The 3rd Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium
Contemporary Greece:
Structures, Context and Challenges

14 – 15 June 2007

Parallel Societies:
An acknowledgement of failure
or a step towards integration?
The Greek paradigm.

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Abstract:

The study examines the formation of parallel societies of immigrants in Greece, using specific indices. It reaches the conclusion that there are no "perfect" (i.e. accomplished, completed) parallel societies in this destination-country. There are, however, characteristics that imply a marked move in this direction, the outcome of which cannot be foreseen. This evolutionary process is, as a rule, subject to different interpretations, ranging from the acknowledgement of failure to integrate immigrants on the basis of state policies (when a society aims to assimilate), to the confirmation of the society's pluralistic nature. A dominant perception of culture (*Leitkultur*) is often recognized and mobilized in order to eliminate the possibility of the formation of parallel societies. However, if polities insist on exerting strenuous demands on immigrants applying for Greek citizenship, it poses the question of: is this approach to immigrant societies in the best interests of the host country or would a move towards a flexible standpoint on parallel societies reap more benefits?

The theologian and thinker Reinhold Niebuhr once said about the constant search for ideal forms of social organisation: "*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference*" (Rand, 1974: 23). This aphorism, which seems to be rather conservative prima vista, is indicative of the moderation that is necessary when dealing with this task. It would be helpful, if the spirit of this observation could accompany one when reading this paper. The reasons for this will become more evident by the end of the text.

A social grouping is conflictual by definition. Although it may have positive outcomes on the whole, i.e. on a long-term basis, its current functioning is usually problematic. Given that this is the case within homogeneous communities, it becomes apparent that the situation is much more complex when pertaining to a heterogeneous society that is striving for a constructive cultural synthesis rather than mere coexistence.

Taking into account its constrictions, this paper will attempt to examine the possibility of applying the theoretical concept of parallel societies to the reality of contemporary Greece and present the results of this analysis within the context of today's historical circumstances.

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A problematic yet widespread term

The term "Parallel Societies" is in fact a German neologism (*Parallelgesellschaften*) that was created in 1996 for the purpose of describing secluded communities of immigrants in Germany. The father of this neologism is considered to be Professor Wilhelm Heitmeyer of the University of Bielefeld. Heitmeyer focused on the self-induced isolation of immigrants of Turkish or Islamic descent and highlighted the dangers of evading social inclusion. Heitmeyer explained that if for instance Islamic fundamentalists manage to direct the group – especially younger immigrants – there is a danger of creating a new wave of voluntary detachment from the social corpus, thus presenting the chance of creating parallel societies on the fringes of the mainstream society. The neologism came to the fore after 9/11 when it was suddenly thrust into the political spectrum through its use by high level politicians – such as the then Social Democrat Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the then leader of the Christian Democrats and today's Chancellor Angela Merkel – who spoke of a threat to the liberal and democratic foundations of the state (Janssen & Polat, 2006: 11 and Hiscott, 2005: 1-4).

However, the term has been highly criticised and remains problematic; not so much because of its implicit content but mostly due to its historical etymology. Some (Hiscott, 2005: 8-9) claim that the neologism replaced the term "state within a state" that was deemed politically incorrect due to its ambiguous usage as a Nazi propaganda tool against the Jews. Given that the term "parallel societies" could also be usurped to serve a similar agenda of discrimination, it has been dismissed by many. This opinion is probably fallacious, given that Heitmeyer is generally recognised as a moderate analyst and that his theoretical framework has gradually gained ground.

A strong argument, inter alia, with respect to this is the adoption of the concept by Thomas Meyer, professor of political science at the University of Dortmund and theoretician of the Social Democrats. Meyer has kept the core of Heitmeyer's idea and presented a matrix of hypotheses and criteria, the cumulative fulfilment of which would translate into a perfect parallel society of immigrants.

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Meyer (2002: 343-346) suggests five indicators for the examination of the formation of parallel immigrant societies:

i.   ethnocultural or religious-cultural homogeneity of an immigrant group

ii. economic segregation and civil society segregation

iii. duplication of majoritarian institutions

iv. (technically speaking) self-induced isolation as a result of discrimination

v.   if all four criteria apply, then spatial segregation also constitutes an indicator, e.g. isolation within a specific area of the city.

