

Discussion Paper No. 9

The Constitution of the Greek-Americans

Peter Bratsis

August 2003

**The Hellenic Observatory
The European Institute**

London School of Economics and Political Science

Acknowledgements

This paper was made possible by a research grant from the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Queens College, and a research fellowship from the Hellenic Observatory. It is based on a talk given at the London School of Economics on November 26, 2002. I would like to thank Chris Binns, Costas Douzinas and Yannis Stavrakakis for their insightful and useful comments on that talk. John Bowman, Andreas Karras, Lenny Markovitz, and Eleni Natsiopoulou have read an earlier version of the current paper and have provided important comments and suggestions. Kevin Featherstone and Dimitris Papadimitriou have been kind enough to read the paper and provide useful criticisms and suggestions.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Fried and the Baked

The Discrete Charm of the Greek-Americans

The Greek-American Work Ethic and Family Life

Religion, Superstition and Totems

Friends, Language and Leisure

The Symbolic Order and the Mapping of the Greek-American Everyday

Interpellation and the Political Community

Conclusions

Works Cited

The little strains of daily life will support him in his decisive discovery more than great intellectual convulsions will. Having first eaten *couscous* with curiosity, he now tastes it from time to time out of politeness and finds that “it’s filling, it’s degrading and it’s not nourishing.” It is “torture by suffocation,” he says humorously. Or if he does like *couscous*, he cannot stand the “fairground music” which seizes and deafens him each time he passes a cafe. “Why so loud? How can they hear each other?” He is tortured by that odor of mutton fat which stinks up many of the houses. Many traits of the colonized shock or irritate him. He is unable to conceal the revulsions he feels and which manifest themselves in remarks which strangely recall those of a colonialist.

-Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

Introduction

The ideas that underpin most of what follows were first formulated in a theoretical essay on national identity (Bratsis 2000).¹ That paper argued that two significant problems plague most all theories of national identification, first, a lack of understanding regarding the relation between people’s lived experiences/everyday lives and their tendency to identify as part of a community and, second, the relationship between the everyday activities that may underpin a particular identity and the intensity of that identification. The paper went on to outline an approach for explaining these dynamics by building upon Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation and the psychoanalytic insights on sublimation and identification, especially as developed by Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek. At the conclusion of that paper, I noted that a brief case study of the Greek-American identity was planned as an initial empirical application of the approach that had been outlined so as to show that it was workable and in order to help in the further revision and refinement of the approach. Thus, this brief examination of the Greek-American identity was initially conceived as little more than a pilot study that would inform more rigorous studies in the future and as a small demonstration that the infamously abstract ideas of Althusser and Lacan could be applied to empirical research.

¹ This paper can be found online at http://web.gc.cuny.edu/csctw/found_object/text/pic.htm.

As a discussion paper, however, this examination of Greek-American identification is more focused on the field of Hellenic studies rather than the larger theoretical arguments from which it is derived. At the risk of sacrificing some breadth and conceptual clarity, this initial, ongoing, and tentative examination of Greek-American identification is presented here in the hopes of furthering some questions and areas of research within Hellenic studies. In particular, there are three areas of inquiry within Hellenic studies that are directly related to the substance of this essay. Firstly, as an attempt to understand the relationship between everyday activities and identification, it is an effort to expand contemporary efforts to explain the modern Greek identity. Whether in the tradition of post-colonial studies (Gourgouris 1996) or along more Marxist lines (Tsoukalas 1999), recent attempts to explain the rise of the modern Greek identity have centered on how elites and socio-political processes have conspired to produce the reality of the modern Greek ethnos. This is perhaps most clearly evident in Stathis Gourgouris' *Dream Nation* where the writings of such figures as Korais, Makriyiannis and Seferis are analyzed and probed in the attempt to explain how it is that the imagery and meanings that underpin the existence of modern Greece were produced. There is no doubt that this is a most valuable project and a necessary step in overcoming the long tradition of nationalist historiography that has plagued Greek social science. What is missing in this type of explanation is the role of the masses. We are left with the image of elites shaping and directing popular perceptions and alliances at will. Although the words of poets, politicians, historians and philosophers are important, they are only important to the degree that they resonate with and are taken to heart by the masses. Any rigorous explanation of the modern Greek identity must not only examine all the symbolic manipulations and political projects that play a part in this process of identity formation but also those experiences and everyday realities that make it likely and rational for individuals to accept and internalize the political and ideological project of

the elites. In the explanation of how an ethnos is constituted, the habits and passions of the non-elite are as necessary as the utterances and goals of the elites.

