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“Greek-Gypsy identity and the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state.”

The aim of this paper is to explore from an anthropological perspective the idiosyncratic relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state as this is expressed in a complex process of negotiating a double identity, Greek and Gypsy. In order to do so, this paper will first illuminate the problematic of analysing and theorising the Gypsy experience in the nation-state context. Through the exploration of ethnographic data, this work aims to look at the specific ways in which this relationship has been shaped within the framework of a politics of power, identity, and culture within wider Greek society. Central, here, is a ‘morality’ that informs Greek-Gypsy practices and a shared sense of self that is seen to distinguish Greek-Gypsies from non Greek-Gypsy ‘others’. Drawing on Herzfeld’s (1997) concept of cultural intimacy the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state will be examined through the lens of this ‘morality’.

This is by no means a socio-historical review of particular political decisions and state policies that directly or indirectly have resulted in the process of marginalisation of Gypsies within modern Greek society. Neither is this an attempt to present a structural analysis of the specific politico-historical and economic processes that have framed the marginal position of Gypsy communities in Greece. Instead, this study seeks to throw light on the hidden aspects of the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state from the Gypsies’ point of view, defining simultaneously its constitutive parameters.

Theoretical Framework

Since the 18th century, and more intensively in the 19th century, the disciplines of comparative linguistics, popular and folklorist studies and later on historians and
anthropologists have tried to give answers to the obscurity of Gypsies’ origins. A puzzle of all the existing resources on the history of Gypsies leads most of Gypsy analysts\(^1\) to the assumption that Gypsies left India many centuries ago and passed through the Middle East to the Byzantine Empire and then Europe. Fraser (1992) gives a detailed account of the written texts that refer to the presence of Gypsies in the Byzantine Empire as early as the 11\(^{th}\) century. Gradually, in the beginning of the 15\(^{th}\) century, as Liegois (1994) describes, different Gypsy groups appear in central Europe and in the 16\(^{th}\) century in northern Europe. Both Fraser (1992) and Liegois (1994) agree that Gypsies’ break-up into smaller groups within Europe was very much the outcome of their continuous persecution and attempts to enforce their assimilation.

Although folklore and popular literature often reflect the “ideological and symbolic disorder” (Okely, 1983: 2) that Gypsies seem to cause to the dominant system and have drawn attention to Gypsies’ marginal position within European societies, they have also contributed to the creation of a stereotyped, exotized and often homogenous Gypsy image across Europe. By contrast, historians and most importantly anthropologists, criticising folklore and popular literature on Gypsies, have challenged this traditional view of a homogenous Gypsy community.

Ethnographic studies on Gypsies across Europe point to the need to look at different Gypsy groups within different national boundaries. Acton (1974), Liegois (1994), Okely (1983, 1996), Stewart (1993, 1997), Gay Y Blasco (1999) have demonstrated that important differences and variations\(^2\) among Gypsy groups - including the specific ways in which they perceive and construct their difference from the dominant non-Gypsy population and express their identity - have been the result of different politico-historical and economic processes within different nation-states. Gypsy groups within national boundaries acquire national characteristics under the cultural influences of the countries they live in. However, these characteristics are not static. They change in response to the changing socio-economic and political context of wider society.

\(^1\) Okely (1983) is indeed the only theorist who has debated the Indian origins of Gypsies.

\(^2\) Important aspects of social life such as housing, language, religion, pollution taboos, political organisation, working patterns, marriage and kinship structures may vary significantly. For example, Okely’s (1983) English Travellers lead a nomadic life, speak one of the Romani dialects and have rigid pollution taboos, while Gay Y Blasco’s Gypsies of Madrid have long been sedentary, speak the language of the dominant majority and do not have rigid pollution taboos.
As far as the relationship between Gypsies and the state is concerned, Okely (1983) reveals in her study on the Travellers and Gypsies in England that the tension between them lies in the specificity of Gypsy culture. According to her, for the dominant society and the state, Gypsies represent a threat to the prevailing order by demonstrating alternative ways of economic activity, thinking and living. Similarly, Calvo Buezas (1990, 1997) makes clear that the Gypsies of Spain embody all that is evil, polluting and threatening for the premises on which the whole state apparatus is founded. Hawes and Perez (1996) give extensive accounts of specific state practices in Britain that result in explicit or implicit multilevel exclusionary actions against Gypsy communities. They analyse the way and degree that public prejudice against Gypsy cultural diversity fuels institutional reactions in the form of public policy or, in other words, the way public prejudice transforms into institutional prejudice and becomes part of the structure and response of the dominant society. Hawes and Perez (1997) also emphasize the way state policies contribute to the reproduction of the traditional image of ‘Gypsyness’ as the ‘other’ and ‘different’. However, according to Stewart (1997, 1999) different state practices dictate different resistive tactics by Gypsies. Stewart’s (1997, 1999) study of the Hungarian Rom unravels the ways Gypsies in Eastern Europe cultivated distinctive practices and skills - such as a sense of cohesiveness sustained in the notion of brotherhood and an anti-authoritarian organisation of the family - as forms of resistive strategies towards state oppression. For Stewart, these practices were the result of their particular relationship with the state that was very much influenced by communist ideologies.

