



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Greek whisky : the localization of a global commodity

Bampilis, T.

Citation

Bampilis, T. (2010, February 10). *Greek whisky : the localization of a global commodity*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14731>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14731>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

7. Conclusion: trajectories of Scotch whisky, realms of localization

By following Scotch whisky through three distinct trajectories—a) the mediascapes of the cultural industry, b) Athenian nightlife and entertainment and c) island drinking habits—this study demonstrated that the concept as well as the product has shifted between various meanings. The shifts in meaning from the cultural industry to various groups of consumers might be interpreted sometimes as complimentary and sometimes as contradictory, making it clear that strategies of powerful institutions can face consumers' tactics. In that sense the material shows that consumers' tactics employ excessive opposition to resist the disciplining desires of the culture industry. Therefore, localization and resistance are understood as tactical practices shifting away from meanings of localization as a "local" dimension of globalization (Miller 1996, Foster 2008).

As Adorno and the Critical Theory scholars have argued, history is marked by progress, and humanity is improving itself by increasing its degree of emancipation (Horkheimer & Adorno 1947). Horkheimer and Adorno believe that people's lives are based on an instrumental rationality or, in other words, the use of the most efficient means to achieve the desired goal. This concept is interrelated not only with capitalism and the economy but also with politics and culture. Instrumental rationality is therefore understood as the capitalistic view of efficiency concerning the pursuit of profits and it is associated with the concepts of mass production, specialization and faith in progress. As a consequence, instrumental rationality is a set of implied values which influence the goal of human activity and in many instances go against the values of other people, as the case of the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1940s. Within this context the culture industry creates standardized products for its consumers and gives these consumers a false freedom of choice, when in fact the product is mass-produced. The consumers are led to believe that they have "real" individuality and are in control of their own decisions and actions, which in fact is a myth. Therefore, popular culture is viewed as an arena where choices are restricted and consumers are deceived (1991: 98-107). This view corresponds to the Hegelian philosophy which views criticism as more than a negative judgment and takes an active role in detecting and unmasking existing forms of belief in order to enchain the emancipation of humans in modern society.

While such critiques of capitalism have been very constructive for understanding social inequalities, this study takes a different stance to demonstrate that consumers are able to practice their own tactics to resist the strategies of the culture industry. As de Certeau has argued,

A society is thus composed of certain foregrounded practices organizing its normative institutions and of innumerable other practices that remain "minor",

always there but not organizing discourses and preserving the beginnings or remains of different (institutional, scientific) hypotheses for the society or for others. It is in this multifarious and silent “reserve” of procedures that we should look for “consumer” practices having the double characteristic pointed out by Foucault, of being able to organize both spaces and languages, whether on a minute or a vast scale. (1984: 48)

In this sense de Certeau offers, in contrast to Critical Theorists or other forms of Marxist theory, a theory of tactics that can resist, subvert, and make use of foregrounded power structures like the case of the Greek cultural industry. Even more, the contrast between the material presented in the first and the second parts of the study shows that the strategies of multinational capitalism and the cultural industry and the tactics of consumers in Athens and Skyros are not based on ideology or hegemony; on the contrary, consumers’ practice in many cases can be autonomous and can be understood as their own cultural space because “the space of the tactic is the space of the other” (de Certeau 1984: 36-37). The ethnographies of whisky consumption in *bouzoukia* in Athens and competitive card playing and whisky drinking on the island of Skyros show that consumers use an the mentality of excess as a tactic. This excessive resistance goes against the argument of the culture industry (Adorno 1991) and shows that this is no triumph of instrumental rationality.

As Bataille has argued, this excessive mentality is a characteristic of humanity in general, and expenditure as well as spectacular transgression can be important in the social life of any group (1991). By adding to this theory of expenditure, the material in the first and second parts of the study shows that excess comes in at the national level, localized in the mediascapes of the culture industry and in the *bouzoukia* of Athens in a clear anti-thesis of the culture industry. This opposition is based on the imaginaries of Scotch in cinema, marketing and advertising as a symbol of Western modern middle classness versus the Minor Asia anti-domestic discourse of *bouzoukia* and Greek contemporary popular music.

On the other hand, on the local scale of Skyros, Scotch opposes traditional matrifocal authority and “shepherdness” which has occupied the political seats of power of national bureaucracy. Within this context Scotch whisky is related to an excessive celebration of working-class positions of the former Kohylians.