Secondly, the degree to which individuals identify with a particular identity and the libidinal function of that identification is a particularly salient question when it comes to Hellenic studies. From the diplomatic aftermath of the Macedonian fiascos of the 1990's to the satirical portrayal of Greeks in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, Greeks are often perceived as irrational, extreme and chauvinistic when it comes to national and ethnic identities. There is no doubt that there is much hypocrisy contained in these perceptions and often they function as little more than a fig leaf to cover the nationalism and chauvinism prevalent within the cultures and politics of those who consider themselves more civilized and refined. None the less, it is also true that often Greeks derive much libidinal satisfaction from their identities. Greek flags fly over diners throughout New Jersey and those who suggest that anyone should have the right to call themselves Macedonians or lay claim to the legacy of Alexander the Great are not likely to be popular figures within Greece. Accordingly, there is a continuing need within Hellenic studies to come to terms with this phenomenon and provide causal explanations for this rather persistent and significant dynamic within Hellenic culture.

Finally, as a paper that is focused on explaining what causes someone to identify as a Greek-American, it is an expansion of the questions that can be found within academic writing on Greek-Americans. Whether focused on providing a comprehensive history of Greeks in America (Moskos 1980) or an overview of Greek-American participation in some area of American life such as labor (Georgakas 1992) or formal politics (Kitroeff 1994), the literature on Greek-Americans is usually silent on explaining when and how someone comes to categorize and identify themselves as Greek-American. Although it may be the case that living in the United States and having a 'Greek' last name qualifies one as a Greek-American for the purposes of some statistical measure, from the perspective of those who they may categorize as 'Greek-Americans' things are

not so simple. For example, many Greek immigrants in the United State may very well take offense to the term and consider themselves to be Greek, not Greek-American. Similarly, the differences and tensions between those who categorize themselves as Greek versus Greek-American can often be extremely important political factors. This became very obvious in the aftermath of September 11 when a significant schism developed between those who consider themselves to be 'Greek' (in Greece and elsewhere) and sympathized with some of the motivations behind the attacks versus those who consider themselves to be 'Greek-American' and considered the position of the 'Greeks' to be a betrayal. In short, although there is been a significant amount of descriptive research on Greek-Americans, there have been no attempts to uncover what causes people to consider themselves Greek-Americans and how the substance of this identification functions relative to the Greek national identity or other identifications within Hellenism.

The findings and analysis that follow are based on a small series of interviews with college students in New York City who identify themselves as Greek-American. The immediate goal was to identify what everyday practices are experienced by the interviewees as being Greek-American in content and to begin an explanation of how these practices function to constitute someone as a Greek-American and also function as the source of enjoyment that becomes displaced onto the identity. The data from the interviews has been organized into sections corresponding to different areas of everyday life. In each of these sections below, those practices that seem to be of libidinal value are identified and the ways that they are categorized and experienced by the subjects are noted. In the section following the descriptions, these practices as a totality are discussed and, based upon the patterns in the ways that the practices are categorized, the symbolic order that maps and gives a national meaning to these practices is deduced and discussed. In the concluding section, the implications of this initial empirical exploration towards

the issues raised in this introduction and future empirical examinations of the Greek and Greek-American identities are discussed.

The Fried and the Baked

A significant ensemble of everyday practices and source of enjoyment entails food and eating. What are those foods and eating practices that Greek-Americans enjoy and how do they categorize and organize these practices along ethnic-national lines? A significant distinction seems to be that of Greek-American food as opposed to Greek and American foods. There is a tendency to identify ‘American’ food as that which is fast and convenient, as one of the interviewed noted, “Your chicken patties, your quesadillas, ready food, quick food, fast food.” Similarly, American food was also equated to ‘finger food’ and foods that don’t involve a lot of sauces and ingredients: steaks, chicken fingers, and buffalo-wings. Concurrent with this distinction is the idea that Greek food is somehow more wholesome and involves more time and preparation, the culinary talents of the Greek mother were also often noted and it seems that almost everyone believes their mother to be a great cook.

