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***SENTIMENT AND MANIFESTATION  
OF GREEKNESS  
IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC***

**DIPLOMA THESIS**

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**PRAHA 2010**

## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.

Souhlasím s tím, aby práce byla zpřístupněna veřejnosti pro účely výzkumu a studia.

V Praze dne

Bubulina Spanosová

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank everybody who participated in my reasearch and provided me with the information necessary to write this thesis.

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Mgr. Petra Ezzeddine for her invaluable advise.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for their support.

# Summary

## In English

In the late 1940s and 1950s Czechoslovakia accepted nearly 14000 political refugees from Greece. In this paper we examine the Greekness of those who chose to stay in the Czech Republic. We analyse their current sense of ethnic allegiance and how it is manifested, after more than 60 years of co-existence with Czechs. Our analysis is based on cultural elements (language, folklore, music, food, religion), which appear to be important factors of ethnic identification for Greeks in the Czech Republic and Greeks in general. We juxtapose the Greek and the Czech-Greek perception of them. We attempt to illuminate the singularity of the Czech-Greeks and uncover the conditions that led to it. Thus we simultaneously acknowledge the varied Greekness of the Czech-Greeks as legitimate.

## In Czech

Koncem čtyřicátých a v padesátých letech dvacátého století přijalo Československo přibližně 14000 politických uprchlíků z Řecka. V této práci sleduji “řeckost” těch, kteří se rozhodli zůstat v Čechách. Analyzuji jejich současné vnímání etnické sounáležitosti a způsoby, kterými se projevuje po více než 60 letech společnéhožití s Čechy. Analýza je založená na kulturních elementech (jazyk, folklór, hudba, jídlo, náboženství), které se jeví jako důležité faktory pro etnickou identifikaci Řeků v Čechách a Řeků obecně. Stavíme vedle sebe způsoby, kterými je vnímají Řeky a Čecho-Řeky. Snažíme se objasnit jedinečnost Čecho-Řeků a odkrýt podmínky, které ji způsobily. Tím pádem zároveň uznáváme pozměněnou řeckost Čecho-Řeků jako legitimní.

## Key words

Greekness, Czech-Greeks, refugees, immigrants, identification, tradition

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# Introduction

## *“Discovering” the Greek minority*

Ever since I was little, I remember my father telling me of how he used to dance traditional dances at the Greek celebrations when he was a student in Prague<sup>1</sup>. I never thought of asking him how come there were enough Greeks in Prague in order to have traditional dance groups and organise celebrations. I thought they were all students like him. Later on, when I moved to Prague, the fact that I knew of a Greek community<sup>2</sup> here made me take it for granted. Then I heard of a president of the Greek Community in Prague and of a magazine called “Kalimera”. It started to seem a bit odd that there are so many Greeks here in the Czech Republic and that they are organised. It’s not a typical place of migration for Greeks, it’s not like the USA, England, Germany, South Africa or Australia where people I knew often had relatives.

Growing up on Cyprus, I was aware of the Greek nationals living abroad and I always thought that they were people who left their homeland to find a better life. The only refugees talked about - at least on Cyprus where I grew up - were the ones who forcefully left Asia Minor in 1922 and the ones who likewise left the Northern part of Cyprus in 1974. I had never even imagined there were political refugees in the Czech Republic. I started learning more about them when I began working as a waitress in a Greek restaurant owned by Serbs. As a waitress, I still wasn’t in much contact with them. I found out more about Greeks in the Czech Republic by working as a tour guide. Most of the Greek speaking guides are descendants of the political refugees or they are somehow related to them. They were curious as to where I came from and how come I speak Greek, and so I also learned more about them and started socialising with some of them who are closer to my age.