Finally, these three trajectories show how Scotch has become a Greek fetish because as a strong drink it is replacing traditional wine, *tsipouro* and *ouzo*, fitting into the use value of older consumption patterns. Rather than understanding the success of Scotch as a construction of needs from the multinational import corporations and the culture industry (simply as an imposition from above), this study argues that the commodification of alcohol has to be understood as a complex process that requires the histories of the importers and the culture industry in the region as well as the histories and tactics of the consumers both in Athens and Skyros. In this way Scotch encompasses both the presence of modernity and the excessive denial of modern discipline and traditional authority, all at once. Its fetishistic attraction resides in the fact that both disrupts and exemplifies what Miller calls “normal” material frames within the context of the “humility of things”(Miller 2005: 4).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Personal communication with Peter Pels.

Multinational capitalism

The fact that the study deals with an imported beverage produced in Western Europe and more specifically in Scotland is due to a socio-economic historical process that was intensified within the twentieth century and, more specifically, after the dictatorship in Greece. Since the whisky boom in Greece between the 1980s and the 1990s, Scotch whisky has been localized and deeply integrated in several aspects of the social life. This shift is also related to the gradual establishment of multinational capitalism in the sector of beverages in Greece and its expansion in the spheres of advertising, marketing and popular. This shift has been followed by a gradual decrease in what has been thought of as “traditional” Greek-made beverages including ouzo and retsina.

A major cause of this process was the contest between the small Greek importers and the large multinational corporations, which ended in the total success of multinational capitalism. It is therefore important to state that the politics of commodity flow should be understood as the politics of contest between those in power. Moreover, this case can also be understood within the context of a “globalization from above”, a definite case for the Greek import industry (Appadurai 2001: 19).

These processes speeded up the processes of production and consumption and influenced the subcontracting and merging of Greek companies with the largest global multinationals in the alcohol business, namely the Diageo, Pernod Ricard and Berry Bros companies. These companies in turn gained control of almost 80% of the market within a few years, taking advantage of the local knowledge of their subcontractors and their associates in Greece. Within this context multinational capitalism in the alcoholic beverages sector was established and became the leading force in the importation of Scotch whisky and other alcoholic beverages in Greece.

A trajectory of mediascapes

The first concrete trajectory of the localization process of Scotch whisky is related to the establishment of post-war Greek commercial cinema and marketing. In both mediascapes Scotch became a central image around which cinematic scenarios, scripts, plots and advertisements were constructed. These imaginaries became complex sets of metaphors that profoundly influenced the projected notions of modernity, traditionality, globality and locality. As a consequence, Scotch was projected as a symbol of Western modern middle classness.

More specifically the commercial Greek cinema of the 1960s, which sold approximately one hundred million tickets per year (Σωτηροπούλου 1995: 44) while the population of the country was less than seven million and had an average number of a hundred productions per year, was a booming industry (Σολδάτος 2002: 73). Within this context a specific “structure of feeling” (Williams 1954) of the elite part of the culture industry was expressed through the cinematic scenarios that focused on consumerism and modernness, cosmopolitan and rural styles, internal and external migration, new commodities and social change and an American way of life. In relation to Scotch whisky, the feelings of alienation, loss of innocence and consumerism were portrayed in various scenarios. On the other hand, the beverage came to represent the feeling of modernness, of optimism expressed in upward social

mobility, and of celebratory companionship.

Such scenarios were approached as stories about possible, alternative imagined futures that integrate human diversity and uncertainty (Ginsburg, Abu Lughod and Larkin 2002, Appadurai 1991, Hannerz 2003) and as scripts circulated by mass communication in the “public sphere” (Habermas 1989). More specifically the scenarios imagined a consumer society where commoditization, individualization, alienation and urbanization would characterize the most part of its social life. Within this context, whisky as well as other commodities expressed the imagined “Americanization” of the society, the alienation of the consumer and the modernness associated with their consumption. On the other hand, whisky was imagined as a symbol of success, urban style and celebration. These contradictions remained part of the various scenarios until the decline of Greek commercial cinema and expressed the uncertainty about the outcome of this imagined modernity.

