

Local and Global Understandings of Creativities

Local and Global Understandings
of Creativities:
Multipart Music Making and the Construction
of Ideas, Contexts and Contents

Edited by

Ardian Ahmedaja

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P U B L I S H I N G

Local and Global Understandings of Creativities:
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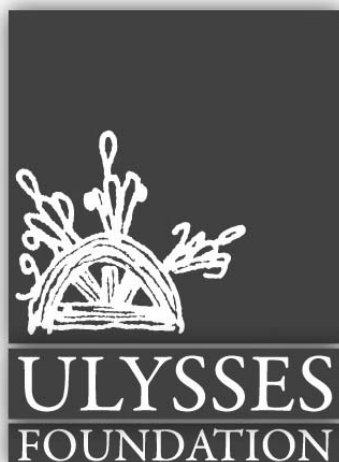
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Fitoni çdo sfidë

PREFACE

Local musical practices are still underrepresented in creativity studies, although focusing on them helps to analyse all of the factors considered dominant within this framework - process, product, person and place (see Kozbelt, Beghetto, Runco 2010) - from particular perspectives. In the process of music and dance making, the “products” are created based on the affiliation between the performers and communities they are embedded in. The communication between them enables an intensive and dynamic local discourse which has also led to the establishment of specific local terminologies (see Ahmedaja 2011). The musical aesthetics deployed influence the cultural listening and enunciation contexts and therefore the perception of the processes and the “products”.

These features are particularly distinguishable in multipart music practices, which might be characterised as a specific mode of music making and expressive behaviour based on intentionally distinct and coordinated participation in the performing act by sharing knowledge and shaping values (see more on <http://www.multipartmusic.org/multipartmusic/>). In music making “in company” (Lortat-Jacob 2011) the protagonists have to follow the rules of interaction and create the cohesion of “being together”. At the same time they try to promote personal goals. These depend on specific personal treasure troves of experience, which are continuously being modified also as a result of the exchange between individuals (see Kubik 2010: 60-61).

Based on this perspective, the contributions in this volume illuminate various aspects that have to do with the local and global understandings of creativity in everyday musical practices. One of them, which has hardly been dealt with until now, is at the heart of the first contribution, dedicated to “multipart drinking (and singing)” by Bernard Lortat-Jacob. Focusing on the “creators” rather than on the “produced object”, the conclusions reveal the existence of “culture as a drug”.

The subsequent contributions are divided into three sections (Parts II, III and IV), each one focusing on a specific theme. The first of them is connected with questions of the identification of the creative processes in multipart music practices. Through the exploration of various methodologies in theoretical approaches and case studies, answers to the following questions are given: How can creative processes in multipart music making be recognized? How do the acts of performance, interpretation and local discourse give shape to them? How can individual, collective and collaborative dimensions, so essential for multipart music practices, be defined in this context?

Part II 1. focuses on the construction of ideas, contexts and contents. The contributions on this subject contain examinations of the role of the pervasive diffusion of instruments for the recording/reproduction of sound, discussions on “oral music” and “secondary orality”, the dialogic of multipart singing, musical creativity in “text-oriented” song traditions, production and process, as well as mediatisation. Part II 2. contains instead case studies on specific questions about procedures, techniques, and revivals in local musical practices.

Part III is dedicated to the diversity of the roles, powers, symbolism, meanings and values given to the “polyphony of voices” in religious traditions, based on analyses of local connotations of the Byzantine Chant and Jewish religious practices.

In Part IV, issues related to awards given to local music are discussed. In public discussions, they are often considered to be not simply connected with the performers, but are seen much more as creating a “ranking” of local repertoires. Multipart music repertoires are significant in this context because of their remarkable role in the establishment of local cultural distinctiveness. Similar situations are apparent in the case of the inclusion of a number of multipart music repertoires in the UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Questions discussed in this context are: what does an award mean for the performers and the communities practising the repertoire which has received an award? What does it mean for communities which practice other repertoires? Does such an award influence everyday practice? What is the role of ethnomusicologists in this context?

Some of the contributions are accompanied by audio examples included on the CD of the book. They are mostly field recordings and are of great use in obtaining better insights into the issues and musical practices discussed.

* * *

The contributions of this volume are a selection of the presentations at the Second Symposium of the Study Group for Multipart Music within the International Council for Traditional Music, which took place in Tiranë, Albania, from 22-29 April 2012. I am very indebted to the local organiser, the Ulysses Foundation, and especially to Emi Aliçka-Ebhardt, for the excellent organisation of all the symposium's activities and for taking care of the financial support for the preparation of the manuscript of this volume: the first proof-reading (none of the contributors is English native speaker), the translation from French into English of the essay by Bernard Lortat-Jacob, and the mastering of the audio examples. Special thanks go to Raiffeisen Bank Albania for providing essential support for the symposium and the preparation of the manuscript.

