

Is difference a privilege of the similar? *Soviet Greek and Albanian Immigrants in Thessaloniki*¹

Pratsinakis Manolis (e.Pratsinakis@uva.nl) is PhD fellow at the Institute of Immigration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), University of Amsterdam and holder of a scholarship granted by the Greek State Scholarship's Foundation (I.K.Y.).

Abstract

Dominant discourse on immigration and immigration policy in Greece has been influenced by nation's self-perception as a homogeneous Greek orthodox entity. According to this perspective, Soviet Greek immigration was considered important resource for the country, in contrast to Albanians immigration which was viewed as threatening both the social cohesion and the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Soviet Greeks have been reserved a privileged position at the macro level. Drawing from qualitative data in the City of Thessaloniki, I redirect the attention to the micro level in an attempt to explore how issues of Greekness are negotiated and experienced in everyday live.

The study shows that ethnic descent, albeit a rigid category is indefinite and flexible as means of differentiation in everyday life situations. On the one hand, Albanian immigrants, conscious about the negative implications of ethnic visibility, followed strategies to conceal the ethnocultural difference supposedly distinguishing them from Greeks. They have been capable in blurring the boundary, which is set to exclude them from the dominant society initially by identity encryption and then by actively claiming similarity with Greeks. Besides being the most stigmatized group at the macro level, Albanian immigrants managed to gain social acceptance at the local level. On the other hand, Soviet-Greeks, due to the history of their migration, are more segregated than other immigrants forming visible ethnic neighbourhoods, which appear unassimilated to local Greeks. Rather disappointed by the fact that for the majority 'return to their true homeland' entailed a downward move in the socioeconomic ladder and having more access to recourses, both symbolic and substantial, they were less eager to comply. Paradoxically, the group which is by legal definition 'the closest to the ethnonational core', is the one that appears more different at the local level. Representations between Soviet Greeks and natives are mutually prejudiced and everyday interaction is minimal. This situation is once more negotiated with ethnic vocabulary but not in ways to challenge dominant thinking. Ideologies of Greekness remain dominant and continue to set the framework around which struggle of inclusion and exclusion takes place.

Introduction

Traditionally a source country for emigration, Greece became a target destination for immigration in the early 1970s. This process gathered momentum during the 1990s when the immigrant population increased more than four times in size. Less than 15 years after the beginning of mass immigration, the immigrant population was estimated at 1.15 million, which accounts for more than 10% of the total population (Baldwin Edwards 2005); this is one of the highest immigrant population rates among the EU member states. Greece's immigration turnaround can be placed in the framework of King's "Southern European model"² (King et al. 1997; King 2000) yet the massiveness and suddenness of the phenomenon in the 1990s is exceptional to the South European experience. The dramatic increase in immigration during that decade was closely connected to the disintegration of the former Communist Bloc and was shaped by two distinct population moves; mass undocumented immigration from the Balkans, notably Albania, and the "return" of ethnic Greeks.

The regulation as well as the ideological perception of those two migrations has been very asymmetrical. On the one hand, the presence of a significant non-Greek immigrant

¹ Paper to be presented in the 4th Hellenic Observatory PhD symposium, June 26-26 2009. Accepted for publication in IMISCOE's cluster C7 edited book on visibility/invisibility in migration studies

² King's model emphasises specific features of the south European economy along with the gradual cease of rural-urban migration in all countries, common demographic trends and social changes.

population has been consistently treated as a temporary phenomenon, rather than a permanent feature of the contemporary Greek state. Immigration policies, thus far adopting a differential exclusion model (Castels 1995), came post hoc to enforce immigrants' exclusion from a multitude of social, political and economical domains by a way of institutional obstacles. On the other hand, favourable policies encouraged the return of ethnic Greeks, especially the Greek Diaspora in the FSU and a series of measures aimed at facilitating their settlement. The unpreparedness and inexperience of the Greek state as well as the particular needs of the Greek labor market have been widely commented as the driving forces for the fragmented Greek policy response to the challenge of mass immigration. Yet, as the above comparison reveals, ethno-national considerations have played an equally central role.

The differentiated policy approach of the Greek state is closely linked to the nation's self-perception as a homogenous Greek orthodox entity. According to this perception, only immigrants of Greek descent may be an important resource for the country, in contrast to non Greek immigrants who are viewed as a threat to both the social cohesion and the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Nationality law served as the main tool to secure this ideology as well as the political interests of the state (Pratsinakis 2008). Access to citizenship rights has been given to Soviet Greeks as a welcoming gesture for their "repatriation" to the motherland whereas strict naturalisation requirements are aimed at limiting the naturalisation of *allogenis* immigrants.

The term *genos*, is a key element of Greekness (Tsitselikis 2007). It is an actual legal category differentiating between those who are of Greek descent, *homogenis*, and those who are not, *allogenis*. This additional distinction goes beyond the common dichotomy between the national and the foreigner. Opposed to the firm image of Greek national homogenis, the category of national allogenis, which refers to persons belonging to minorities in Greece, appears as an anomaly (Christopoulos 2007:253). At the same time, foreigner homogenis, i.e., Greeks from the Diaspora, retain their ties with the "motherland" through a preferable legal status as people without Greek citizenship but with Greek descent.

Greek national ideology was constructed around two core ideas: homogeneity of the nation and the uninterrupted continuity of Greek civilization and history from the classical past (Boeschoten 2008:212). Firstly, emigration of groups with non-Greek consciousness, population exchanges and withdrawal of nationality minimized religious and ethnic diversity of the Modern Greek state. The 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey alone involved the movement of about 1.5 million people. More than one million Christians came to settle in Greece and more than 350,000 Muslims left for Turkey (Hirschon 2003:14). At the same time, assimilation policies targeted the linguistic minorities. The religious and cultural plurality of the Ottoman past, as well the continued presence of many linguistic minorities within the Greek nation-state have been erased from public memory, making nation's self-imagination as a homogenous Greek-Orthodox entity a norm. Secondly, the idea of continuity with the classical past was justified by defining the nation with reference to common ancestry. This ideology, which gradually rendered Greek citizenship an ethnic privilege derived from descent is of significant importance in the reception of immigration in contemporary Greek State (Pratsinakis 2008).

The distinction between homogenis and allogenis has not only played a central role in the design of Greek immigration policy and citizenship acquisition but it also prevails in public and political discourses. Homogenis immigrants are acknowledged the right to return to the country where they supposedly belong to and the Greek State is thought as having the obligation to facilitate the return of those Greeks who 'unluckily had found themselves living away from mother land'. Especially concerning the post 90ies immigration of ethnic Greeks from the FSU this is further supported with references to the legacy of the "successful assimilation" of Asia Minor refugees of the 1923 compulsory population exchange between

Greece and Turkey (Voutira 2004:535). Even though, the population exchange and the settlement of the refugees that followed the *Minor Asia Catastrophe* is considered one of the most tragic moments in contemporary Greek history, it is also acknowledged as a major resource for development of the Greek nation state.

In contrast, immigration from the Balkans was followed by a public fear and it was related to disputed borders and ethnic minority contests that have long tormented the relationships between Balkan countries (Triandafyllidou Veikou 2002). These images have been widely reproduced in media which have played a leading role in picturing immigration as a threat for the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Together with the police-logic of the exclusionary legal framework (especially during the 1990s) they contributed to the construction and reproduction of the “criminal migrant” stereotype, particularly for Albanians (Karides 1995; Lazarides 1996; Droukas 1998). Pavlou (2001) who did research on local newspapers in the city of Thessaloniki, identified a clear distinction in immigrant group representations where Soviet Greek “returnees” and Albanian immigrants comprise two poles the former group positively represented and the latter negatively stereotyped.

Clearly, ideologies of Greekness are crucial in determining inclusion and exclusion of immigrants at the macro level both in the implementation of policy as well as in the representational sphere. In this article I take the enquiry a step further redirecting the attention to the micro level, to the motivated interaction between immigrants and natives at the neighbourhood level, in an attempt to describe how issues of Greekness are negotiated and experienced in everyday life. Are differentiations based on ethogenealogical criteria visible and the resulting evaluative distinctions relevant in everyday interaction, and if yes in what respect?

My focus will be restricted on Soviet Greeks and Albanians, in the city of Thessaloniki. Albanians and Soviet Greeks, which are numerically the major immigrant groups in Greece, make an interesting comparison ‘as extreme cases’; the first group has benefited the most from the provisions of the Greek state to facilitate its return, whereas the group of Albanians is the most stigmatised one. The empirical base of the paper comprises of field observations and approximately 50 interviews with Soviet Greeks, Albanians and native Greeks. Data were gathered primarily through ethnographic research in 2007 and 2008 in the neighbourhood of Mithrio, Thessaloniki, as well as by interviews carried out with Albanian immigrants in the same city in 2004. Issues that come up in such a comparison might refer to ‘ethnic particularities’. Those are understood in a broad sense including not only cultural differentiations but also different immigration biographies and structural characteristics of the two groups. To account for those, I will briefly outline the immigration context for Albanians and Soviet Greeks and give a short note on the structural characteristics of the two communities in Thessaloniki before I go on describing the field material.

Soviet Greek Immigration to Greece

The Greek Diaspora in the FSU is commonly distinguished in three main categories in terms of the time and causes of settlement as well as the backgrounds and places of origin of the settlers; the Marioupol Greeks, the Pontic Greeks and “the political refugees”(Mackbridge 1991; Voutira 2006). The vast majority of the estimated 200000 (Voutira 2004) Soviet Greeks who have settled in Greece during the last two decades are of Pontic descent. The Pontic Greeks trace their origin in the eastern half of the southern coast regions of the Black sea, an area known as Pontos, where Greek speaking orthodox communities were settled. During the turbulent period from 1914 to 1923, Pontic Greeks were forced to completely desert their ancestral homeland. Approximately 200,000 fled to Russia joining older migrations, while

183,000 went to Greece following the population exchange between Greece and Turkey (Voutira 2006: 405)³.

