

Listening Rebetica Songs in Makronissos Concentration Camp (1948-1950):  
A Testimony and an Interpretation Attempt by a Former Detainee

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# Introduction

- Recent research concerning the relationship between music and detention/concentration camps offers crucial insights in order for focusing on certain aspects of concentration camps everyday life previously neglected.
- This presentation focuses on the testimony (written during the '80s decade) of an exiled person in Makronissos concentration camp during Greek Civil War, Apostolos Bogiatzis.
- There, he underwent unthinkable tortures: A psychological one among them was that his beloved music constituted a part of the indoctrination propaganda made by Makronissos Radio Station.

- This presentation posed these parts of the testimony against the background of the whole Apostolos Bogiatzis' life experience.
- It attempts to explore:
  - how he recalled in his text his then-contemporary thoughts,
  - how he tried to interpret this music use in order to decode the propagandistic mechanism and in this way to confront the pain and his torturers' pressures.

# A Short bio

- Asia Minor refugee origin (born 1910 - Triglia Vithinias - Prussa/Bursa).
- Apostolos -and his brother Yiannis- lived in Athens and Piraeus during the Greek interwar period as a tailor apprentice (Yiannis as a shoemaker apprentice).
- They had a first-hand experience of the social climate and the rising of rebetiko music: social strata-guitar and dance courses-visits to “tekedes” and “koutoukia”.
- Rebetiko music in its cultural and social aspects was indispensable part of their everyday routine.

1936: characteristic “rebetiko” outfit (A. Bogiatzis at the right)



1937: characteristic “rebetiko” outfit (Apostolos Bogiatzis at the left side, Yiannis Bogiatzis at the right-guitar)



# Occupation-Resistance-Civil War

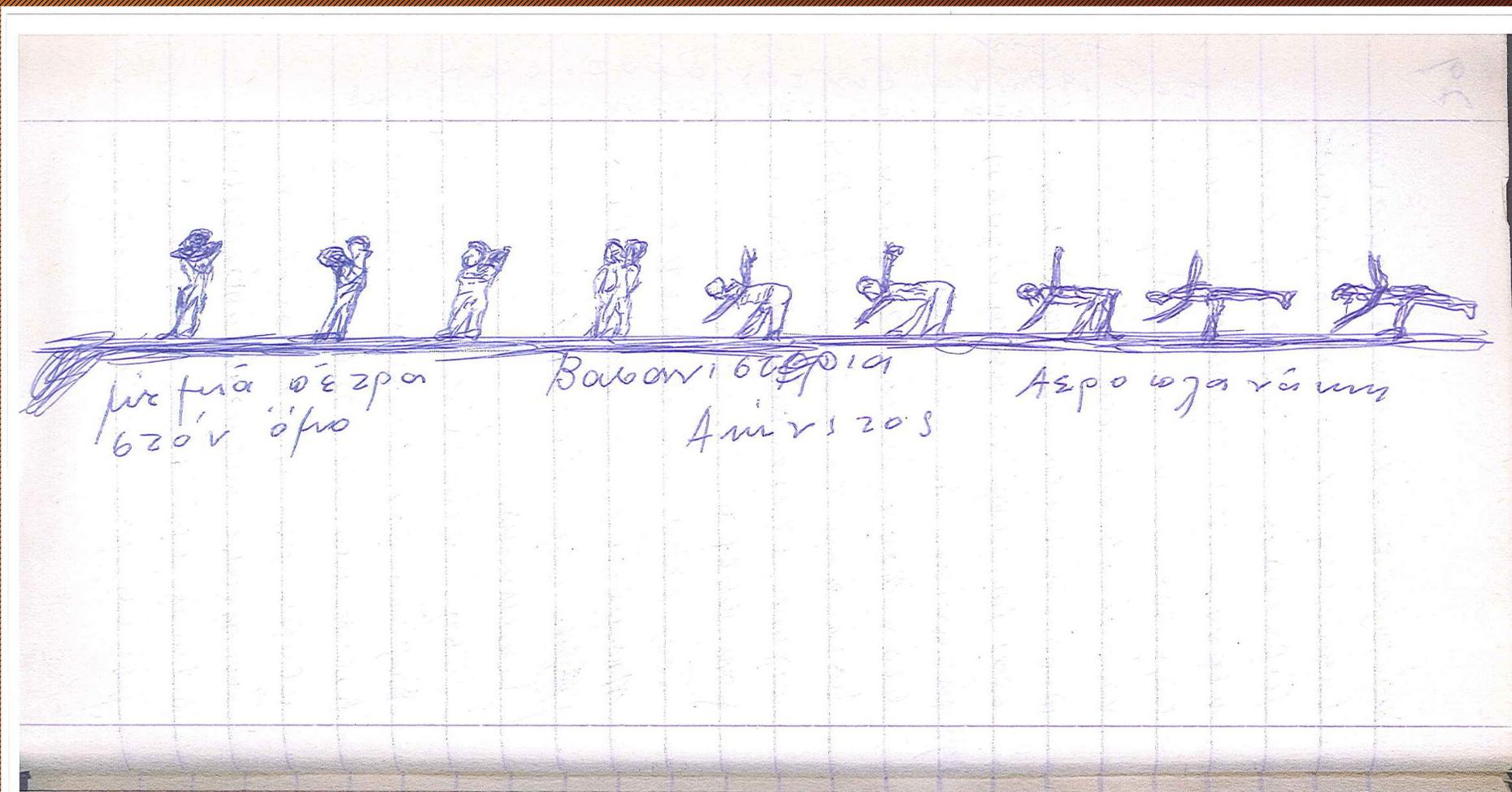
- They joined Greek Resistance movement through the ranks of the communist-led National Liberation Front (EAM) and its military branch National Popular Liberation Army (ELAS) - Yiannis was killed at a fight with the Germans, September 1944.
- Due to this commitment, soon after the Liberation, Apostolos wanted, was arrested and finally deported to Makronissos concentration camp (1948), being already (1947) sentenced to death.
- There, he underwent unthinkable tortures in order to sign the infamous “declaration of repentance”, namely the repudiation of communism (he didn’t sign).