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—Ardian Ahmedaja

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PART I

MULTIPART DRINKING (AND SINGING): A CASE STUDY IN SOUTHERN ALBANIA

BERNARD LORTAT-JACOB

*“Drink with me, play with me,
love with me, wear a crown with
me, with me, when I am mad, be
mad and be wise with me when I
am”*

(Extract from a drinking song
from Classical Greece, quoted by
François Lissarrague 1987: 11).

I. Some general and comparative assertions

Singing and drinking¹. Associating those two actions is not really obvious. Whereas singing is viewed as a largely positive artistic activity implying body and expressivity control, drinking has more ambiguous connotations. Medicine advises against it, taking into account the pathological excesses likely to affect drinkers; the authorities feel concerned about it and regulate it for the disturbance it may lead to; anyway, it induces a loss of self-control which disturbs morality to such an extent that puritanism, under different forms, never tires of condemning it.

The fact remains that drinking together is an everyday and widespread action, which is fundamentally valued in numerous societies. In ours, it is kept alive through a powerful ancestral activity, the “café” which, along with the church and the station, constitutes the very centre of the urban landscape.

This ambivalence of drinking endows the drinker with a relatively doubtful identity. Sometimes he seems to embody the sociable man *par excellence*, a cheerful communicator who can open up the group to meaningful interactions. Sometimes, risking a loss of self-control, this same drinker interferes with social order. For – in the common meaning of the word – drinking is not just ingesting alcohol (that is fairly obvious), but is laying oneself open to excess. Thus drinking is also “drinking too

much". According to assessment systems, this "drinking too much" can be detected in antisocial behaviour, loudness, stagger, violence sometimes, or can be measured in terms of alcohol level in the blood.

Within the "company" (Lortat-Jacob 2011), the drinker occupies a distinctive position, at once central and marginal, centripetal and centrifugal. The centre in question is that which is granted to him as soon as he enables the others to enjoy the modification of his state; the margin is that of his own deviance, a deviance he is invited to take up, then to explore within the company. In a way, the drinker is the "acrobat" of this company, which encourages him to drink, implicitly or explicitly, and, if need be, does not hesitate to support him, taking on the right to control his undue deviations.

"Drinking together" is what we are interested in; it is very different from "drinking alone", which is unanimously identified as marginalising or pathological². As probably repeated all over the world (at least in the Mediterranean world), claiming that "he who drinks alone is mad" is but the social, critical and diagnostic form of those courses of treatment for alcoholism undergone by solitary alcoholics in clinically advanced environments – if they have the means to pay for it. While the reactions to the phenomenon may differ, the symptoms are the same.

The mechanism of this argument raises a question, both logical and sociological, which could be formulated thus: why and how can a society allow collective behaviours, which it forbids as soon as they are practised alone? That is not self-evident. You may walk alone, run alone, eat alone, work alone, etc. without attracting disapproval, but "drinking alone" is not done, or must not be done. Raised thus, the question is not ethical, but logical, and has a feel of aporia. In its way, and in terms of category, drinking could be likened to crime since the latter is prohibited in the private sphere but authorised and even encouraged in the public sphere: a declaration of war in due form is sufficient to justify it.

This logical difficulty comes in a variety of forms. The first one consists in considering that one does not kill in the same way when "alone" or "with others" – but on a technical level this explanation is not really convincing because, whatever one may say, killing is killing. The second one consists in questioning the semantic extension of the words.

Let us come back to "drinking". You have to note that, in its very simplicity, the verb and the action cover neither exactly nor exclusively the fact of absorbing a liquid, be it alcoholic. One could say grammar is here to consolidate the words. The word takes on a fundamentally different meaning as soon as you attach the adverbs "together" or "alone" to it – powerful additives since they are enough to change the nature of the action

and even to reverse the sense. Swallowing a liquid can be understood differently, not only because of the nature of the liquid, but also from the grammatical operators which are added and which, in such a case, refer to decisively conflicting categories. Finally, and this will be the subject of the following study: drinking is submitted to varying contexts and cultural controls. As such, its approach implies ethnography and invites pragmatics.

I.1. Classical Greece

Drinking in company is an old matter; it goes back at least to the Classical Greece, when wine, closely linked to the cult of Dionysus, was of divine essence. In the context of the *symposium*, its consumption, from the great Crater in the centre of the gathering, was always bound to the others' presence.