The Pontic Diaspora of the FSU dispersed in small cultural enclaves mainly in Stavropol and Krasnodar, in South Russia and in Abkhazia and Adzharia in Georgia as well as in Central Asia where they were deported during the Stalinist era⁴. Due to common experience as members of the old Soviet regime they can all speak the Russian language and the majority of the younger generation was socialized in Russian. The older generations however speak Pontic Greek, the Greek dialect of the region of Pontos, with the exception of the Pontic Tsalkalides, the settlers of the in mountainous region of Tsalka in Southern Georgian, who have been speaking Rum, a Turkish dialect. Several Pontic Greeks can also communicate in other languages spoken by the locals in the places they have been living (eg. Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani etc).

Having settled in different periods and being so widespread over the FSU territory, the Pontic communities were not only characterized by linguistic plurality but the degree of their attachment to Pontic culture also varied considerably. In terms of their self-identification, Pontic Greeks called themselves *Romaioi* or used *Greki*, their formal Russian ethnonym; despite their differences they felt part of a Greek imagined Diaspora community. Brought up to think of themselves as Greeks within the Soviet Nationalities model, the Pontics of the FSU were for the first time confronted with their “Pontic identity” as a separate, albeit Greek identity when they immigrated to Greece or when they came in contact with Greeks in FSU (Popov 2000, Voutira 2006). Several of my informants told me that although they had been taking pride in their Greek roots and the classical past to which they considered themselves inheritors, they became aware of their regional Pontic ethnic identity and extensively informed about “their” Pontic history in Greece. As Kostas told me:

We did not know what Pontii means there (in FSU). Everybody was Greek. We did not know those differences. We called ourselves Romioi. Only here in Greece we learned that there are different Greeks like Cretans, Thracian etc. Here we learned that we are called Pontii.

In the 1990ies similarly to other “less privileged nationalities under the Soviet regime”, their Greekness, passing thought a proof of their Pontic origin, became a competitive resource in light of the prospects of emigration it entailed for its members (Voutira 2006:393). Crucial in determining their immigration to Greece has been Greek State’s effort to strengthen the country’s demography and economy through a repatriation plan. This policy was expressed by the official invitation to the Pontians to come for permanent residence in Greece (Papaioannou 2001:4). On immigrants’ side fear of economic and physical insecurity and the threat that minority rights would be undermined in the context of an emerging nationalist discourse in different regions of Central Asia, Georgia or Southern Russia had informed expectations concerning Greece (Voutira 2004:535). The desire “for return” to their imagined homeland and ethnic centre boosted further their expectations of a perceived opportunity of a better life and working condition that shaped their decision of immigration. During the first years information about the existence of a state-organized program of Reception and Settlement contributes significantly to taking the decision to emigrate. Migration to Greece followed a family pattern, in cases concluding in the complete relocation of kinship or ethnic locality based networks.

³ The number Pontic Greeks who came as refugees in Greece should have been higher. A considerable part of the approximately 47,000 refugees who declared Caucasus as their place of origin had origins in Pontos and possibly others who appeared in the census as refugees from Asia Minor and Thrace (Vergeti 1991: 383).

⁴ During the Stalinist period, Soviet Greeks were persecuted and deported to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Siberia and the remote steppes of Central Asia. The deportees were allowed to return after Stalin’s death but a large number remained in Cental Asia, especially in Kazakhstan since many of them had lost their properties.

A ministerial decision in 1990 aimed to ease and regulate the acquisition of citizenship by Soviet Greeks, which was defined as “a specific case” by the 1993 law. Soviet Greeks who wished to acquire Greek citizenship could apply through the so-called procedure of “verification of nationality”. By means of a summary mode of acquisition, citizenship rights were granted on proof of the applicant’s descent through documents certified by the Greek consular authorities in the country of origin. The investigation of the applicant’s “Greek national consciousness” was introduced as a supplementary criterion in 2000. Soviet Greeks, who do not wish to acquire Greek citizenship in order not to lose their existing one, are provided with a special “card of homogenis”. This is a tantamount to semi-citizenship, which grants them all but voting rights. According to Christopoulos (2007:272), by 2003 approximately 125,000 out of the estimated 180,000 Soviet Greeks residing permanently in Greece had acquired Greek nationality, mostly through the verification procedure.

The National Foundation for the reception and Resettlement of Repatriate Greeks (EIYAPOE), which was established in 1990 to carry out the planning and coordination of the reception of Soviet Greeks, proposed a plan involving housing, language and employment programmes. Greek language courses for adults as well as vocational training and programs for promoting entrepreneurial activity were set up. At the same time Soviet Greeks have been granted promoted access for positions in the public sector. Eventually, those programmes either reached to a small number of immigrants or proved ineffective⁵. In terms of education, reception classes were organized at schools to address the needs of Soviet Greek students and a few Intercultural schools opened mainly in Thessaloniki and Athens.

More emphasis was put on housing and a policy plan promoted their placement in the province of Thrace, home to the Muslim minority. Following the same logic of the 1920s refugee policy, Soviet Greeks’s immigration was considered by the Greek State as a resource for national development (Voutira 2003). In particular, the settlement scheme aimed at the economic revitalising of this underdeveloped region as well as at changing its religious and ethnic demography in favour of the Christian citizens. However, the EIYAPOE’s inefficiency to carry out such a large scale project and widespread unemployment in the region destined the program to a failure which signified a reconsideration of policy goals. Since 1994 the official line was to contain rather than encourage immigration of ethnic Greeks from FSU and a more flexible agricultural settlement scheme in rural Eastern Macedonia and Thrace was then introduced. Once more the scheme was met with limited success; the majority of newcomers preferred to settle in urban areas or close to urban areas where job opportunities are much greater. It should be noted that a large number of Soviet Greeks, especially those that arrived after the mid 1990s, preferred to use the help of family and kinship networks already settled in Greece rather than follow integration routes organized around state measures and policies. Moreover, many overstayed on tourist visas before they decide whether to immigrate permanently or not.

Whichever, migration route they followed, acquiring own housing, like native Greeks was particularly important for Soviet Greeks not only as an improvement in their material circumstances but symbolically attesting the establishment of roots in Greece. On the other hand, Greek State policies continued prioritising housing schemes especially due to inability to provide any substantial help in the labour market. The majority of Soviet Greeks managed to materialise their aspiration to own a house through two distinct ways: self-generated unauthorized construction (*afthereta*) and the acquisition of housing loans. In both cases the State played an important role: either by simply turning a blind eye (reproducing decade-old

⁵ Besides the EIYAPOE’s initiatives, the Soviet Greeks have been designated as a vulnerable social group and thus have formal access to additional programs aimed at promoting and supporting self-employment. However they have utilized them only minimally due to lack of information about these options (Papaioannou et. Al 2001:5).

practices) or through the distribution of privileged housing loans of 60.000 euros per family for a period of four years (2001-2005).

Albanian immigration to Greece

Albanian immigration with its forceful emergence after years of strict mobility restrictions and isolationist politics probably represents the most impressive case of “East-West” population movement (King & Barjaba 2005). Denied their fundamental human right to travel abroad during the previous 45 years, and with their country dissolving into economic anarchy around them, many Albanians were desperate to leave to the neighbouring states (King & Barjaba 2005). While the perceived pull factors were the attraction of ‘western’ life styles and access to income unimaginable at home, the push factors concerned a lack of faith in politicians’ promise of domestic reform, insecurity, and the imminent threat of violence, which pervaded Albania as the communists lost their grip on power (Hall 1996: 186). Immigration was continuous ever since and a second mass exodus was sparked in 1997. That was the result of the renewed political and economic chaos that followed the collapse of a set of huge pyramid investment schemes that bankrupted more than half the Albanian population (Mai & Shwander-Sieven 2003).

West, in the case of Albanian migration, meant Greece and Italy. Especially Greece hosted the majority of Albanian immigrants. According to the 2001 population census 438,000 Albanians were recorded living in Greece, representing 58 per cent of *allogeneis* immigrant population. The prominence of Albanian immigration in Greece is remarkable considering that the second largest foreign national group, the Bulgarians, constitute only 4,7 per cent of foreign immigrants in Greece. Although, Albanians were initially welcomed with a mixture of curiosity and compassion they were soon brought centre stage of discourses on “the migration invasion”.

The sheer size of the group was perceived as a major “threat” for the supposedly homogeneous Greek-nation state and reference to disputed borders and ethnic minority issues between the two nations framed Albanian immigration as an issue of national security. Albanians seem to be the most stigmatised immigrant group in Greece, stereotyped by characteristics that render them inferior in the eyes of the dominant society (Lazaridis & Koumandraki 2001). The word Albanian itself has acquired a negative meaning and it is used in a derogative way to insult someone as poor, uncivilized and prone to criminality. Concerning the latter, media played a leading role by portraying Albanians as dangerous criminals. These stereotypes were reproduced in everyday discourse with reference to illegal activities of Albanian gangs in Greece reproducing a public prejudice of their culture’s alleged innate proneness to criminality. The police logic of immigration policy especially during the first years contributed further to the negatively stereotyping of Albanians by framing immigration as a criminal activity (Karydis 1996).

The immigration “boom” of the 1990s found the Greek administrative structure significantly unprepared and the legislative framework based on an archaic Law from 1929. The new immigration Law, designed by the Ministry of Public Order, aimed at controlling immigration and bringing Greece in line with the strict EU directions. Despite of (or, more precisely, because of) a very restrictive policy response six years after the new immigration Law, 90% of the approximately 700,000 immigrants living in Greece were irregulars. Although the official line continued to be that “Greece is not a country of immigration” having failed to restrict undocumented immigration, the Greek state adopted a first regularisation programme in 1997. Failing to resolve the problem, a second regularisation was applied in 2001, part of a broader immigration Law. The 2001 law established more favourable provisions regarding the right to family reunification and the acquisition of long

term residence. However, those provisions remained still exclusionary and naturalisation procedures became even more cumbersome by the 2001 law⁶. It is almost impossible for immigrants of non-Greek descent to acquire citizenship, as illustrated by the fact that only 13,500 people managed to naturalize in the period 1985-2003 (Christopoulos 2007:267). The most recent immigration bill on the '*Entry, stay and integration of third country nationals in Greece*' which passed in August 2005 follows the logic of the previous law with the objective to rationalise the co-ordination of Greece's immigration policy, simplify procedures and cut red-tape (Gropas & Triandafyllidou 2007:143)⁷.