The matrix is quite challenging. It is also neutral when it comes to highlighting the dangers that can be created by the formation of parallel societies. This means that its implementation within the Greek context (as well as the German one) will almost certainly yield the conclusion that there are no perfectly formed parallel societies. In any case, approaching the issue with an ideal model in mind provides a certain amount of assistance. One of the advantages of the criteria checklist is that if a specific case fails to fulfil all of the given points, it is then not necessary to provide an in depth analysis of the rest. Specifically with respect to the last indicator, Meyer points out that spatial segregation can be substituted for other, alternative, non-geographical networks that nonetheless bind the members of a community; this could include mass media directed towards a specific minority.

Considering that Meyer's model is of an adequate standard to provide a holistic approach to the issue of immigrant communities, the following sections will attempt to use it in order to analyse elements of Greek society. Although not all parameters need to be examined (given that if one element is not fulfilled, the *whole* system is negated), we will attempt to use the model in its entirety. References to each indicator will be brief, given that our goal is not the presentation of in depth facts but the overall assessment of the model.

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Why the Muslim minority of Thrace does not constitute a parallel society

The multicultural character of Greek society is grounded on the coexistence of economic migrants, members of the Hellenic community from abroad, culturally diverse families, legally recognised minorities and other communities with a distinct cultural identity (I.ME.PO., 2004a: 11). It is important to point out that the model addresses economic migrants and their families, given that they are the ones that instigated the debate that resulted in the creation of the term "parallel society". The Muslim minority of Thrace does not fall within this category. The reason for providing a specific mention to this community becomes more evident bellow.

Will Kymlicka (1999: 16) has made the following useful distinction:

i. Ethnic groups (minorities) that historically reside in a given area within the "host" country; they have developed their culture to a large extent independently.

ii. Recently formed ethnic groups; their residing in a specific area, i.e. spatial isolation, is rather coincidental.

The Muslim minority of Thrace belongs to the first category. The second category could for instance encompass a group of Pakistani immigrants living in a specific Athenian neighbourhood. The main difference between the two cases lies in the historical specificity that led to these two communities residing in Greece. Further details regarding the Muslim minority of Thrace would probably be redundant. With respect to migration, it is well known that Greece switched from being a country of origin to a host country of economic migrants just after the fall of the Soviet Union. Economic migrants primarily come from the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe (including states that became member states of the European Union in 2004 and 2007) and developing countries of Africa and Asia.

It is important to interpret Meyer's model in the light of Kymlicka's distinction because the Muslim minority of Thrace fulfils a number of the model's prerequisites. There is no doubt about the group's cultural and religious homogeneity; irrespective of the group's ethnic homogeneity, which has been contested. The group's spatial isolation (many members of the Muslim minority

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reside in segregated neighbourhoods as well as in "culturally uniform" towns and villages of the area) could also denote incomplete economic isolation. Despite the fact that the community participates in the national circular flow of economic activity, it could be argued that quite many transactions display cultural and local characteristics.

In a similar way, the organisations and civil society that deal with specific issues of the Muslim community could also be described as isolated. These organisations also partly represent the duplication of majoritarian institutions. "Partly" because the group's participation in national and local affairs is safeguarded through the implementation of additional policies and measures. There are differing opinions with regards to the group's voluntary isolation as a result of discrimination. Nevertheless, we could assume that this is true for the sake of our reasoning.

The Muslim minority of Thrace is very similar to the archetype proposed by Meyer and Heitmeyer - more so than any other group examined within this paper. However, as we have already mentioned, these people are not economic migrants. The Muslim minority also fulfils another - according to Meyer (2002: 351) - important condition: there is a separate sphere of justice, i.e. a distinct set of values that leaves its mark on the group's perception of justice. Meyer bases the fulfilment of all parameters on this condition. This sphere exerts pressure - at times even through special jurisdiction - on the members of the community in order to deter them from taking advantage of their basic rights as provided by the national constitution. In addition, it promotes seeking justice via the group's judicial paths rather than through the mainstream legal system.