Moreover, in the cinematic scenarios of the 1950s and the 1960s several conceptualizations in relation to whisky could be identified. Scotch was projected as a force that corrupts or decenters people and an evil drink that corrupts social relations. This alienation has been conceptualized as a form of division of the constructed self. Nevertheless, whisky came to represent modernity in a bottle consumed by the Greek-Americans or those who would identify with a modern way of life, by the wealthy cosmopolitan urbanites or those who would challenge the traditional family roles including patriarchy, matchmaking and the subordinate role of women.

By the time of the decline of the film industry during the dictatorship, a consumer society characterized by mass culture and mass commodities would begin to emerge (Karapostolis 1984, Stathakis 2007). That shift was accompanied by several other changes such as rapid urbanization, increased numbers of women in university education, new youth movements and an emergence of popular culture and music.

The decline of the Greek commercial cinema did not result in the decline of the cultural industry in general. In 1966 the Association of Advertising Companies or EDEE was founded and played a major role in promoting advertising in Greece. However, there were two clear differences between the marketers and their predecessors in the film industry: they did not project whisky as an alienating force and they would capitalize on the meanings of “global” and “local”. From the end of 1960s, marketing and advertising became institutionalized, the marketing companies multiplied and commodification became intensive. During this period several styles of projecting whisky in advertisements could be identified that correspond to different periods.

Distinction was used as a form of differentiating and reproducing class inequalities by emphasizing the association of Scotch with “superiority”, a “cosmopolitanism” and a superior foreign influence that was expressed by the accent at the “threshold of perception”. Especially the use of the English language in marketing and advertising discourse has shown a long pattern of claiming higher status and has also been used politically. Furthermore, these conceptualizations were associated with an assertive sexuality, a gender emancipation and a “high class” style that was expanded to the sphere of art and culture. Haig, for example became the “arty” beverage, Johnny Walker the “science”-oriented Scotch and Cutty Sark the sporty and “modern” beverage.

Moreover, marketing and advertising used “scale making” to associate the concepts of “national” with Scotch whisky (Tsing 2000: 327-360). By investing in the meanings of “national” and “Greek”, “scale making” reproduced the conceptualizations of a Greek whisky and the national connotations of Scotch whisky

are expressed in advertisements that use national symbols and landmarks as a legitimate form of localization. This form of “scale making” became more active at the end of the nineties and began to include national accomplishments such as the Athens metro, the new Olympic stadium designed by Santiago Calatrava for the Athens Olympics in 2004, and even the Greek flag. The nationalization of whisky through advertising demonstrates that despite the economic structures of multinational capitalism, the globalization of financescapes and the standardized mass culture that has been emerging through the cultural industry, mediascapes reinforce the national imageries. Hence, it can be argued that mass media and, more importantly, the mediascapes continue to influence the formation of an imagined national community (Anderson 1983).

Moreover, the commodity of Scotch whisky transforms into a Greek gift in marketing and advertising discourse. More specifically, names can be engraved on the bottle of Scotch for name days (*giortes*) in order to individualize and personalize the gift. Scotch has also been projected as an ideal gift for Christmas and name days or birthdays in general and it is almost always part of the ideal gift list of magazines and newspaper supplements.

A trajectory of popular style and entertainment

The relationship between Scotch whisky, popular style and Greek popular music has to be understood within the context of commercialization, commoditization and standardization of music and entertainment in general in post war Athens. The emergence of *bouzoukia* and *skiladika* from a marginal scene from below (*rebetiko*) and their “Europeanization” and “modernization” resulted in the establishment of Scotch whisky as a symbol of popular music and entertainment to the extent that the prices of these music venues are now represented in whisky. Moreover, this process of modernization resulted in a new aesthetic and in new consumption habits in night entertainment and *bouzoukia*. Live music became a trend, the orchestras multiplied and grew bigger, microphones were added and the orchestras would perform on a stage where customers could also dance; food was not served any more and whisky was established as the main beverage of consumption. Excessive consumption was institutionalized with the breaking of plates and the throwing of flowers. Within this context, the artists had to make the choice to continue their performances in these commercialized conditions or retire from the nightclubs.

The emergence of this genre of popular music during the 1980s coincided with the localization of whisky in *bouzoukia* where live contemporary music was performed in Athens (as well as in other areas of Greece) and still today the *bouzoukia* and the *skyladika* are spaces that require the consumption of Scotch whisky. While in the early stages of this institution and this genre the anti-domestic practices associated with it were marginal and possibly more popular among the groups of *rebetes*, the increased commodification of this music and the capitalization of anti-domesticity by the cultural industry resulted in its establishment and success.