The lifeworld of the Albanian immigrants especially before regularization was characterized by social isolation, marginality and vulnerability. Studies drawing from research carried out during the first years of migration, recorded precarious material condition, widespread stigmatization and super-exploitation by local employers which were pointing to the emergence of underclass (Lazaridis & Psimmenos 2000; see also Psimmenos 1995; Lazaridis 1999). The only 'opportunities' for Albanian immigrants in Greece were connected with the availability of jobs. Despite being marginal, insecure and poorly rewarded, those jobs had much bigger economic returns compared to the wages provided by more skilled and prestigious jobs in Albania. Along with hard work, acquiring Greek language skills was critical for survival in the country, given the lack of any institutional provision. All informants reported learning the language as a primary goal during their settling-in period; virtually all of them were self-taught through television and daily interaction with natives, the latter taking place mainly at work.

Being an illegal immigrant, especially during the first years, entailed living in fear and social isolation. My informants' avoidance of social interaction with local people—even with other Albanians—and self restricted mobility in the city also has to be understood as a survival strategy: to be as 'invisible' as possible in order to avoid arrest and deportation. However, that does not mean that the Albanian immigrants did not have any networks at all. They relied on strong collective bonds with small and close-knit networks. Usually those networks were comprised by relatives and less often by friends, providing support and protection from everyday hardships. Apart from these close-knit networks, my informants gradually started cultivating ties with Greeks, especially employers or neighbours.

In the course of time the majority of Albanian immigrants in Thessaloniki have taken advantage of certain opportunities that arose and the regularisation turned out to be a crucial point in their lives. Moreover, getting more familiar with the country's conditions, learning the language and drawing support from their own networks and interpersonal relations with

⁶ The criterion of minimal continuous residency was reduced from 5 to 2 years for family reunification and from 15 to 10 years for long term residence permits. For naturalisation the minimal continuous residency is also 10 year and conditions include: sufficient knowledge of Greek language, history and culture and a fee of 1500 euros. Decisions are not justified in case of rejection (Tsitselikis 2007: 150).

⁷ It is crucial to mention that Albanian immigration happened together with the immigration of ethnic-Greek Albanians. In the case of Greek Albanians the Greek government was had to balance its policy between the proclaimed moral obligation towards co-ethnics and political considerations according to which Greek Albanians are more important for the nation outside the nation rather than within it (Pratsinakis 2008). In particular the continuous presence of the Greek minority in Albania is considered vital for the promotion of Greek interests in the neighbouring country. Since a threat exists that Albania will withdraw Albanian citizenship from those who eventually acquire Greek citizenship, the Greek policy attempts to prevent the acquisition of Greek citizenship by homogenis from Albania (Tsitelikis, 2007:156). Their status was clarified in 1998 when they were granted the "card of homogenis". Although they are given preferential status as people without Greek citizenship but with Greek nationality, they receive fewer benefits than the Soviet Greeks and they have no voting rights since they are excluded from citizenship. Although my focus in this article is explicitly on the Albanian immigrants of non-Greek descent, as it will be shown in preceding sections, the presence of ethnic Greek Albanians conditioned to a large extent the strategies of other Albanian immigrants.

local Greeks they managed to secure an upward socio-economic mobility and organize their lives in increasingly better terms. This observation should neither lead to an idealization of their conditions in Greece nor imply that their adaptation be likened to a straightforward evolutionary process. Improvement in their life conditions in some domains is coupled with new difficulties and problems they constantly encounter, given the persistence of stigmatization, institutional discrimination, political exclusion and still precarious legal status. Moreover, upward mobility is not the experience of all Albanian immigrants in Greece⁸. However, my field data in accordance with others (Lambrianidis & Lyberaki 2001; Hatziprokopiou 2003; Lyberaki & Maroukis 2005) suggest that the grand picture at least for those oriented towards a more permanent stay in the country is of a dynamic one. The metaphor of the underclass implying a permanent socio-economic stagnation and the depiction of Albanian immigrants as powerless subjects without agency, are inappropriate descriptions of the dynamics of their trajectories.

Albanians and Soviet Greek immigrants in Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki, which is the second major area of settlement for immigrants in Greece following Athens, is rather exceptional in its high concentration of immigrants from FSU, including ethnic Greeks⁹. Albanians form a considerable part of the city's immigrant population, though with a lower share than in the rest of the country. They are present in approximately equal numbers with Soviet Greeks and together they constitute more than half of the 112,000 immigrant recorded living in the Greater area of Thessaloniki in 2001. On the basis of the 2001 Census, I will attempt to sketch the socioeconomic profiles and the residential patterns of the two immigrant groups in the city.¹⁰

As already mentioned Soviet Greeks followed family migration patterns involving the entire household thus having a much more balanced demographic structure in comparison to Albanians who are at working age in larger shares, and on average younger than Soviet Greeks. Turning to education levels, these appear to be higher among Soviet Greeks than in the Albanian but also indigenous population. Particularly the shares of people with no completed primary education ("illiterate") are 9.2% of Soviet Greeks, as compared to 12.7% of local Greeks and 14% of Albanians. As for the share of those with higher education, 19% of Soviet Greeks have had university education as compared to 18.7% among the local population and 7,6 among the Albanian immigrants¹¹.

However, the education level of immigrants is not translated into a position in the labour market that matches their qualifications, confirming the structural forces behind immigrants' economic integration in Greece. The work migrants do is mainly manual, physically demanding, often of a servile character, and, for the majority, in low-skilled positions indifferent from their educational attainments. While immigrants constitute no more than 11% of the Greater Thessaloniki population, they represent about 30% of the GTA's labour force working in unskilled jobs, nearly one third of whom are Soviet Greeks, i.e. the group with the highest qualifications. The case of Soviet Greeks is particularly striking not

⁸ In a previous study I have brought attention to the case of "target earners" and to single Albanians who emigrated at a young age and Lazarides highlighted the significance of gender and age for exclusion from the labour market.

⁹ Compared to the prevalence of Balkan immigrants throughout Greece and a far greater diversity in Athens (Lambrianidis & Hatziprokopiou 2008).

¹⁰ All data presented here are from the analysis in Lambrianidis et al 2008.

¹¹ Albanian migrants holding a university degree are significantly less in comparison to natives in Thessaloniki which is a Department hosting a large share of the highly educated Greeks. However, a large number of them have completed some form of technical/professional education.

only for their high qualifications but also for their privileged position in terms of social and economic rights, as well as promoted access to positions in the public sector. Except from a small minority of Soviet Greeks who achieved high-income earnings by means of entrepreneurial and transnational economic activities, immigration and resettlement entailed for them a substantial declassing and deskilling experience. Despite their privileged position they found themselves occupying the lowest position in the labour market together with other immigrants¹². At the same time Soviet Greeks exhibit a significantly higher unemployment rate both from natives as well as from Albanians who have comparable rates.

As far as housing is concerned, Soviet Greeks have considerably high shares of homeownership compared to Albanians. Especially after the state-funded housing loans homeownership among Soviet Greeks should be approaching native Greeks standards. Most important for their social interaction with natives is that both the acquisition of housing loans as well as the process self-generated unauthorized construction, through which most of Soviet Greeks acquired their house, have channeled them in the Western part of the City and have augmented their segregation levels. On the contrary Albanians have extremely low homeownership share. At the same time they appear to share residential space with Greeks and their tendency to spread across the urban tissue is impressive. Calculated at the census tract level from data of the 2001 Census, the segregation index is approximately 0,60 for Soviet Greeks in Thessaloniki's Conurbation, whereas for Albanians is slightly more the 0,30. Currently the difference is expected to even bigger because of the prescription of the housing loans to Soviet Greeks which took place from 2001 until 2005.

The paradox: immigrants in the eyes of their native neighbours

Considering the positive framing of Soviet Greeks' immigration one could expect the development of sustained interaction between them and locals, at least more so in comparison to other immigrants. Yet, evidence from qualitative research in Thessaloniki's neighbourhoods challenges this hypothesis. Mithrio¹³ is a working class neighbourhood at the outskirts of Thessaloniki which has expanded rapidly during the last decade to a large extent by and for Soviet Greeks. This area is hosting approximately 10,000 people the majority of which are Soviet Greeks, followed by native Greeks and a small number of Albanians and other immigrants. The spatial segregation between Soviet Greeks and natives within the neighborhood, which is an outcome of the history of the expansion of the neighborhood reflects also a clear social polarization. Natives and Soviet Greeks do not intermingle in the public space of Mithrio nor at the admittedly few taverns and cafeterias of the area. Moreover, there are two churches in the neighborhood, one for each community and even the open market is divided in two parts.

Besides minimal interaction, representations are negative, too. Native Greeks living in Mithrio have an unfavorable image of their Soviet Greek neighbors and accuse them for various reasons. Complains about improper behavior in the neighborhood are common. In Sotiris words:

They are shooting and generally they show a complete refusal to comply with any of the rules of quietness and keeping the neighborhood clean."

Others stereotyped Soviet Greeks as violent and aggressive and they claimed that they feel insecure in the neighborhood. The representation of the neighborhood as a ghetto is also very

¹² Soviet Greeks have slightly higher rates of self-employment as well as share of employers in comparison to Albanians. Yet the vast majority of them (88%) are waged employees just like Albanians and other immigrants in the city.

¹³ The name of the area is fictitious

common confirming the territorial stigmatization of Mithrio as non safe place. Such images of Mithrio are becoming common among residents of adjacent neighborhoods. More interestingly a cultural gap between them and the residents of Soviet Greek background was also noted by many informants. Manolis told me

“They are sitting outside of their houses in pilotis or they make temporary barracks and the play cards there. They speak Russian... they have different habits. They do not go out to cafeterias or taverns so as not to pay. Moreover, they are drinking a lot. They can’t have enough. How can you come together with them?”