Within the domain of ‘Greek’ foods we also find a clear distinction between what differentiates Greek and Greek-American foods. Greek-American food is different not so much because of any differences in actual ingredients and style but because of the differences in quantities. The cheese pies here are huge, it is noted, when compared to those found in Greece, “At Athens Cafe the cheese pies are bigger than the plate, the corners are sticking out of your plate.” A similar distinction is noted when it comes to gyros and *souvlakia* (like a gyro but with cubes of meat, usually pork, rather than strips of or minced meat). Although some stated that the gyros in Greece are more tasty, the descriptions of eating the American versions are very direct regarding the enjoyment derived from them, “Big sandwich, you don’t know where to start, you attempt to eat it and it falls apart, it gets messy, the grease all runs all down your hands.” The enjoyment operant from the excess of the size itself is purely American, the gyro is so big that it is

hard to handle, the grease runs down your hands, it is messy, probably not too good for you, but, none the less, very pleasurable.

The Discrete Charm of the Greek-Americans

When it comes to manners, politics, and cultural attitudes, Greek-Americans view themselves as decidedly genteel. All the interviewees noted that Greeks in Greece tend to be rude and obnoxious, especially when it comes to Greek-Americans. “The Greeks think we are naive and stupid, they only want our dollars when we go there.” The typical Greek quality of *filotimo* (a notoriously difficult term to translate, it refers to the hospitality Greeks have towards others) is seen as increasingly lacking among Greeks in Greece, explained by their increasing Europeanization. By contrast, they see themselves as much more authentic practitioners of *filotimo* precisely because they do not live in Greece and are able to retain this traditional virtue.

The genteel character of the Greek-Americans is embodied in a wide range of practices. Bad service from retail clerks, waiters, and bureaucrats was noted and contrasted to the polite and proper service found in the United States. Also of importance was the lack of political correctness by Greeks in Greece, a few stories were told regarding comments Greeks would make regarding the physical characteristics and appearance of tourists and passers by. All the interviewees found Greek attitudes towards politics and political discussion particularly disturbing. “I don’t understand why they were so angry at me, don’t they understand that Clinton bombed the Serbs, not me. They get too emotional about these things.” Heated and antagonistic political debates were described as common to the Greeks but as something that the Greek-Americans found distasteful. Much preferred was the more ‘American’ practice of either not discussing politics at all or discussing it in more detached ways. Alternatively, and this is obviously a function of those interviewed being New York City residents, the interviewees saw themselves as being more refined and ‘American’ than most Americans because they live in New York City and are thus much more in tune with and respectful of the multi-

cultural nature of American society than Americans who live in places like “Montana and Oklahoma.” Similarly, when asked about the attitudes towards Greek-Americans by other Americans, all responded that Greeks are well liked and respected. They partly attributed this to the friendly and good-natured ways of the Greek-Americans and the lack of any negative characteristics of Greeks in America. As one person responded, “Can I be a little bit racist? I mean, when you watch the news it is always some Black or Hispanic that creates problems and crime, never the Greeks. So what do Greek-Americans do for others not to like them?” In this way, the Greek-Americans pride themselves on being polite, culturally sensitive and relatively urbane when compared with the images they have of some Americans and Greeks.

