Cultural Identity and Cultural Policy: 
Manipulating Expectations in Contemporary Greece

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“One could say, without exaggerating that the crisis of identity constitutes the central problem of modern Greek society the constitutive element of contemporary Hellenism and the axis around which our modern history revolves” (Tsaoussis 1982:17).

Abstract
This paper starts with a short critic of rigidly separating ‘the civic’ from ‘the ethnic’ in nationalism theories as well as mapping them broadly as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ respectively. It further doubts the potential of such theories to provide explanations for the case of Greece. On the background of attitudes towards ‘co-ethnics’ during recent years where Greece has been transformed from a sender to a receiver society, the paper suggests that things might be subtler than that. It then turns to one widely accepted ‘ethnic’ theme of ‘Greekness’, namely the link between Modern Greece and Ancient Greece and, after presenting schematically its development, the paper investigates its possible persistence in Greek ‘public culture’ through a discussion of data in cultural policy. It further explores how people might use what is ‘ethnically’ expected of them both in conventional and in ‘unexpected’ ways, as well as the conceptual and pragmatic implications of such uses. It, thus, investigates how cultural identity-expectations are used in everyday life and the active influence they might have on the possibility of action. The paper considers turning to the use of metaphors in conception in search of a subtler understanding of cultural identity construction and use. It suggests a more nuanced approach to understanding how identity is constructed and wishes to imply that an investigation of the case of Greece could provide novel tools for both theorising and understanding areas with similar itineraries but also other ‘unexpected’ ones.

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1. Introduction

Within nationalism theories a broad division could be identified between those who claim that nations are modern conceptual constructions or ‘imagined communities’ – among whom Ernest Gellner\(^1\) is prominent – and those – for instance, Anthony Smith\(^2\) – who see pre-modern ethnicities or ‘real communities’ behind the formation of nations. A third group of theorists has been arguing that both tendencies can co-exist. Such is the position of Brown, Hearn, Nielsen, Yack etc.\(^3\) Whatever their position on the relative modernity of ‘nations’, though, nationalism theories usually accept the inevitability of a relation between political and cultural dimensions in specific societies. However, more often than not one could observe that in the spectrum of theories with ‘citizenship’ on one end and ‘ethnicity’ on the other, or ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ identity respectively, and even in frameworks that do acknowledge the co-existence and potential overlapping of both ends in real-life situations, there may still be a tendency to map broadly ‘civic’ as ‘good’ and ‘ethnic’ as ‘bad’ or ‘civic’ as ‘inclusive’ and ‘ethnic’ as ‘exclusive’.

Within such a framework Greek national identity is often considered as primarily ‘ethnic’. Thus Triandafyllidou writes: “National identity in Greece is predominantly ‘ethnic’, based on the belief in a common genealogical descent” (2001: 40). Furthermore, since, \textit{inter alia}, “the western institutions that were transplanted into the newborn Greek state, although alien to the traditional, rural and deeply religious Greek society of the early 19th century, could be said to mark the continuity between classical and modern Greece” (Triandafyllidou & Veikou 2002: 194), such a ‘civic’ element never really merged with its ‘ethnic’ predecessor. Such lack of merging is often seen as being carried on to the present and blamed for the malfunctioning of Greek institutions.

Proponents of such views could be seen as being justified when in the late 1980s and all through the 1990s up to today, both the Greek state and the ‘Greek people’ seemed highly unsuccessful in their dealings with an increasing number of immigrants. For

the first time in its history Greece became a host country and ‘she’ (as one would refer
to the country in Greek) seemed totally unable to deal with the facts. On a first level
one could regard such inability as a straightforward xenophobic reaction of an
‘ethnically’ rooted identity to ‘others’ disrupting its homogeneity; a reaction whose
results were multiplied by a perception of citizenship based on ethnicity and what is
often perceived as a malfunctioning democracy. However, I would argue that things
might be somewhat more complicated.

In what follows I shall first attempt to briefly justify why an opposition of ‘civic’ and
‘ethnic’ as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ does not provide a satisfactory framework in which to
discuss ‘Greekness’. I would like to argue that even theories which see those elements
as dynamically interacting with each other are still often based on a premise that those
elements are distinct and can be treated in isolation from each other. Instead, I would
like to propose a framework which rather sets out to explore the manifestations of
those elements in the public domain, or, as I shall name it, the domain of ‘public
culture’.

A ‘public culture’ is a contextual concept. It is a domain which is space and time
relative. As such, it is a concept which allows for both openness and closure in a
specific society. It testifies to tensions between pursuing both cohesiveness and
distinctiveness in the same context and often with the same means. It attempts to
define slippery concepts such as culture and identity by focusing on contextual
processes, as influenced by policy-implementation, rather than on abstract definitions.