The genre of contemporary Greek popular music has been related to a lifestyle that has been projected by the popular singers themselves and has influenced the notions of style of the social networks that I followed in Athens, who identify with contemporary Greek popular music. The style of the social networks that I studied is identified with several excessive practices, even if the individuals are not always able to spend excessively in these social contexts. It follows that my interlocutors make

themselves through the beverage and claim a relationship between Scotch and their style.

While Greek ethnography has been predominantly based on models of commensality and reciprocal exchange in drinking (Papataxiarchis 1991, Madianou 1992, Iossifidou 1992), which correspond to market and gift relationships or notions of calculation and spontaneity, the case of the Scotch in *bouzoukia* expresses a consumerist mentality that has been built on an anti-domestic style. Only recently, a few anthropologists in Greece have described the use of imported alcohol in relation to commodification and excess (Αμπατζή, 2004, Σουλιώτης 2001). In *bouzoukia* clubs for example, where live contemporary popular Greek music is played, a modern popular style is reinforced or reproduced through the consumption of Scotch whisky. The whisky users (and my interlocutors who identify with this style) share the belief that excessive consumption and the unproductive aspects of spending in *bouzoukia* and night entertainment are major factors in producing an inner feeling of enjoyment or letting off steam from their personal and social problems.

The style of this audience expresses the construction of the conceptualization of modernity which Argyrou has discussed (2005) and which might expand to various notions of modernness and traditionality, concepts that are constituted in relation to popular music, popular culture and consumption in general. More particularly, a style invested with an aura of modernness might appropriate Scotch whisky or single malt depending on the knowledge of the consumers and the style they want to pursue. This appropriation can be further expressed in relation to a masculine style, even by women who want to challenge dominant conceptualizations of womanhood and femininity. Furthermore, the social groups with which I was involved consume whisky on their outings. In most cases whisky is localized in *bouzoukia* as well as in *ellinadika* and expresses the prices of such venues. Usually the prices of the bottle of Scotch are quite high depending on the fame of the singer of the club.

This excessive mentality was established in recent decades and has been associated mainly with entertainment in *bouzoukia* or *elliniadika* and includes “opening a bottle of special”, throwing baskets of flowers at singers, opening “champagne” and paying enormous bills for a bottle of whisky. Similarly the popular singers/stars who express the new Greek popular music scene and perform in *bouzoukia* spend their wealth conspicuously and publicly (Βαρουχάκη 2005: 83).

The trajectory of North Aegean alcohol consumption

The modernness of whisky on Skyros Island in the North Aegean is associated with an imagined Athenian style which opposes the values of shepherdhood and domesticity and is widely shared by the laborers of the island. This process is related to the socioeconomic changes that took place during the twentieth century on the island of Skyros and resulted in the redistribution of social privileges among the occupational groups of the island. In particular, the *arhontes* (elite) who were the main owners of the means of production and the landowners disappeared from the social landscape of Skyros. The shepherds were able to take a leading role in the economic and political life of the island and acquired the land and the old symbolic capital of the *arhontes*. The farmers as well as the *kohyliani* who used to be the poorest strata of the Skyrian society became upwardly mobile in an economic sense during the 1970s and 1980s, the period during which wage labor expanded. Moreover, the laborers migrated *mesa*

to Athens and abroad; then, upon returning to the island, they invested in small businesses and shops. However, their upward economic mobility did not bring any social and political recognition or privileges.

Upon their return from Athens and from abroad the *kohiliani* took the risk of opening bars during the 1980s. They were the first to invest in tourism and they also were the ones who worked in manual labor and as a result were able to make their fortunes. As a consequence of their economic mobility and in order to be differentiated from the shepherds, the lower social strata intensified the consumption of imported commodities and imported beverages and they adopted a cosmopolitan style, which allies itself with the urban Greek popular music of Athens. These laborers are attached to the *laiko* music scene, to the consumption of whisky and to a style of dominant or assertive masculinity. Within these networks, assertive masculinity is a form of symbolic capital which lies in opposition to the disciplined and ordered domesticity of manhood as expressed in the values of the matrilineal households of shepherds. “Domesticated” householders represent the mainstream values of the majority of the community and they cannot afford economic excesses, gambling, drinking or extended sexual relationships outside the context of marriage. Laborers, on the other hand, not only negotiate their masculine style through an assertive sexuality but also in some cases divorce. In addition, the *horiani* laborers drink whisky “inside” the village in opposition to most *eksolinous* shepherds who drink wine “outside” the village. Likewise, laborers go regularly *mesa* (“inside”, to Athens) for their shopping or entertainment, in opposition to the shepherds who spend most of their time *ekso* (“outside”, in the countryside).