So far, the existing studies on Gypsies suggest that the Gypsy experience as a cultural phenomenon has been widely influenced by historical, economic and socio-political factors. Therefore, it should be examined within the context of the nation-state in which state practices and policies are developed and implemented. Under this perspective, the exploration of Gypsies’ marginal position within wider society, their specific relationship with the state and the analysis of state practices that are associated with their marginal position need to be studied within the theoretical framework of ethnicity and nationalism, as well as state policies and systems of governance.

However, as Hawes and Perez (1997: xii) note, in the vast majority of the academic literature on ethnicity and nationalism “the Gypsy experience is never more
than peripheral to the mainstream argument”. It is true that concepts of ethnicity and ethnic identity, as well as the very notion of ‘Gypsyness’, constitute complex and often ambiguous aspects of the politics of difference. As Banton (1983) and many other theorists have stressed, the case of Gypsies hardly fits any existing theory and therefore its analysis needs to overcome considerable theoretical gaps. In fact, the relationship between Gypsies and the non-Gypsy society does not actually fit well into any theoretical and analytical tool that refers to intra-group relations. For Eriksen (1993) there is not an actual competition between Gypsies and other groups. The fact that Gypsies have different goals and aspirations from the dominant majority, never posing an economic or territorial threat, as well as the fact that Gypsies themselves stereotype non-Gypsies in strongly negative forms, indicate that the Gypsy experience cannot only be understood in the framework of theories of competition and domination. In Eriksen’s (1993) view, Gypsy identity should be seen as “a cultural and symbolic phenomenon” (1993: 74) and Gypsies’ relationship with the non-Gypsy society may be analysed as the interplay between different cultures.

The symbolic and cultural approach itself is not strong enough to explain the marginal position of Gypsies within different socio-economic and political frameworks. For Hawes and Perez (1997), although there are significant differences between Gypsies and other minority groups, the analysis of Gypsies should constitute part of the study of minorities within the wider theoretical framework of ethnicity:

“If the concept of ethnic minority is defined by its subordinate status within a wider society, by the low esteem in which its characteristics are perceived, and if its distinctive cementing features are to do with feelings of shared history, culture and tradition, then there is no doubt that Gypsies and Travellers constitute such a minority” (Hawes and Perez, 1997: 149).

Both Stewart (1997) and Gay Y Blasco (1999) argued that Gypsies do not ground their perception of distinctiveness from non-Gypsies in a primordial, superimposed identity, or something forged in the past. By contrast, they build their shared sense of belonging in the present. Stewart (1997: 92) sees Gypsy identity “as something that could be acquired and could therefore also be lost” and Gay Y Blasco (1999: 15) as something that “is more performative than reproductive”. For them, the
Hungarian Rom and Gypsies of Madrid cannot be seen as having an ethnic identity and therefore the study of Gypsies should shift its focus from those elements that illustrate Gypsy distinctiveness to those particular processes in which this distinctiveness persists, is reproduced and sustained.

The problem with the theoretical analysis of Gypsies does not end here. Although the cases of different Gypsy groups cannot be examined outside of the framework of their relationship with the state, this relationship, however, is not enough to explain intra-group differences and diverse Gypsy identities within the boundaries of a nation-state. This is particularly obvious in the case of Greece, where there are different and often competing Gypsy communities with a great variety of cultural characteristics (such as language, religion, customs, working patterns, etc.). What is more, the paradigm of Greek-Gypsies, who consider ‘Greekness’ along with ‘Gypsyness’ an intrinsic aspect of their identity, makes this theoretical perplexity even more striking.

Taking under consideration the above-mentioned theoretical difficulties in the analysis of the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state, this paper attempts to look at those constitutive parameters and ascribing elements that make this relationship idiosyncratic. This presupposes a shift from those theoretical models that view the Gypsy experience in different nation-states either as a resistance by a marginalised population towards the state’s intolerance of distinctiveness, or as the result of an unproblematic conflation of Gypsy and national characteristics.

Additionally, in order to illuminate the particularity of this relationship we have to place our analysis within the framework of a specific ‘morality’ that constitutes the basis of Gypsy social and political organisation and the most important expression of Greek-Gypsy identity. This explains why the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state should be seen and examined in the framework of identity politics and politics of culture rather than strictly theories of ethnicity and nationalism, state policies and systems of governance. However, the fact that ‘Greekness’ constitutes an element enmeshed in Gypsy identity suggests that this specific analysis cannot ignore theories of ethnicity and nationalism.
The case of Gypsies in Greece

As far as the case of Greece is concerned, Herzfeld (1987), as well as Papataxiarchis and Paradellis (1993) have indicated that the foundation of the independent Greek nation-state was accompanied by the elaboration of an academic discourse that served both as a means of forging a national consciousness and as a reaction to various studies produced by foreign scholars that questioned the ‘purity’ of Greek ethnos. For Danforth (1995) and Cowan (2000), the disciplines of history and folklore played an important role in shaping a feeling of ethnic continuity and commonality, grounded in a mythology of a glorious ancient past. In fact, folklorist studies not only fed the nationalist discourse in Greece but also prompted a strong nationalist orientation in academic research that contradicted the traditional anthropological thinking (Herzfeld: 1987). Consequently, the disciplines of history and folklore in Greece have largely neglected the contribution of minorities to Greek tradition. It is also true that folklorist and historical studies have, to a large degree, ignored the contribution of Gypsy legacy to modern Greek history, partly because Gypsies, along with other minorities, have not inspired the vision of a ‘homogenous’ Hellenic ethnos.