A way of approaching such a domain is by looking at the language of practices in it.
This is not to say that culture is easily reducible to some set of practices or some
group of cultural products. It is just to attempt to designate loci of analysis in which
such a culture’s characteristics can be discerned. The hypothesis is that this language
has permeated and continues to be used in public policy, mainly in policy about
culture. The relationship of course is dialectical. Public policy reverberates what the
agreement of the ‘public sphere’ is and at the same time sustains and nourishes such a
‘public culture’ through, inter alia, the perpetuation of the understanding of what that
culture is to be. The state draws on ‘public culture’ for its policy but at the same time
such policy affects the domain of the public concretely – in terms of the measures
being initiated – but most importantly discursively – in perpetuating assumptions which sustain society in an apparent cohesiveness.

It is in this domain that ‘Greekness’ is actively debated and it is to such ‘conversations’ that I shall then turn. I focus on cultural policy for two reasons: first, cultural policy has been less investigated in comparison for instance to immigration, labour or education policy\(^4\) as to its potential to provide clues in an investigation of ‘Greekness’. Second, and most important, cultural policy is very often conceptualised as carrying the potential for changing existing ‘cultural identity’ conceptions, thus, how ‘Greekness’ is debated within it is important.

One could observe many constituent elements of ‘Greekness’ as developed through, *inter alia*, the country’s establishment and consolidation. In this paper I shall focus on one theme, mainly the perception of Ancient Greece as Modern Greece’s ancestor, a constitutive feature of ‘Greekness’ that has been heavily debated. I shall test whether it is still manifest by focusing on its characteristic uses in the data, deciphering how much expected or not they are, in view of their ‘ethnic’ provenance, and by attempting to map such uses on a system based on the use of metaphors in conception.

An initial clarification should be made. In this paper I use the term ‘Greekness’ in an unqualified manner in order to refer to Greek ‘cultural identity’. ‘Culture’ and ‘identity’, two highly debated and controversial terms, are used in combination, because they are not treated here as purely ‘theoretical terms’. If they were, I would maybe agree with a critique on their abuse and possible dispensing potential.\(^5\) However, I would rather like to consider those terms as uses by people in their everyday interaction and as being considered important by them to them. It is in this latter sense that we cannot dispense with ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ as readily as some would like us to.

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\(^5\) See, for instance, Brubaker & Cooper 2000.
2. A New Reality – An Old Theme

2.1. ‘Co-ethnics’

Massive immigration towards Greece occurred mainly as a result of the collapse of communism in Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The larger group of newcomers arrived from Albania and according to King et al., “the scale of… figures makes [this] emigration unique amongst recent migratory movements in Europe” (1998: 161). The newcomers were in fact Albanian citizens, but a large percentage would identify themselves – and would actually be identified by the Albanian government – as ‘ethnic Greeks’, sharing with their co-ethnics a language and a religion. In addition to Albanian immigrants, “another category of ‘ethnic Greeks’ emerged in late 1980s as significant: Pontian or Pontic Greeks from the USSR began to arrive in large numbers in 1989.”

The overall inability of the Greek state to deal in a consistent and comprehensive way with these migratory waves is notorious and the literature quite extensive. In an article published in 2002 Triandafyllidou and Veikou state that “the continuing lack of a comprehensive policy framework even after 10 years, and the political and public debate on the issue suggest that there is a relationship between this reluctance and the ethnocultural definition of the Greek nationality and citizenship”. They further accept that “things became more complicated by the presence of some immigrant groups that claimed a right to Greek citizenship on the basis of their ethnic and cultural origins” (2002: 191). In the same article, Triandafyllidou and Veikou set out to demonstrate the redefinition of the boundaries of the ingroup in view of the presence of new ‘others’ within it as well as in view of “present needs and pragmatic considerations” (ibid.: 203).

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6 The same authors note that even by “a conservative estimate of 300,000 [in 1998], this amounts to nearly one-tenth of the Albanian population and to around seven per cent of the labour force in Greece” (King et al.1998: 61).