As Florence Dupont reminds us (1998: 31), freely commenting François Lissarrague (1987): "During the *symposium*, the drinker is never alone, neither with his wine, nor with his song, nor with his loves... The *symposium* drinker never lives a solitary and personal adventure, on the contrary, he is seeking shared gestures, pleasures and emotions."

Thus, being a cult dedicated to Dionysus, the banquet – a meeting of drinkers – is not a mere profane event. It links together three types of activities [wine, singing, love] and involves three divinities too: Dionysus himself, the Muses and Eros. As to the Muses, they are "song-goddesses" likely to possess the singer

[...] by having him compose a song full of *charis*, of beauty and seduction which can charm men as well as gods. Unlike the Greek bard who sings epics, the *symposium* drinker is not a Memory professional, his word is not inspired, it is devoid of all superior knowledge, and that is why he only speaks of the banquet and of its divinities. The drinker's song is never mythical, most of the time, it only recounts the pleasure of being at the *symposium*, of drinking, loving and singing [...]. So each banquet is an event and an adventure for a singular performance corresponding to the way the ritual developed on that day. The actors of that declaration are the drinkers, the negotiators between the rules of the ritual and the singularity of the event; the pragmatic meaning of the song, on its own, is always the same since it tells and carries out the sympotic ritual; on the other hand, its semantic meaning is variable for it records the singularity of the banquet, it is a contextual variant." (Dupont 1998: 33-34).

Precise in its form as well as in its substance, this analysis offers invaluable reading clues on “being-together”: as Florence Dupont says, the drinker-singer never lives alone in the *symposium*; he looks for a “community of gestures, of pleasures and emotions”. Consequently, drinking and singing become closely related since both are under divine tutelage. And if Dionysus is really and physically present in the drinker’s body, drunkenness is not a question of alcoholism any more but of divine possession.

I.2. At the Jalq'a's in Bolivia

Some twelve thousand kilometres and over two millennia are apparently not enough to introduce a fundamental break as regards the links between musical art (*tocar*) and collective drinking (*tomar*). The Greek model is unlikely to have been exported to the other side of the Atlantic (at least, no serious source can say so). But ethnography teaches that, as underlined by Rosalia Martinez (2002) about Andean Bolivia, both ingredients are essential for the feast to function and moreover – in Bolivia as in Ancient Greece – are linked to divine forces. Unlike what is often repeated, drinking is not just a form of individual or collective release³. It becomes a spiritual necessity when the ritual consists in “coming into contact with the Saint”. But also a social one: the amount of liquid to be ingested and the state into which it gets you directly refer to the role each one occupies in the ritual. Music partakes of this ritual effervescence: you could also say that it is ingested and, in its way, governs the necessary change in state which solicits the five senses and awakens everyone’s conscience.

We shall know how to benefit from those two examples. They refer to a widespread phenomenon and are therefore significant. They do not offer an analysis grid for what follows (projecting a reality onto another can only lead to approximate comparativism) but they invite to pay attention to Albanian realities, where drinking and singing refer to common practices, which are apparently trivial but are not so in fact. As a hypothesis, what can be suspected is that their relationships are part of a system.

II. The Albanian experience

II.1. The participants’ space

In Albania, the heart and the *raison d’être* of company singing, is the group of singer-participants – friends, members of the same family, etc. – but, for an evening, this company can also integrate strangers who, most of the

time, come from a neighbouring province and who share a repertoire compatible with that of their hosts, thus putting themselves into their hands.

Company songs are sometimes called “table songs” (table: *sofra* for a coffee table *alla turca*, or *trapeza* for the western higher table). But the phrase “table song” has a drawback: it puts an emphasis on that board perched on its four legs. But that piece of furniture is not always there, especially in those areas both rural and Muslim in the South, where people eat, talk and live sitting on the floor. The Vlachs in Romania [*alias* “Aromanians”], now living in Dobrogea, but originally from Southern Albania and Northern Greece, use the phrase “sitting songs” (*din pade*).

Whatever micro-regional differences and variants, the table remains a widely used space, around which people can settle and which is freely accepted, if only so as to put glasses down. But it is also a space needing to be acoustically covered and whose cumbersome physicality needs to be eliminated as far as possible.