Although recent anthropological studies of minorities in Greece have shed light into the relationship between the Greek state and particular minorities3 (Campell, 1964; Danforth, 1984; Karakasidou, 1997; Cowan, 2000), the absence of broad ethnographic accounts on Gypsy population has practically left Gypsies outside of this academic discussion. The marginal position of Gypsies in Greek academic literature has consequently reinforced an exotisized image of Gypsies clearly distanced from the wider socio-political and historical context of Greek society. Gypsies, in this sense, have been depicted as a distant, bounded, unchanging, and homogenous community ‘frozen’ in time and space. Consequently, Gypsies in Greece have been absent from the discourse on the politics of identity, power, and culture.

3 It is true that the majority of ethnographic studies on minorities in Greece and their relationship with the state focus on Northern Greece, since the Macedonian conflict has recently constituted an issue with regional, national and international implications.
Lately, historians and Gypsiologists in Greece (Dousas, 1997; Giannakopoulos, 1981; Georgiou, Dimitriou and Politis, 2001) increasingly emphasize the contribution of Gypsies to the history of the recently formed nation-state, depicting them, for the first time, as an intrinsic part of modern Greek society. As such, they have both shaped and been shaped by the wider Greek socio-economic and historical circumstances. Additionally, the historian Thomas Gallant (2001) acknowledges the importance of ethnographic accounts in the study of modern Greece - especially those focused on rural Greece and on marginal populations - in overcoming historical inconsistencies.

In contrast to the ahistorical and exotisized image of Gypsies in Greece that has been created by popular and academic literature and sometimes sustained in the rhetoric of minority groups rights’ organisations and political parties that victimise, oversimplify and generalise Gypsy identity for the sake of an effective political negotiation, Greek-Gypsies constitute a group that not only participates in the politics of culture and identity but also takes part in the nationalist discourse and clearly reproduces it. This is particularly visible in the tension that characterises the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and other Gypsy groups or marginal populations that live within Greek society. For example, during my fieldwork in a Greek-Gypsy settlement of Athens, a group of Greek-Gypsy children between six and twelve years old argued with a ten year-old Albanian-Gypsy girl about her ‘Greekness’. One of the boys’ words reflect that not only adults but also children participate and reproduce the nationalist discourse:

“Living here doesn’t make you Greek. You were not born here, your parents don’t speak Greek and you don’t wear a cross”.

In order to look at the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state, I suggest we take under consideration what Sutton (2000: 205) calls “the shifting boundaries of insiderhood and outsiderhood” which have predominated the modern anthropological theory. These shifting boundaries indicate that the use of the word ‘community’ should be perceived and examined “as a term best understood in action”

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4 For example, Gypsies took part in the Greek War of Independence in 1821 Dousas, 1997; Giannakopoulos, 1981), in many social fights (Doussas, 1997) and the Ethnic Resistance Movement during World War II (Georgiou, Dimitriou and Politis, 2001).
(Alleyene: 608) and not treated as a “‘black box’ concept” that encompasses ahistorical, fixed, and ‘frozen’ in time and space totalities of people.

Additionally, a great number of post-war studies have demonstrated that small-scale communities that exist in large-scale environments are consolidated and sustained by networks of social relations or what Carsten (2000: 1) calls cultures of relatedness. Therefore, Alleyne (2002) suggests a more reflexive use of the concept of ‘community’ in the study of ethnicity. Indeed, the study of ethnicity should focus on the particular ways the negotiation of networks of relatedness results in various expressions of identity. Gay Y Blasco (1999: 41) indicates that the term ‘community’ for the Gypsies of Madrid does not refer to “a cohesive or harmonious whole, but to the Gitanos’ awareness of each other as moral beings”. In the case of Greek-Gypsies, this very same awareness constitutes the ground, on which Greek-Gypsy relatedness is organised, performed within the members of the group and projected as an expression of ‘Greek-Gypsyness’ into the wider non Greek-Gypsy society.

This process of organisation of relatedness, interestingly, cultivates the moral basis on which the state’s nationalist project and Greek-Gypsies’ expression of identity intersect. At the same time, however, this very same point of reference may easily transform into a source of ideological or moral disorder. This happens because Greek-Gypsies’ networks of relatedness operate at many different levels, surpassing official state mechanisms and institutional processes, challenging simultaneously the effectiveness of the state’s apparatuses by demonstrating alternative ways of living within the boundaries of the nation-state. Sutton (2000: 174) maintains that anthropology should move its focus away from top-down approaches in the study of nationalism, inspired by Gellner and Hobsbawm, to processes through which “local-level kinship ideologies and practices feed into feelings of nationalism.” Herzfeld’s (1997) concept of cultural intimacy provides us with a useful analytical tool in unravelling the ways these local-level ideologies and practices fuel nationalist emotions and shape the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state in the framework of identity politics.