The Greek-American Work Ethic and Family Life

Family life and the working day both seem to be important sources of enjoyment. When it comes to Greek-American family practices, the closeness of the family is often noted. What is interesting is the ways that this closeness is demonstrated. The best expression of the closeness of the Greek-American family supposedly lies in the fact that Greek-American parents never charge their children rent. “With most Americans, when their children become eighteen years old, they either throw them out of the house or charge them rent.” Although it was noted that some other ethnic groups share this family closeness, primarily Italian-Americans, Greek-Americans experience parental altruism as a ‘Greek-American’ characteristic and source of pride and satisfaction. Concurrently, they view the work-ethic as also being a product of family life and something that distinguishes them from the Greeks. Although paying rent to one’s parents is attributed to the anomalous ‘Americans’, the degree to which Greeks rely upon their parents is also seen as being undesirable. It was noted that Greek-Americans are much more appreciative of higher education and of the virtues of work than are the Greeks because of the tendency of Greek-Americans to work, even while they are students. “I think we are much more dedicated to education. I mean, in Greece they don’t even go to classes

much and no one ever works. They just sit around drinking coffee and they let their parents feed them. All of us here not only go to school we also work. We are more serious students.” The tendency to have a job seems to be a significant point of libidinal satisfaction and this is also taken as a sign that Greek-Americans are more serious as students. A similar distinction is made regarding the tendency of Greeks to not work after they graduate, “They will just live at home with their parents until they find a job they like, we here will do all kinds of jobs even if we don’t like it because we do not see work as a bad thing.”

Religion, Superstitions and Totems

The repetitions and rituals associated with religion and superstitions appear to be of some libidinal value. All the interviewees stated that they do not attend church services. When questioned further, all noted that they go for Easter and Christmas but that it does not count since going for these occasions is more a function of the ethnic culture rather than anything having to do with religious beliefs. None of the interviewees were attempting to hide their attendance, they took it as a given that everyone attends services on these days. All those interviewed wore some sort of religious or quasi-religious jewelry (either a cross or a blue stone, used to protect against the ‘evil eye’). All also tended to place a stone to protect against the ‘evil eye’ in their car and displayed the Greek flag on some part of their car as well (a practice that is extremely common). The one partial exception to this was one person who removed the ‘evil eye’ protector from her car after a string of accidents and since then has had no accidents. When asked if maybe the stone was bad luck, she said that she was certain it was only coincidence but she decided to do away with it none the less.

All those interviewed also noted the pleasures of the religious ceremonies themselves. The chanting, the smell of the incense, the taste of the bread given out during mass, the cathartic feelings that stem from confession, and the feeling of

community that religious gatherings foster.² This was consistently understood as not being a function of religiosity but of aesthetics. “I like going to the church during the holidays because of all the chanting, the robes the priests wear, the smell of the incense. You don’t have to be very religious to like all these things.”

Friends, Language and Leisure

All of the respondents attended Greek parochial schools for all or most of their primary education. It was noted that this was extremely important for them but they did not stress any school rituals and practices. They stressed the friendships they had formed and their continuing tendency to socialize only with other Greek-Americans. “My friends from Greek school are like my brothers and sisters, we still hang out together and will always be close.” The typical forms of leisure seem to be very limited and predictable. All noted that they go out with their friends at least twice a week. This either entails going to Greek coffee shops or, on the weekends, discos. A typical outing seems to be going to a cafe and drinking a *frappe* (iced instant coffee that is shaken so as to have a thick foam on the top). Very rarely it was noted do they eat any desserts or have anything else other than coffee. When going to a disco, it was also very predictable in that it involved contemporary Greek pop music and quasi-traditional Greek dances, especially the *tsiftetili* (also very popular with other cultures in Asia Minor, especially Turkish and Israeli). What was significant in this regard is the lack of any other forms of leisure. Always going out with other Greek-Americans, always drinking the same kind of coffee, always listening to the same kind of music and participating in the same kind of dancing.

When in Greece, all the interviewees noted that they felt much more American there than when they are in the United States. It was beyond doubt for all that they were

² It should be noted that the Greek-American student organization at Queens College, where all of the interviewees were students, is titled the ‘Greek-Orthodox Club’. It sponsors weekly visits by a priest who hears the confessions of students and a priest is present during most public events in order to offer blessings and ‘spiritual leadership’.

much more comfortable and familiar with ‘American’ culture than with ‘Greek’ culture. Also universal was the inability to explain why this is the case. All the interviewees found it impossible to identify any specific reasons why they felt this way. Some noted that because they do not live in Greece they will feel less Greek than those that do but could not give any particular reasons why they would feel so different simply because they find themselves in a different country.

