

The second Generation: The case of 'Negros tou Moria' and his contribution to the formation of a new cultural space.

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‘Ελλάδα μου, Χώρα που με νιώθεις, Χώρα που με διώχνεις’
‘My Lovely Greece, country that understands me, country that drives me
away’

Introduction

With the global phenomenon of mass migration, a limited though consistent wave of economic migrants from both North and Sub-Saharan Africa came to reside in Greece in the decades between the 1970s -1990s (Houliaras and Petropoulos, 2015). The central neighbourhoods of Athens such as Kypseli and Patissia, where the African community mostly situated themselves, were branded 'immigrant' areas, indicating the tendency of Greek society to impose social identities and create borderland minorities (Art Alliance Illinois, 2020). However, the African community decided to oppose the reinforced stereotypes through the activities of various African organizations that demonstrated a unified voice against racial discrimination and exclusion. Moreover, with their collective efforts the African culture was popularized through various artistic practices such as music, dance and festivals among others (Anasa, no date).

The second-generation of African descent children which emerged in Athens as a result of the population's mobilization was born and raised in the multicultural environment their parents had settled in. Whilst still in their teenage years and broadly unlike other young people of their age, they already had significant life experiences to share with the world. Issues such as daily racial discrimination, and social exclusion reached a boiling point on becoming adults, when they were rendered stateless due to a flaw in the legal system. (Zotou, 2013).

This resulted in many of them adopting an oppositional stance to the dominant viewpoint that derived from their lives in the margins, a fact that simultaneously empowered their team spirit (Hooks, 1996). Consequently, several young people of African descent developed their artistic flair based on the need to express their reality as second-generation Afro-Greeks. Within their efforts to identify with a locality and to construct an identity they associated with the genre of hip hop; which is recognised as a cultural practice of resistance and a force which promotes a shift on power relations (Watkins, 2005). Deriving from the existing multicultural elements, the Afro-Greek hip hoppers brought about a creative revival in the Greek capital while initiating a neutral space for a dialogue among people of different backgrounds (Fedorova, 2018). As it happens, individuals with dual identities which are comprised of antithetical elements continuously interweaving define a subjectivity that scholars such as Stuart Hall (1994) or Homi Bhabha (1990) refer to as 'Third Space'. (cited in Styliou, 2017, p9). Within this space individuals recognize their origin from more than one country and speak more than one language (Kortessi, 2020). In the following text and through the context of second-generation Afro-Greeks, the case of young hip hopper 'Negros tou Moria' is investigated as a unique example of resistance against a dominant culture.

Documenta meets hip hop

Among the artists that participated in Documenta14 one of the most prestigious international art fairs was the Afro-Greek hip hopper Kevin Zans Ansong. During summer 2017, Ansong presented his artwork titled *Black Odyssey* a clear reference to Homer's epic poem *Odyssey*, in both exhibition sites, Athens and Kassel (Documenta 14 daybook, 2017).

Ansong, publicly known as 'Negros tou Moria' (which translates as 'Negro of Moria') performed dressed in the Greek-folk costume of 'Τσολιάς' (Tsolias), the official uniform of the soldiers serving in the Greek Presidential Guard. Rhyming words with sound pieces, he offered a visual based on the amalgamation of Greek historical elements with notions of racial classifications, an act which instantly challenges the existing cultural stereotypes. Both the artwork's title and his stage name also indicate his effort to realign the complex issues of race and identity within the frame of contemporary Greek society (Maronitis, 2017).