Herzfeld (1997) argues for the centrality of the concept of cultural intimacy in the study of minorities and nationalism. Cultural intimacy encompasses “those aspects of cultural identity that are considered to be a source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with the assurance of common
sociality” (Herzfeld, 1997: 3). Based on ethnographic data, the concept of cultural intimacy, can contribute to the anthropological analysis of nationalism and minorities through the exploration of semiotic practices - “day to day subversions of norms” (Herzfeld, 1997: 21) or “those aspects of cultural identity that are considered as source of external embarrassment but nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (1997: 3) - of marginal populations as well as to investigate “the elite values whereby that embarrassment and that marginality are constituted” (1997: 4). At the same time, Herzfeld argues that the nationalist project has been largely successful because “its formal ideology encapsulates, or, incorporates, all the inward flaws and imperfections to which it is officially and ostensibly opposed” (1997: 172).

The confusion that reflects the wider problematic of conceptualising the Gypsy experience in theory, posed in the beginning of this paper, is exemplified by a great variety of factors in the case of Greek-Gypsies. In the official political discourse, the Greek state does not acknowledge the status of minority to any ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural group that lives in its territory with the exception of the Muslim minority, whose status as a minority was officially acknowledged in the Lausanne treaty of 1924. On the other token, under the pressure of different organisations and institutional bodies, different Gypsy groups across Europe have been acknowledged as a cultural minority under the unified term Roma. In practice though, and in everyday Greek-Gypsy discourse, such a definition seems to be highly problematic. This confusion is especially reflected on Greek-Gypsies’ ambiguous stance towards the use of the term. As an old man characteristically described:

“One day, somebody passed by the settlement and told us we are called Roma… and I told him that all my life I’ve been a Greek, I’m a Greek-Gypsy, but if he wants us to be called Roma in order to get houses, then there is no problem, let him call me whatever he likes. I know who I am.”
Definitions of Greek-Gypsyness

General Framework

In general, Gypsies in Greece, working and living in a mainly agricultural economy over the last two centuries that due to specific socio-political circumstances skipped the characteristic phases of the industrialisation process, became part of the pathologies of modern Greek society. Gypsies felt the impact of rapid urbanisation, economic restructuring and recession and followed the internal\textsuperscript{5} and external\textsuperscript{6} migrant flows of the beginning and middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In the highly competitive urban environment Gypsy groups had to shift their economic activities towards more flexible, labour intense and opportunistic working patterns. However, in big cities and for a variety of reasons, some migrant Gypsy groups didn’t manage to follow the pace of the processes that the rest of the population followed and soon got marginalized (Dousas, 1997).

Since the restoration of Democracy (1974), the country’s increasing levels of economic prosperity, in association with a number of other significant political processes such as EU membership and the fall of Eastern European borders, has transformed Greece into a country that imports rather than exports immigrants (Gallant, 2001). Under these circumstances, both urban and rural Gypsies, in the last decades, have experienced the major impact of migrant economic activity within Greek society.

The Community

In the absence of concrete and linear historical evidence that could illuminate both the route of Greek-Gypsies within Greek society in general and the particular processes that defined their relationship with the state, this analysis inevitably concentrates on the exploration of ethnographic data produced in fieldwork. Constrained by the historical limitations, the use of ethnographic material contributes

\textsuperscript{5} Internal migration, which was very much the result of agricultural recession, affected rural Gypsies who migrated into towns and big cities.

\textsuperscript{6} Gypsies, who came to Greece during the 20s either as migrants from Asia Minor in 1922, or through the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey as part of the Lausanne treaty of 1924 (Dousas, 1997).
to a more informed theoretical analysis that exemplifies particularity and avoids
generalisations and reductionism. In fact, fieldwork, in tandem with limited historical
data, reveal that there are some important descriptive features that characterise Greek-
Gypsies, making this group simultaneously particular and different from other Gypsy
groups in Greece. It is important, though, to stress at this point that the Greek-Gypsy
community of Athens is wider than the group I conducted fieldwork with and, in fact,
it is dispersed in settlements and houses in different suburbs and outskirts of the
capital\(^7\). Greek-Gypsies also live in other parts of southern Greece such as Khalkida,
Aitoliko, Khios and Crete.

The community, in which I conducted my fieldwork\(^8\), is an urban, sedentary,
exclusively Greek-speaking, Christian Orthodox Gypsy community. The members of
this community settled more than 30 years ago - and lived until the time of my
fieldwork - in a settlement\(^9\) in a large suburb of Athens, to which I give the
pseudonym Geitonia\(^10\). They claim that they belong to the wider Greek-Gypsy
community of Khalkidaioi or Ellinogyftoi, as they call themselves. In fact, the elder
members of the settlement come from the capital of the island of Evia, Khalkida.
There, as they describe, they used to be sedentary or semi-sedentary, living and
working in the periphery of this capital. However, when economic recession struck
them, they moved to the city of Athens to chase a better future. The fact that in
contrast to the vast majority of other Gypsy communities in Greece, Greek-Gypsies
do not speak the romani language but they exclusively speak Greek, as well as their
strong religious faith to Orthodox Christianity, allows them ample space in
negotiating their ‘Greekness’.