Moreover, many laborers do not identify with the *soi-based* society of Skyros and the matrilineal obligations that such kinship relationships entail. They own their own houses, they are able to spend (*ksodepsoun*) and they have their own money. Shepherds, by contrast, do not own houses as houses constitute part of the dowry. They are expected to do *oikonomia* (save money) and they do not have money of their own as women are usually in control of the economics of the matrilineal household. Among these networks some perform an assertive masculinity; they may engage in courtship with *ksenes* from *eksoteriko* (foreign women from abroad); they do *eksoda*; and they stay up late at night in bars drinking whisky or other imported beverages from *eksoteriko*. In these ways they can express their anti-domestic style or their breach with domesticity.

As Day, Papataxiarchis and Stewart have argued, these “oppositional identities” can be found in marginal networks who wish to define themselves in opposition to the dominant cultural values of more powerful neighbors (1999: 1-24). For that reason, former Kohyliani replace the experience of dependency with the notion of cultural difference. In addition, such marginality has a focus on the luck of the present moment since any future transcendence such as religious belief and practice is associated with the dominant order (Day, Papataxiarchis and Stewart 1999: 1-24).

One of the most important differences between laborers and shepherds in terms of the consumption of alcohol is within the context of their entertainment in *kafenion*. The shepherds, shop-owners and public servants socialize in the “traditional” *kafenion* of the upper market street and usually drink *tsipouro*, beer or wine when they come together with their friends and groups. By contrast, the laborers socialize in the *Makedonia* and *Syantisis kafenion* on the margin of the town of Skyros. When the shepherds play cards they usually play *prefa* (πέφα) or *xeri* (ξερή), games to be played among friends. The game of *xeri* has several basic differences with the game of *poka*, which is usually played by the laborers in the down part of the market street

(Papataxiarchis 1991: 166-167). The first and most important difference is that there are no money stakes in the game of *xeri* and no material interests involved but only drinking gifts. The second difference is that teams of two men usually play the game and the third is that the rounds of the game are repeated over long periods (Papataxiarchis 1991: 166-167). The losers of the game will be obliged to buy the *tsipouro* for the winners as a honorary gesture, a gift that requires no immediate return or future reciprocation.

On the other hand, a minority of laborers plays the competitive game of *poka* (poker) in the *Makedonia* and *Synatntisis kafenion* and they put large amounts of money and property at stake. Whisky is the main beverage of consumption in these two *kafenion*, in opposition to the other *kafenion* in the central and upper market street, and the customers identify with an “Athenian style”. In the game of *poka* only individuals can participate (in opposition to the teams of two in *xeri*) and only when they can afford the money stakes. Similar research in the Eastern Aegean has demonstrated that gambling is a form of “ritual destruction” of money” that “purifies the male self and leaves *kefi* triumphant” (Papataxiarchis 1999: 158-175). Especially on Skyros, where the money is associated with the matrilocal obligations of domesticated shepherds, the squandering of money by laborers challenges the dominant cultural values of the dominant neighbors.

Participation in the game is limited to a few sessions a month and sometimes long periods of time elapse between games as the losers of the money stakes cannot afford to play very often. As a result, the formation of the group of *poka* changes regularly. During the game whisky is transformed into a gift; it is consumed in moderation to relax the players and in every session the winner is obliged to buy drinking gifts of whisky for the losers if they are willing to accept them. Within this context, Scotch is transformed into a symbol of profit which expresses an anti-domestic discourse as well as an upward economic mobility. However, this upward economic mobility of the laborers does not necessarily bring them political or social recognition within the hierarchical, *soi*-oriented and hereditary society of Skyros.

Consequently, Scotch is for the *horianous* and for those who want to break apart from the matrilocal rules and extended matrifocal kinship obligations. It materializes the notions of Skyrian modernity and laborhood and opposes the values of domesticity. In addition, it expresses an outward movement as it comes from *eksoteriko* and is related to *ksodema* (spending-consuming) and to an Athenian style. Its localization is therefore tactical and cannot be understood without the kinship and matrilocal cultural values of the inhabitants of Skyros.