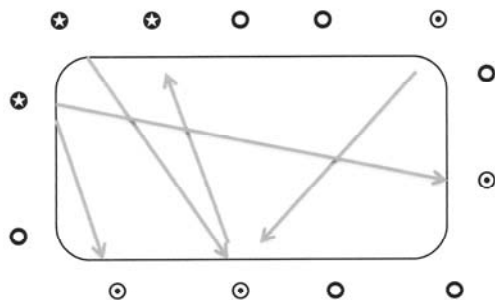


Fig. 1. The “song table” (*këngë trapeze*) [★ main parts, which singers claim for themselves *a priori*; ⊙ other possible main parts; ● supporting parts (*iso*)].

When the singers know each other (in most cases), they tend to settle around that table according to their parts, their regions of origin and their ability to match their voices⁴. Soloists like to keep together. But, during an informal evening, other singers, *a priori* undeclared, may launch into the action, without leaving their place, in a process which will embrace and rouse the whole table, creating intertwined interactions (cf. fig. 1). What the song will lose in musical coordination (it is more difficult to hear and

tune your voice to that of the chosen partner), it will then gain in terms of strong social implication.

II.2. A social construction

Of an evening, some thirty songs can easily follow each other more or less continuously. They are agents of this continuity since they impose a shared time, centred on the active listening, watching and proximity of the participants. Though, as underlined by Dalipaj and Pistrick, (2011: 183), they are related to *muhabet*, the art of discourse and being together, they have a relative organic autonomy – a song is never interrupted. They are only separated by usually short pauses – whose role, as will be seen, is very important. Together with *raki*, those songs are responsible for the evening's progression and the successive changes in state which must take place smoothly. In close association, drinking and singing meet three quasi-conflicting requirements: continuity, setting up of stages, modification of state.

What seals this continuity and ensures the progression and the successive changes in state is as much “producing together” as “drinking together”. For its part, drinking ensures the setting up of successive stages (one drinks in between each song, never during the song itself). It is necessarily attended by the ritual and technical gesture *dollia* (toasting), expressed in the words “*gëzuar!*” or “*shëndet!*” [your health] which are vocalised, tossed by the singers before they start singing, then repeated after their song is ended. But the two *gëzuar* – the one before and the one after the song – are different: if, in numerous instances, the first one points the song towards a recipient and aims at someone in particular (sometimes two people at once), on the contrary, the second one has no precise recipient and is intended for the whole group of participants, without any name being given. *Dollia* has its own rules: the first round is started by the *dollibash* (prime of toasting, usually the host) and the next ones by the other participants; and with each song, it goes to a different recipient, according to a distribution system which conveys the hierarchical and affective relationships between those present. With Pistrick and Dalipaj (2009: 217-219), we shall note that those relationships only have a relative permanency and that they vary according to the situations and the kinds of festivity. Thus, in these authors' words, “singing follows [a] pre-established social order” and, we could add, makes this social order public, wholly real and clearly vocalised.

Sustained by the ingestion of *raki* – binding both those who indulge and those who will benefit from its effects, more or less directly –, the

song constantly feeds on contributions from the participants, who may be now real, now virtual actors. If the songs themselves are aimed directly at those who hear them and are nourished by the contributors' energy in producing a shared emotion, through their words or their referents, they evoke and even convoke loved ones (present or absent) or mythical beings (one could say semi-present) and finally dear departed ones. The singers' memory, and their ability to pass off for real what is only confusedly so, are what unite those different entities. That is what is at stake in a performance.

II.3. Raki and Co

For the Ancient Greeks (cf. *supra*), the symposium took the form of a possession cult, centred on the crater, Dionysus's metonymic and epiphanic form, where wine was prepared by mixing it with water. In a convergent manner, even if it is not similar, Albanian participants put their *raki* – brandy – at the centre of their gatherings. Carefully prepared, valorised (and relatively costly, besides), in the course of an evening, it is always named, assessed, and its qualities are often sung.

“Me raki e verë u denda /kush qe baba? kush qe nëna?”

[Too much raki, too much wine / who was my father who was my mother?]⁵

Nazif Çelaj, 2005

Raki also partakes of a larger semantic context. It is a rich metaphor of the body and of the loving soul, linked to the loved one's absence.

“Rakia shtruar s'më pihet.”

[The *Raki* is served, but I do not feel like drinking it.]

Abas Qamo, 2009

Because it is absolutely necessary to the company, the co-consumed alcohol cannot be considered as a secondary ingredient, and neither is it among the Jalq'a in Bolivia (cf. *supra*). It refers to incandescent body as much as to being together. There resides its ambivalence. In fact, it is all about combining the altered inner being with the social being; the exercise is not that easy. Consuming *raki* amounts to entering into a sharing, and entering into the world of that sharing: the glass is filled and the arm is stretched towards the bottle held out towards you, and that is the first link in a social relationship.

