate the Cretan lyra not only to prominence in the musical life of the island, but also to status as a national symbol. From this new height, enjoying the undisputed role of preeminent musical instrument during the explosion of musical creativity and commercial recordings among Cretan artists in the 1960s, it eventually took on a myriad of meanings intimately tied to the collectively consciousness and identity of the Cretan people as a whole – connotations with which it was not previously associated.

These results, coupled with the futility of the violin-oriented musical community of Hania’s efforts to overturn the ban through official channels, demonstrate the power over public opinion that government institutions may wield through decisive and calculated use of the media. In a sense, the ban amounts to censorship of a particularly insidious kind, aimed not only at suppressing the free exchange of musical and cultural

ideas, but, carried to its logical extreme, the extermination of a local identity and the enforcement of cultural homogenization in the name of cultural “purity”.

In a curious way, the story of the ban of the Cretan violin also sheds some light on the weight of Karas’ legacy, the reality of the interaction between politics and public policy in Greece, and the relative intractability of government institutions. Despite repeated petitions by its citizens, the interest of foreign musicologists and anthropologists in the Haniot violin tradition, and the admission of Simon Karas himself that the ban was a mistake, it has never been officially repealed. Karas’ “invented tradition” took on a life of its own, and has truly become custom and reality in the musical and cultural life of modern-day Crete.

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