The most common occupation of the members of the settlement is vendors at
open markets, the \textit{laikes agores}\(^11\). Apart from this occupation that grants the
settlement’s population a more secure daily income, their most important and
lucrative economic activity, as they confess, is seasonal trading\(^12\). This urban house-
dwelling population has learnt to benefit both from the opportunities that the urban

\(^7\) There are also Greek-Gypsies living in Agia Paraskevi, Kalandri, Menidi, Spata, Gerakas, etc.
\(^8\) Fieldwork took place from June 2001 until September 2002
\(^9\) They lived in dwellings made of wooden parts, cartons and plastic covers.
\(^10\) The members of this community commonly used this term in order to describe the settlement and its
surrounding houses.
\(^11\) However, they rarely possess a vendor’s permit. Most of the time they try to sell their goods illegally
at the fringes of these markets.
\(^12\) Such as Christmas trees during Christmas, kites during carnival and religious items during Easter,
etc.
environment offers, as well as from the flexible characteristics of their nature of economic activity. In that sense, they make a multi-level use of the urban environment, both in terms of space and time, by using the maximum of their human resources. More specifically, they use the overcrowded urban space in order to get the advantages - while at the same time minimize the risks - of the informal sector of the economy.

However, it is getting increasingly hard to keep these activities up. Greek law has become stricter with vendors who don’t possess both a vendor’s permit and a legal proof of purchase for their products. But most importantly, during the last decade this economic sector, which used to belong almost exclusively to the Gypsy population, has shrunk considerably due to the overwhelming migrant flows into the country. The new highly competitive economic environment has had a tremendous impact on the ‘traditional’ Greek Gypsy occupations, while at the same time has led to a more rigid legal framework that minimises the state’s tolerance towards illegal working and economic activity.

Greek-Gypsy Morality

Various ethnographers (Sutherland, 1975, 1977; Okely, 1983; Williams, 1993; Stewart, 1997; Gay Y Blasco, 1999) lay emphasis on the preoccupation of Gypsies with the demarcation of the boundary between themselves and non-Gypsy society, predominantly expressed in moral terms. They emphasize the ways in which Gypsies constantly stress the ‘superiority’ of Gypsy morality as a quality that becomes the vehicle through which they perceive their distinctiveness in relation to the non-Gypsy majority.

According to Gay Y Blasco (1999), ‘Gypsyness’ for the Gypsies of Madrid is intimately intertwined with ideas of an aged and sexed personhood that should be constantly enacted, manifested, and evaluated by the members of the Gypsy community in order to affirm a collective identity. In this sense, ideas of personhood and perceptions of collective identity seem to be inextricably connected. Through the performance of Gypsyness that is consolidated in this distinctive morality, Gypsies create a rigid hierarchical system among themselves that is based on relationships of
honour’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘respect’ creating this way a particular form of social and political organisation different from the non-Gypsy one.

Interestingly, in the case of Greek-Gypsies, its members premise their shared sense of self and their distinctiveness and superiority on a moral framework that is not exclusively ‘Gypsy’ but rather, I would call it ‘Greek-Gypsy’. Similarly to Gay Y Blasco’s (1999) morality, the Greek-Gypsy one is premised on the ongoing performance of gender and age specific roles, duties and obligations that are based on sets of relationships of honour, knowledge and respect. Relatedness constitutes the ground on which performative roles are being enacted and simultaneously reaffirmed. Central here is the need for constant reaffirmation of relatedness that precludes ideas of permanence in such relationships. This, in its turn, indicates a Greek-Gypsy perception of personhood and collective self that is consolidated through performance in the present.

However, there are two significant elements that distinguish the morality of this particular group from Gay Y Blasco’s morality of Gypsies of Madrid. Firstly, Greek-Gypsies’ morality draws its distinctiveness from the content of its performative roles, through which Greek-Gypsies view themselves as the carriers of an ‘authentic’ tradition that interestingly entails claims not only to Gypsy but also to Greek ‘authenticity’. Simultaneously, while Greek-Gypsies consolidate their collective identity through performance in the present, the content of this performance, or in other words, the ascribing features of performative roles claim the authenticity of the ‘old Greek tradition’ that according to them tends to extinct.