The use of public space seems to be a contested issue. Since their low income does not allow for frequent outgoing and consumption, Soviet Greeks develop leisure practices mostly at the neighbourhood public space. Possibly this also relates to different cultural perception of open space and the rural background of a large number of Soviet Greeks¹⁴. They gather in pilotis and in pavements just outside of the private domain of residence to play cards, backgammon and chess, socialise, drink, eat and chat. Moreover they have created some “spontaneous leisure-scapes” by bringing sofas, chairs, tables and even building shanties. Three places like those exist in the neighbourhood each hosting different people in terms of age gender and country of origin. As leisure culture for the host population is increasingly moving towards consumption and as entertainment options are more and more oriented towards the private sphere (Hatziprokopiou 2006:127) such use of the public space is heavily criticized by local Greeks.

Equally negative representations towards Soviet Greeks are also held by local Greeks with who they share a common Pontic origin¹⁵. Although, there has been formal approach from Pontic associations towards their Soviet co-ethnics, evidence from Mithrio suggests that common ethnic descent alone was not enough for the development of reciprocal relations at the local level. Indeed the spatial segregation of the two communities within the neighborhood does not facilitate mutual approach. The established native Pontics together with other natives had immigrated to Thessaloniki from the mid 60ies until late 70ies from adjacent villages and they had settled in what is today the south part of Mithrio¹⁶. Soviet Greeks came in 1993 and they gradually built a self-constructed unauthorised neighbourhood in a small distance from the old Nikopli, in an area where there was available land for sale. After 2000 and the prescription of the housing loans to Soviet Greeks, which triggered big construction companies to hastily build the area, the two sub-neighbourhoods merged. In the middle and largest part of the neighbourhood natives, Soviet Greeks are not mutually excluded, like in the upper and the lower part of Mithrio, but Soviet Greeks form the majority¹⁷. The established Pontics, residents of old Mithrio were not eager to approach their Soviet Greeks co-ethnics and fieldwork experience suggests that in cases they were more negatively disposed towards them than the rest of the Greeks. Being a rather cohesive community they have tried to differentiate themselves from the newcomers.

It can be argued that those findings are not exceptional. Already in 1965 Elias and Scotson have highlighted that the reception of newcomers can be prejudiced even in cases when the “established and outsiders” do not differentiate in terms of nationality, ethnic descent or class standing as in the case of Mithrio. What is remarkable however, is the antithesis in the relations of locals, both of Pontic origin or not, with Soviet Greeks and

¹⁴ According to Antrikopoulos (2005) the organization of public space in Georgia, which facilitated meeting outside home, had contributed to a development of a culture of socialization in public space.

¹⁵ Descendants of the Pontic Greeks who settled in the country in the context of the 1920s forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey.

¹⁶ The neighborhood was built through processes of unauthorized self construction. This was a very common practice until the 70ies through which most of the post-war city expansion happened. This process was then banned to be revitalized by the “return” of the Soviet Greeks.

¹⁷ Albanians and other immigrants live mostly in the old part of Mithrio

Albanians. Generally, native residents record having good relationships with their *allogeneis* neighbors including Albanians who they describe as peaceful hard working and “causing no problems” in the neighborhood. As Iordanis said:

“No with the Albanians we have no problem. They are here for several years. They did never cause any problem. They are good guys.”

Others explicitly compare their Albanian neighbors to Soviet Greeks to express their negative perception on the latter group. For instance Roula mentioned the following with reference to parents’ attitudes.

“Soviet Greek boys speak Russian at home and when they come to the school they have difficulties. It is natural as the children have no help from their parents. They also use bad language. Those issues depend on the environment you are raised(...). On the contrary I have a close Greek friend who I visit regularly. He has an Albanian friend. I have an excellent opinion about her as a mother. She tries to provide to her children whatever they need. They are a very good family and nice people you can drink your coffee with them and have a nice time.”

Interaction between Albanians and natives should not be overstressed, however a few friendships have developed and Albanians frequent in one of the two Greek owned cafeterias in Mithrio. Besides of their presence in this cafeteria, Albanians go rather unnoticed in the neighbourhood setting or in discussions of native Greeks about the immigrants living in Mithrio. Indeed, this is largely the outcome of their under-representation in the neighbourhood. In the same line of thinking it could be supported that the pattern of interethnic coexistence developed in Mithrio is also an outcome of the population structure and history of the neighbourhood.

Yet, the ethnographic research of Andrikopoulos (2005) in a more well off neighbourhood where immigrants form the minority and Albanians are more numerous than Soviet Greek presents similar evidence to that of Mithrio. According to his findings Albanians are the least visible immigrant group, willing to adapt to the dominant norms in the use of public space. At the same time they are notably more involved in social interaction with local Greeks than Soviet Greeks. Representations are more positive for the Albanians who are once more represented as good family people –*oikogeneiarhes*-, working really hard and being peaceful in contrast to Soviet Greeks¹⁸ who are though of as causing all the problems in the neighbourhood.

Andrikopoulos’ ethnography is the only one to my knowledge which explores interethnic relations of different immigrant groups and native Greeks at the local level and the first to problematize the relevance of macro discourses in understanding everyday interaction. However, a few studies have also observed the development of positive interethnic relations at the local level between Albanians and natives despite widespread stigmatization (Shell 2000; Pratsinakis 2005)¹⁹ and the prejudiced symbiosis between natives and Soviet Greeks (Voutira 2004; Hess 2008). Although it is possible that in other cities or even in other neighborhoods within the same city one might encounter different experiences, it draws that the figuration described here is neither singular to one neighborhood nor exceptional.

Hence, discourses at the macro level may differentiate sharply from the experience at the local level and the empirical material presented here confronts us with a paradox; the most stigmatised *allogeneis* immigrant group appears accepted at the local level whereas there is minimal interaction between natives and “Greek returnees” who are viewed as culturally and socially alien. How are we to explain this contradiction between representations at the macro level and experience at the local level? One might be tempted to slide into culturalistic

¹⁸ In this research Soviet Greeks are lumped together with other Soviet immigrants in a common category that of ‘Caucasians’.

¹⁹ Albeit embedded in a paternalistic framework

explanations by inverting the hierarchy posed by the Greek state. However, claiming that Albanian immigrants have more cultural proximity with Greek rather than Soviet Greeks do is definitely not an adequate explanation. The question has to be rephrased in the following way; why do natives consider the social behaviour of Albanians in the neighbourhood better than that of Soviet Greeks? Or why are Albanians more eager than Soviet Greek to adopt a social behaviour at the neighbourhood level, which is better accepted by natives?

Albanian immigrants: Blurring the boundary as a response to negative visibility

As described, Albanians experience of immigration during the first years in Greece entailed hard work, self imposed invisibility, acquiring basic language skills and developing networks to provide them with support and information to deal with the everyday matters. Besides those coping practises they had to undergo in order to build their lives in Greece, Albanian immigrants also adopted strategies to reduce cultural racism and enhance their social position. Conscious about the privileged position of the ethnic Greek immigrants, their tactic entailed a certain blurring of the ethnic boundary between Greek and Albanian identity. A widespread strategy was that of name-changing. Albanians with a Greek name who also spoke Greek could pass as Albanians of Greek origin in order to be treated better by the dominant society. Many chose to introduce themselves with a Greek name in their everyday interactions with natives, and some had even had their name changed officially in their passport. The voluntaristic aspect of this practice should not be overstressed. Albanian immigrants did not have that much room to present themselves in a way that was congruent to their own self-conception. Therefore, identity 'hiding' and modification should be mainly understood as a survival strategy (Pratsinakis 2005). Especially for those who arrived in the early 1990s this practice was more of a forced one. This is vividly depicted in Gazmend's words:

We had our normal names. When I came here they told me 'I can not call you Gazmend so I will call you Vasili'. Another told me 'I will call you Petro'.. . . Eh, if you cannot just give me my job and my daily wage and I do not care, call me as you want.. . . Educated people—but they were claiming that they could not say my name!

Even if passing as Greek Albanians was not a conscious purpose, hiding vital elements of their identity which marked a limiting boundary between them and the dominant society was a way to avoid mistreatment. Religion was a major one. As Eda told me:

In the beginning you could not say that you were a Muslim, you would lose your job . . . that was the first thing that they asked you. 'What is your religion?' not 'What is your name?'

The above quote symbolically depicts the contested relation of Greece with Islam and the strong value of Christianity in contemporary Greek society²⁰. This is further confirmed by the fact that the practice of name-changing concerned mostly those with Muslim names; all my Muslim informants used Greek ones in their interaction with Greeks, unlike those having non-Muslim names, who mostly retained theirs.

In all relevant studies, name-changing and religious encryption have been largely explored in relation to Albanian immigrants' baptism. Baptism is a vital and obligatory religious practice for the Orthodox Christian tradition. However, there are some good reasons for discerning the two former practices from the other. Baptism was not that much of a widespread practice but a voluntary decision, following the informal change of names. This

²⁰ The Greek national identity sought justification not only in the alleged historic continuity of the Greek ethnos, but was also constructed in opposition to the Ottoman Empire, which in turn was correlated with the Muslim world. In this context, Muslim names are considered by the dominant Greek society as representatives of a hostile Other

practice is also embedded in a paternalistic mentality however, from the perspective of the Albanian immigrant it was either a tactic aimed at cementing relations with a native, or a symbolic verification of an already strong relation with a Greek person. Moreover, the immigrants who aspired to remain in the country internalized the mainstream Greek view that to be Greek is to be Christian Orthodox (Pratsinakis 2005).

Albanians eventually managed to secure their position in the country and gradually enhanced their socio-economic position. This also signified an important shift in how they viewed themselves and their position in Greece. Especially those who are oriented towards a more permanent stay in the country developed active strategies, in contrast to reactive strategies became more involved in society, and re-narrated their identity (Pratsinakis 2005). It should be noted that knowing locals was crucial for Albanians already during the first years to cope with everyday situations in an extremely exclusionary setting. The phrase '*Afterwards, we made some acquaintances ...*' was echoed by many respondents in order to illustrate that, from a certain point onwards, they started to feel more secure about their standing in the country. In the course of time relationships strengthen and increased especially for those who attained certain job and housing stability.

Albanian immigrants' renegotiation of their identity happened in those circles, through incorporating and presenting a working ethos as part of their identity, by stressing similarities with Greeks, and by taking pride in the achievements of other Albanian immigrants in Greece. Interviewees expressed a belief that 'with work you can manage everything'.