When I decided to write my diploma thesis about the Greek community in Prague, I met with a Greek friend of mine, who had been doing historical research about the community in order to get some pointers as to where to start from. He advised me to go to some Greek evening. These are evening celebrations with Greek

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<sup>1</sup> My father is from Cyprus and he was a student in Czechoslovakia in the years 1976-1983.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, when referring to the Greek community as an institution we spell “Community” with a capital “C” and when we refer to it as a group of people we spell it with a “c”.

music and dancing, usually organised by the Greek Communities. A tradition of Greek evenings exists in the Czech Republic ever since the refugees settled in the country. I knew celebrations were often organised but since I don't listen to Greek music and I haven't danced any Greek dances since I was in school, I had never been to any in the past. In April 2009 such an evening was organised to celebrate the March 25th national holiday at Hotel Belvedere in Prague. I didn't want to go alone since I didn't know what it would be like and so I asked some girls that I was teaching Greek at the time and who adore everything Greek, if they wanted to come. My brother and his girlfriend said it might be interesting for them to come too. The weather was nice, the mood was right and so we went.

It was Saturday and the Greek evening was set to start at 7 p.m. We were late, which as some say, is a common Greek characteristic. We entered the hotel and there I saw two girls in their twenty's I knew from working as a tour guide. Being members of the *Akropolis* dance group, they were both dressed in traditional costumes. They were fixing their makeup in front of a large mirror and one of them was smoking a cigarette, another typical Greek characteristic as some would say. We took the stairs to the main hall and we stumbled on the tickets counter. The event wasn't for free; there was an entrance fee of 200 Czech Crowns. We were informed that if we wanted to take part in the lottery we'd have to buy extra tickets but we didn't. The hall was full. Fortunately my students had come on time and they sat around a table at the balcony. This way we even had a good view of what was going on.

Everybody was ready and the festivity could start. A few words were pronounced on stage by the president of the community. It was mainly about officially welcoming the new Greek teacher from Greece and thanking the retiring one. A little boy had his birthday and so a birthday cake was brought to him. Then everybody was ready to welcome the Greek traditional dance group *Akropolis*. They came in



*The Akropolis traditional dance group at Hotel Belvedere*

singing a slow, somewhat mournful melody while slowly dancing to it. For about thirty minutes they danced a few traditional dances. As I later found out, due to lack of costumes only twelve of the twenty six members of the group performed: three men and nine women. The women were wearing three kinds of traditional costumes and the men were wearing the same kind of traditional costume. This variation of costumes isn't usual in Greece but it is necessary when there aren't enough costumes of the same kind at the dance group's disposal.

When the dance group left, technicians and musicians started preparing the stage for the long awaited local music group, which was meant to entertain the people till late hours. They started playing Greek songs, old and new and people began to dance. I could see many Czechs. A couple of them I had taught Greek at some point. There also were many Greeks that didn't look familiar at all and they looked particularly Greek. They were on the balcony with us. They were obviously teenagers judging by their clothing and behaviour. I was thinking that they must be some repatriated cousins of members of the Greek community, who have come from Greece to the celebration, but as it turned out it was a High School from Crete. The students were in Prague on a school holiday and they had arranged with the president of the community to attend the festivity.

At some point, I turned around and saw my brother chatting with an older woman. She looked around the age of 80 something. My brother, who isn't shy at all, immediately introduced me to her saying that I was writing something about the Greek community. I spoke with Marina for a while and then the daughter of a friend of hers came looking for her, thinking that something might have happened and so we went downstairs. I asked Marina if I could call her and arrange a meeting and so she gave me her phone number. Her sister wrote it down because Marina couldn't see very well. She wrote it down incorrectly as I later discovered and so I still had to look her up in the yellow pages. Fortunately I knew her last name and so it wasn't difficult. Everybody was very friendly and in a good mood. I met a few other people at the Greek evening; I chatted about the subject of my diploma thesis with some and arranged a couple of meetings to discuss it further.

When the Cretan school departed, few people were left and most of them were Czech. The Cypriot singer of the music group told me a few months later, that there are less and less people at each festivity. There also was some kind of tombola with gifts such as a ticket to Athens, vouchers to Greek restaurants in Prague, clothing, olive oil, Cypriot wine, Greek spices etc. It was basically a selection of what various, mostly Greek, businessmen, businesswomen and organisations could offer. We left after the tombola. I took some photographs during the



course of the evening as mementos, and I kept the ticket and the list of possible winnings from the tombola.