The view of identity as the result of a performantive expression (Butler, 1990; Bell, 1999) enables us to conceptualise the ways in which performance is embodied and enacted through specific practices. In this sense, Greek-Gypsy morality operates as the vehicle through which Greek-Gypsies differentiate themselves from non-Gypsy ‘others’. Greek-Gypsy morality and identity is an amalgam of diverse cultural characteristics that are negotiated differently within the Greek-Gypsy community itself, between Greek-Gypsies and non-Greek Gypsies or non-Gypsy Greeks, as well as between themselves and the state. In fact, the emphasis on performance aims to serve a multiple cause: a) to consolidate relationships of support within the Greek-Gypsy community b) to differentiate and affirm the ‘superiority’ of this group towards other Gypsy and non-Gypsy or non-Greek marginal groups through the performance
of a distinct ‘Gypsyness’ entangled in ‘Greekness’ c) to express a ‘moral superiority’ over the dominant non-Gypsy Greek population through the performance of the ‘old’ Greek tradition that tends to be lost, and d) to reify a sense of collective self through inverting those state’s ideals that serve them this particular cause.

The exploration of the most important aspects of Greek-Gypsy social organisation, such as marriage, kinship structures and interpersonal networks of relatedness, as well as domestic activities and working patterns, through which Greek-Gypsyness is performed, provides an insight into the way Greek-Gypsies perceive, manifest and transmit a gender and age oriented enactment of roles that transforms performative practices into multi-level processes of objectification of Greek-Gypsy identity. The following example demonstrates how the methods and outcome of performing nikokirosini or domestic tasks by Greek-Gypsy women constitute the means, through which the personal and group identity is affirmed, reinforced and transmitted to the younger generation, contrasted with other group identities and projected into wider society.

*Nikokirosini* represents a specific set of practices and methods in undertaking and performing the household chores. Being praised as a *kali nikokira* connotes a responsible, organised, efficient and competent housewife and - along with a number of performative bodily manifestations\(^{13}\) - constitutes the most important credentials, on which female personalities and reputations are established within the Greek-Gypsy community.

Therefore, within the settlement, Greek-Gypsy nikokires like to compete with each other in terms of housework method, outcome, and improvisation of household activities. This is why they prefer to undertake their domestic chores in the public eye. Tasks, such as cooking and washing of clothes, bedlinen, blankets and carpets take place almost exclusively outside the house, in the yard. Apart from establishing female personalities and reputations, this highly competitive performance serves another cause: to display to non-Gypsy Greek society the best proof of being clean and tidy, transferring simultaneously the competition onto the concept of nikokirosini between themselves and the groups they interact with. In this sense, Greek-Gypsy women and men would support the overall image of the Greek-Gypsy nikokira and

\(^{13}\) Different ways of managing the female body such as virginity, hair and dressing code, bodily movements etc.
her superiority in performing household activities over the Albanian or Turkish-Gypsy or the non-Gypsy Greek nikokira.

During fieldwork, Greek-Gypsy women repeatedly stressed the distance that separated themselves from the Albanian-Gypsy ones, both at the level of household activities, domestic practices, and methods, as well as at the level of personal hygiene. Indeed, they constantly blamed their recently settled Albanian-Gypsy neighbours for the katantima\(^{14}\) of the neighbourhood. As one of the women of the settlement said: “We’ve managed to keep this place clean and tidy for so many years until they [the Albanian-Gypsies] came and messed it up”.

However, when discussion permitted, women brought up issues of cleanliness in a comparative way between Greek-Gypsies and non-Gypsy Greek nikokires. It was common for them to talk proudly of the fact that they do not use a washing machine but rather wash their clothes by hand, or the fact that they change their bedsheets every day and wash carpets and blankets weekly. Washing everything by hand and cooking on gas instead of electricity were issues that connoted the performance of the ‘old Greek tradition’. As one of the informants described:

> “Nobody here uses a washing machine, because if you don’t wash by hand, dirt does not go away, I’m sure your grandmother, like all elder women, would agree with that.”

On another occasion, an elder woman explained to me that:

> “The gas and charcoal oven add real taste to food. Today you can’t really find an authentic Greek taste because you all cook in the electric cooker. I can’t imagine a pitta in an electric cooker. I’ve tried it and it’s disgusting.”

**The Idiosyncratic Relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the State**

*Their View of the State*

Before we look at the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state, it would be useful to examine how Greek-Gypsies, a predominantly illiterate group,  

\(^{14}\) Here, they imply the dirty appearance of the settlement.
perceives the state. Fieldwork revealed that although this illiterate community finds it difficult to objectify the notion of state and its operating mechanisms, it nevertheless acknowledges the fact that these apparatuses keep the nation-state construct functioning effectively through time and space. As a middle-aged man characteristically said: “if the state does not exist, then Greece does not exist either”. It would also be interesting to see how Greek-Gypsies interpret the different forms of institutionalised racism, which they undoubtedly face in their everyday lives and activities (such as for example threats of eviction from their settlement, insecurity in their working environment, police violence etc.). As the following examples prove, the interpretation of their reflections on these issues should be seen through the spectrum of the Greek-Gypsy ‘morality’ described above.

The informants’ general views on state mechanisms, as expressed both in informal discussions and semi-formal interviews, as well as in everyday language, demonstrated a mixture of sentiments of fury about the state’s negligence towards their problems and gratitude for the state’s tolerance towards their ‘Gypsy’ way of life. The words of an old woman, one of the first inhabitants of the settlement, seemed to echo this contradiction exactly:

“I don’t believe in them [meaning the state’s representatives in general] because they’ve never held their promises, they simply don’t care about us…But I have to admit that the state has been good to us. For example, we are lucky that the state hasn’t kicked us out for so long. The land is not ours, the state has every right to kick us out.”