The poem's central character is Odysseus (the ancient king of Ithaca), known for his intelligence and resourcefulness, abilities that helped him to overcome the several obstacles he came up against during his ten-year journey home from the Trojan war. The painfully long journey home could also serve as a parallel to the long struggle of the African community in their effort to establish a base within the Greek capital. Moreover, a parallel could be drawn between *Odyssey* and the ongoing fight over the legal recognition of the right to citizenship the second- generation of Afro-Greeks is still facing, a fact that has earned them the characterization the 'invisible' generation (Papaioannou, 2013). Ansong's stage name 'Negros tou Moria' is a paronomasia of

'Geros tou Moria' which translates as the 'Elder of Moria'. The authentic title refers to the highly acclaimed general Theodoros Kolokotronis, one of Ansong's icons, who led the Hellenic revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire. He was called 'Geros tou Moria' as his birthplace was in the Peloponnesus (or Morias), the south region of Greek mainland (Liantinis, 1993). Ansong challenges the conventional perceptions of race relations by paraphrasing the nickname of the Hellenic historic figure that connotes mainly Greek heroism. He opened his performance with the following greeting: 'Good evening, I am your white friend, 'Negros tou Moria', his unique way of addressing the existing multicultural Greek society while reinventing traditional beliefs.

Maronitis (2017) in his text published in *Documenta 14* daybook, describes Ansong's work as an integration of diverse cultural elements open to several interpretations. His knowledge of the Greek language is evident while the skilfulness with which he intergrades words from the dialect of *Rebetiko* (a Greek subculture which originated in Smyrna, Minor Asia, in 1920) forms a solid foundation for communication (Ekathimerini, 2020). Moreover, the ability to integrate the folklore with the contemporary reflects on his selection of music. In addition to the lyrics, the mix of *rap*, *R&B*, *Rebetiko*, *trap* and *hip hop* introduce a hybrid cultural space from where Ansong attempts to raise awareness of the overlooked second generation of Afro-Greeks and furthermore for the whole of Afro-Greek community.

Ansong is one of the popular youths of immigrant descent that define the contemporary hip hop/rap Athenian scene. Together with *Athens kids* (ATH KIDS) and *Mc Yinka* among others they began to verbalise their experiences as a second generation of immigrants by decoding their multicultural reality within contemporary Athens. The act of

acknowledging their dual identity validates their bond to the Greek capital and furthermore their integration to the Athenian environment as two dimensional, local and national (Kortessi, 2020).

Their sense of belonging was frequently challenged by the often-unfriendly surroundings fortifying their choice to express themselves through hip hop, a music genre which is recognised as much more than just music and more as the voice of life in the margins. Boyd (1997) acknowledges hip hop as an extraordinary 'social force' and a 'state of being', as a modern-day social movement characterized by its collective quality. For the Afro-Greek youth, hip hop embodies the most relevant artistic structure through which they successfully communicate their frustration and aspirations. Rooted in Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American musical, oral and dance formations mixed with notions of the African Diaspora, hip hop became a form of protest providing the platform for a political discourse. Powerless youth employed it as an apparatus to promote marginal identities and refer to pressing matters such as racism, economic oppression and social injustice (Rose, 1994). A language of sustained resistance that aims to redefine the social norms in relation to culture and politics (Rabaka, 2013).

Bell Hooks (1995) refers to sustained resistance as a situation that generates power and strength. The fact that the young Afro-Greeks have chosen to exercise resistance through an artistic practice, indicates as Hook confirms a creative as well as a political gesture that challenges the hegemonic forces. An act that Hooks defines as therapeutic but fundamentally it is an act that introduces the space in which they proclaim their existence and voice their experiences and needs.

Second Generation: The 'invisible' ones

The second-generation of children of immigrant descent came under the attention of the Greek public in 2005 with a campaign initiated by the United African Women Organization and the Pan-Hellenic Organization of Migrant Women among others. Central to the campaign entitled 'Say no to racism from the baby's cot' was the pressing matter of naturalization and citizenship. Up until 2005 no related legislation existed that would secure citizenship for that generation and consequently those children-being under the protection of their parents' residency permit until the age of 18- once they have entered adulthood were conditioned to a stateless status. As a result, they were deprived of basic rights such as the right to vote, the right to enrol in higher education or enter the workforce, or even the right to travel. Moreover, while enforced to deal with the harsh reality of their own illegal position facing deportation from their birthplace was also a possibility for these young adults (Styliou, 2017)

The campaign aiming to raise awareness within Greek society, the media and various organizations, it also exposed the reluctance of the state to organize an appropriate legal framework as a solution (Zotou, 2013).