By attending this evening, my stance toward the Greek community changed. Until then I was a peripheral Greek speaking onlooker and since then I became a researcher and an interested person, for a certain period of time. The evening served as a turning point for me and it marked the beginning of my research.

## ***Research positioning***

The Greek minority in the Czech Republic is scattered. The largest concentration of Czech-Greeks is in Northern Moravia. I live in Prague and since there are about 800 Greeks living in the city and there is a Greek Community, I decided to conduct my research in the city. There isn't a Greek neighbourhood in Prague. Greek people moved to the city independently on each other, when life situations allowed them or forced them to do so. The people that moved to Prague didn't necessarily know each other before they started meeting in Prague at the Greek evenings and at various other occasions. The community was more populous and more active in the past but most of its members returned to Greece. The Greek Community of Prague has been and is being reinforced by Greek citizens who chose to study, to work, to get married or simply to live in the Czech Republic. It is interesting that Kostas Tsivos, the founder of the Prague Greek Community's quarterly, the *Kalimera*, as well as its former president, Christos Mataragkas, and its current president, Tassula Zissaki-Healey, all fall under the latter category. Kostas Tsivos has written many articles concerning the history of the Greek refugees and is currently working on his PhD on the subject and Tassula Zissaki-Healey has, among other, published a book called "*Hellenism in the Czech Republic*" (Zissaki-Healey 2009) and is currently chief editor of the *Kalimera*.

Various papers, bachelor and diploma theses have been written on the subject, many books and articles have been issued and an oral history project is currently being initiated<sup>3</sup>. It would seem that it is a subject exhaustingly exhausted but during my preparation for the subject, I didn't come across any kind of reading that would refer to the community as I got to know it. Most works are of a historical nature and even those that are of a more sociological character speak of the minority mostly in

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<sup>3</sup> The EVZ foundation, Geschichtswerkstatt Europa in cooperation with the Charles University in Prague.

terms of history. In terms of culture they speak of Greece but not so much of the minority. My goal was to approach the subject in a way that would allow for the true nature of the community to speak for itself.

I couldn't of course interview every single Greek in the Czech Republic or Prague. I limited my scope of informants to Greeks with common refugee background. This choice was made in order to differentiate Greek citizens, who immigrated to the Czech Republic willingly. Their narrations would be misleading since their relation to Greece is of a different nature than the one of the refugees and their offspring. The majority of the Greek minority is consisted of refugees and their progeny, and so the results of my inquiries would be closer to the true condition of the Greek minority in the Czech Republic. I approached members of the Greek community, attempting to include members of three generations of political refugees, and men and women equally. What they had to have in common was the fate of the political refugee or to be offspring of some. For the purposes of this paper, we sometimes refer to the political refugees as Czech-Greeks, which is a characterisation often used by them as well.

## ***Research methodology and problems***

I conducted my research during April - June 2009 in Prague. Since there isn't an area, in which the research subjects would be concentrated, I resolved to interview as primary method of research and participant observation as secondary method, when and where possible. The interviews were conducted at various places such as cafeterias, restaurants, the homes of the informants and one interview was conducted via *skype*. The place was always chosen by the interviewee. I outlined the subject and created a guide list that would assist me in concentrating relevant information. My purpose was to receive as much information as possible about each informant's personal history, about religious belief, about customs and traditions preserved, about the influence of communism, contact with Greece and the sense and construction of identity. The guide list created was thus thematic and under each subject I formulated certain questions, which would help in obtaining the information necessary.