Interestingly, their views reflect an important ideological distinction between the morality and ethics of the state and its mechanisms and the actual acts of its agents. On one hand they seem to show confidence in the state’s proclaimed ethics and aims while on the other they attribute to its agents the failure of the realisation of these aims. For example, when I asked the man who represented the settlement in the long lasting negotiations for their resettlement, to give me his opinion on the process of negotiations, he gave me the following answer:

“The state wants to spend money and build houses for us but the problem is that all these atimoi [immoral] politicians will rip the state off and nothing will be done for us again.”
What is more, during fieldwork, it wasn’t rare that Gypsies even praised the very same institutions that seemed to be the source of their continuous oppression such as the police and the courts.

“The police and the courts should do their jobs. They shouldn’t do favours to anybody. The problem is that we are poor and illiterate and whatever happens the police blame us and the courts convict us. If you have money, you can easily escape jail. Policemen and judges are sometimes *atimoi* [immoral] and *theloun ladwma* [get bribed] to set you free. If you don’t have money, they lock you up”.

From their words it becomes obvious that they see the state’s representatives as people, who are prone to corruption, but most importantly as people who have betrayed the ideals and ethics of the nation-state. The phrases *aftoi den ehoun timi kai mpesa*\(^{15}\) or *aftoi den sevolentai tipota*\(^{16}\) were commonly employed characterisations by the members of the community for the representatives of the state institutions and mechanisms.

This probably explains why the army seems to be the institution that more than any other institution along with the church, in spite of its rigid curriculum, seems to be highly respected by the Greek-Gypsies. This is presumably so, because the army exemplifies ideals such as solidarity, brotherhood, and hierarchal relationships that lie at the very core of Gypsy morality, while at the same time, its highly mandatory character leaves little space for corruption.

One of the most important domains, where the ambiguity of Greek-Gypsies perception of the state institutions is expressed, is the school\(^{17}\). It is true that the vast majority of Gypsy parents and children acknowledge illiteracy as one of the main sources of their marginalisation and they would at least like to have a minimum degree of education. However, the overwhelming illiteracy rates among the members of this community and the high drop out percentages among the community’s children indicate that schooling constitutes a process with a highly contradictory meaning for the Greek-Gypsies.

\(^{15}\) These people do not have value and do not keep their word of honour
\(^{16}\) These people do not respect anything
\(^{17}\) The examination of Greek-Gypsy children and parents’ views and aspirations of schooling in relation to Greek-Gypsy processes of becoming and belonging constitutes the main theme of my thesis.
In fact, schooling seems to be one of the institutional processes, which children find difficult to get incorporated into, since its lengthy and demanding curriculum seems to be incompatible with some of their most important everyday practices and long-term aspirations, threatening, simultaneously, the basic aspects of Greek-Gypsy identity (family, marriage, domestic and working patterns). This is presumably why, as the statistical data prove, Greek-Gypsy children mostly decide to drop out of school at the time when their duties and obligations in the family environment become the first priority in their lives.

What is more, Greek-Gypsies are better incorporated into institutions such as the church and the army, which do not threaten but reinforce the basic aspects of Greek-Gypsy identity. In this sense, it becomes obvious that Greek-Gypsies use state institutions and mechanisms in a multiplicity of ways - and they are not exclusive recipients of repressive policies – in order to consolidate their identity.

This is especially obvious in children’s stance towards schooling and the way and extent children participate or decide not to participate in the schooling process. Childhood constitutes a conceptual category, which grants children considerable space and freedom in playing with contested identities\(^\text{18}\) (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998). This seems to be particularly the case for Greek-Gypsy children, who as carriers of a twofold cultural identity - Greek and Gypsy - show a remarkable ability\(^\text{19}\) to play with and negotiate this identity in different frameworks. Children make use of their inclusion/exclusion in/from the schooling process depending on the extent they sense this process is compatible or contradictory to processes of becoming and belonging.

\(^{18}\) Children are to be understood as social actors (Jenks, 1992, 1996; James, 1993) and active participants in the process of making culture (Stephens, 1995), constituting at the same time childhood an agency (James and Prout, 1990). Children participate in the politics of culture and identity through processes of becoming and belonging (James, Jenks, and Prout, 1998). Schooling constitutes one of these processes.

\(^{19}\) This ability provides us with an interesting insight into the way Greek-Gypsies experience their present, visualise their future, and perceive their sense of belonging in general.
The peculiarity of the relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state

The use of Herzfeld’s term of cultural intimacy in the case of the Greek-Gypsies enables us to understand this peculiar relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state. As already described, cultural intimacy refers to those aspects of everyday life and subversions of norms that the nationalist project uses in order to become largely successful. Herzfeld sees the essentialism of the state and people’s everyday practices as premised on a rigid rhetoric that exemplifies notions of community, family, solidarity and interdependence, all drawing on metaphors of patrilineal relationships of blood, or “the very features of localism that the state most abhors” (Herzfeld, 1997: 75). Additionally, Herzfeld (1997) sees in these attributes of the state’s rhetoric, - the family, the community and the individual - “a commonality that encapsulates plural possibilities” (1997:171) In this sense, the nation-state “shows that its apparent fixities are the products of the very things they deny: action, agency, and use” (1997:165). These features, however, seem to be the very issues that define the problematic relationship between the state and its people.