It is well known that you get *raki* by fermenting fruits (grapes, plums, blackberries, etc.). Thus, before being a “transformer of state”, it is itself the result of a bio-chemical transformation requiring a technique and a careful control of time. The fruit is grown close by and the drink prepared locally (in practice, each farmer, or nearly each one, has his own production) and it will be consumed locally, between people who have mastered the art of fermenting fruit. This fermentation is to be compared with the transformation exerted by *raki* on the singers themselves and which the latter exert on the song when they have been drinking it at length. From the fruit to the still, from the still to the table, from the table to the drinkers and from the drinkers to the singers; there is a series of transformations part of the same continuum.

II.4. Distributing/transforming

An evening associating song and *raki* is a complex construction with several spatial and temporal dimensions, part of a duration which leaves the company long enough to thoroughly decline their affects.

In a constructed and progressive way, the performance aims at bringing together the close and the distant, the present and the absent and – more largely – the physical and metaphysical worlds. But things appear more complex than at first sight, for those presences evoked in the songs are as much real [those of the actors-singers] as they are virtual. In that last case, they are mythical beings: heroes recalled through the words of the songs, whose names are remembered, as well as their various feats of arms (generally against the Turks), their lost or inaccessible fiancées – who may not even have existed. But also presences-absences: the song is the trace of a memory, of a former situation, of a dear remembered friend, who finds himself invested with particular expressive attentions. Therefore, being together means rallying those present, but above all evoking/recalling those absent [for parallel developments on these questions, cf. Delaporte 2003, Bonini Baraldi 2010, Pistrick 2012]. The result is paradoxical: the synchronicity – the so-called performance – is but an illusion. Performance in singing must be seen as a highly mnemonic act. It refers to a “fictive presence”.

In terms of interactions, as a rule, what may happen during an evening of singing is expected, but it also contains large zones for the unforeseen, which call for deciphering. Each and everyone put in their performing roles, now through their own actions, now through their reactions to the others, drawing from personal and collective motives. Thus, individually, in the course of the evening, each one may take the initiative in inserting

numerous *gëzuar* in between songs (they are not exclusively reserved for the singers). At the same time, together with the others, each one must produce a careful and substantial *iso*, with no break nor hiatus. That is why the *iso* – a unison choir producing a continuous sound – cannot be considered as secondary; it is a sonic approval and it supplies the necessary musical support which the solo singers always call for⁶. It is an essential clue to participation and bonding.

The prevalent custom is to address the first *gëzuar* to those present – those who are really around the table, starting with the most respectable guests or the dearest friends, not forgetting the host and hostess, of course. The following rounds will symbolically convoke “those who are not there” – those who are away by accident (they were prevented from coming); and then, those who are away because they cannot come (migrant workers); finally, the evening always ends with an evocation of the dead, distant ones first, then emotionally close ones.

In the course of this construction, bodies come to life and words lose some syllabic clarity as voices warm up, helped along by *raki*. The tone tends to go up progressively (a good third on average) and a singing evening always ends in a dance, which is an act of bravery; each one must show that, in spite of alcohol, he can still keep his balance and his station, and rule his altered body without losing the rhythm.

In short, it appears that a singing evening is a celebration for those present (including those absent who, in fact, are present emotionally) and is also a double journey, both in the past and inside oneself. The outline of this formal construction is not entirely fixed, but it meets a number of principles (cf. *infra*, fig. 2).

In fact, memory “in performance” solicits both personal and impersonal mnemonic chains. Each one has “his” friends, his migrant workers and his dead and each one also remembers a repertoire of songs which is only partially known to the others. In this situation, you must aim at compatibility and create a common work from shared elements. Finally, a singer is not expected to “sing again” a known song but to endow it with a particular local and unique identity – an identity which it will acquire all the more easily if the company is present and strong.

Musically, it is better to consider the whole series of performed songs as a suite. Which does not mean that the order is totally settled in advance, like the famous “suites à la française” of the baroque period, but that each song takes on its signification, its weight and its emotional colour according to the preceding one and the following one within a whole which is nothing less than a “composition”. It is less a question of producing a series of songs *a priori* fixed, than, by stringing them

appropriately, to choose those which are likely to produce more interactions and cohesion as well as a better “being together”. The successful evening is that when the performers sang well socially and musically, when no one was forgotten nor kept out, when risks were taken and assumed and when self-sacrifice benefited everyone.



Fig. 2. Singing and drinking: structural evolutions during a party. Note (at the top) the regular alternation of drinking and singing. Exceptionally, this alternation may be spoiled towards the end of the evening by the increasing energy of the song and the singers. In that case, the song tends to cover the *gēzuar*, by overlapping.