The Symbolic Order and the Mapping of the Greek-American Everyday

All these practices noted above and found in the everyday lives of Greek-Americans are experienced by those interviewed as pleasurable. Family life as well as eating, going out with friends, attending religious ceremonies, dancing, and displaying totems, are all practices from which Greek-Americans derive enjoyment. The practices in and of themselves, however, are meaningless in the absence of a symbolic mapping of them and their corresponding categorizations. What the interviews demonstrate and what psychoanalytic theory consistently argues is that only in relation to some ‘other’ do the symbolic values of such practices become clear. In order to understand how individuals categorize everyday practices and identify what it is about these practices that they find to be enjoyable, questions must constantly be posed in terms of what it is about the ways that ‘others’ enjoy that makes these other forms of enjoyment anomalous. In the case of the Greek-Americans, the enjoyment of the Greeks in Greece constitutes one ‘other’ in comparison to which we can identify what Greek-American enjoyment is and the enjoyments of WASP-Americans tends to function as another privileged ‘other’. It is false to assume that the ‘other’ in the formation of the national identity is always to be found outside the territorial limits of the nation-state. German Jews represented a very significant ‘other’ in the constitution of the German national identity in the 1930's. In the contemporary imaginary of the United States, welfare recipients also function as a significant ‘other’ best identified by their lack of self-discipline and aversion to work. So it is with the case of Greek-Americans that WASPs function as an ‘other’ when it comes

to enjoyment. They do not care about their children, are money hungry and, we could add, like to play golf and eat mayonnaise and sliced white bread that comes in plastic bags. In relation to these various 'others' that appear in the sections above, we can deduce the symbolic order that categorizes and organizes all these everyday enjoyments of the Greek-Americans.

The totemic displays to be found on the cars, clothing, and living rooms of Greek-Americans seems to be the most general and clear expression of the enjoyment of identity in itself. This is a very characteristic American practice. Given the movement against the 'melting pot' mentality and the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism, identity itself becomes a source of enjoyment and pride. This is a quality never found among Greeks in Greece where the idea of multiculturalism, despite all efforts by the EU, is still not widely accepted and one would be hard pressed to find a flag ever glued to a car or hanging from a balcony. The fact that Greek-Americans gain enjoyment from placing Greek flags on their cars, or wearing flag pins is an attribute that is a product of the contemporary American symbolic order. It is not particular to them and most ethnic groups in the United States have similar habits: Irish, Italian and Croatian flags can be found on automobiles throughout immigrant neighborhoods such as Queens.

In a very similar context, we see that the formal declaration of national sub-categorizations becomes a key link in establishing the symbolic mapping of everyday practices. Those interviewed experienced socializing with their friends, and bonding with their fellow students in primary school, as Greek-American practices because the contemporary American symbolic order tends to categorize people along ethnic lineage and origins. The nature of friendship and comradeship need not be any different from what is true of all other people, just the fact that the individuals involved and the schools and spaces where these friendships take form are labeled Greek-American is sufficient for them to be experienced as practices that are 'Greek-American' in content.

Beyond these rather overt and easily discernable ways of categorizing and giving meaning to practices, we have all the other more nebulous practices that have already been identified, from the eating of oversized cheese pies to parents not charging rent to their children. Here we see some patterns in how Greek-Americans categorize and map the libidinal practices that constitute them as part of the American national community. There is the tendency to experience and categorize those practices that are manifestations of the work-ethic as very American. The willingness to work on the part of young Greek-Americans, the tendency to work while going to school and the fact that they strive to be economically independent from their parents are all experienced as ‘American’ attributes. There is no question that this ensemble of practices is a great source of satisfaction for the Greek-Americans and helps constitute them as part of the national community.