As Vagelis said: *We faced many difficulties . . . but we overcame them by working, not by doing harm to other people. We were working, then managing something and the same again. We obtained a house in Albania, a car here. Normal life. We face difficulties as all the others. Need a better quote to highlight those below!!*

The above quote raises the issue of socio-economic upward mobility and stresses the belief that Albanian immigrants' lives currently do not differ from those of Greeks. Many told me stories about Albanian immigrants who had 'made it'. Others denied that Albanian immigrants nowadays only take on jobs that Greeks reject. References are also made to the cultural proximity between Albanians and Greeks.

In Lucas words : *In any case we are not different from Greeks. We are the same people. We both share a common Balkan culture.*

Overall Albanian immigrant discourse and renegotiation of their identity aims to challenge the constructed difference which supposedly distinguishes them from Greeks²¹. Their effort to negate the stereotypes of the criminal, poor Albanian passes through a claim on a common way of life and cultural similarity with Greeks²². In such an exclusionary setting where difference is certainly not a privilege, Albanian immigrants have been apt in blurring the boundary and claiming similarity with Greeks, especially since the boundary which is set to separate them from Greeks is less obvious because of somatic and cultural proximity²³.

This was initially done by strategies of identity encryption, which aimed at passing as Greek-Albanians or at least minimize difference from Greeks. Facing in imagination the lack of choices which confronted them one understands that this tactic was more a survival strategy rather than voluntary assimilation²⁴. But even when Albanians manage to organise

²¹ see also Lymberaki Maroukis on the anxiety of Albanian immigrants to differ

²² In cases of polarised interethnic interaction difference is partly invented and overstressed and similarity is shadowed to ensure the sustenance of ethnic division.

²³ It has been supported that similarity rather than difference is the main factor sustaining stigmatization of Albanian immigrants in Greece. Being rather indistinguishable from Greeks, Albanians were associated with undesired memories of Greekness such as poverty, experiences of social anomie and the necessity of internal and international emigration (Kapllani 2005)

²⁴ Assimilation may be the outcome of this process, but the attempt to minimize difference in order to lessen cultural racism does not necessarily imply adopting 'Greekness'. In their co-ethnic sphere Albanians retain their

their lives in better terms their attempts for social inclusion are still made through individual strategies to blur the boundary that separated them from Greeks. Given the widespread stigmatisation and exclusionary immigration policy, once more Albanian immigrants act individually or based on family strategies to dissociate themselves from the negative stereotype. Ascribing as part of their ethnic identity the virtues of hard-working, honest and trustworthy, need not always refer to the entire Albanian immigrant community (Pratsinakis 2005). Those who live with their families in Greece, construct a collective 'we', referring to 'Albanian family people', and those who are many years in the country refer to their prolonged stay in the country in order to differentiate themselves from the stereotype of the 'dangerous Albanian'. Others blame a segment of the Albanian immigrant population for the "bad name Albanians have acquired".

Despite the formation of associations those generally lack socio-political character. Moreover, many studies have highlighted the low participation rates of Albanian immigrants in associations (Hatziprokopiou 2003; Lamprianidis Lyberaki 2001; Lymperaki&Maroukis 2005; Pratsinakis 2005). On the whole, Albanians in Greece have not developed a coherent community but they are organized in fragmented kin-based groups, which are loosely interconnected. That is also very clearly mirrored in their residential patterns. Albanian immigrants do not form concentrations in the city yet they live in small distance from relatives. Their impressive dispersion all over the city may be also seen as partly the outcome of their strategy to fit in.

The reluctance to act collectively has been analyzed as a deficit caused by their general lack of trust towards co-ethnics or collectivities in general, or the fact that Albanian immigrants in Greece are a fragmented heterogeneous group. Yet, the main reason why Albanians organized in close-knit groups rather than in big communities is related to the history of their immigration and the exclusionary Greek policy framework. Small groups provided personal support to immigrant Albanians, whilst being more flexible and less visible than big organized communities during the period of illegality. Close knit-groups continue to be the main source of support and negotiation after regularisation, too.

The football victory of Albanian national team over the Greek national team in 2004, after it has won the Euro-cup was an exceptional case which mobilised Albanians to demonstrate collectively. This proved to be also an occasion which allowed the emergence of a latent ethnic conflict. Albanian immigrants got out in the streets not only to celebrate of sport victory over a game which had gained symbolic significance²⁵ but they were also claiming the right to be visible (Papandreou 2005:20). They were confronted by a mob of Greeks which included hooligans and members of a fascist group. The night was rough in many neighbourhoods around the country. The tragic climax was the murder of an Albanian man by a Greek-American in the island of Zante (Papandreou 2005:20). Although the media condemned the pogromlike attacks, several depicted the celebrations of Albanian immigrants barring the Albanian flag as unacceptable or even as an uprising of a dangerous internal enemy. This incident has elevated feelings of anxiety and cautiousness among Albanian immigrants (Papanreou 2005:20).

The above described symbolic event highlights the difficulty for Albanian immigrants to claim any right over their ethnic identity. The denial of a political identity keeps Albanian immigrants out of exposure, out of sight and therefore out of trouble (Kapllani 2005). Thus, Albanian immigrants renegotiation of their identity is taking place at the individual level in

own names and identity markers.

²⁵ This game had gained symbolic significance beyond the field. Greeks were eager to defend their precious national football achievements against an opponent that was perceived as inferior. Albanians on the other hand had seen in the game an opportunity to get even with the arrogant and exploiting employers of so many compatriots of them.

their interpersonal relations with Greeks and while individual acceptance is achieved, the negative stereotype of the Albanian immigrant goes unchallenged. Although, interaction with the local society is increasing and close relations with Greeks have developed it appears that life-world of Albanian immigrants is divided into two social entities: a narrow which includes 'known people' who are friendly, supportive or at least respectful towards them; and a broader one, their encounters with officials and others in the city, which is experienced as a potentially hostile social environment in which they are reminded time and again of the prejudicial stereotypes about 'the Albanian immigrant' (Pratsinakis 2005:).

Soviet Greeks: incongruent expectations and social closure

Formally, Soviet Greeks are referred to as 'repatriated Greeks' (palinnostoundes). This is an incorrect term since they are not returning to their native land, as they have never lived in Greece, but to an 'imagined homeland'. The use of this ideologically loaded term however indicates the nationalistic logic behind Soviet Greeks immigration; claiming that Soviet Greeks are returning rather than immigrating implies that they eventually move to the land where they belong to; to the country where they ought to contribute to and where they will unrestrainedly be able to better their life conditions. The Greek state besides considering an obligation to facilitate Soviet Greeks 'return' it has also treated it as an opportunity for the nation. But why would that be so given its exclusionary attitude towards immigration in general? The answer lies on the perceived significance attributed to their Greek culture and Greek consciousness, which was supposed to favour them over other immigrants. According to policy-makers logic, their Greekness would enable them to easily adjust to the country's social environment and assure their 'devotedness' to the nation. Both implied certain expectations from the 'returnees'. The following quotes from the EYIAPOE annual reports as cited in Voutira (2004: 535) are illustrative:

'The repatriates are people with low economic claims, demands, and therefore they can accept without any kind of complain even the most difficult form of life in the borderline regions' (EYIAPOE 1992:8);

'Their presence in these regions will be able to create in and of itself an economic revitalization...' (EYIAPOE 1991:6)

The space-time context and the character of Soviet Greeks' immigration differed substantially from the 1923s population exchange (Voutira 2003). The policies, which aimed to replicate century old practices, were deemed to failure. At the same time, the policy logic implicitly constructed a constraining frame of reference for Soviet Greeks; the Pontics refugees of the 1920s or more rightly the legacy of their supposedly 'successful assimilation' became the yardstick of comparison for Soviet Greek. Their acceptance passes through a proof that they "possess the same virtues", culturally (language, cultural customs) and socially (hardworking, loyal to the nation). Ideologies, which made possible the opportunity of a privileged immigration, underlie also a constraining framework of reception. Negative views gradually developed locally and Soviet Greeks 'became' disloyal, lazy and opportunist in contrast to the 1920s refugees who are represented to have been hardworking and devoted to the nation. As Petros told me:

'Those who came are not like the Pontics of the old stock ... they are somehow degenerated'
Such a discourse commonly also incorporated complains about the policy favouritism towards Soviet Greeks. Some of my informants claimed that Soviet Greeks are unthankful and that they know only to complain. They also told me that they consider it particularly unfair that Soviet Greeks are prioritised for positions in public sector and a few even claimed that it is because of them that their sons and daughters will not find job.

At the same time disillusionment was experienced and expressed on part of the Soviet Greeks. The settlement plan in Thrace, especially after its failure, was very negatively represented. In Ivan's words: *'I did not come to Greece to live with Turks! Why no Greeks go to live there after all? They want to have us in the borders so that we will be the ones to defend them in case of a War. Why it has to be Pontics who always take this role?'*

Several of my informants compared their experiences to Soviet Jews who immigrated to Israel so as to highlight Greek States inefficiency and others accused it for misappropriation of EU funds, which were supposed to facilitate their settlement.

The deskilling and declassing experience, which followed immigration and resettlement, was particularly painful for Soviet Greeks for a number of reasons. First of all it was the high expectations of an idealized perception of 'return to the homeland', which was informed by collective memories of persecutions they had suffered due to their minority status away from Greece. The promises by the Greek State and the overestimation of its capacity to provide housing and occupational accommodations played an important role, too (Papaioannou 2001:4). At the same time, the fact that immigration to Greece acquired for the majority an irreversible form meant increased disappointment due to relative deprivation to native Greeks. The most disappointed described their immigration as one of their worst lifetime decisions. Finally one should not underestimate the inability of a large number of the highly educated Soviet Greeks to find jobs that matched their qualifications. That was partly due to discrimination at the labour market and partly due to lack of human capital transferability but in any case augmented disappointment from life conditions in Greece.