In the end, what is judged is indeed the transformation operation which the group carried out on themselves. And that transformation is effected consecutively through alcohol ingestion and sound exhalation. It is circular develops in three phases. 1) *Raki* is poured to the drinker (a centrifugal gesture, creating a bond between the one who gives and the one who receives); 2) it goes down the drinker's throat and transforms the receiving body (a centripetal action); 3) the end of the cycle is then set in motion again in a centrifugal movement: horizontal redistribution – in a vocal form this time – aimed at all the participants, intended to cover the whole table, in a movement equivalent to a collective compromise.

II.5. Fermentation of the text

Music does not keep apart either in that alchemy. But it works in a different way: on the words. It alters them, hyper-vocalises them, adds chevilles and uses various exclamatory formulas meant to exalt the text or rather to induce it to ferment so that it may take on the right taste and effects. A short example will do: the line quoted earlier - "*Rakia shtruar s'më pihet*. [The *raki* is served, but I do not feel like drinking it.]"- does not have much existence *in se*. In its bareness, its meaning is not really certain (cf. *supra*) and its reality is even unlikely. In fact, its "normal" form, when sung in company, is of another type. It is first preceded by a long "e" realised by the drone, as though the word arose from the sound, and not the contrary. Then the words are uttered by the soloist, as a wail, and the text gets peppered with phonemes laden with a high affective content. Those phonic complements are in no way secondary, neither optional. As such, they are not mere add-ons; they are part of the song, which, without those ingredients, would have no emotional effectiveness. Moreover, if we refer to one of its performances⁷, the second section is echoed in the canonical intervention⁸ of the second singer, then by a third one who, in an improvised vocal gesture, signifies his approval, before the final sound "*het*" should again dissolve the text into the drone's vocalic colour.

"(Ore) *shtruar (e) (ja) rakia (moj) (ja) rakia s'më (ja) pihet*"

repeat: "*O moj rakia shtruar s'më pihet*"

repeat by another singer: "*S'më pihet*"

ISO: e.....

For the most part, the following lines – as an echo too – will keep that phonic structure that crafting of assonances, thus continuing the modal and emotional content taken on by the song. That is how, over a singing

evening, it could be said that, like footballers, they enjoy “dribbling” on a mood (*alias* ethos).

In that game of internal transformation, as can be seen, the phonic route of the song is not that distant of the *raki*’s: transformation-dilatation of the words, expectoration, echoisation, sharing out of the song, which, after being ingested, is restored to the company, while the *iso* – who only utters vowels – plays its part insistently in reminding those present that it is always good to be together. As for the sung words, they have neither the phonic constancy, nor even the lexical firmness which they are generally accorded. They would seem to act as some sorts of markers and we could attempt to understand how.

Synthetically, it is as though a sung text implemented processes of symbolical compensation in which content and form symmetrically respond to each other. The main themes are absence or loss (of a beloved one, of a hero, of one’s own youth, or perhaps even simply of a certain positive energy), and just as much loss of one’s native country, one’s “Homeland” (*vatan*) in the case of the songs from Tchameria⁹. Expressing that loss through singing could serve a purpose of compensation. It continuously feeds on voiced adjuncts and adjustments with an expressive function. The phonic support syllables could be seen as the acoustical form of absence; they are voiced stigmata. Rather than adjuncts, they should be seen as chevilles, which are there both to signify and to fill in a painful separation. Loss (real, mythical or spiritual) would be allayed by sound, which absorbs it, taking on the form of evocations accompanied with interjections, figures imbricated into each other, amassed and amended within a collective emulation. As a result, what links those songs together chants is more a matter of mood/ethos [*mood /ethos*] than of the stories or actions they deal with. They lie in a more or less conceptualizable semantico-affective continuum, marked out with a few words – *mall* [*longing*] or *qejfi* [*delirious joy*] (cf. Pistrick 2012) – but they still retain their own rhetorical processes. Here are a few:

– assonances of quasi-similar sentences setting up formal parallelisms. Those assonances (and of course, the rimes themselves) ensure continuity and efficiency for the song and meet a system of general paronomasia. The result is that meaning is guided by form, so much that it gives the impression of being subject to it. As an example, taken from the CD Ocora 2005 [C560188], may serve: “*Arë ditën e mërkurë /kërceva me dhën në gurë*”. Obviously, in spite of being faithful, the translation cannot reproduce the stream of signifiers with similar sonorities: “*That Wednesday, I danced with my sheep on the stones*”.