My original goal was to show how communism and lack of contact with Greece had culturally alienated the Greek community of the Czech Republic from

Greece. This was something I had observed but I didn't feel comfortable in sharing with all my informants from the beginning. I shared it only with the ones I had an already established communication. I didn't want to challenge their sense of Greekness because this could cause either an exaggerated attempt to prove it or a feeling of hostility towards me as a researcher. My research was escorted by a feeling of guilt from my part, since I wasn't going to attempt to bring up the Greekness in them but point to the lack of it (as I then thought was the case). When I spoke with people who expressed their love for Greece and how they feel being Greek, my guilt grew larger. This feeling affected my research in the fact that I wasn't "pushy" enough with my informants during the course of interview. Another problem emerging from this issue was that when I approached the informants I simply told them I was writing a diploma thesis on the Greek minority and I didn't specifically outline my subject, which resulted to the informants concentrating mainly on history and their feelings towards the Czech and Greek people. At the end of each interview I managed to "squeeze in" the questions that hadn't been answered. I had decided to do the best of what I had and if necessary to complete the research with further inquiries during the course of writing.

The interviews were semi-structured and thematic. I formulated a number of questions under each theme on my guide list, which I posed during the interview in case the informant hadn't already answered them in the course of the narration. I let the interviewees speak freely and I made notes on the guide list. During interview I used my guide list as a selective protocol. I noted what I thought was relevant to my research. After the interview I made notes and wrote down various stories the informants had told me, various details and observations, which weren't necessarily useful but could prove to be useful later on. A tape recorder would be of much assistance but even though I carried one with me, I didn't use it. By not using one, I made it more difficult for myself to process and use the data collected. I didn't use a tape recorder because as I was myself twice interviewed by fellow students, I realised I didn't feel comfortable to be recorded. I had to consciously surpass the odd feeling of having opinions and thoughts recorded, by reminding myself that it was for a good cause, and by reminding myself that I should say whatever I believe without fear, because there is nothing to be afraid of anyway. The main reason why I decided not to use a tape recorder was that I am not a complete outsider to the Greek community in

Prague and it is a small one. I didn't want people to be afraid of speaking because they didn't know whom I know and whom I'm friends with.

As mentioned earlier, my goal was for the interviews to be as casual and informal as possible. I contemplated on getting an informed consent signed from the interviewees, but since I wasn't going to record anything and I knew most of them personally I didn't consider it necessary. Moreover, for the purpose of my research, it was also not necessary for me to acquire any information that would be delicate or that could be harmful to anybody. If I thought it would be I would not use it in my paper. In any case the true names of the informants are not disclosed and only basic personal data such as age, place of birth, parents' nationality, country or city of residence is given. My goal was to do interview as if it was part of the process of doing participant observation: to make casual conversation, to take notes when possible and to take further, more detailed notes after the end of the interview/conversation. The guide line papers I took with me at each interview played thus the role of the anthropologist's notebook and my notes on the interviews are actually more like fieldnotes<sup>4</sup>.

The interviews lasted from about 2 to 5 hours. The interviewees were quite open and they sometimes talked about personal problems, which were often irrelevant to my subject. Most of them concentrated on personal and family history and memories from the past. The younger ones especially, spoke extensively about their problems with and opinions about Czech and Greek people. Political and religious belief, family traditions and traditions of the community were subjects they didn't expand much on and so I had to ask further questions about these subjects. Sometimes the interviewees expected our encounter to be a formal interview, where I would pose questions and they would answer, but it usually didn't get them long to get used to conversing informally.

During the course of writing the paper, I contacted members of the community and other people via e-mail or telephone or by meeting and discussing, to clarify certain issues or to back up some hypothesis or conclusion. I also informally discussed some issues with acquaintances at the Greek evening in which I participated and at other occasions. I had the opportunity to attend two Greek evenings, one organised by the community and one organised by individuals and there, I shortly practised participant observation and made fieldnotes. Since my communication with

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<sup>4</sup> We use different fonts in order to differentiate between information derived from fieldnotes and analysis.

members of the Greek community is a longer one, I also use personal memories of discussions I had with people in the past.