7 “…peaking at 14,000 in 1990-91” (Baldwin-Edwards & Fakiolas 1998: 186). “Pontian Greeks come mainly from the ex-Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia and Kazakhstan. They are ethnic Greeks who either emigrated from areas of the Ottoman Empire to the ex-Soviet Union in the beginning of the twentieth century, or who left Greece in the 1930s and the 1940s for political reasons. Pontian Greeks are defined by the Greek state as members of the diaspora community who return to their homeland and are, therefore, given full citizen status and benefits aimed at facilitating their (re)integration into Greek society. Vorioepirottes are Albanian citizens, mainly from southern Albania, of Greek ethnic origin and Christian Orthodox religion”. (Triandafyllidou 2001: 125).
However, what is key, I believe, to a subtler understanding is the mere fact that many of the new arrivals had the credentials of ‘co-ethnics’ which did not, though, make their inclusion an easier undertaking. Even if an inflexible or even ‘mulfunctioning’ legislation did make progressive – even though inconclusive – steps towards these groups’ recognition and inclusion, things in everyday life did not seem to develop accordingly; i.e. towards a gradually broader acceptance of those groups as fully blown citizens. If one starts from an assumption that ‘ethnic’ is drawn to ‘ethnic’, though, that should have been easier. Paradoxically it would seem that the category of the ‘ethnic’ was in this case used in order to exclude co-ethnics from potential active participation. I would like to argue that such reluctance, inability even, may be linked with how Greeks conceptualise their ‘Greekness’ or at least with the dominant ways in which they are socialised to conceptualise it.

Could it be otherwise, i.e. could the category of the ‘ethnic’ have been used in a concretely inclusive manner? In order to answer one should first try to deconstruct the features of such an ‘ethnic’ identity and consider them separately. In what follows I turn to such a feature, namely the perception of Ancient Greece as Modern Greece’s ancestor. This theme incorporates a view of Greek history as a continuum of three main phases (Ancient Greece – Byzantium – Modern Greece) and maps onto a culture ancient, continuous and universal in the sense that it is a culture which incorporates Ancient Greece, the ‘cradle’ of European civilisation. Let us first present briefly how such a conception has come to be formed.  

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8 Pragmatic reasons for such delays include, inter alia, the Greek government’s effort to discourage such migratory movement from Albania for instance, as maintaining the minority there was seen as being in ‘Greece’s interest’. Or that, despite the fact that “according to the Greek constitution, people from the Greek diaspora are entitled to a favourable legal status in Greece […] law does not provide a conceptual definition of who qualifies as a co-ethnic. According to the decision of the State Council [Supreme Administrative Court of Justice in Greece] (no. 2756/1983), the legitimate criterion for one to be characterised as a co-ethnic is ‘to belong to the Greek Ethnos’. That is, ‘to have Greek national consciousness’, which is ‘deduced from characteristics of personality which refer to common descent, language, religion, national traditions and extensive knowledge of the historical events of the nation’”. However, ‘Greekness’ is not easily identified through such criteria. For instance, “language could not be a valid criterion because some of them [the new arrivals] spoke very poor Greek while others have learnt fluent Greek during their undocumented stay in the country” (See Triandafyllidou & Veikou 2002: 198-199).

9 Taking into consideration the scope and purpose of this paper such an account cannot but be extremely sketchy and even simplistic.
2.2. Ancient Greece and Greece

The conceptual link between Greece and Ancient Greece dates back to the years before and during liberation from the Ottoman Empire – the first signs of uprising having been manifested in 1821 – and was behind much philhellenic action during that period. Its ‘recapture’ was also among the motives of some of the members of the Greek liberation movement itself. On the other hand, the powerful presence of the Orthodox Church and the need to accommodate it found its expression in a vision for the rehabilitation of Byzantium. The catalyst part for the construction of a tripartite historical continuum would be played by the philologist Jacob Falmerayer who in 1830 claimed that the Greeks of that day did not have any continuity with their namesakes, the Greeks of antiquity, and that they were, in fact, Slavs.

However, as any such entity of that time, ‘Modern Greece’ needed to prove its roots. The chronological gap would be finally and firmly bridged by Paparigopoulos whose multi-volume history started to appear in the 1850s. Contra Falmerayer, Paparigopoulos “managed to provide a new conceptualisation of Greek identity, based on a threefold continuum of Greek history which incorporated the heritage of pagan hellenism, the tradition of Orthodox Byzantium and the modern status of Greece as a secular European state. The effectiveness of this intellectual achievement as a focus of collective self-definition and the profound cultural and psychological needs to which it responded may explain its tenacity and resilience in Greek political thought to this date, more than a century after its original inception”. As Kitromilides further remarks, it can be explained by “… the psychological comfort it offers to the Greek mind” (1995: 11). Furthermore, the link to Ancient Greece provided and has been providing ever since, a point of entry for Greece in ‘the West’, the country being considered as “the idealised spiritual and intellectual ancestor of Europe” (Herzfeld 1987: 1). As such, the link with Ancient Greece served Greece well at a time when the country was struggling to enter the Western political arena. Finally, as noted earlier, the western institutions that were transplanted into the newborn Greek state during the early 19th century could also be seen as testifying in favour of the continuity between classical and modern Greece.
The internalisation of such a link becomes nowadays even more manifest when contemporary writers, who, in every other sense, critical of ‘Greekness’ and its constitutive elements, use such a link somehow inadvertently or ‘naturally’. Triandafyllidou *et al.*, for instance, in an article entitled ‘New Greek Nationalism’ write: “Thus, the classic Greek dichotomy between 'us' (Greeks) and 'them' (non-Greeks) is currently used within a new context. In antiquity it had served to distinguish between the Greek civilization and the 'barbarian' populations (those not enlightened by Greek thought)…” (1998: 8; emphasis added). And Kokosalakis and Psimenos open their report on ‘Modern Greece: A Profile of Identity and Nationalism’ with the words: “The long history of Greece, *from pre-classical antiquity to the present, …*” (2002: 2; emphasis added). To some extent it would seem that such a link has become ubiquitous, that it has become a common feature of Greek ‘public culture’. In fact data from cultural policy suggest that a conception of ‘Greekness’ as founded on a link with Ancient Greece, as well as Greek history being perceived as a tripartite continuum, is still being widely used – not, though, always as one would have maybe expected.