Of course, there are scores of examples of that type, products of a widespread paronomastic matrix.

– internal inversions creating some sort of micro-circularity. Things are said within phonically marked out situations. The word order is reversed according to a system of endo-variations generating a phenomenon of “auto-resonance”.

– adjuncts, creating an “increase of affect”: “*ja*”, “*moj*”, “*moj seç*”, “*o*”, “*ore*”, “*ajo*” (“that one”), “*apo*” (intensifier), “*c’e*” (truly), “*more*” (a widely used affective interjection, including in Vlach songs), etc.

Apart from those phrases – more developed in the Tosk tradition than in the Lab one, it must be pointed out –, no performance pretends to hold aloof from its origins and each one is willingly prolonged by comments aiming at locating or re-locating what has just been sung. Everyone is always ready to enter into discussions of the origin and originality of a song and the local style it requires: *skraparlli*, *kolonjar*, *myzeqar*, etc., so that each song is a mix, and even a double mix: temporal (a time for sorrow, blends/ confuses epochs which performance assembles); spatial: a space which they are fond of constantly redefining: “where does it come from?”, “who sings it best?”, “who sang it first?”, “how must we sing it, *in fine*?”. In its turn, this questioning acts as a spoken resonance chamber for what has just been sung.

In that context, evoked names, as well as convoked beings, hold a particular place. They are names of places or people known or unknown by the speakers, which they imagine or give others to imagine. Uttered and melodised, those names are catch-lines for the voice and their scope-efficiency is mainly of an affective order. Thus, quasi-mythical heroes as well as often-distressed egerias float in some sort of unreality and are only united by the emotion brought by mentioning their names. Ymer Ago, Zenel Çelua, Çelo Mezani, heroes from a history which is not always well known (to quote Pistrick 2012, a “*mythistory*”) meet up with Agnagnost, Vito and other Marinë who are not really identifiable. But is all that important? It is not, for those names serve as catch-lines as much as toponymic references. They are mere “phonic springboards”. Names of places and towns are indeed numerous in Albanian songs, which does not in any way mean that the singers are experts in Geography, or in History. Basically, it counts for little – you just know it can arouse emotion, all the more so that it speaks about death or desertion. Those names are there for the emotional forces which they are likely to bring into play. Only the affective repercussions are taken into account. They point out something both precise and inexact on which one’s own feelings may be hung since,

if indeed the name of the place or of the hero is there, the reactions and re-evocations they allow remain open.

II.6. Qualifying time

If polyphonic singing (in Albania) has a function, it is that of putting into music its own company (or putting itself into music as a company) in a semi-public space, around a table, while drinking *raki* – a function because:

1) it has properties which act with this aim – or at least it is given those properties.

2) According to the mathematical meaning of the word “function”, singing combines two entities which are organically linked, so that any modification of the first one will have an influence on the second one (and vice-versa). Those two entities are the sound form and the meaning, which highly depend on the performance. A meaning which mainly concerns the actors themselves and cannot be read outside the context it creates. A meaning then, which is embedded in the social, which is born from the interactions between singers and guests *in præsentia* and which includes a memory both collective and personal.

Unlike what is often said, music is not just “organised sounds”. When vocal, it imposes memorised and referenced texts, common beliefs and *habitus*, etc.; and somehow, the aim is to “come out” of those songs, to revive them, to update them.

In that perspective, songs are “live beings” and are endowed with agentivity. Their performance aims to:

1) qualifying the present

- by stopping time locally: agogical *rallentandi*;
- by singing long held notes until breath fails
- by hurrying the tempo
- by building up musical suites

2) qualifying space

- by using a process of widening:
 - multiplying the number of singers
 - raising the voice, increasing the volume
- by suggesting this widening in an inventive way
 - with the hand: palm upwards or backwards, in a horizontal gesture for the songs called “*shtruar*”

- (literally “drawn out”) underlining the necessary upholding of long-held notes
- with the arm: at face level and above
 - by rising up from one’s chair
 - with the eyes: when a singer does not content himself anymore with the link with one companion (particularly in the couple *marrës* / *kthyesi*), but embraces the whole table with a look, and even beyond the table
- by a tightening up
- lowering the voice and singing more softly
 - with the hand
 - addressing others: palm downwards
 - to show others that the song must be refocused on the singer – generally the *marrës*, who then raises his hand at cheek level, signifying a tightening up of the communication space: everything now has to take place between his ear and his voice [a refocusing which is not accompanied by louder singing, but on the contrary, requires the others to lower their voices]
 - by closing one’s eyes [a confirmation of broken relation with the others].

