# CHAPTER 27

## The heterotopic space of the *tekke* in pre-war Herakleion: Symbolisms and rituals in rebetiko subculture

Yannis Zaimakis [University of Crete]

### Introduction

My paper deals with the question of hashish-use in the "dens", the so-called *tekkedhes*, in Herakleion, Crete, during the first half of the twentieth century. Using historical and biographical material I shall attempt to trace symbolic and ritual elements of this practice, and its ties with the world of rebetiko. Moreover, examining information from oral and written sources, I shall explore symbolic nexuses between the rebetiko world and the world of Islamic mysticism, particularly, the dervish *tekkedhes* that developed in Crete in the years of the Ottoman Empire up until 1923. My empirical material has been gathered from a long-term historical and anthropological research project conducted in Herakleion during 1991-92, and includes 25 biographies of old people, born between 1904 and 1925, together with commentaries and information gathered from local newspaper archives.

My approach seeks to study a local scene of rebetiko as a cultural phenomenon emerging within a specific socio-historical context. Therefore the study looks at the social place of rebetiko in Herakleion, the surrounding value systems (masculinity, pleasure, etc.) and the behavioural patterns, including *manghia* and smoking hashish. Following Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces (1986), I approach the *tekke*, a specific place of gathering and entertainment of rebetes, as a heterotopic social space where pleasurable activities are undertaken and where masculine identity is negotiated and performed.

### The socio-historical context

During the period of the Autonomous State of the island of Crete, Herakleion was a commercial city with a large harbour, inhabited by various groups, included Greek Cretans, Turkish Cretans, Armenians, Jews, and British soldiers of the Great Powers who were camped in the city to control the conflicts between its different communities and the many foreigners (Zaimakis 2008). It was a cosmopolitan period in which the institution of *kafodheia* (musical cafés) flourished in the cities of Crete influencing the genesis of a local musical scene of rebetiko associated with what was later called *tabahaniotika* songs (Magrini 1997). The *kafodheia* was a modern form of popular entertainment located around harbour and inner city places that offered two types of entertainment: *café chantant*, with light popular European-style music and dance, and oriental *café-aman*, with local songs and creations inspired by late Ottoman popular music. In them, musical companies and troupes of singers and dancing women touring the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean as well as domestic musicians to entertain the music loving public. Like other similar types of popular entertainment in Western Europe (*café concerts* or *café chantant*, see Harris 1989), the *kafodheio* was an institution frequently exploited the female body, combining popular music performances, often with daring spectacles and forms of sexual entertainment that challenged the city's respectable bourgeois society, as indicated in the commentaries in the local newspapers (Zaimakis 1997-99).

After the Asia Minor catastrophe, the cultural geography of the city was totally changed. With the Lausanne Treaty (1923), which provided for the exchange of Muslim and Christian populations between Greece and Turkey, about 10,000 Turkish-Cretan inhabitants of the city left the city and about 14,000 refugees from Asia Minor arrived, bringing into the new environment their cultural traditions. The refugees' songs became popular in Herakleion, and the tradition of Turkish-Cretan *amanedhes* and Anatolian music seems to have a continuity with these songs. The latter were for the refugees a platform upon which they could voice their longing for their lost lands in Asia Minor, a means to express their personal need for emotional lament and strengthen their collective identity.

Analysing articles from the daily press in Herakleion in the first half of the 20th century, I noticed that hashish smoking was not a public interest issue until the arrival of refugees from Asia Minor. The state's attempt to integrate refugees and impose disciplinary control on the growing populations of Greek cities was marked by an extended social control exerted over refugees and later over other alleged dangerous social groups, such as communists. During the first years after the refugees' arrival, negative observations started appearing in newspapers about Asia Minor songs, and in some comments there was an implied connection between these songs and hashish (Zaimakis 2001). Later, after 1929 and the period of social and economic crisis, the state mechanism of social control became more strict. In those years we see the beginning of a crusade against drugs, hashish songs, corruption, immorality etc. The comments were followed by police clean-up operations during which many *tekkedhes* were banned and closed.