3. ‘Greekness’ in practice

3.1. The ‘setting’

The focus of the empirical work has been a cultural institution founded and supervised by the Greek Ministry of Culture and intended in its original ‘manifesto’ to be “a custodian of the ideals of peace, fair play, creativity, and the universality of man”. Its events would span all artistic fields (music, theatre, dance, cinema, visual arts etc.). In one of its first proclamations it would be maintained that “what is all-important is the worldwide aspect of the message … It is a message of peace and social cohesion; a message that links tradition to modernism and modernism to postmodernism” [sic]. In such a framework, ‘people of the arts’ were invited to submit proposals with ‘a Greek theme’ for projects in all relevant fields. Thus, on the one hand the institution set out to achieve some kind of universality and

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10 Quote from brochure and website.
transcendence, a movement that would locate its activities beyond ‘Greekness’ and on the other to portray the ‘new Greece’ and even redefine it.

During fieldwork and after, it became progressively apparent that imperatives were being gradually transformed from ‘more international’ to ‘more Greece-focused’ events. In some sense, due to such a development, the institution under study became a ‘typical’ cultural institution with atypical characteristics in terms of initial aspirations as well as pragmatic potential. However, for the purposes of this paper the important question is not whether the institution has met its aspirations. The question is rather the extent to which it could succeed taking into consideration not only pragmatic hindrances but also and mostly the availability of discourses in the domain of public culture and their scope. Thus, conceptual and interpretational matters were at stake.

Within such an institutional framework the specific material studied consists of theatre projects discussed in relation to the possibility of their realisation. Usually a project would either be proposed to the institution by a multitude of different organisations and/or individuals – Greek or ‘foreign’ – or initiated by one of its ‘higher’ employees. Also, projects might be original or already performed and in need of financial assistance in order to be reproduced. It would then be given for consultation to the relevant consultant who might ask for additional information in order to make a recommendation to the managing director who would then submit it to the board of directors for rejection or initial approval. Ultimate realisation would depend, though, on the gradual smooth development of the practical aspects of the project (participants, locations, budget, etc.).

The selection of projects to look at has been based on them providing some ‘Greekness’- referential material and not on their relevant success – which besides ‘Greekness’ criteria would take into considerations parameters such as ‘quality’, trustworthiness, exportability as well as equilibria to be kept on different levels. The choice of the theatre-field can be justified mainly through its supposed special link to ‘Greekness’ and Greek culture, as will also become obvious shortly. Most of the

11 Such parameters include, for instance, expectations and equilibria within the organisation as well as expectations and equilibria related to Greek internal politics and world politics.
theatre projects studied do evolve around some form of ancient drama-related performance either ‘conventional’ or mixed/hybrid. Such proposals are closely followed in number by projects centring around what is perceived as being a ‘Greek theme’, i.e. a mythology or antiquity referential theme.

Such uses constitute expressions by both those proposing projects and those considering them – thus revealing that there is a shared understanding on which communication is based. However, the reader can follow a project’s provenance and relative success through the coding system. Also, in the next section terms ‘sender/receiver’ refer to senders and receivers of proposals whereas ‘insider/outsider’ relate to geographical location in relation to Greece. Furthermore many of the issues discussed are not either uniquely or quintessentially Greek – although their constellation as well as their specific expressions may be. Still, either separately or in different variations or combinations, they may remain relevant for a series of other places.