During the first years of their immigration, since they could not export money in cash out of their countries, they were allowed to import and resell the assets of their household without having to pay any import duties. Ivan made a bitter reference to that experience. *'That was the absolute embarrassment (xeftila) we had to sell our things in the streets to get some money. I spend nights in the street to keep our place in the open market for the coming day. And I was a young guy at that time do you expect me to manage and study? This is the help we got from Greeks and the Greek State.'*

Particular cases of exploitation were repeated to me by different informants, which pointed that such negative experiences were widely discussed. Circulation of such negative experiences seems to have contributed substantially to social closure on part of the Soviet Greeks, especially for members of the community who had minimal experience of interaction with natives. Groups by the exchange of information attribute certain characteristics to out groups thus forming 'contextual' determinant of another groups behaviour. Supporting Esser's (1986) finding, it seems that socialization and normative controls within the respective primary milieu have been of paramount importance for social segmentation.

As described, Greeks in the FSU were a culturally segmented Diaspora that formed an imagined community due to belief in common descent. In Greece however, categorized by the dominant society as an undifferentiated mass and institutionalised by the Greek state as one category, they are being constructed as an out-group. At the same time, despite initial antagonism, Soviet Greeks' immigration and settlement experience produces multiple "arenas of convergence" (Barth 1994) that intensify interaction and convergence in behaviour and attitudes. Several of my informants made reference to internal conflicts that took place in the first years of immigration. Old rivalries between different regions but also neighbouring villages triggered prejudiced relations and even cases of physical violence between Soviet Greeks. At the same time stereotypes and endogamy practices restricted mixing in Greece. Such practices however are rapidly fading away and Soviet Greeks are forming a rather coherent community which understands itself as having a common past in FSU and a sharing a common fate in the Greece.

Due to the character of their immigration, which in cases involved not only family and kinship move but the complete relocation of locality-based networks, old relations were transplanted to Greece. Those were gradually expanded to include others from the Greek Soviet Diaspora. Interaction was facilitated due to the eventual channelling of Soviet Greeks to particular neighbourhoods. Yet, it seems that a spatial reference has always been present for the emerging community. Nikolas describes how Diikitiriou square has served such a purpose in Thessaloniki

'From our very first days here we knew that this is the place where our community gathers. It was not only a place to meet people and have a chat but also a place to solve basic everyday needs. My father is a doctor. People would go there and ask information how and where to reach him. And they could easily find him you know... always there would be someone around to know his phone number or his address'

Soviet Greeks formed from the beginning a rather visible group in the city. The open street markets where they sold goods from the FSU republics were followed by the gradual emergence of ethnic entrepreneurship. At the same time the use of Russian language and the extensive presence in public space for leisure and socialization has been always widespread. Currently they are the most segregated group in Thessaloniki and the ethnic neighbourhoods that have emerged appear alien and unassimilated to local Greeks. Especially interesting is an impressive wooden church of Russian style, inaugurated in 2005. This is the only temple build by an immigrant group, which challenges the homogeneity of the city's religion townscape.

Given that the expectations of natives for Soviet Greeks were mediated by collective perceptions of the 'refugee past', such a difference was definitely not well perceived. Yet, equally important was the fact that Soviet Greeks 'return' took place together with the mass undocumented immigration. Doubts were voiced by locals about their true 'Greekness' and the non-Greek immigrants from FSU (i.e. Georgians, Russians, Ukrainians) who had immigrated to Greece at the same period constitute a second frame of reference. The term *Rossopontii*, Pontics coming from Russia, commonly used to call Soviet Greek has gradually acquired a pejorative meaning questioning their true Greek descent.

Soviet Greeks being trapped within those two opposing frames of reference had to mobilize a culturally bounded discourse in their interaction with native Greeks. They were expected to prove their ponticness and highlight their Greekness. From the discourse of my informants it became evident that such a process could be particularly stressing, especially for the least acculturated. Soviet Greeks were accused for not speaking correctly the language or 'having forgotten their Greek ways'. Drawing from my fieldwork data it seems that many Soviet Greeks are not willing to act in ways the dominant society expects them to. They choose to assert their 'difference' and their coherent and spatially organized community provides them the means to reconstruct their life according to values and norms of their life in FUS.

As far as representations are concerned from my first days in Mithrio I was told that "you will never hear a good word about Greeks from us" which proved a good description of the attitudes of the most negatively disposed Soviet Greeks towards natives. Soviet Greeks have also developed their stereotypes about native Greeks who are represented as soft and lazy. In the course of time I was also informed that relations with natives are not very well received at least by some members of the community; relationships with natives might be interpreted as a sign of assimilation or as instrumental aiming to an economic or other goal. Such behavior is highly devaluated. Social capital generated within the community is considered as a main resource to enhance their socioeconomic position. Their strong minority culture is re-activated, mobilizing a deep belief in the potentials of the community and a

feeling that “we will make it based on our own resources and soon we will be better of than them”.

Tajfel and Turner (1986), in the context of their Social identity theory, explain the status of groups as an outcome of intergroup comparison. Group relative position on some evaluative dimensions of comparison produces hierarchies of perceived prestige. According to Tajfel and Turner there are three distinct reactions to the negative or threatened social identity of subordinate groups: Individual mobility, social creativity and social competition. The first refers to processes when individuals are attempting to abandon or dissociate themselves from their erst-while group. This strategy usually entails individual strategies to achieve upward social mobility to pass from a lower to a higher status group. In cases of social creativity the group members may seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or changing the elements of the comparative situation. Finally, social competition refers to cases when group members seek positive distinctiveness through direct competition with the out-group. This may imply efforts to reverse the relative positions of the in-group and the out-group on salient dimensions (Tajfel & Turner 1986:19-20).

Both Albanians and Soviet Greeks have followed strategies of social creativity to enhance their group position. Albanians have tried to compare the in-group with the out-group in new dimensions to highlight similarity and counter the negative stereotype by challenging dominant views. At the same time Soviet Greeks have tried to change the values assigned to the attributes their group²⁶. Yet, it is the substantial difference between the two groups, which makes this comparison particularly interesting. On the one hand the dominant reaction of Albanians has been that of social mobility whereas for Soviet Greeks has been social competition. Having more access to both symbolical and substantial capital, Soviet Greeks are less eager to comply with dominant categorizations. They aim to reverse the relative position of their group by seeking positive distinctiveness for their group. On the other hand given the widespread stigmatization for Albanian immigrants in Greece and the (perceived) heavy obstacles in mobilizing for group action, Albanians have widely followed individual strategies to fit in. One should not understand such group strategies as permanent. Being the outcome of particular space-time conditions they are subject to changes when the conditions and/or the perception of those conditions change. Yet, the different immigration history and the reception context for Albanian and Soviet Greek moves produced distinct patterns of ethnic reactions towards negative identity. Those current strategies seem also to explain the local cases of interethnic interaction described here.

Conclusion

Greek immigration policy is designed with reference to an ethnic conception of nationality and citizenship. As a result, special provisions are taken for homogeneous immigrants while immigrants of non-Greek descent are faced with an extremely exclusionary policy. This hierarchical treatment of immigrant groups is also reflected in public and political discourses as well as media representations. Soviet Greeks immigration was considered an important resource for the country whereas Albanian immigration was viewed as threatening both the social cohesion and the cultural homogeneity of the nation. Clearly, Soviet Greek immigrants have been reserved a privileged position at the macro level. Redirecting the attention to the micro level, it seems that the ideologies, which made possible the opportunity of a privileged immigration, **underlie** also a constraining framework of reception. Common descent entailed high expectations for both native and Soviet Greeks and alone it did not

²⁶ As an example here we may refer to their response to the accusation of not being real Greeks. Soviet Greeks aimed to turn this accusation to a positive distinction by claiming that their distinct identity points to a proud minority history which makes them superior Greeks.

prove a sufficient reason for the development of reciprocal relations. More interestingly, evidence from everyday interaction at the neighbourhood confronts us with a paradox; Albanians, the most stigmatised immigrant group appears accepted at the local level whereas there is minimal interaction between natives and Soviet Greeks, who are negatively represented and viewed as culturally and socially alien.

These patterns of local coexistence have been the outcome of distinct individual and group reactions to a substantially different context of reception. Conscious about the negative implications of ethnic visibility, Albanian immigrants followed strategies to conceal the ethnocultural difference supposedly distinguishing them from Greeks. They have been capable in blurring the boundary, which is set to exclude them from the dominant society initially by identity encryption and then by actively claiming similarity with Greeks. According to evidence from Thessaloniki's neighbourhoods, although in cases in a framework of paternalistic relationships, Albanian immigrants have managed to gain social acceptance at the local level. Contrary to that, Soviet Greeks and natives seem to be mutually avoided at the local level. Having rather high expectations about their move to the "motherland", Soviet Greeks became rather disappointed by the fact that for the majority 'return to Greece' entailed a downward move in the socioeconomic ladder. Being rather frustrated by what they perceive as inadequate state support and exclusion by the local Greeks, who doubt their true Greek origin and are their patrons at the work field, they did not engage in strategies to embrace their common ethnic descent but they asserted their difference and claimed their superiority over native Greeks.

Ethnic invisibility in the case of Albanians was an active strategy to survive in a hostile social environment whereas for Soviet Greeks *ethnic visibility* was the outcome of the gradual formation and construction of an ethnic community. Soviet Greeks immigrated collectively transplanting their older social networks in Greece. Institutionalized as one group by State policies they further expanded their relation with other members of the Greek Diaspora of former USSR. A visible and coherent Soviet Greek community was eventually produced in cases forming visible ethnic neighbourhood, which appear alien and unassimilated to local Greeks. On the one hand, Albanian immigrants had no option but try to fit in order to strive for inclusion. On the other hand Soviet Greeks having more access to recourses, both symbolic and substantial, they were less eager to comply. Hence, the group which is by legal definition "the closest to the ethnonational core" is the one that appears more different at the local level simply because it is able to present its difference. In that sense ethnic difference can be seen as a 'privilege' only for the ethnic similar.

Concluding, it has been shown that experience at the local level may differentiate sharply from group representations at the macro level. One should not read the development of social integration from dominant ideologies and policy measures before the different patterns of interethnic coexistence in everyday life are recorded and explored. Different actors and groups of actors make use of ideologies symbols and discourses in diverse and creative ways to secure their social status and identity. In the Greek context, ethnic descent, albeit a rigid legal category appears indefinite and flexible as means of differentiation in everyday life situations.