One of the significant requests were the granting of residency to children who were born in Greece or have completed three years of education (of any level) in the country. The permit of residency could be considered as the first step towards naturalization. Moreover, the amendment of the Greek Nationality code from the existing 'jus sanguine' (blood line) criterion to the 'jus soli' (law of soil) criterion (United African Women Organisation, 2009). Under this regulation children born in Greece from immigrant parents were not entitled for citizenship as the Greek legal structure acknowledges the 'right of blood' (parents' origin) and not the place of birth (Wilhelm, no date). At that point, residency permits were obtained only as an extension of a pre-existed ones or through legitimate evidence of entry in the country, a point of logic that did not correspond to the conditions of the legal framework that these families were living under (conversation with Odubidan, 30, June. 2020).

Among the groups involved in the promotion of the campaign was the non-profit organization Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity. The organization is the result of an alliance of two groups, the Second-Generation group, active since 2006 and the institute for Rights, Equality & Diversity (i-RED). Within their range of activities are legal counselling, the fight against discrimination and the promotion of equality, diversity and human rights (G2RED, no date).

Generation 2.0 RED(G2RED) was founded and managed by Nikos Odubidan, a second-generation child of Nigerian descent born and raised in Greece. He feels privileged for his dual identity, and he is very open in sharing his experiences and therefore initiate a platform of communication with people that come from different backgrounds. He refers to his balanced upbringing - which resulted from the equal importance given to

both cultures by his parents - with pride and gratitude. His family home is portrayed as a multicultural hub where three languages were spoken in equal measure, Greek, English and Yoruba, a Nigerian dialect. At the dawn of adulthood, the sense of being stateless, highly motivated him to research the Greek legal system aiming to find a solution. This life changing experience together with the growing need for the second generation to be recognised legally and culturally was the generating force behind G2RED (conversation with Odubidan, 30, Jun.2020).

After the coordinated and consistent pressure of several social groups and migrant organizations, a law that entitled the second generation to citizenship was introduced in 2009 only to be abolished by the government of New Democracy in 2013. In 2015 the government of SYRIZA passed a law where the acquiring of citizenship was possible under the primary criterion of nine years of attendance in a Greek educational institution (conversation with Odubidan, 30, Jun.2020).

The notable positive outcome at the legal front did not mark the end of the fight for the second generation. According to Odubidan, there is the ongoing struggle against systemic racism but also against embedded or 'casual' racism as he describes it. On several occasions small scale incidents of racism are not being prioritized or even registered as such by the migrant minorities due to the lack of physical violence. However, daily interactions in the form of a conversation or a gesture can establish 'symbolic' racial boundaries among people (Papantonakis, 2019). Yet, such incidents are often trivialised as survival on a daily basis within the often-demanding conditions of Greek reality is challenging enough for the immigrant population (conversation with Odubidan, 30, Jun.2020).

Odubidan points out the unfairness that lays upon his generation due to the problematic structure of the immigration process. In a society where the reinforcing of stereotypes is common practice, the state apparatus occasionally promotes ideas that conditions those children to prove themselves worthy of naturalization in both the eyes of the state and society. This elitist approach could be potentially damaging for their self-esteem. He explains and fairly so that the idea of branding the children of second-generation as immigrants within their birthplace, demonstrates a lack of common sense by the state. Additionally, it stands as evidence that any existing racial prejudice is supported by state institutions hence the state's reluctance to accept society's multiculturalism (conversation with Odubidan, 30, Jun.2020). Therefore, as Parsanoglou and Petrakou (2010) observe the tendency of some to legitimise as immigrant any individual who represents a diverse culture (whatever his/her conditions) is still evident within Greek society (cited in Kortessi 2020, p23).