Similarly, all those practices that are understood as being manifestations of politeness and sociability are also experienced as ‘American’ attributes. The requisite detachment when it comes to political discussions, being friendly towards strangers, not engaging in criminal behavior, and treating other individuals and cultures with respect are all seen as being characteristic of the Greek-American community. In part, this stems from the idea that Americans are much more capable of deferring satisfaction. The Greeks are incapable of being polite and offering good service to their customers so as to secure more long-term business, they are out for the quick buck and detest having to serve others for money. Blacks and Hispanics also are less capable of deferring satisfaction and are much more likely to engage in criminal behaviors and other such ‘un-American’ practices that illustrate this inability to properly defer pleasure. Since the Greek-Americans are not so blinded by the desire for the quick buck and instant satisfaction, they are more open and friendly towards strangers. They see the long-term benefits to them as well as others in being polite and embracing multi-culturalism. Family life also is a prime example of this ability to defer enjoyment in that parents

willingly sacrifice for the long-term benefit of their children and the children themselves will also sacrifice their own short-term enjoyment in order to work and contribute to the economic health of the family. In this way, the work-ethic and the ability to defer pleasure function as complementary principles with which the symbolic order maps many of the everyday practices of the Greek-Americans.

The emphasis on size and convenience when it comes to food is another organizing principle. Serving both as a metaphor for the ‘in-between’ status of Greek-American culture *vis-a-vis* Greek and Anglo-American culture and as a sign of the degree to which the Greek-American everyday practices are structured by contemporary popular culture, the dual characteristics of size and speed are the principles through which food gains its ‘Greek-American’ character. Greek-American food is thus similar to Greek foods in terms of ingredients and taste but is very American in terms of its size and convenience. Similarly, Greek-Americans derive enjoyment from ‘American’ fast-food in general and this, as well, is experienced as an American attribute. In this way they feel a separation from the ‘authentic’ Greeks, who Greek-Americans project as having an aversion to fast-food, and this serves as a link to other Americans because of their shared pleasures from fast food consumption. The Greek-American may feel some guilt because of this desire for fast-food and because of their distaste for many of the traditional Greek dishes, dishes that they think they should like and which they suspect are much healthier for them.³ None the less, the love of oversized cheese pies and gyros as well as greasy hamburgers is something, regardless of their ability to control the consumption of, that functions as an important ‘American’ ritual and everyday practice.

³ Not surprisingly, it is often the case that Greek-Americans have an aversion to traditional Greek dishes when they most differ from the standard foods found in the United States. For example, rabbits, pig jelly, butter milk, goat heads, many soups made from intestines and organs, fish heads, snails, prickly pears, and okra are usually despised by Greek-Americans.

The question of religion is an interesting one because, despite claims to the contrary, it seems to be viewed from a primarily religious point of view. The attendance of religious services on only the major holidays is viewed as being insufficient as a manifestation of true belief. Concurrently, the religious rituals themselves are viewed as being pleasurable and the idea that god does not exist is seen as unthinkable (all stated that no Greeks are atheists because everyone must believe in some kind of god, those that claim to be atheists only do so to be controversial and create debate). This not only conforms to the heavy presence of religiosity in American popular culture but also reflects the centrality of the neighborhood church to Greek-American socialization. Traditionally, the only 'public' space common to Greek-Americans has been the church and they are notoriously much more conservative and devout when it comes to religion than are Greeks in Greece. In this way, religiosity is viewed by the Greek-Americans as a significant element in the constitution of their community and not simply some property of individuals or something that can be separated from the question of ethnicity.

Finally, we see that many examples of contemporary Greek popular culture are readily transplanted here. Thus, drinking Greek-style iced coffee and dancing modern Greek dances in Greek-style discos are common to Greek-Americans in New York City. In part, this is also a hybrid of popular cultures. Certainly, going to night clubs and to sidewalk cafes is not alien to New York popular culture. The 'Greek' character of these practices in this case is simply an articulation of practices that produce some levels of social distinction and exclusivity within contemporary American popular culture. These practices represent the clearest attempts at self-selection and constitution in that what is most attractive about them is their semblance of cultural authenticity and ethnic exclusivity. In this sense, it is not unlike the prevalence of golf playing and cigar smoking among many factions of the Anglo-American bourgeoisie. Through these libidinal practices, Greek-Americans attempt to distinguish themselves from other Americans through practices that are unique and culturally exclusive but eminently

reconcilable with American popular cultural tendencies. Thus, cafes and discos are very functional for young Greek-Americans in search of members of the opposite sex or for leisure activities that bring them into contact with other members of their community and function as a common point of reference for the whole community.