The case of Greek-Gypsies, who strongly premise their identity on these aspects seems to be particularly interesting. Greek-Gypsy identity is based on family and extended kinship networks that exemplify brotherly relations and relations of interdependence and solidarity, the most important issues the nationalist project draws upon. At the same time, they seem to use networks of relatedness and its associated processes in order to realise short and long term projects mainly outside of the boundaries of state institutions. These networks of relatedness simultaneously substitute for those social institutions and state processes from which Gypsies are largely excluded (such as pension schemes, social insurance, etc.).

For example, Gypsy marriage produces and reinforces a complex dynamic process through which a number of diverse and important socio-economic and cultural features of Gypsy life intersect and are sustained. In this sense, the wedding process constitutes an affirmation and consolidation of wider community relations of support. Through marriage, long-term projects are realised outside the boundaries of the state and the formal economy, through ideologies of gender, sexuality and kinship. What is more, marriage and its associated ideologies of gender and sexuality, the practice of endogamy and concerns of honour lie at the centre of a socio-
economic process through which the Greek-Gypsy community is not only ‘imagined’ but also realised.

Marriage, or a prospective marriage, engages community members in a cyclical investment process that signifies a long-term commitment to economic and social support. In other words, it triggers a whole set of economic and social strategies and alliances based on sets of reciprocal relationships. This socio-economic activity actually takes the form of money recycling and forms of investment that simultaneously indicate the existence of a strong socio-economic bond among different Gypsy families. This set of relationships that is fortified by reciprocal exchange through the money ‘loaning’ process, constitutes an effective support system, substituting for those social institutions and services in the wider society to which Gypsies are denied access because of their marginal position.

But exactly here lies the problematic relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state. Gypsies not only perceive and realise their long-term projects beyond the boundaries of state institutions through alternative mechanisms and processes but also, in order to achieve their goal, operate at the fringes of Greek society posing a threat to the prevailing order and creating a sense of non-conformity with the state’s ideals. Simultaneously, the emphasis on these networks of relatedness seems to be the reason for their problematic participation of Greek-Gypsies in some state institutional processes such as schooling.

Interestingly, Greek-Gypsies themselves adopt the very same aspects of nationalist speech in order to consolidate their identity vis-à-vis non Gypsy-Greek others. For Herzfeld (1997: 43) “the language of national or ethnic identity is indeed a language of morality”. However, the paradox with nationalism is that:

“The state is caught on the horns of its own reification. To achieve at least an illusion of stability it must command the active involvement of ordinary people; and ordinary people reify, all the time, everywhere. They too invoke, involve solidified histories,

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20 It is common practice for parents to organise their economic activities in such a way that enables them primarily to support their families on a daily basis, while at the same time they can intensify their work in order to cover their children’s wedding expenses or the gift for an upcoming relative’s wedding ceremony. Indeed, parents not only have to plan their work and savings for their children’s wedding preparations but also they have to put down money for the weddings of relatives and family members in the process of intra-community money recycling. This socio-economic mobilisation presupposes the existence of a flexible economic activity and labour intense working patterns.
rediscovering in the official mythology some aspects that will serve their own cause.” (Herzfeld, 1997: 24)

**Concluding Remarks**

To conclude, this paper offered an insight into the ways the idiosyncratic relationship between Greek-Gypsies and the state have largely informed the process of negotiating a Greek-Gypsy collective identity. The examination of the ascribing features of this peculiar relationship through the analysis of ethnographic data, informed by Herzfeld’s notion of *cultural intimacy*, suggests that Gypsy experience within the context of nation-state cannot be merely reduced to a strategy of resistance and passive adaptation. The use of the concept of *cultural intimacy* in this analysis enables us to unravel the particular ways through which Greek-Gypsies have negotiated their identity, by infiltrating those aspects of the state’s essentialist rhetoric that intersect with a specific Gypsy morality, while simultaneously informing practices that differentiate them from non Greek-Gypsy ‘others’. In this sense, Greek-Gypsies have elaborated an ambiguous concept of the state, in which its representatives, lacking Greek-Gypsy morality, have failed to sustain the state’s proclaimed *ethics* by slipping into an immoral path. On a more mundane level, Greek-Gypsies seem to be more successfully incorporated into those state institutions which promote ideologies and practices compatible with Greek-Gypsy moral values. For example, their successful incorporation into institutions such as the army and the church but not the school, as already shown, can be attributed to the fact that these institutions rather than threatening the basic tenets of Greek-Gypsy morality instead support and exemplify them. The concept of *cultural intimacy* helps us view Greek-Gypsies as a group that constitutes an intrinsic part of Greek society and, therefore, removes it from the margins of theoretical analysis.
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