These operations intensified during the era of the fascist Metaxas regime. In that period all the cultural patterns which deviated from Metaxas' notions of a clear and authentic "Greek civilisation" were rejected and banned. In this ideological climate the rich tradition of *amanes*, *tabouras*, or the shadow theatre, all elements of a long-standing traditions in Crete, became the victims of the regime's ethnocentric policies. Against these traditions Metaxas promoted the folk tradition of Crete with lyra and lute. In reality that genre was only one part of the rich musical traditions of Crete, diffused only in agricultural areas. Gradually the construction of a local folklore, tailored to fit the ideals of the regime, was carried out.

**The ritualised practice of hashish-smoking**

The anonymous, non-commercial rebetiko tradition seems to have developed in the large port cities of the eastern Mediterranean from the late 19th century to the interwar era, in the framework of a subculture that emerged among marginalised urban social groups and was associated with a divergent system of beliefs and values outside mainstream society. Among the areas where this tradition appeared were urban centres on the island of Crete (Zaimakis 2011).

Within the rebetiko subculture, hashish-smoking was perceived as a meaningful social practice in which cultural values were expressed and forms of hegemonic masculinity were performed. Often hashish-smoking took the form of an aesthetic collective ritual in which the participants experienced a state of collective pleasure and excitement, uniting the *manghes* in a collective body and creating and empowering a sense of community. The hashish-smokers believed that they were following a long term tradition inherited from the old *manghes*, the *kalderimitzides* and the *berbantes* of the Castle [the popular name of the city] in the Ottoman era.

My interviewees tended to idealise the society of the past, stressing the social character of hashish smoking and its euphoric dimensions and contrasting it with a devalued

present marked by reckless drugs abuse. I quote two parts of interviews in which old *manghes* puts this eloquently:

> Hashish wasn't like it is now where they go through the needle and end up getting lost. Then, we 'drank' [smoked] to reach [a state of] *kefi*, to dance a zeibekiko, to laugh with our company […] to enjoy. (Biography No 11)

> In the old days the hashish-smoking was a custom…. We knew the right way to 'drink' it. Today things are different. Heroin is a catastrophe. (Biography No 6)

Often the practice of hashish-smoking took the form of a collective ritual in which the participants experienced a state of collective pleasure and excitement, associated with feelings of euphoria and arousal. This practice joined the *manghes* in a collective body, empowering a sense of a distinctive community and developing an emotions-oriented system for assisting the interactions among users in collaborative networks. Narrators used a specific language (argot) to describe the state of mind in the practice of hashish smoking. A desired state of pleasant euphoria during the ritual was called *kefi* and the practice for achieving it was called *mastourliki*, a social and entertaining practice with performative aspects. I shall now detail some of the perfomative phases of hashish smoking in a *tekke*, employing a narration of a prestigious *mangas*.

> We were making a *narghile* [hookah] and 5-6 people were sitting around. The *narghile* went around and, for example, to the first two or three, it was over. He was making it then. You went to each one until it was the turn of the next one, so you smoked five or six *narghile* blends. We were singing a little song, I wanted to play a bit [on the bouzouki] for a while. We are a company, a group, beautiful, silent, serious, very serious, sometimes a joke. (Biography No 3)

In this passage the narrator emphasises the mystagogic, collective and equalising character of the ritual, the convergence of the ego towards the we (company, group), with the ultimate goal of creating a state of collective euphoria ("we are beautiful"). It also reveals some of the ritual phases of the practice: The first was the practice in which the *narghile* passed from one participant to the other. They would be seated in a circle, and the procedure began, and the *narghile* was passed from hand to hand around the group. This was repeated many times. Sometimes, the ritual was initiated by the father, a respected person in the company, the so-called *dervisomanga*.