In the following section the theme of the link between Greece and Ancient Greece is examined under two perspectives: a- in it being present through expected, common-sense assumptions about ‘Greekness’ as a ‘restrictive and exclusive ethnic identity’ and b- in the unexpected uses it may be subjected to. I shall demonstrate that depending on which characteristics of such an all-encompassing link one chooses to highlight, its potential can be exclusive or rather inclusive. Furthermore, within the two sets of such potentially exclusive or inclusive characteristics, further subsets can be identified with a more or less exclusive or inclusive potential. Such an approach resonates with an influential theory by Lakoff and Johnson which extrapolates from the use of metaphors in language to a theory of the metaphorical structuring of conception (1980). The main merit of their theory to me has been their passionate support for what has become so ubiquitous that we hardly notice anymore, i.e. that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (1980: 3). Lakoff and Johnson set out to demonstrate how all three of these domains are superimposedly defined and delineated by metaphors. In doing so, even if not exhaustively, they point to a simple fact which, though, can be easily

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12 See Appendix.
overlooked; that “in allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept […] a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (1980: 10).

In the light of these observations we could see the material discussed below as falling under the general theme or ‘metaphor’ ‘Modern Greece is Ancient Greece’ and the latter being considered as a constituting element of ‘Greekness’. Now this could readily be characterised as an ‘ethnic’ characteristic of identity being related as it is to ‘the past, roots and ancestors’. However, the uses of such a characteristic may vary extensively and this may be linked precisely to it being a metaphor.

In the first set of uses ‘Greekness’ is portrayed mostly as a restrictive and exclusive identity, thus predominantly supporting an equation of the type ‘ethnic equals exclusive’. However the second set of characteristics offers a possible opening potential to such an ‘ethnic Greekness’. Those characteristics are also based on the basic metaphoric structure ‘Modern Greece is Ancient Greece’, but in those instances other aspects of the metaphor are highlighted; aspects which shed light to its potential for a differential treatment.

3.2. The 'script'

3.2.1. ‘Greekness’ restrictive and exclusive

a. Theatre originated in ancient Greece

Such a characteristic seems to support the main metaphor of the link between Ancient Greece and Modern Greece in an exclusive way. According to one of the main contributors to the original design of the theatre-projects the predominance of ancient drama amongst both foreign and indigenous choices was justified mainly, he suggested in a short and informal interview, by ancient drama being perceived as the locus of theatre’s birth.
Furthermore, because of Greece being perceived as the birthplace of theatre, an entire vocabulary commonly used in ancient drama plots/structure is available and easily reproducible in everyday life thus sustaining the assumption of a hereditary link. In one project, for instance, we read: “A ‘choral’ for the 21st century” or “the cantors’ parts” etc.\(^{13}\) Such vocabulary is often used in an un-qualified manner, based probably on an assumption of its recognisability as well as the right of the Greek user to use it. Apparently, antiquity/mythology references can be both easily made and easily understood, thus, supporting this perception of ancient drama being ‘owned’ by contemporary Greeks.

Additionally, such a hereditary link is accepted not only by insiders but by outsiders also who may, though, consider it as part of “the cultural heritage of the world theatre”.\(^{14}\) A premium of world-theatre having its ancestor in Ancient Greece complicates the rights of ownership on ancient drama (and Ancient Greece) for Modern Greece but also provides, as we shall see, a point of entry for Greece to the ‘world cultural arena’.

**b. Greek culture is old/ancient**

Such a characteristic also seems to support the main metaphor of the link between Ancient Greece and Modern Greece in an exclusive way and it seems again accepted by both insiders and outsiders.

In some instances a characteristic of antiquity or even mythology suffices so as to describe a project as sufficiently Greek, as a project “with a specific Greek angle”. Thus projects about *Icarus, the Trojans, Orpheus, or the Argonauts* are held to be primarily of Greek interest. The ancient deeds and creations are ‘ours’ too. Thus, a sender can claim that “the vision of the great tragic [writer] was for the triumph of Greece against barbarism to stay unabated through the centuries through his immortal play *The Persians*”,\(^{15}\) referring to Aeschylus’ famous tragedy.

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\(^{13}\) UP-PC-gr/S

\(^{14}\) SP-R/R

\(^{15}\) UP-No-gr/S.
The alleged antiquity of Greek culture is also recognised by outsiders. Thus, the ancient Greek mythological universe is conceptualised as both the link to Greece and the unquestionable core around which to construct an international event with “a theme derived from the mythological universe of ancient Greek drama”. 16 Another project is proposed under the general title “the Greeks” when all its contents refer to ancient tragedy plots and heroes. 17 Thus, the understanding of such a link is capitalised upon by contributors to the discussion, although not uncomplicatedly since it can be taken to mean that Greek culture is just old/ancient, thus ascribing to Greek modernity or actuality a rather obscure status.