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Constructing Regional Identity: Crete and the European Union

Adam Trusner
PhD Candidate
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

Abstract

The paper discusses how national and local identities interact in our contemporary world considering the introduction of a recent phenomenon: the regional organization of the European Union. Considering the theoretical work on the formation of national identities during the 19th and 20th Centuries in Europe, and the burgeoning literature on the recent process of “Europeanization,” the paper discusses how the European Union is aiding the deconstruction of national identity by indirectly encouraging a renaissance of local/regional identities. The paper uses a specific case study, the Historical Museum of Crete in Herakleion, to analyze this trend.

Introduction

Nationalism, though a comparatively recent phenomenon, is so widespread and prevalent in the daily lives of people across the globe that many individuals take nationalisms as somehow natural or deeply rooted in history. Historians and other scholars know, however, that nationalism is a product of the relatively recent past, and have begun to ask how and why nationalism has become such a profound force across the world. Though nationalism is a powerful influence on contemporary life, there have been growing factors that scholars believe will decrease the relevance of nationalism, including the increased globalization of the world economy and the rise of regional organizations – the best example (because of its size, structure, and goals) being the European Union (EU). Recent scholarship, however, is lacking in describing exactly how the EU will replace nationalisms, and what will replace the older nationalisms (if anything). Though various EU programs exist to create a new “European” identity and decrease national identities, the “European” identity seems to be weak for all citizens across the EU member-states, and especially in Greece (European Commission 2001:11). Rather than creating a strong “European” identity, it seems instead that the various EU programs are helping to emphasize older regional identities to the detriment of the national identities of Europe. Using the island of Crete as a case study, the cultural policies of the EU, specifically the funding of local cultural projects like the Historical Museum of Crete, apparently directly (though perhaps not intentionally) aid the promotion of regional identity at the expense of national identity. This case study is part of a much larger project to analyze the changes that integration into the European Union is making on the politics, economics, and culture of the island of Crete.

Theoretical Issues

The historiography on nationalism has grown exponentially in the last twenty years, driven perhaps by the rapid growth of nationalist movements during the decolonization period and in wake of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe. With inputs from anthropologists, political scientists, and social psychologists, historians have grappled with the why and how of nationalism in two broadly defined ways. Also, a recent process, the integration of the European nation-states into the EU is beginning to be studied intensely, which is broadly defined as “Europeanization.” Because Europeanization, especially when it relates to culture (the creation of a feeling of “Europeanness”), is a new area of study, and because the older nationalisms and a new European identity are in direct competition, any study of the Europeanization of identity needs to build upon the theoretical framework already developed for nationalism.

Identity Formation

The first school of thought concerning the why and how of nationalism is best represented in the work of Clifford Geertz and Anthony D. Smith, whose position on the origins of nationalism has been labeled as a “primordialist.” Geertz writes that there are “primordial” ties that exist amongst individuals which function predominantly in creating individual identity. He differentiates this primordial tie from the desire to be part of the modern state, which he labels as civic ties. By creating this dichotomy, Geertz provides an analytical space in which the explanation of how modern nationalism is created can be found (Geertz 1994). Using this formulation and attempting to fill out this analytical space, Smith writes that nationalism builds upon an organic foundation called the *ethnie*, a group of people that have common ground in shared names, the belief in a common ancestry, a common history and cultural framework, and an association with a shared “homeland” (Smith 2005). The *ethnie* becomes a nation (and is used in nationalism) by a conscious construction by the intelligentsia, marginalized in pre-capitalist society, in order to gain access to power. According to Smith, nationalist ideas first gained prominence in education through the influence of the intelligentsia, and the desire for nationalism became associated with the desire for wider political and social change. As European societies adjusted to capitalism, the new middle classes, educated with nationalist ideas and newly empowered by the new economic order, adopted a series of symbols from the earlier *ethnie* and promoted those symbols as evidence of the nation. It is this process that creates nationalism and makes it possible for nationalism to spread – the incorporation of organic symbols to promote the specific political project of educated elites. Another factor in this debate is the issue of local identity, and what role local identities play in the larger nationalist project. Recent scholarship on local identity suggests that earlier local or regional identities played a large role in the manufacture of national identity. Alon Confino, for example, believes that local identities were the main constituent part in the creation of national identity. Using local imagery, Confino believes that German nationalists were able to abstract local images and appropriate them for nationalist ends, such as the depiction of regional symbols (such as the Alps or notable architecture) as all parts of a national *Heimat*, or homeland (Confino 1997). This was done to both build on the earlier symbols of identity and to manufacture a national symbolism that could be used to transfer the emotional attachment between the individual and the region to the nation.

The alternative school of thought to the “primordialist” school of Smith and others is labeled the “modernist” school. Proponents of this school have varied specific details in their answers to the why of nationalism, but all agree that the how of nationalism is that, unlike in the primordialist vision, national identity is created from completely invented traditions, rather than earlier symbols. As John Breuilly suggests, key intellectuals in Europe in the 18th Century (such as Johann Gottfried von Herder) create romantic nationalism as a negative response to the rapid changes brought about by modernity. Romantic nationalism is the fiction of such intellectuals of an “authentic past” which can be discovered in folk traditions and in linguistic analysis, all with a view to find a “pure” national tradition, devoid of outside influence (Breuilly 1994). By “uncovering” the “authentic past” in linguist analysis and through the collection of various folk traditions, the individuals who cull the linguistic and oral traditions of their chosen subjects make a series of important decision that leads to the invention of a tradition rather than the discovery of older traditions, as in the primordialist school. By eliminating certain tales, objecting to various words or phrases, and categorizing influences as “authentic” and “foreign”, the romantic nationalists manufacture a national identity that omits beliefs, practices, and even the language used by the supposed nation that the nationalists are defining. The modernist school differs on the why of nationalism. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, has written that nationalisms were created in order to mobilize the masses behind the creation of the bureaucratic nation-state, which privileged the intelligentsia as the only class educated enough to run the new state (Hobsbawm 1994). John Breuilly believes that instead of a specific goal (creation of the bureaucratic nation-state), nationalism was used across Europe to support numerous reforms, and that nationalism is so effective because its language can be used to gather support for (and, was then seen as accomplishing) many goals, such as economic reform, enlargement of the franchise, and social mobility (Breuilly 2005).

Europeanization

Europeanization – the adjustment of the various nations and their citizens to European norms and regulations – is a recent development, and one that has attracted numerous scholars and commanded the attention of European policy-makers. There is a burgeoning literature on the idea of Europeanization as it applies to institutional change as national governments adapt to EU regulations. However, few scholars have fully addressed the idea of Europeanization as a cultural phenomenon, and fewer still that analyze the conscious role that EU officials play in the process. An exception is the work of Cris Shore, whose book *Building Europe: the Cultural Politics of European Integration* began the process of constructing an analytical framework with which to assess how the numerous policies and programs of the EU affect cultural life for Europeans.

Shore’s work suggests that EU programs are designed with the primordialist’s view of national identity formation in mind. Shore documents how EU officials are assiduously attempting to cultivate a larger European identity by manufacturing symbols of identity – the Euro, the EU flag, the architecture and sculpture of different EU buildings – and that these symbols are adopted precisely with the hope that a European identity will be created (Shore 2000).

Though there is certainly an attempt to create a European identity through symbolic means, there is more effort (certainly in terms of funding and work-hours) in creating a European identity by two broad changes: encouraging the mobility of highly educated labor and by funding

massive public works projects to modernize the economies of lesser developed member-states and/or their specific regions. In terms of labor mobility, the EU (and its predecessors) allow for the free movement of workers and students across the EU. This is creating a highly educated intelligentsia who, in the opinion of Dirk Jacobs and Robert Maier, have careers which “have to kick off with a research position abroad” or see working outside their home country as “an inevitable stepping stone” (Jacobs and Maier 1998: 20). In terms of public works projects, Greece as a whole, and Crete specifically, have been major beneficiaries of funds designated under the Regional Development Funds and under Cohesion Funds, which are making a huge impact on the modernization of the economy in Greece and in other lesser developed nations of the EU.

Results

Theoretically, then, Europeanization follows both trends prevalent in the literature on nationalism. There is an attempt by EU officials to create a European identity with the methods that the primordialists say earlier nationalisms used: the creation of common symbols for a new European identity, such as the flag. Additionally, many EU publications cite a common historical lineage, beginning with ancient Greek democracy and philosophy, continuing with the precedents of Roman law, and the shared influence of Christianity (Jacobs and Maier 1998: 19). All of these attempts are intended to evoke a common history, much as the nationalists used the symbols of the *ethnie* to create the nation.

Beyond a common symbolism, however, the EU does more to create a sense of Europeaness spends billions of Euros in Structural and Cohesion Funds, like the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which are intended to aid the development of the poorer regions of Europe (European Commission 2009). This investment is helping modernize the economies of these regions, a similar goal to earlier nationalisms according to the modernist school. Also, the increase in worker mobility, especially of highly educated workers, is perhaps creating the intelligentsia of the new Europe, who might, as the modernists described, be the harbingers of a European identity as the earlier national intelligentsia were for nationalisms (see Shore 2000).

A potential theoretical problem still remains, however. As mentioned above, a part of the primordialist argument is that nationalists appropriated local or regional identities and symbols to create national identities. In many ways, this process would be very difficult for a European identity to replicate, since using national symbols for the purposes of promoting a European identity would only reaffirm the power of the national identity that Europeaness wishes to replace. Instead of incorporating national symbols into European symbols, EU policy works instead to privilege local and regional authorities by granting to them greater power over economic development (through use of EU funds) than the national governments. For example, in Greece, since 2000, the regional governments have exercised complete authority over the “preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the Community Support Framework (CSF)” (Cassimati 2003: 8), a large part of the ERDF program. Though the intent of this funding is to aid development in poorer areas of Europe, it has the effect of encouraging the decentralization of the national governments which in turn lets loose other, unintended effects. One of these unintended effects is the reemphasis on regional identity. Though this is perhaps a Europe-wide phenomena, this paper presents one (of many potential examples) case study, that of the Historical Museum of Crete in Herakleion.