Interpellation and the Political Community

We find that there is an entire ensemble of everyday practices that the Greek-American interpellation is founded upon. Three basic types of everyday practices were identified, those practices that involve the totemic and habitual celebration of identity (displays of flags and so forth), those practices that are not celebrations of the identity but, rather, are everyday pleasures that come to be categorized and experienced as particular to a given identity (cheese pies and work routines), and those practices that are consciously instituted and practiced as a way of producing social distinctions and group cohesion (drinking iced coffees and dancing at 'Greek' cafes and discos). It may be the case that those practices of the first type are central in the continued reproduction of identity but they are also symptoms and manifestations of the interpellation itself. Only an already interpellated subject is able to gain satisfaction from flag waiving. Moreover, the displacement of libido that takes place in this revelry of identity is itself likely only a stand-in for the broader ensemble of practices that function as the foundation of national enjoyment. This revelry of identity is thus, at least in large part, something that only makes sense and can be explained as an outcome of interpellation and as a displacement of libidinal value to identity. The later two categories of practices are much more fundamental in the interpellation of national individuals. These include a great number of everyday practices, from eating and drinking to working and socializing, that are of libidinal value and which come to be mapped and imbued with a national meaning by the symbolic order. Participation in these practices becomes the material foundation of the interpellation and the enjoyment operant in these practices gives the identity its causal weight and social significance.

Some of these practices seem to gain their nationalist meaning through their incorporation into fundamental myths regarding the national character. Thus, some of the everyday practices identified as central in the Greek-American interpellation gain their nationalist character by being incorporated into the myths of the American work-ethic and the ability of Americans to defer their passions and pleasure seeking in order to secure their own long term interests and the communal good. Those practices of a more self-selective character that function to produce cultural distinctions and group cohesion among the national sub-groups also display a strong nationalist function. By further ritualizing and formalizing the existence of national individuals as members of sub-groups, the general status of these individuals as members of the national community is augmented and further cemented by the relatively homogenous practices and strong libidinal connections operant in their own immediate community. Thus, the coffee drinking and dancing of the Greek-Americans, the golf playing the cigar smoking of the corporate middle-Americans, the football mania and barbeque traditions of Texans, and so forth, function as strong libidinal bounds to both the immediate cultural community as well as the more abstract and nebulous national political community in the sense that each sub-group reproduces and defends its proper symbolic and cultural space as their version of proper 'American' life.

In all cases, practices and their libidinal content are paramount. To refer back to the opening quote from Memmi, it is the real enjoyment operant in the everyday practices themselves that explains the tendency of well intentioned colonialists to assume a racist stance towards the colonized. In the case of the Greek-Americans, it is their participation in and repetition of a nebulous ensemble of everyday practices that constitutes them as national individuals and binds them in a libidinal way to the political community. Although discourse and the symbolic order are also very important variables and a necessary component of any attempt to explain the national political community, causal primacy lies with the practices that gives weight and substance to the words and symbols.

Conclusions

This foregoing is only a brief experimentation, an attempt to highlight some unasked questions and begin the process of addressing them. The limited number of interviews presented here and the homogenous character of the interviewees preclude any overarching substantive conclusions regarding the specifics of which practices may or may not tend to result in individuals recognizing themselves as Greek-Americans. Moreover, there were no measures of the intensity of this identification relative to other identities (occupational, familial, political, and so on). Thus, a mapping of the libidinal weight of the Greek-American identity relative to the other identities that these individuals also possessed was not attempted. None the less, there are very clear implications for future research on Greek and Greek-American identification.

There are two overarching principles that are foundational to the study that was attempted here. Firstly, identities should not be treated as formal categories. We can always define Greeks or Greek-Americans in terms of birthplace or the spelling of their last name or immigration status. This is of no interest to social science, it is the stuff of bureaucrats and vulgar statisticians. Social science is not in the business of deciding who is or is not Greek or Greek-American, its task is to explain how and why someone recognizes themselves as this or that identity. Secondly, this tendency to recognize oneself as a given identity cannot be reduced to language and symbolic significations. Beyond the meaning producing activity of intellectuals, there are the lived experiences of concrete individuals, an ensemble of everyday practices and repetitions that constitutes the material substratum of consciousness and identity. Thus, the typical elitist emphasis on philosophers, poets, statespersons, and the like is insufficient to explain identification.