Gradually, the users moved into a condition of ecstasy, and an experienced bouzouki player could start to play, elevating the spirits of the assembled company. The instrument-playing aimed at the culmination of the emotional excitement, in which the self tended to join the collective body of the company. Often the participants expressed their internal states by singing hashish songs and other traditional, oral diffused, songs based on Anatolian modes. Some of them were slow-moving *amanedhes* and *mourmourika*. It is a performance of hashish-rebetika songs that seems, in Sarbanes' terms, to open up everyday life to aesthetic (musical) transformation: "One co-subjectivity leads to another, and from there to a deepened intersubjectivity, as the smoker's altered physical relationship to space and time bestows an ontological dimension on the musician's experiments in sound and rhythm." (Sarbanes 2006: 24)

The verses were in a type of couplet around which the participants improvised and created new verses that were coloured with the local dialect. In the years of Christian and Muslim cohabitation we find many Turkish phrases or words that are interchangeable with Greek lyrics. Sometimes, the music and the songs were accompanied by dance, offering a space for the public performance and negotiation of masculine identity through the dance of "heavy" zeibekiko. For some narrators the hashish smoking was part of a distinctive way of life associated with pleasure-seeking

in the specific spaces of popular entertainment in the city. The following excerpt from a refugee from Asia Minor is illustrative.

> Hashish-smoking was an entertainment. Others did it occasionally to show that they too were something. We did it consistently. For me, it was part of my life. I had the company, because the hashish wanted company, I went to the place where we did it, we had all the paraphernalia. You had to create the right atmosphere. Sometimes we also brought instruments, laterna, bouzouki or gramophone. Back then, bouzouki was fashionable in our group. This is what the old people used to do. People older than me told me that when the Turks were here they had long-sleeved bouzoukis with frets. We had a "good time" and if we were ready we would go to the port and [the bordellos of] Lakkos. There was *dalaveria* frolicking, women, dancing, company. Nice things, I tell you. (Biography No 6)

Similar narratives show that the practice of hashish smoking was inextricably linked to a subculture of divergent social groups from the lower social strata of the city, who form a heterotopic space of pleasures on the city's fringes in search of opportunities for courtship, popular entertainment, and temporary escape from the sufferings of low life.

**The heterotopia of the *tekke* and its symbolism**

The *tekke* was a familiar and private place of hashish users and also a symbol of their cultural identity. The name *tekke* came from the homonymous religious place of Muslim sects. According to the census of the Autonomous State, in Herakleion in 1900 there were 19 Muslim *tekkedhes*. The majority of them belonged to the Bektashi monastic orders, but there were also other orders such as the Khalwati, Pifai, Kadri and Naqshbandi. All of them followed the values and the religious practices of Islamic mysticism known as Sufi.

The dens of the *dervises* were religious places characterised by an order and a hierarchy. During the ritual of *dervisiliki*, a dervish, a Muslim monk, was dancing, singing and eulogising God in order to reach a state of ecstasy and to enter into trance. Making due allowances we could find a connectedness with the *tekkedhes* of the hashish-smokers. In the ritual of hashish-smoking there was a community atmosphere and a relatively strict and defined ritual (for example the practice was initiated by a *mangas* who disposed of symbolic capital). He would be an acceptable and respectable person among the members of the group and everyone else would wait their turn to take their dose (*tzoura*). Once again the aim here is a state of ecstasy, an emotional excitement that allows the ritual rising up, the chance for the participant to join the collective body. It was a means through which they experienced community spirit and confirmed and strengthened the symbolic bonds.

Apart from ritual, we can also trace cultural loans from the wider Islamic world to rebetiko at the level of daily language. *Manghes* and hashish-smoking used an argot with many phrasal loans from the world of Islam, such as *dervisi*, *tekke*s, *dounias*, *derti* etc. Moreover, we can observe that some of the Turko-Cretan *amanedhes* and *tabahaniotika* songs sung by the hashish-smokers in Crete had influences from Ottoman popular traditions. The chanting ritual of hashish-smoking appears to have parallels with the practice of *muabbet* found in Bektasi Sufi communities in the Balkans and the East. According to Sugarham (1987), in the practice of *muabbet* the singing is performed in the context of a ritual that lasts for many hours and sometimes ends at dawn. The ritual has a collective character and the participants form a circle in the company. The active participation of each member is imperative and the group's songs are based on ready-made improvisations on certain poetic forms, while sometimes they are accompanied by traditional dances. Based on his analysis, the musicologist Williams (2004) considers the influence of Bektashism on certain types of

Cretan music to be possible and finds analogies in the songs of Crete with similarities to the music of the *muabbet*. It is worth mentioning that the impact of Anatolian music on the urban popular tradition of Cretan music was identified by the illustrious music teacher Georgios Hatzidakis in an informative article published in 1907 (Hatzidakis 1907).