This remark has connotations of the case of the (pseudo)-Muftis of Western Thrace. Greece is the only European country in which Islamic Law (*Sharia*) is enforced despite the fact that it goes against basic tenets of the legal system, such as gender equality (Vasileiou, 2006: 6). Statute nr. 2345/1920[1] was abolished with

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[1] According to the statute, Muslim religious figures were supposed to be elected by the Muslim minority, following the example of Greek Orthodox clergymen. The act never came into effect and – given that Muftis exercise both religious and judicial power – the Muftis used to be appointed by the Greek government without any problems until 1990. In 1990 two members of parliament from Xanthi

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an Act of Legislative Content "On Muslim Religious Figures" [2], issued on 24/12/1990, without however providing a solution to the problem. On at least two occasions, the European Court of Human Rights has managed to appease Greek citizens, complaining of an abuse of their religious rights, without bringing the Greek state into disrepute.

The judicial system of the Muslim minority demonstrates the importance of including Meyer's "justice perception" concept as a prerequisite for the existence of a parallel society. We will now move on from the Muslim minority of Thrace and examine other cases within the contemporary Hellenic context.

Attica

Attica provides an ideal setting for drawing information with regards to immigrants. The 2001 census recorded 797.000 individuals that were not in possession of the Greek citizenship. Half of the immigrants live in the vicinity of the capital. Approximately 206.000 Albanians out of a total of 444.000 in the whole country state Attica as their area of residence. They amount to 55% of the total immigrants in the area. The percentage of immigrants in Attica is measured at 11% as opposed to 7,3% in the rest of the country. These figures (Panteion University, 2004: 3) demonstrate the suitability of the region as an area of examination of Meyer's parameters. It is also noteworthy that there is a breadth of research that has been carried out in the region on the issue of immigration that could also be used in order to form a better understanding of the situation. The general picture of the Greek situation provides us with increased flexibility when examining the issue, as it is clear that not all parameters are fulfilled.

After all, Meyer's additional parameter regarding a parallel perception of justice dispels all doubts with regards to the Greek situation. Apart from the Muslim minority, this parameter is not applicable to any other immigrant community in the country. Therefore, from the onset it becomes impossible to argue that there

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and Rodopi held an election without permission. Ever since, appointed Muftis coexist with illegally elected pseudo-Muftis (Kartalis, 2006: A20).

[2] Muftis are appointed for ten years by Presidential Decree, following a recommendation of the Minister of Education and Religious Affairs (Konidaris, 2006: A55).

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could be a perfect parallel society in Greece. Given that we already know the result of our forthcoming analysis, we can be brief in our description.

Indicators

It is obvious that there are cases of ethnic, cultural and religious homogeneity within the region that we are examining. It is easy to recognise Athenian communities of Pakistanis, Albanians, Nigerians and immigrants of other descent. Many of them are Muslim. This bond would be more apparent if they were able to practice their religion in an organised and formal fashion. Nevertheless, this is not possible, given that no mosque exists in Athens. This situation hinders our understanding of the city's immigrant community. After thirty years of negotiations and protests (Giannarou, 2006: 23), the creation of a mosque has finally been planned and is expected to be completed in 2008. Needless to say that this initiative enjoys the support of the Athenian Muslim community (Bouloukos, 2006: 14).

There are also indicators signifying the mobilisation of a parallel civil society. Immigrants belong to associations and organisations formed on the basis of professional interests or ethnic origin. There are also associations and organisations wishing to encompass immigrants in general, such as the Greek Forum of Migrants. The creation of these associations has been facilitated by a 2006 Presidential Decree regarding the "Adaptation of Greek legislation to Council Directive 2003/109/EC, concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents". The decree ensures that immigrants have the right to organise themselves in such groups and associations. It is also worth mentioning that, at least on a theoretical level, civil society is boosted by the existence of printed and electronic media specifically targeted to immigrants.