My existent knowledge of the community was a factor that assisted me, especially in outlining the subject of my research. I didn't enter an unknown community looking for something to write about. I approached a community familiar to me in order to find out more about it and test my hypothesis. The fact that I speak Greek and Czech and that my father is Greek Cypriot and my mother is Czech, might have also assisted in my communication with the interviewees, but I cannot be sure of that, since I cannot fully experience any different situation other than my own. Any language, Czech or Greek, wouldn't be a communication barrier, since Greeks living in the Czech Republic are often bilingual. What assisted me was the fact that I knew most of the people personally and so, in most cases, I didn't have to use liaisons to get to them. When I had to, I did it through people I knew well and knew me well so that the interviewed subjects would feel more comfortable with me. We can say that another criterion for choosing informants was an already established familiarity with me or a third, intermediate person familiar to both sides.

As already noted, my familiarity with the community also created a barrier in my research: I didn't use a tape recorder, I didn't get an informed consent signed and I felt guilty of attempting to point to their lack of Greekness while I knew most of them felt to be Greek. It is difficult to evaluate my personal position as a researcher, since I don't have much to personally compare it with. Maybe if I was a complete outsider I would be more professional in my approach and I wouldn't be thinking of all the ethical problems that led me to act as I did. On the other hand maybe if I was an outsider without Greek roots, who entered the houses of people with a tape recorder in one hand and a paper to sign in the other, people would be alienated and they wouldn't behave normally or they wouldn't speak as they did. However, I can say that in spite of all the ethical and practical difficulties, my own biculturality and familiarity with the community provided me with a point of view that actually opened the subject for me. Being a "halfie" but by not actually sharing the same background with the community, I was provided with an insight unaffected by "myths" of Greece and Greekness, as it could be in the case of a Czech researcher or a Czech-Greek researcher. Naturally, as any other researcher's position, being a "halfie" has its positive and negative aspects. As Lila Abu-Lughod (1986) describes in *Veiled Sentiments*, she was accepted into the Bedouin society more easily by being half

Arabic but then she was also treated like one, which substantially affected and shaped her research. Lila Abu-Lughod's case is not only a bright example of how the researcher's position affects the fieldwork but also of how that, which appears as negative, can be used and turned into something unique.

This paper's subject matter is perhaps too broad and it probably could serve as material for more papers. However, when speaking of Greekness one has to at least attempt and analyse as many formative factors as possible. By limiting one's scope only on particular factors one only gets to partial conclusions. By analysing formative factors of Greekness as I encountered them, I attempted to draw a fuller and more accurate picture of the Czech-Greeks. It was necessary to look at the subject synchronically and diachronically and therefore references to the past are often. In order for the reader to understand the singular situation of the minority a historical and demographical account were also necessary.

# Historical background

## *The Greek civil war*

The Greek civil war of 1946-49 is one of the darkest chapters in Greek history. School books of modern history refer to it as a part of the Cold War. In the one we are referring to here, there is a small chapter of twenty lines (pp.145) about it<sup>5</sup>. The school book's subject is not only Greek but also world history, so one could say it is understandable that so little space is devoted to this particular string of events. Even though there is a detailed account of the role Greece played in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and a detailed account of the numbers of victims (pp. 118-125), the horrors of the civil war are contained within twenty lines, which the authors thought were satisfying. It is also mentioned that the psychological trauma the civil war caused to the Greek nation has been healed. Overall there is still great controversy surrounding the civil war and it shouldn't surprise us that history books don't get into details. It would be difficult to create a storyline satisfying both sides. The problem with the Greek civil war is that both sides were right and wrong at the same time. There were victims on both sides and atrocities were performed from both sides. For the purposes of this paper we will try to shortly outline the events that led to the civil war, the events that took place during and which, in their turn, caused the flight of about 100 000 Greek citizens.