Despite the obvious difficulties Odubidan managed to adopt a positive standpoint that contributed to his development and advancement which he confirmed when he stated 'difficulties and experiences made me the person I am today' (conversation with Odubidan, 30, Jun.2020).

Apart from G2RED's activities linked to legalities raising awareness through several different routes is within the organization's goals. Various initiatives such as protests, festivals, concerts, and sports activities among others is evidence that G2RED values and manages culture as a political tool (G2RED, no date).

Negros tou Moria: a unique case of resistance

Kevin Zans Ansong was born in 1991 to Ghanaian parents in the area of Ampelokipi in downtown Athens. Although he is emotionally attached to his birth neighbourhood it is the district of Kypseli where his parents settled in that he depicts as a constant point of reference (Zargani, 2019). A middle-class district, Kypseli is well known for its multicultural character and diversity as a significant portion of the population is from an immigrant background, mostly African. Ansong certifies Kypseli as the 'future of Greece' due to its strong multicultural elements. He explains that there is no division or differentiation between Greeks or Blacks residents as all exist under the label of 'Kypseliotis'; a person who originates from Kypseli (Triantafillou, 2017). The issues of location and identity are of major importance to the young Afro-Greek, concepts also central to the hip hop subculture. The familiarity of the 'hood' and of all the local elements appear to play a crucial role in the way Ansong explores and perceives his identity and therefore in the way he expresses his artistic vision (Rose, 1994). For him every neighbourhood bears the weight of its history that creates a certain dynamic when is interweaved with the lives of its residents. It is all very organic and a precious raw material that daily motivates the artist. Growing up in Kypseli he encountered and

became friendly with people from different ethnicities (Greeks, Ukrainians, Albanians, Romanians) which proved consequential for his future collaborations. (Zargani, 2019).

Among his body of work two of the most distinctive pieces that demonstrates the significance of location and identity is through his teamwork with Moose, a young rapper of Nigerian descent (Nikiforakis, 2019). Throughout the song *Kypseli*, a title that serves as a homage to the specific district, the reference on locality is evident. Through the lyrics the hip hoppers are narrating incidents of the daily life in the neighbourhood. Moreover, references to Greek society, the notion of identity and hints on racial prejudice are evident within the song and its video *Athinaios*. Lyrics such as 'this is for the Athenian' (the white Greek that originates from Athens) and the legal complications linked to the second-generation such as 'Athens makes me paranoid, just like hanging on for my permit' are noticeable. Remarks such as 'kids from Ambelokipi turn up, you see the style is African' are also indicative of their acknowledgement of their dual identity (Jungle juice, 2020). Moreover, the video reinforces the notions of society's multiculturalism with visuals of technological excellency, another characteristic of the development of hip hop and rap (Rose, 1994). Images of the young rappers wandering in the city centre against the urban landscape are juxtaposed with picturesque views of Athens. Furthermore, views of ancient Greek monuments such as the Acropolis temple or the Herodion Odeon hall, that refers to pure white Greekness interweaved with portraits of the rappers dressed in white, is indeed a robust reminder of their existence. As Moose successfully highlights 'it is time to state our presence' (Nikiforakis, 2019). These bold images also stand as a fearless resistance to the dominant ideology which it

could be argued has at times sought to maintain an all-white status quo constructed on beliefs of ancient Greek glorification.