Each song has intrinsic formal properties with which it is possible to play different games of interpretation. But it is not expressed in those words and you get nowhere considering that these songs are “interpreted”. They are rather “experimented” among the group (see Lortat-Jacob 2011). Admittedly, as is often heard in the Mediterranean, “the song is the one who rules” or (other formula) “the song must be respected”, which is another way of saying that the song is an agent. But those words, repeated by the singers, as though to convince themselves, need to be qualified. There are songs which *widen* the phonic field, whereas others *tighten* it [on the soloist especially]. In the same way, some songs imply looking for the companion (sometimes at the other end of the table); others invite to a whole “stage” performance. Finally, when the atmosphere is particularly ardent and *raki* has had its effect, it leads to a noticeable confusion or redistribution of musical parts, to the addition of extra voices and thus to a questioning of the basic formal system. In that case, it will be understood that *raki* does not simply help to regulate the song during the whole

evening, it also contributes to its disorganisation and sometimes even to its sublimation.

II.7. A socio-musical grammar

In brief, for Albania, it is tempting to assume, that a universal pattern of singing and drinking exists. Here are the principles, summed up in figure 2:

- 1) Existence of a repertoire (an extensive corpus, with variable dimensions). It rests on the more or less precise memorization of a set of songs. The company's role and function is to implement, give new life, update, transform and express those songs.
- 2) Those songs are performed without any regular metronomic tempo, which imparts a great expressive plasticity.
- 3) With a certain elasticity, each song has to follow stylistic and regional canons, of which the singers are well aware: *Lab / Tosk*, and inside, the subdivisions *Himariote*, *Skrapari*, *Myzeqare*, etc.
- 4) Each song has its own "ethos", related, in a flexible way, to a literary content. This ethos is generated by musical forms, internal tempo and interactions, dynamic expression, etc. more than by the lexical signification of the words themselves.
- 5) Each song sets up and qualifies the relationships between individual body and social body;
- 6) Each song has its beginning and its ending, which give it its unity. This beginning and this ending are marked by a drinking punctuation.
- 7) The *gëzuar* has a double function:
 - to celebrate those present
 - to recall those absent.
- 8) Between two *gëzuar*, each song comes into a temporal construction and is qualified by its place in the global temporal construction.
- 9) Usually constructed over several hours (e.g. evening and part of the night), the form brings about continual transformations which affect:
 - the register and pitch (from low to high)
 - the tempo (syllabic, then strict *rubato* and finally, enlarged *rubato*)
 - the interactions between the singers (from "cold" to "warm", from static to dynamic, then to a collective movement for the final dance)
 - the memory itself: passive memory, first resting on the performance of pre-memorised songs, then soliciting an active autobiographical memory, introducing improvised elements and involving loved ones, whether close, alive or dead.

These combined principles determine the whole form and are the corollary of a succession of states/moods leading to delirious joy (*qejfi*). If the evening usually begins hesitantly, it always ends with greetings, cordial and emphatic embraces which always take place after a final collective dance of a ritual nature.

III. Conclusion: culture as a drug

Drug is a supposedly harmful substance, characterised by the dependence it creates. Dependence is now a prime subject of research for neurosciences. They have come to the conclusion that alcohol and hard drugs, but also music, activate the same neuronal systems. The fact remains that, from the point of view of neurosciences, music – playing it as well as listening to it – ranks among this category of more or less harmful substances (cf. Zatorre and Isabelle 2003).

Anthropologists are not used to being confronted with such brutal and mechanical realities, but they are ready to admit that culture as such – and not just music, which rises out within it – can also be seen as an object of dependence. For the anthropologist, it is clear that Mediterranean societies (whether in Morocco, Sardinia, Rumania, Albania) live their culture in a somewhat frenzied way. They are clearly dependent on the culture they produce; the latter must not be seen as a set of acquired knowledge [which can be objectivised inasmuch as it is “knowledge” and “acquired”], but as a drug whose absorption is realised within interacting cells, at the level of villages, groups, friends. What defines the cell is the fact that it exists only in its interactions. Otherwise it dies. A culture is a cellular network and Music is quite an efficient device for its functioning¹⁰.

These ethnic and social data are an invitation not to consider music as an accomplishment in which it would be a pleasure to take one’s “part” in “multipart singing”. Associated to alcohol consumption, it must be seen as a “founder” of company, of essential relationships, of necessary company, of social interactions which are constructive, decisive, crucial, etc. The objective of the research thus moves sideways from the objective. The interest here will not be for the produced object [unlike an aesthetic approach], but rather for those who create it [an anthropological approach], in a form of Copernican revolution.