**Makronissos** (with Achillesas Kontaras, prominent communist/humanist of Lesvos island - he was executed in 1949, without recitation of specific charges against him)



# Makronissos - Tortures (Apostolos Bogiatzis' sketches)



# Music as Torture

- A psychological one among them was that his beloved music constituted a part of the indoctrination propaganda made by Makronissos Radio Station.
- The military marches provoked to him only annoyance. He believed that were used for “nerve-racking”.
- But, the first one was a disturbing situation which struck his then-and-after thought (given that he continued to listen rebetiko music).

- Middle/end '50s decade: he had returned in Rafina from exile, however his legal condition was “as if he was being in exile” (*τελών εν εκτοπίσει*)



When he writes his self-biography testimony  
-40 years later- there are two major  
digressions from the main line of narration.



ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ ΜΠΟΓΙΑΤΖΗΣ

## ΜΑΚΡΟΝΗΣΙ

*Το βιβλίο που ήθελα ν' αφήσω*

Η χειρόγραφη μαρτυρία του Απόστολου Μπογιατζή  
για το κολαστήριο της Μακρονήσου

Φυλακές Καστορός - Σ.Φ.Α. - Α' Ε.Τ.Ο. 1947-1950

Μεταγραφή-Επιστημονική επιμέλεια-Επιλεγόμενα:  
ΒΑΣΙΛΗΣ Α. ΜΠΟΓΙΑΤΖΗΣ

**ΠΛΗΘΩΡΑ** Μαρτυρίες / Εμφύλιος

# Music as Torture

- The one concerns the use of “mangika” (μάγκικα) songs (the other concerns the enforced labour)
- *The soldier (Το φανταράκι)*

A soldier who serves his military service feels so sad (έχει μεράκι) and he is drunk, because he has a long time to get a letter from his beloved girlfriend. He hesitates to ask from his captain a leave, because he is afraid of a negative response. But, fortunately, his captain -they came from the same neighborhood in Athens- understands his difficult position and gives to the soldier the longing leave in order to go in Athens and to meet his girlfriend

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcgOYqt15so>

# Music as Torture

- *The sailor (Ο ναύτης)*

A ship has departed from Piraeus port for a distant destination, however a sailor has always and steadily his mind “attached in the land”. In the following verses of the song we learn both that he has always his mind to a “black-haired beautiful girl” (*melaghrini-μελαχρινή*), and that this sense of nostalgia is the common destiny of all the sailors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlIMZyr69wE>

# Music as Torture

- Makronissos radio station played rebetika-*mangika* songs just after the indoctrination “lessons”
- Its listening motivates Apostolos Bogiatzis’ interpretative attempts: why do they -our torturers- let us listen rebetika songs?
- It was clear for him that music was organically embedded in the whole torture mechanism: “In this era of tortures and beating and executions and murders, the mangiko song, among other songs, constituted a major trial for the soldier and the detained citizen, something which they had to wrestle with: because, it reminded them the life outside from the galley, the everyday madness, and the tortures”.

# Music as Torture

- Being shocked, he describes the influence of the music in the morale and the general psychological condition of the detainees: “It made you wonder and pry all these people who ‘were felt down’ and suddenly, in an unexpected way, they came round, and after they were wailing, wailing, wailing... Despair...”.
- According to Apostolos Bogiatzis, the effectiveness of such a torture was based on that songs were rooted/embedded in the hearts and minds of the soldiers and all of the detainees.
- Thus, the longing for the life outside from the concentration camp combined with the everyday terror functioned as a further motivation/pressure for the signing of “declaration of repentance”-repudiation of communism.

# Music as Torture

- However, Apostolos Bogiatzis points to the fact that another appropriation of this music listening was possible.
- Soldiers and detainees, he underlines, could sing these songs during their guard or their few chances they had for walking and rest.
- Then, they felt happy, “they felt that they were no more inside the galley; because, deep in their heart, they suffer”.

# Instead of Epilogue

- During the same period -when he was detained in Makronissos- his beloved friend, fellow countryman and refugee too, Stathis Pirpiris used to sing to Apostolos' mother, Maria, the Tsitsanis and Bakalis' song *Kapoia mana anastenazei* (*A mother is sighing*)
- The mother referred in the song suffers due to her son's absence abroad (*ksenitia*), a metonymy for political exile. While she is in despair, somebody informs her that her son (*to palikari*) is alive and he will certainly return at home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cn7b5ozshlg>