Ansong's first album titled *Listening and learning* was released in 2016 through which he presents his experiences as a second-generation kid in Athens. By choosing to describe daily incidents of his life he creates a solid route through which he aims to communicate his interpretation of life and the world. The racial prejudice and discrimination resulting in the legislative difficulties is common ground for many of his generation which serves as a constant challenge on the issue of identity. However, despite of the existing stereotypes of racial prejudice for Ansong, this reality triggers notions of unfairness on the matter rather than a notion of confusion. There is no doubt that he recognizes Greece as his home hence his lyrics 'Ghana is my country, Athens is my region' celebrating in this way his Ghanaian-Greek identity. This brings in mind the works of Sociologist W.E.B. DuBois and his theory of 'double-consciousness' referring to the psyche of Black-American. DuBois outlined the 'two-ness' that defined the Afro-American psychology as two incompatible elements that troubled African-Americans for decades. As a result, they acknowledged themselves through the eyes of others, in this case through the eyes of white Americans in a way subordinating to the white dominant order (DuBois, 2007[1903]). Ansong's perspective appears in contradiction with DuBois's theory as the rapper defines his dual identity of Afro-Greekeness as perfectly balanced, a condition which paves the way to resistance. It comes as no surprise when he confirms his love of Greek history and folk music and his obsession with Rebetika, elements of which one can observe extensively in his work. He points out the authenticity of iconic Rebetika figures such as Markos Vamvakaris and Vasilis

Tsitsanis and how his work and his life credo was influenced by their originality towards music and life itself (Zargani, 2019).

Additionally, philosophers of ancient Greece such as Socrates and the heroes of the Greek revolution of 1821 such as Kolokotronis are a constant inspiration to his work. The language he employs to unfold his stories, the use of proverbs from the Greek tradition and the amalgamation of slang with different dialects and anachronistic words is another added element that define his uniqueness. (Tsantilas, 2006).

All the elements above harmonically interweaved into his thematics and constructed on the beats of hip hop, rap, and trap mark a new musical language and validate his musical approach as one of a kind.

Ansong's effort to form an identity must be placed in context with the characteristics he shares with his fellow Afro-Greek hip hoppers. According to sociologist Stuart Hall the essence of identity, stems from an 'all-inclusive sameness' of characteristics one shares with another individual or a group of people (Hall, 1996). However, Hall argues that is through the differentiation and not outside of it that people construct identities. It is through our ability to exclude that we are able to mark the differences between individuals and consequently to define ourselves. In the case of Ansong while he acknowledges similarities with his contemporaries he differentiates simultaneously. He intentionally excludes himself from the group-with his artistic choices-in order to define his identity. Laclau (1990) outlines that the establishment of an identity is an act of power (cited in Hall, 1996, p 5). In the case of Ansong this is clarified by his utilization of Greek history and folk tradition. The use of both Greek heroic figures and ancient symbols that refer to a hegemonic ideology of all Greek whiteness interwind with music, symbols or people that represent the exotic Other is a powerful act of resistance against

the dominant social order. And for the young rapper it would be only logical to disregard the Greek historical element because of what it precisely represents. On the contrary he incorporates it in his work to further solidify his standpoint. And actually, as Hall observes, the significance lies in how one uses the resources of history, the language, and tradition in order to 'become' rather than to 'be'. In other words, it is not a matter of where Ansong originates from but rather what he is constructing with the various cultural elements available to him (Hall, 1996). Gilroy (1994) also highlights that it is about re-inventing the traditions not constantly reproducing them. (cited in Hall, 1996, p4).

Life in the margins is critical for Ansong as for the rest of the African second-generation as their state of mind could be under threat if according to Bell Hooks, they don't treat the margins as 'sites of resistance'. It is only through resistance that people with marginalised identities will cease seeing themselves through their stigmatised representations given to them by the dominant class. To work against the idea of seeing themselves through the eyes of the Other. Therefore, by resisting repression-a primary element of the margins- one can initiate the fight for freedom of thought and creative expression.

Ultimately, Ansong from within the Greek hip hop scene are providing a counter-hegemonic approach of the diverse Athenian landscape. Mihalis Afolanio (2015) a second-generation Afro-Greek and founder of *Anasa* cultural center, outlines that by communicating their life experiences and by challenging the power relations, a positive dialogue is initiated on a platform where art functions as the significant equalizer. Therefore, the second generation's contribution to the new cultural space is crucial for

the establishment and maintenance of the Greek multicultural society (Afolanio, cited in Bozoni, 2015, np).