Conditions leading to economic isolation are rarely manifested in a large urban area. Interests and business exchanges are interlinked and carried out so rapidly that there would have to be a truly concerted effort to induce the economic isolation of a specific group. Relevant research has shown that there has been no such effort (National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2004 and INE

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GSEE/ADEDY, 2004). The geographical placement of immigrant businesses in specific areas of the city cannot be seen as an indicator that induces economic isolation [see maps from (Kolios, 2003), in (Panteion University, 2004: index)]. These businesses are for the most part targeted to the mainstream public. The fact that specific immigrant businesses tend to congregate in the same area is probably the result of lower rents in the area as well as the feeling of security that is created by being in proximity with each other. It is also important to note that a large number of immigrants are in the employment of Greek businesses (INE GSEE/ADEDY, 2004: 272-280). All points indicate that there is no segregated immigrant economic system.

Majoritarian institutions do not really double. For the time being, immigrants do not have any strong institutional representation (apart from civil society) that could demand authority from the local or central government. There is also no duplication regarding non-majoritarian institutions like courts and independent authorities. It is for this reason that it is assumed that there is no parallel sphere of justice within the Athenian context.

Voluntary isolation due to negative discrimination probably does exist, given that this phenomenon can also be found in homogeneous communities. It is however, pertinent to make a distinction between: voluntary isolation, the action of discrimination and the experience/perception of discrimination.

Negative discrimination exists for instance on the part of Greek employers who, when asked about their stance with respect to migrant workers, are either neutral or negative towards them, expressing their conviction that economic migrants are to blame for the unemployment and lowered wages of Greeks (National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2004: 59-62). Immigrants experience discrimination either due to the prejudices of local population or due to the institutional framework that allows discrimination, for instance on the basis of citizenship (Delithanassi, 2006: 28 and Bielefeldt, 2006: 6).

Voluntary isolation may also be the natural result of immigrants forming subgroups within their core group, based on criteria such as their education level. According to recent surveys, most immigrants have completed their

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primary or secondary education (Panteion University 2004: 53-54, INE GSEE/ADEDY, 2004: 246). Another reason for voluntary isolation is marriage between individuals of the same culture or religion (Janssen & Polat, 2006: 12-13). Finally, voluntary isolation may result from an individual being supported by a network controlled by the group, which means that the individual would not require assistance from a third party (INE GSEE/ADEDY, 2004: 272-273) [3].

The parameter of spatial isolation is of minor importance. Given that not all parameters are fulfilled, there is little importance in the geographical isolation that can be found in Votanikos, Kerameikos, Plateia Theatrou or elsewhere within the centre of the city or elsewhere (Panteion University 2004: 44). What is important is that there are no perfect parallel societies of economic immigrants either in Attica or the rest of the country [4].

Could parallel societies be dangerous?

With respect to the outcome of the creation of perfect or incomplete parallel societies, it could be argued that the non-existence of parallel societies would theoretically facilitate the assimilation of immigrants, with or without the help of a dominant perception of culture.

Meyer (2002: 360-365) points out that the formation of parallel societies could result in both hindering the individual integration of a migrant as well as being negative for the society as a whole, given that parallel societies not only support their members but also greatly limit them. This process is managed by the elite members of the groups, whose primary concern is the protection of their distinct identity. As we have seen however, the preservation of cultural attributes may at times be in opposition to the fundamental rights enjoyed by individuals and can also lead to questioning the rule of law. When one reaches this point, the line between questioning the social status quo and witnessing events like the ones that take place in the Parisian suburbs is dangerously fine.

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[3] An individual could require assistance at any integration stage. Baldwin-Edwards (2004: 324-329) makes a distinction between three essential stages: accommodation and employment; joining existing groups and settling down; forming ethnic communities and/or assimilation.
[4] Clear-cut parallel societies do not exist in Germany either (Bade, 2006: 5), except maybe for city-gangs with ethno-cultural features.

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Given that our goal is the co-development of social conditions by both mainstream and immigrant communities based on a fair arrangement (Walzer, 1983: 105), it is imperative that all citizens should be allowed to freely develop their personality in order to be able to pursue their aims within a framework of true liberty and justice. In order for this to take place, immigrants must join a moral and political community as equal members. They need to be "taxed" with the role of partaking in the collective decision-making process and the conviction that their destiny is as important as anyone else's must be imprinted in the collective mind (Dworkin, 1998: 192-309). In other words, the objective is to safeguard a minimum level of self-determination, which is also the reason why cultural diversity should not be an end in itself (Bielefeldt, 2006: 11).