As 'imagined' as identities may be, they are not disconnected from the social activity of actual people.

In terms of Hellenic studies, these principles and their application lead to a new set of research questions and methodological tasks. A rigorous explanation of the modern Greek identity demands phenomenological studies of everyday life. The significance of grocery shopping, wine drinking, and all other elements of everyday life need to be understood and added to our knowledge of the role of intellectuals and their utterances. Concurrently, the causal weight of the Greek identity in terms of how the identity causes actions (tendency to support a particular political project or movement, fight in a war, and so on) should be examined in terms of libidinal displacements. It may often be the case that the participation in some political project can be explained in terms of self-interest. For example, it may very well be the case that many peasant participants in the Greek Revolution were acting out of their desire to decrease their obligations to the local tax farmers. However, many times, the link to self-interest is very weak, such as with mass demonstrations protesting the use of the name Macedonia or the ill-fated military offensive into Asia Minor. When faced with the challenges of explaining these tendencies, we can either revert to arguments that the masses are irrational, seduced by the words of elites into some form of false-consciousness, or we can seek the rational foundations for these actions. This paper has suggested that the route to an explanation of these actions lies in the practices that underpin national identity and the libidinal values of these practices.

The examination of Greek-Americans suggests certain patterns in how practices may be categorized and explained. It is likely that activities can be identified that are

overtly nationalist in their content but only make sense if we assume that those involved already strongly identify with the nation and are deriving enjoyment from this. These practices, everything from flag waving to fighting in wars, are indications of the causal weight of the identity and exactly the kinds of actions that the approach demonstrated here would seek to explain. Other activities will appear as banal everyday practices but will tend to be understood and experienced as fragments of the ethno-national enjoyment. In the brief study here, the eating of cheese pies, working, religious practices, and similar actions were discussed but there are many potential practices that could fall into this category, from sports to music to fishing. Lastly, there appears to be a third kind of everyday practice that is self-selective in that it is particular to cultural subgroups and these subgroups rely upon them as a way of reproducing themselves and maintaining their separation from other segments of society. In the American context this may manifest itself in the form of Greek-discos versus country-club parties versus poetry readings. In the Greek context this may manifest itself in the form of differing regional foods and dances, recreational activities (tennis versus hunting versus breaking plates at music halls), or styles of dress. What this paper suggests is that these self-selective practices also function as ways of cementing national identification by providing a concrete and relatively homogenous community as a stand in for the more abstract notion of the national community.

Lastly, the differences between Greeks and Greek-Americans highlighted in this paper suggest that contemporary Hellenism is very diverse and that significant fissures and contradictions exist within its various sub-groups. This is likely to be the case not only between the various Greek diasporas and Greeks in Greece but also between groups

within Greece. The emphasis on the everyday suggests that differences within everyday life will help explain differences between competing identifications within Hellenism. Even if you read Seferis and Kavafy day and night, the differences between participating in the everyday life of Athens as opposed to Alexandria, Chicago or Crete will very likely result in significantly different conceptions of Hellenism. The task at hand is to go beyond the idealist and descriptive accounts of Greeks, Greek-Americans, and the like, and to begin the process of understanding how our social being helps determine our consciousness and identities.

Works Cited

- Bratsis, Peter. 2000. Political theory and the problem of the national individual; or, the dangers of baseball, hotdogs, and apple pie. *Found Object* #8: 67-95.
- Georgakas, Dan. 1992. *Greek America at work*. New York: Smyrna Press.
- Gourgouris, Stathis. 1996. *Dream nation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Kitroeff, Alexander. 1994. Diaspora-homeland relations and Greek-American lobbying. *Journal of Modern Hellenism* #11: 7-32.
- Moskos, Charles. 1980. *The Greek Americans*. Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Tsoukalas, Constatine. 1999. European modernity and Greek national identity. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* Vol.1 #1: 7-14.