Another thing that is apparent is that in both practices participation involves a procedure of initiation into the codes and behaviour patterns of the group. The role of mystic is played by an old *mangas*, who teaches the norms of group to the initiate, the so called *fintani* (seedling). The latter needs to have arrived at a spiritual conception about hashish through dealings with the hashish-smokers. The first ritual step occurs in the *tekke*. There he takes his position at the end of the circle of participants, and he participates in the performative phases of the ceremony under the eyes of the members of the group. In the world of Sufi too the novice dervish took the decision, called *irada*, to follow the order, the so-called *tariqa*, under the guidance of the single leader known as the *shaikh*. The novitiate had an obligation to follow the consults and advice of his leader and express all interior desires. Thus, passing via a process of testing, he could gradually become a dervish.

The interaction between the Christian and the dervish world in an open and multicultural society such as was the city of Herakleion, is very interesting. There is written evidence that proves the interest of some scholars in the ritual of *dervisiliki* in the *tekkedhes*. Evangelia Frangaki, in a work about Turkish hammams, quotes part of the account by Thrasivoulos Markidis of the visit to the city at the beginning of the 20th century of the Turkish-Cretan Nureset Alibasaki with the Greek-Cretan leader Aristidi Frangaki, who had taken part in *dervisisliki* at a famous *tekke* of Herakleion, that of the Khalwati Order in the suburb of Mastaba in Herakleion . The narrator says:

> …Dervishes were falling down on the floor with froth at their mouths. They were Bektashi [Muslim sect].At the beginning they were dancing under the sound of *taboura* following the rhythm of their belief. With Muslim music they were turning round and round in a circle. They had many small candles where they burned not incense but *cara bouhari*. At the end, when they were dizzy and exhausted, they sat at the table for dinner which had been prepared by the slaves or servants. The main food was rice with saffron. There were not only Turks but also Greeks… (Frangaki 1907)

Similarly in a comment in the newspaper *Νέα Εφημερίς* of 1917 we find a reference to *dervisiliki* and the dances of dervishes accompanied by *taboura*, an instruments of the lute family similar to the bouzouki. The columnist describes the performative ritual and the hymns to god as they revolve for a long time seeking to represent the planetary system and to reach a state of ecstasy as they contemplate the wisdom of creation. Moreover, in an oral history of the life of a bohemian figure of city, who had consorted with *manghes*, we have the following:

> When I was young and went to school, this would have been about 1915, we turned down to *Tris Kamares* square where there was a Turkish *tekke*. We went there with my friends secretly and we visited the dance of the dervishes. They were chanting and dancing, and as they were dizzy they came to a kind of *ekstasis*. They had a good appearance and were serious. They were a good sort of men, and they impressed us. They used some instruments, *tabouras* and 'ud. I think that we used the word dervish metaphorically in the *manghes*' places. When someone was a good man, upstanding and trusty, and behaved right, straight like a sword, then we said he was a dervish-boy. (Biography No 17)

**Discussion**

In this short text, I have tried to show through the voices of anonymous rebetes the cultural significance of hashish-smoking practice in a local rebetiko scene. The analysis reveals the multicultural setting and the interactions between different ethnic groups. The interviewees recognise and evaluate positively the influence of their Muslim counterparts. They approach hashish smoking as a pleasurable and euphoric state of mind, inextricably linked to the lifestyle and codes of behaviour and communication of the rebetis. The *tekke* is understood as a distinctive space where rebetiko identity and masculinity is ritually negotiated and performed. It is a heterotopic site of an alternative ordering (Foucault 1986) aimed at enjoyment, companionship, participation in improvised music, and camaraderie. Sexual pleasure, which according to the storytellers, is strengthened through proper use, is also an important issue addressed in the biographies.