This characteristic is also supported by a usage which seems more straightforward but not, though, without, complicating implications. A way of considering Greek culture as old/ancient can also be observed in treating mythology as history. This usage may take a number of forms. For instance accounts of myths by ancient Greek writers may be taken to the word as if they describe something that actually happened. One finds mentions such as: “and it matches the descriptions of Ikarus’ shrine, given to us by Pausanias and Apollodorus”. 18 In another instance one reads: “it is known to all that Ikarus together with his father Daedalus in their effort to escape from Crete constructed wings from wax” 19 or it is maintained that “the footprints of the giant Hercules” 20 can be seen at some location. However, if mythology is treated as history, it can then be seen as belonging to the specific ‘people’ to which the relevant history belongs. Thus, it cannot be easily shared with ‘others’.

c. Greek history is continuous

For most of the projects ‘our’ historical continuity seems to constitute ‘accepted wisdom’. Thus protesters against one specific project can claim that they are “resisting the efforts of depreciation and distortion of the historical continuity of our tradition”. 21 In relation to this characteristic we can observe the function of both language and visual means in order to collapse time and draw attention away from the
temporal distance between different periods of the past and close to their essential ‘Greekness’.

In one instance the collapse of time is achieved through the person of the narrator: “At the beginning he is the ‘singer’ [aoidos] of the Homeric years who is developing into rapsodist-singer-narrator”. Thus, the narrator’s function is portrayed in a unified way. Visual exemplifications of continuity may be offered, for instance, by a distinctive use of costumes. The production manager of a performance of Medea remarks: “The chorus is dressed with traditional very Greek post-Byzantine costumes… and resembles a chorus of black-dressed Caryatids”. Such a merging is perceived as absolutely legitimate; it is “a sample of an honest effort to offer a performance exactly as its own creator would have wanted it”.

In another project language is perceived as continuous as well as a further proof of historical continuity. Independently of the linguistic validity of such claims, Ionic language is perceived as becoming Pontic dialect or idiom or language, the latter constituting a link between ancient and modern Greece, and, thus, exemplifying, as a reviewer remarks, “the richness, the continuity and the span of our language”.

d. Greek culture is a whole

Possible inner contradictions are obscured through the submission to the general concept of the Greek Cosmos (‘Ellinismos’ – Hellenism). The term ‘Ellinismos’ - Hellenism has wider encompassing potential than saying ‘the Greek nation’ which is also commonly used. It’s the Greek ‘cosmos’, referring to both the physical presence of Greeks in places different than Greece and to commonality of history and conception. The latter, then, could be seen as the essential metaphoric structure in this instance which provides coherence to a series of what could be otherwise incoherent patterns.

22 UP-NC-gr/S
23 SP-R/Int-S
24 UP-SE-gr/Int-S
25 UP-SE-gr/Int-S
A unitary approach to ‘Greekness’ is supported by a series of expressions and means. There is talk of “the diachronic values of Greek culture”. Even a ‘different’ kind of company, a Street Theatre one, not only proposes mounting ancient comedy but also maintains that through its project “the catholicy and universality of both the myth and Greek Culture are highlighted”. Furthermore Greek culture is seen as a whole not only in its diachrony but also in its relative synchrony. Thus, a project initiated within the institution is promoted because “with this action will be attempted the rehabilitation of the continuity and the unity of contemporary Greek culture”.

**e. Greece as the matrix vs Greece as Greek**

Such a use surrenders only part of the ‘Greekness’ of Greek past and only to the extent that the ultimate control of its definition continues to remain in Greek hands. The balance seems hard to maintain though not unimportant as exemplified, *inter alia*, by its potential to become political.

The Greek myths are taken as being universal and ‘the cradle of civilisation’. Thus, the Ministry of Culture supports actions by which “the Greek myths, which influenced global civilisation, return to the places where the artefacts they generated were inspired”. It would then seem that even if ‘universal’, the myths’ essential ‘Greekness’ (which is proven inter alia by the linguistic and visual relics of a mythical past) should not be negated. Such an expression could be seen as an effort (a paradoxical one?) to combine universality with ‘Greekness’ in a way that takes advantage of ‘outsiders’ assumption about what is Greek but also keeps the Greeks alert to what is theirs. However, it seems that as we descend levels of ‘political sophistication’ such nuanced combinations may become hard or even impossible. What matters is recognition of property both of mythology/history and its definition/version.

In a letter of protest for the somehow ‘subversive’ use of an ancient myth by a foreign director, we read: “The myth is Greek, its leading characters are Greek, it takes place

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26 UP-YP-gr/S  
27 UP-YP-gr/S  
28 SP-IP-gr/S-R  
29 AB-gr/R

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in the Greek space and it is not allowed for its international and humanistic character to erase its ‘Greekness’ and to insult myths of millennia and actually with money by the Greek public sector”.30 Notice here the repetition of the ‘Greek’ adjective in an effort to re-claim rights of property that have partly been lost through time. Notice how ironically if ‘an outsider’ accepts a Greek myth’s universality, she strips it somehow from its ‘Greekness’ and how the ‘insider’ resists the completion of such a move. Unconventional interpretations are described elsewhere as “rape of sanctities”.31

Thus, the Greek past’s universality and its possible function as a symbol for non-Greeks may be ultimately incompatible with a perception of such a past as literally Greek. There is pride in its international recognisability. However, there is also fear in its unconditional surrender to some kind of international interpretation.