Leitkultur: An answer to parallel societies?

Leitkultur, meaning a leading cultural ideology i.e. a dominant perception of culture, constitutes the opposite of the parallel society model. Its promotion is a means of prevention when multiculturalism or parallel societies are deemed unwelcome.

There are two basic theories pertaining to the integration of immigrants (Halm & Sauer, 2006: 19). The first one is based on the possibility of equal participation while retaining cultural differences, while the second one necessitates abandoning cultural attributes in order to achieve equal participation through assimilation. The first theory requires a state that is neutral with regards to regulating the co-existence of cultural minorities and the mainstream community. The second theory requires that the state maintains a dominant cultural model while also protecting the basic rights of minorities (Ostendorf, 2002: 121-131). The first model represents the French mode of thought. The second model is "implemented" in the Anglo-Saxon world, discussed greatly (yet not really implemented) in Germany and some times it is quite popular in Greek debates.

The term *Leitkultur* (which was coined during a period of increased fear over Islam) can mean that the immigrant is called upon to adopt and promote the basic values of the host country (e.g. through the citizenship test in Germany)

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and to recognise the multitude of elements that bind him/her to the majoritarian society. This system could however be linked to rigid integration policies and present a minority with the dilemma of either assimilating or being excluded (Bielefeldt, 2006: 5-9).

An alternative approach

Based on the above, we can conclude that parallel societies can be dangerous when they constitute incomplete stages of the integration process or pockets of immigrants that the majoritarian society has failed to integrate. Some of their elements however, as well as elements belonging to the concept of *Leitkultur*, could play an important role in a moderate eclectic approach.

Parallel societies can be constructed in cases where multiculturalism is allowed to develop without a plan, i.e. without a long-term strategy and appropriate integration policies, either because the state is incapable of formulating such policies or because neutrality has become an end in itself. There is no such thing as a dangerous social grouping *per se*. A grouping becomes dangerous when it meets existing social problems. In other words, as Shakespeare has written (Booth, 1977):

> *The summer's flow'r is to the summer sweet,*
> *Though to itself it only live and die,*
> *But if that flow'r with base infection meet,*
> *The basest weed outbraves his dignity:*
> *For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds;*
> *Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.*

The secular character, which is so highly prized by countries such as France, is not under dispute at this point, but what is becoming increasingly apparent is that secularism does not equate to indifference (Devers, 2005). Secularism has a dual character: on the one hand it dictates a non-religious public sphere and on the other it is translated as a neutral stance of the state with respect to religion (La laïcité dévoilée, 2004).

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Rainer Geißler, a sociology professor from the University of Siegen, has suggested a model of managing multiculturalism on the basis of seven fundamental principles (2003: 21):

i.   Acceptance of the beneficial outcomes of ethno-cultural diversity.

ii.   Explicit recognition of the right to cultural difference.

iii. Cultural equity and mutual tolerance, without this excluding a hierarchy of cultural identities with that of the host country retaining the highest level.

iv.   The "security and contact" hypothesis. The minority community's support increases an individual's self esteem and feeling of security, which enables him/her to branch out to other ethnic and cultural groups.

v.   Unity within diversity". The limits of a core of fundamental values and rules (e.g. constitution, common language) mark the boundaries between acceptable and unwelcome multiculturalism. Everyone has to accept the primacy of the core values, whereas the definition of compatible particularities and exact boundaries are a matter of political discussion and compromise.

vi.   Equal opportunities. A combination of the liberal (*status negativus*) right to being different with the right of equal participation (*status activus*).

vii. The so called "management hypothesis". Sustainable multiculturalism is not a random occurrence; it is the outcome of certain policies.

This model is characterised by theoretical adequacy, though - practically speaking - it requires long-term structural planning. Its breadth is congruent with the fact that the term "social cohesion" is often used as a synonym for the term "integration" (Panteion University, 2004: 5), implying that communities with effective social cohesion and inclusion strategies also integrate immigrants successfully. This correlation may in fact give good reason for a holistic approach of immigrant integration issues. After all, this question is a political one, i.e. a problem that should be tackled by the political community rather than merely a …parallel issue.

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