CONCLUSION

It would be unrealistic and unfair to address the contemporary Athenian reality without referring to the existing multiculturalism as a vital part of the city's essence (Kortessi, 2020). The diversity that mass immigration has contributed to the city-the wave of Africans in particular- is reshaping the cultural landscape. In the context of a harsh reality of financial difficulties, racial inequality and exclusion, the second generation of Afro-Greeks has found a unified voice through which is resisting the social labels bestowed upon by hegemonic forces. The young Afro-Greeks are valued as an organic part of the new stream of artists that have reenergised the Athenian music landscape, in particular the hip hop scene. Hip hop originally established as a subculture representing life in the margins provides the young Athenians with a platform which encourages them to establish their roots and formulate their dual identity (Rose, 1994). As a result, the young hip hoppers treat music as a political apparatus initiating a neutral space of communication against the idea of ghettoization and exclusion, a space where all are equal (Afolanio, cited in Bozoni, 2015, np). Within this space, and while art is acknowledged as a system of equality, individuals with diverse cultural origins can

coexist and dialogues can be initiated all in the prospect of the emergence of a balanced and culturally hybrid environment.

Within this setup Ghanaian-Greek hip hopper Kevin Zans Ansong is adopting an approach which distinguishes him from his contemporaries. By incorporating elements of the Greek culture and history with Afrodiasporic music beats, Ansong strengthens his stance and stakes his claim in the Athenian music scene.

No better words could epitomise his state of mind more accurately other than the words of one of his icons. Bob Marley's lyrics from *Babylon System* (1979), 'we refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are and that's the way it's going to be, (cited in Hooks, 1995, p 341).

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Figure 1: Pagrati, Athens, 2014. 'Γκάννα, Φιλότιμο και στο Αμερिका το προτυπο' (Ghana, 'Filotimo' and the role model in America), courtesy of Silia Niassou (Sally Ly)

Ansong dressed in typical Ghanaian colours and patterns mixed with urban elements. In his left hand holds a 'koboloi', a string of beats, an object favoured within the *Rebetika* subculture. Words printed in *Documenta14* daybook and composed by Ansong as part of his artwork.

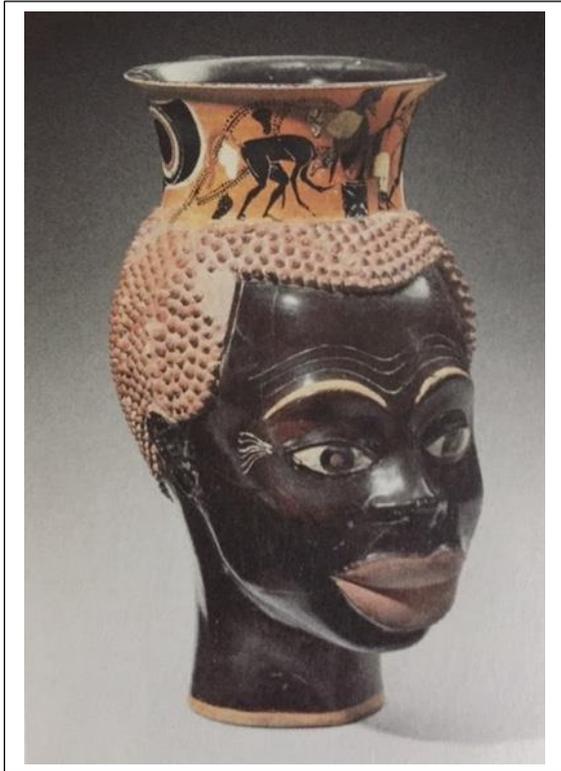


Figure 2: Greece then and now: mug in the shape of a man's head, ca. 510 BCE. Image printed in the *Documenta14* daybook and part of Ansong art work.