### 3.2.2. ‘Ethnic opening’

**a. Ancient drama and contemporary creation**

Such a use does not consider traditional performances of ancient drama as sacrosanct. Instead, ancient drama is only used as the beginning of an otherwise innovative approach to theatre as well as well-known convention around which to experiment with new means. Thus, ancient drama may be used somehow subversively in terms of form. It may be fragmented or mixed with other texts; a usage characterised, as one sender remarks, by “an attitude of un-discipline and insubordination”.32 Ancient myth (‘Medea’, for instance) may function as ‘raw material’ for diverse “transformations and reproductions”.33 Ancient tragedy is providing a core well-enough known so that it has potential for reworking and ‘renewing’ other aspects of a performance; thus, it can “be put in the epicentre of a new discussion aiming to the theatre’s renewal”.34
Additionally, and most importantly as far as contemporary Greece is concerned, ancient drama can be used subversively as a de-linker of Modern Greece from Ancient Greece. It can do so by providing a context through which to demonstrate that Greece has not only an ancient culture but also and mostly a contemporary one as well, something that may be difficult to do with contemporary means. The promotion of Greek contemporary creation through ancient drama may take different forms. The ambassadorial potential of ancient drama is not lost either on the sender’s or on the receiver’s end. The former remarks that a certain project will familiarise “the international public with […] the diachrony of the Greek cultural heritage through our country’s contemporary artistic creation”\(^{35}\) while the latter observes that “the proposal offers a unique possibility for showcasing contemporary Greek dramatic production”.\(^{36}\)

### b. Regional over national – Regional as national

This use builds on the basic metaphor in order to cater, though, for a specific Greek region. Besides demonstrating the penetration of the metaphor from national to local consciousness, such use also shows its potential for differentiated treatment when other issues are at stake.

A section of “Greek past” can be appropriated by specific regions in order to advance regional claims. In one case the myth of Ikarus is claimed by the island of Ikaria (which owes its name to the myth) and through it by the group of the Dodecanese islands to which Ikaria belongs. It is also claimed by Crete where one part of the myth is supposed to unfold. These areas are “claiming the traditional relationship of the mythical heroes with these regions”\(^{37}\). Such uses demonstrate, *inter alia*, the penetration of ‘national discourses’ on a regional level.

In fact different regions claim that they protest both in the name of their region and in the name of Greece. Thus, in a letter of protest we read that a project “will not only provocatively distort the Aegean’s historical and cultural continuity. Furthermore it will exclude unallowably the national Aegean and Greek space from a cultural

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\(^{35}\) UP-YP-gr/S

\(^{36}\) SP-R/R

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activity of international reach”. The space is Cretan, Ikarian, Aegean and thus Greek and national.

In a similar move of regional appropriation, Salamis, for instance, is advancing claims of having the right to host ancient tragedy events since it constitutes both the location of Aeschylus’ Persians and Euripides’ ‘birthplace’. Also, through the alleged link of their idiom to the “age-old Ionic dialect”, Pontic Greeks can ask prioritisation when decisions have to be made.

c. Mythology/Ancient Past as an allegory for present times

This is probably the theme with the bigger inclusive potential in terms of the issues we are mainly concerned with. Furthermore, such potential is captured by both insiders and outsiders. Such allegoric use can vary from a very general one (world-wide concerns) to a country (Greece or other) or even region or theme specific. For instance, the past/the myths may be used in order to ‘converse’ with danger zones as well as about ambiguous relationships with other countries. Such treatment seems to be favoured by ‘others’ in similar positions; for instance, neighbours in the wider South-eastern area. Whereas representatives of ‘the West’ seem more concerned with ‘existential issues’. Such use is not new or specific to recent times. Rather the issues and situations it is activated for may be of more or less contemporary concern.