The interviewees romanticise the past and the common, customary practice of hashish and contrast it with the ills of modern society and the abuse of hard drugs. They also criticise the policies of the state to control and prohibit hashish-smoking which gradually become a serious deviation from dominant societal norms. The factual material of the research shows some symbolic links between hashish-smoking and the practices of *dervisiliki* in Islamic *tekkedhes* in the island of Crete, during the Ottoman Empire and the Autonomous State of Crete. The findings indicate that symbolic elements of a religious stage can be used in a totally different social and cultural space with different meaning and symbolism.

The merging of biographical discourse with historical material can elevate neglected views of rebetiko phenomenon, particularly as regards the early phase of its creation. First, working on my factual material brought to light some basic elements about the practice of hashish–smoking, a lower classes habitus in the first decades of the twentieth century which has since gradually become problematic and illegal. In the interwar era in Greece, a period when the country faced serious political and economic crises, hashish-smoking became an action to be disapproved of and a deviation from societal norms. Second, in this paper I have presented some symbolic links between hashish-smoking and the practices of *dervisiliki* in Islamic *tekkedhes* in the island of Crete, during the Ottoman Empire and the Autonomous State of Crete. By analysing rebetiko in the port-cities, it is possible to find new avenues to investigate both the connections and interactions between these local pockets of rebetiko as well as the particular social and historical contexts under which rebetiko micro-societies developed.

Paper presented at Hydra Rebetiko Conference 2003.

**E-mail**: **zaimakis@uoc.gr**

**Bibliography**

Foucault, M. (1986) “On the other spaces” *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22-7.

Harris, H. (1989) “But is it art? Female performers in the café-concert” *New Theatre Quarterly* 5 (20): 334-7

Hatzidakis, G. (1907) “Κρητική μουσική και όρχησις” [Cretan music and dance]. *Κρητική Στοά* B.: 273-86.

Magrini, T. (1997) "Tabachaniotika" *Ethnomusicology OnLine* 3.

Νέα Εφημερίς, “Επαρχιακές ημέρες: Καστρινός χορός ή συρτός” [Provincial days: castle dance or syrtos], 6-5-1917.

Sarbanes, J. (2006) Musicking and communitas: The aesthetic mode of sociality in rebetika subculture. *Popular Music and Society*, 29:1, 17-35.

Sugarman, J. (1987) "Making muhabet: the social basis of singing among Prespa Albanian men". *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology* 7: 70-85.

Williams, C. (2004) "The Cretan Muslims and the music of Crete". In Tziovas D. (ed.) *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment* (p. 208-22*)*, London, Routledge.

Zaimakis, Y., (1997-99) "Αστικές αντιλήψεις και ψυχαγωγικές πρακτικές: Τα καφωδεία στο Ηράκλειο την περίοδο της αυτονομίας της Κρήτης" [Urban conceptions and entertainment practices; The *kafodheia* in Herakleion of Crete in the period of Autonomy of Crete]. *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, 5-7:133-61.

Zaimakis, Y. (2001) "Κοινωνική ενσωμάτωση και πολιτισμική διαφοροποίηση: Μικρασιάτες μουσικοί στο μεσοπολεμικό Ηράκλειο" [Social integration and cultural differentiation; Asia Minor refuges in interwar Herakleion]. *Δοκιμές* 9-10: 110-36.

Zaimakis, Y. (2011) "Music-making in the social world of a Cretan town (Heraklion 1900–1960): a contribution to the study of non-commercial *rebetiko"*. *Popular Music* 30:1-24.

Zaimakis, Y., (2008[1999]) *Καταγώγια ακμάζοντα στο Λάκκο Ηρακλείου: Παρέκκλιση, πολιτισμική δημιουργία,ανώνυμο ρεμπέτικο (1900-1940)* [Flourishing dens in Lakkos of Herakleion: deviance, cultural creation, anonymous rebetiko (1900-1940)]. Athens: Πλέθρον.