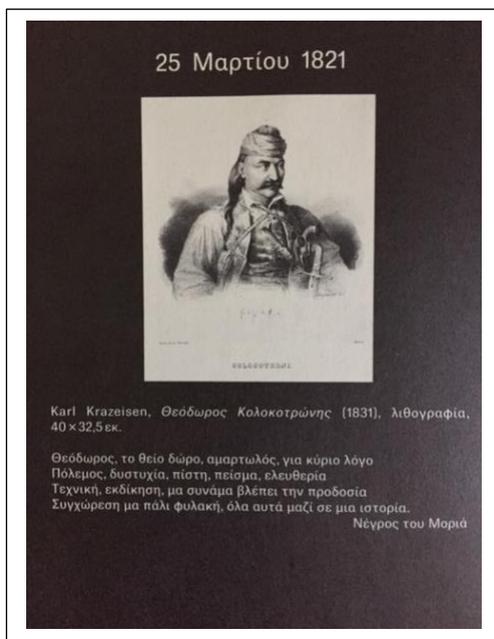


Figure 3: Karl Krazeisen, Theodore Kolokotronis (1831), lithograph, 40x32.5cm
 Theodore, Gift from God, sinner, for a reason, War, tragedy, faith, tenacity for freedom

Technique, revenge, but at the same time he sees betrayal
Forgiveness but again in jail, all of that in one, it's his story
Image with poem composed by Ansong printed in the *Documenta14* daybook and part of Ansong's artwork.



Figure 4: Negros tou Moria, *Black Odyssey*, 2016-17, public performance, spoken words, sound pieces
Fridericianum, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Fred Dott
Ansong performs in Documenta14 in Kassel, dressed in the Greek folk costume of 'Tsolia'

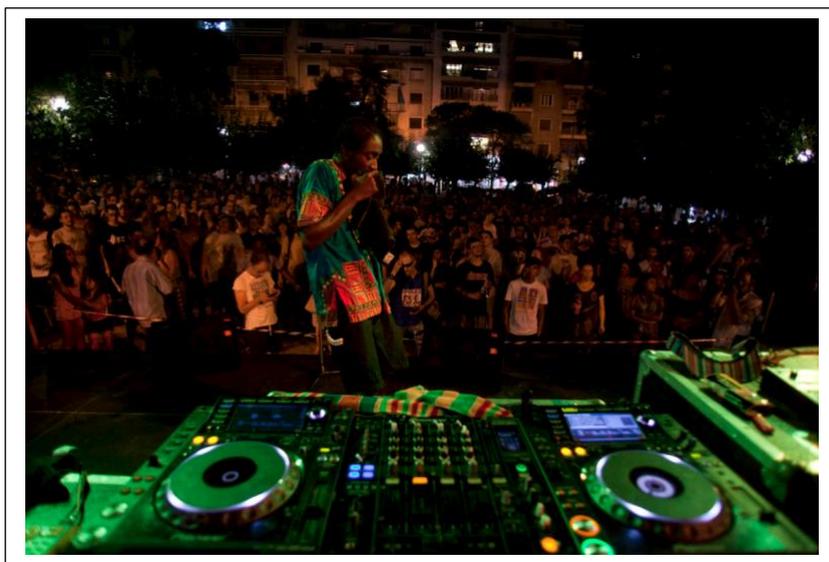


Figure 5: Negros tou Moria, *Black Odyssey*, 2016-17, spoken words, sound pieces, fustanella, and **open-**
air public performance, Kanari Square, Kypseli, Athens, documenta 14, photo: Angelos Giotopoulos



Figure 6: Still image from the video *Athinaios* portraying Moose and Ansong against the temple of Acropolis.



Figure 7: Still image from the video *Kypseli*. Ansong and Moose in the neighbourhood



Figure 8: Still image from the video *Kypseli*. 307 Squad in the side streets of Kypseli

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