In one the initiator of a project aims to associating “the ambitions of classical mythological characters with the ambitions of today’s people” and to “creating tableaux of the seven sicknesses of mankind (narcissism, depression, schizophrenia, desire to stay young, self-hatred, desire to fly, desire to be loved)”. “Universal” issues can be tackled, for instance, through the myth of Oedipus. A sender remarks: “Through the myth, Oedipus the human being is revealed as the incarnation of the universal [ecumenical] man”, since he brings with him all past, present and future since his message reverberates still open questions underpinning contemporary

37 AB-gr/R
38 AB-gr/P
39 UP-No-gr/S
40 UP-SE-gr/S
41 AB-gr/R
42 AB-gr/S
Western thought … [It is about the] kinds of frontiers [that] must be overcome within the human and amongst humans and in what ways … The performance aims in revealing contemporary man’s difficult itinerary towards common understanding’.\(^{43}\)

Thus, the myths have the potential of ‘blending’ different times: “The time is now and not now, but of ancient realms, which cannot be forgotten and which still inspire and haunt the day-to-day reality of the characters”.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, the myths have the potential of bringing different cultures together “with respect to Greek culture but also with contemporary universal references”.\(^{45}\)

Elsewhere, we read that “ancient themes” can be used in order to talk about the Balkans.\(^{46}\) As already mentioned, the myths’ universality and also them being sufficiently temporarily distanced also provide potential for their use as a medium to approach ‘difficult’ geographical zones. In such instances often the ancient/mythological reference is one that incorporates other regions in the project’s development. Such potential is captured by both insiders and outsiders.

From an insider’s point of view, for instance, a revival of an ancient ritual across both Greece and Turkey is proposed because it is assumed that it “can contribute in smoothening the relationships between the two states, with unknown (positive) [sic!] implications for now and the future”.\(^{47}\) For an ‘outsider’ but yet one located in the wider South-eastern area, turning to the “ancient past” is seen as a way for the region to cope in the present with new imperatives, with globalisation. In this instance the project is based on the myth of the Argonauts. We read: “The argonautic expedition constitutes a fact of global [ecumenical] significance which transcends the limits of Hellenocentrism… [It is about] the ancient cultures of the countries through which the Argonauts passed. ... [It constitutes] a way of salvaging the cultural identity of every nation”.\(^{48}\)

\(^{43}\) UP-NC-gr/S  
\(^{44}\) UP-NC-en/S  
\(^{45}\) UP-NC-gr/S  
\(^{46}\) UP-NC-gr/S  
\(^{47}\) UP-NC-gr/S. Interestingly enough, in this case, the revival of the ancient tradition as proposed would actually be upsetting the core of the myth since the tradition is based on an announcement of siege of a city now located in Turkey (Troy).
Whether such a treatment provides any assistance in removing a fixation with the past and dealing with the present remains in this paper an open question. As a sender puts it, “the dimensions, the limits and the possibilities of a meeting between ancient and contemporary world” should be further investigated. This meeting, though, could be further extended. The subtleties as well as the potential of such a conversation are intriguing. The question of them being upheld and supported during the projects’ development and actual performances remains open. Is ‘Greekness’ expanded through its conversation with other cultures and issues? Or is it rather that through the myth’s essential ‘Greekness’, Greek culture can be seen as universal enough to encompass different cultures? And how much room is left for the other’s genuine inclusion? The hope may be weak but such a differentiated treatment of the past/myths could possibly also be used in order to approach those puzzling ‘others within’.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this paper I investigated the uses of one of the main characteristics of ‘Greekness’, namely Greece’s link to Ancient Greece against the background of a conceptualisation of nationhood as either ‘civic’ or ‘ethnic’ as well as recent population changes in Greece and their implications. I then turned to cultural policy and the uses of such a theme in this context focusing on how much ‘ethnic/exclusive’ or not they are. Finally I tried to map those categories on a system of metaphors.

Real-life situations, testify in favour of the unpredictable ways in which people use what is expected of them. Alleged common ethnic routs do no necessarily work towards integration, a lot depending on which part of commonness one chooses to focus on. However, this is not an argument either in favour or against ‘the ethnic’. Instead of trying to eradicate anything ‘ethnic’ or even surrendering any hope of change to the ‘evil’ ethnic characteristics of the nation, it could be that we could focus instead on those ‘ethnic’, or any for that matter, characteristics of which one could make inclusive use. Actually it would seem that, to some extent, people already do so.

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48 UP-PC-gr/S
49 UP-NC-gr/S

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Thus, if changing ‘Greekness’ – however ‘ethnically’ or ‘civicly’ the latter may be defined – is difficult, using it differently may not be impossible.

References


Appendix

Coding system:

UP: Unsuccessful Proposal
SP: Successful Proposal
PC: Positive Consultation
NC: Negative Consultation
No: No Consultation
YP: ‘Yes, provided that…’; positive consultation if specific criteria are met
SE: ‘Somebody else’s job…’; positive consultation but not suitable for the institution
AB: Aborted project
IP: In process of realisation
R: Already realised
/R: Receiver’s End
/S: Sender’s End
/P: Protest
/Int-S: Intermediary for Sender
gr-en: Language markers; Greek – English

Such markers pertain to the moment of material collection.