Sites of Identity Formation: The Historical Museum of Crete in Herakleion

The Historical Museum of Crete (Ιστορικό Μουσείο Κρήτης) was founded in 1953, a part of the efforts of the Society for Cretan Studies (Εταιρία Κρητικών Ιστορικών Μελετών) to encourage the growth of historical and ethnographic studies of Cretan culture since the Byzantine Empire (Historical Museum of Crete, 2005). The three floors of the museum, recently renovated and expanded with funds from the European Regional Development Fund's (ERDF) Community Support Framework (CSF) III (2000-2006) grants, have exhibition space devoted to cultural artifacts dating from the late Roman/early Byzantine Empire to recent times. The founders of the museum wished to preserve archaeological and ethnographic material related to Cretan history after the fall of the Roman Empire (Historical Museum of Crete 2005), and the museum now serves as one of the largest museums in Greece devoted to modern history.

Structure and Layout of the Museum

The first floor of the museum is devoted to the display of artifacts from the periods of Byzantine rule (430 CE – 828 CE; 961 CE – 1204 CE), the Arab conquest (828 CE – 961 CE), and especially the Venetian period (1204 CE – 1669CE). The Venetian period is the most prominent, with the largest exhibition being a model of the city of Herakleion circa 1660 CE. The displays of artifacts are also heavily weighted towards the Venetian period, with a number of architectural pieces (door frames, columns, fountains, etc.) used to show the Italian Renaissance influence on Cretan architecture. The text surrounding the exhibition focuses on daily life and political issues surrounding all four periods, but with an overwhelming amount on Crete during Venetian rule. One display notes: “the Cretan population responded to the violence of foreign occupation with a series of rebellions between 1211 and 1528. These movements were of a marked social and national character...urban Cretan society showed homogeneity: the people spoke a common language and shared a sense of national identity.” Besides the attempt to demonstrate the historical origins of Cretan culture, the museum also tried to draw the connection between Crete and European affairs. The first floor has many artifacts devoted to the Cretan War (1648 CE – 1669 CE), the struggle between the Ottoman Turks and Venice for control of Crete, and the text accompanying the artifacts explains “the Cretan War was the first time in history that the European powers joined forces against a common foreign enemy. With the forging of a common defensive policy...we can perceive the first attempts at collaboration in European politics.”

The second floor is dominated by an exhibition of the various artistic achievements of what is labeled “the Cretan School” of iconographers of the 16th Century. As the text accompanying the display of various icons explains, “the Cretan icon...continues the Palaeologue tradition and, despite the Cretan School's receptivity of Western influences, remains foreign to Western art.” The second floor also has two rooms devoted to the Ottoman period (1669 CE – 1913 CE) and the rebellions of the 18th and 19th Centuries against Ottoman rule. The text accompanying the artifacts from this period is quite explicit in its definition of Cretan culture. The text explains that “the unbearable oppression of the occupiers led many Greeks to denounce Christianity and espouse the Muslim religion. The Christian population shrank...the infamous Turko-cretans emerged at this time. Cretans by origin, customs and language, but

Muslim by faith. They often proved themselves to be more savage and cruel than the Turkish Muslims.”

The third floor is dedicated to a large display of artifacts from the Battle of Crete (1941 CE) and the resistance to German rule during the occupation (1941 CE – 1945 CE). Common in all the displays is the uncommon valor of the Cretan fighters in resisting the Nazis and helping British and other Commonwealth forces to escape the island safely. In addition to the Battle of Crete display, there are a few rooms dedicated to the career of Nikos Kazantzakis (1883 CE – 1957 CE), the well-known Cretan author. Finally, the third floor is completed with a number of rooms dedicated to an ethnographic representation of an “authentic” Cretan household, with model rooms depicting peasant life, customs, and occupations.

Analysis of the Museum

The broad theme of the museum, reflected in both the visual layout, prominence of certain artifacts, the textual explanations accompanying the artifacts, and especially certain omissions, is that Cretan identity (as separate from Greek identity) is a long-standing and deep historical tradition. While some of the exhibition space attempts to draw the connections between the Cretan narrative and the wider world (both Greece and Europe), the vast majority of the museum is devoted to the display of Crete as a unique place, and the Cretan culture as separate and distinct.

This is reflected physically and textually, both in what is displayed or recorded and also by what is omitted. The museum’s collection on display is markedly skewed towards the Venetian period of Cretan history, and that period’s importance to the overall narrative of the museum seems best exemplified in the approach that the museum takes to what is labeled “the Cretan Renaissance.”

The Cretan Renaissance (mid-16th Century to mid-17th Century) saw a marked growth in the cultural production, especially in visual art and in literature, on Crete. For example, Domenikos Theotokopoulos (better known as El Greco), was born in and was trained on Crete, and the first major work in modern Greek literature, the *Erotokritos*, was written by Cretan author Vitsentzos Cornaros (Detorakis 1994: 219 – 224). The museum takes pains to show this cultural flowering, explained by Professor Theocharis Detorakis as emanating from “a blending of the conservative Byzantine tradition with the influence of Italian painting” (Detorakis 1994: 224), as a purely indigenous creation, with little influence from Western art. By explicitly labeling the Cretan Renaissance as “pure” and immune from outside influences, the museum creates the impression of an early “authentic” Cretan culture.

This process is especially noticeable in the third floor of the museum, where there is a display of ethnographic material organized to demonstrate an “authentic” Cretan peasant household. Continuing in the romantic nationalist tradition, the museum’s display consisted of various household implements, furniture, and ceremonial costume with jewelry, all crafted to promote a certain ideal of Cretan peasant life. The privileging of this ideal, along with the omission of any displays of city life or of the life of non-Christians in Crete, demonstrates a similar search for an “authentic past” common in earlier nationalist projects.

The omission of non-Christian influence is most striking throughout the museum. The negative mention of Muslim Cretans, along with the absence of artifacts from the non-Christian population, gives a skewed vision of the influence of these “Others” on Cretan history and culture. In fact, the only artifacts displayed that are of a noticeably Muslim character are a series

of tombstones, which are not in the museum, but rather inconspicuously placed outside the museum in the fenced backyard. In the ethnographical display of “authentic” Cretan village life, the explanatory text states that Muslim Cretans “left Crete for good” in 1923 as part of the population exchanges, and mentions that while Muslims lived in Crete “few villages were mixed.” Considering that the text also makes it clear that Muslims made up the majority of city-dwellers (“cities were 82.4% Muslim”), the absence of city-life in the museum multiplies the effect of omission – Muslims appear as oppressors and traitors, hard to believe if almost half of the island’s population was Muslim (as the text explains: “in the early 19th Century the population of Ottoman Crete is estimated to have been...213,000...113,200 Christians, 99,764 Muslim).

It should be noted, of course, that a museum faces structural and physical problems (such as space concerns, funding problems, and lack of appropriate artifacts due to neglect or physical deterioration) that can explain the omission of certain historical themes or the emphasis on a certain period. However, the way in which a museum is organized, and how the narrative of the artifacts on display is written, remain within the hands of the museum organizers and staff. The purpose of the museum is to memorialize a certain conception of Cretan history, and a truly comprehensive narrative would be difficult to do under the best of financial circumstances. As a private institution, the Historical Museum of Crete lacked large amounts of public funds with which to create the museum, and financial pressures made difficult choices inevitable. However, with injection of EU funds under the Community Support Framework (CSF) III (2000-2006) of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the financial difficulty of the museum was largely mitigated. The end result of the restructuring and renovation of the museum is reported above, and the impression is left that key omissions (such as the Muslim Cretans) and interpretative choices (such as the emphasis of the Cretan School as “pure” indigenous culture) reflect a particular interpretive schema and are not the affect of physical or financial difficulties.

Conclusion: The Centrifugal Force of the European Union

In the theoretical debate over the origins of nationalism, the questions of why and how divide scholars into two camps: the primordialists and the modernists. The division is caused most by a divergence of views about how nationalists created national identity – did they appropriate preexisting symbols (the primordialists) or did they simply invent the symbols of the nation through a process of pruning and omission (the modernists)? This debate has wider ramifications than simply as an analytical tool to better understand the past, since our contemporary age has seen both the renaissance of nationalist fervor (leading to violence) and a rise in seemingly anti-nationalist movements, such as regional organizations like the EU. With the development of the EU, and especially its growing competencies in directing seemingly local affairs through funding grants and legal convergence, a growing need to study this process, labeled as Europeanization, is increasingly relevant. Scholars studying the EU and Europeanization note that EU policies are seemingly tracking the ideas of both primordialists and modernists in the attempt to forge a European identity – the creation of common symbols with appeals to a supposedly shared European past, along the lines of the primordialists, and the development of a pan-European intelligentsia, which, combined with modernization funds from the EU, might create and spread a European identity much as the modernists believe earlier nationalists did for national identities.

If scholars of Europeanization are correct – that is, if EU policies are directed towards the fostering of a European identity – then this trend begs the question of success. Given that few Europeans seem to respond to the common symbols of the EU as much as supporters of a common European identity would like, would the “modernist” track of providing EU funding for modernization, coupled with creating a pan-European intelligentsia, be more successful at creating a sense of Europeanness?

Using the Historical Museum of Crete in Herakleion, whose expansion and renovation is due to ERDF CSF III funds under the direction of the regional authority of Crete, as a case study to test this hypothesis, it seems doubtful that, at least in the short term, the success of a European identity will be provided through this angle. Instead, we can see an interesting unintended development from the adoption of these policies, which is that instead of fostering a European identity, these funds are used to develop and strengthen regional identities. This is perhaps not an unforeseeable consequence of regional policy – indeed, what can you expect if you give money to a regional government in order to foster regional development and culture? While these programs seem to help lessen the pull of national identity, the void is not being filled with a new European identity, but rather the breakdown of national identity might help the reassertion of its constituent parts – local and regional identities. I would call this the centrifugal force of the EU, since the EU is largely a centralized political authority whose actions, it seems, encourage the decentralization (a pushing outwards, hence the term “centrifugal”) of national identities.

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