Greece got involved in the Second World War because the Italians and the Germans needed it as a passage to Africa. The Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas said “*OHI*” (NO) to the Italians so they attacked Greece from the North. Greece resisted with surprising success and the Italians had to ask the Germans for assistance. The Germans, Bulgarians and Italians eventually conquered Greece. They entered Athens in April 1941. The Greeks resisted during the occupation. The resistance was mostly led by the communists who thus gained the sympathy of the people. The Greek Communist Party (KKE<sup>6</sup>) and other leftist organisations created groups of resistance as soon as the Germans entered the country. The main left-wing resistance group

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<sup>5</sup> High school modern history schoolbook: Ιστορία του νεότερου και σύγχρονου κόσμου Γ' Γενικού Λυκείου – Δ' Εσπερινού Λυκείου (Γενικής Παιδείας) Αθήνα: ΟΕΔΒ [online]

<sup>6</sup> The KKE was founded in 1918 and it is one of the longest functioning parties in Greece. In the election of October 2009 it gained a percentage of 7, 53% and 21 seats in the parliament, thus being the third strongest party in Greece after the socialist party PASOK and the Democratic Party [online]

called the National Liberation Front (EAM<sup>7</sup>) later founded the Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS<sup>8</sup>). Right-wing organisations like the National Republican Greek League (EDES<sup>9</sup>) were also created. Left and right-wing organisations often cooperated, but many times they sabotaged each others' efforts to establish some kind of order in the area they controlled (Nachmani 1990).

The "first round" of the civil war started in October 1943 and lasted till February 1944. During this time the guerrillas fought against the Germans and against each other. The British supported EDES in fear of the communists receiving power after the end of the war.

When in 1944 EAM was in control of about two thirds of Greek territory, it was apparent that the German occupation would soon come to an end and so the "second round" began. In October 1944 Churchill and Stalin signed the "Percentages Agreement"<sup>10</sup> in Moscow, according to which the UK should control 90 percent of Greece. The Greek exiled government with Georgios Papandreou as Prime Minister and with the accordance of the communists, agreed to the invasion of the British army led by Colonel Ronald Scobie. The British had meanwhile agreed with the Germans that their occupation army would leave without struggle. What was harder was the attempt to disarm ELAS. EAM and the government could not come to an agreement and so Colonel Scobie ordered the complete dissolution of ELAS by December 10<sup>th</sup> 1944. The leftists announced a general strike and on December 3<sup>rd</sup> they started a rally in Athens. A battle started over the control of Athens which was called *Dekemvriana*, the December upheaval. With the assistance of the British Units and the police, the right-wing groups won, but the conflict continued since the two sides did not come to an agreement. In February 1945, EAM and the Greek government signed the *Varkiza Agreement*, by which all paramilitary organisations were to disband, ELAS had to surrender all weapons within two weeks, amnesty was to be granted to ELAS soldiers, and a referendum about the form of the new government was to take place before the elections. None of the sides fully complied with the terms of the agreement and when new elections were announced for March 1946, without first holding a referendum, the leftists boycotted it, which of course led to an even easier victory for the unified nationalists, royalists and right-wing liberals. After the *Varkiza Agreement*, the right-

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<sup>7</sup> Ελληνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο, ΕΑΜ.

<sup>8</sup> Ελληνικός Λαϊκός Απελευθερωτικός Στρατός, ΕΛΑΣ

<sup>9</sup> Εθνικός Δημοκρατικός Ελληνικός Σύνδεσμος, ΕΔΕΣ

<sup>10</sup> More information about the percentages agreement on the *European Navigator*: <http://www.ena.lu>



wing regime started a series of oppressive actions against its opponents, the “white terror” as they called it. This caused them to flee into the mountains and get ready for warfare. In December 1946 they organised themselves as the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE)<sup>11</sup> and the “third round” was ready to begin.

In the beginning, DSE was supported by the neighbouring communist countries, especially Albania and Yugoslavia. The Greek army was supported by the British and after 1947 by the USA. Around Christmas 1947 Markos Vafiadis, the leader of the DSE, announced the “Provisional Democratic Government of Greece” known as the “Mountain Government”. The government in Athens issued special orders according to which more than 3000 people were executed in the years 1948-49 and tens of thousands were incarcerated. While the national army was getting much material support from the USA, Stalin didn’t want to overtly support the guerrillas in order to avoid USA military intervention in the Balkans. The 1949 disagreement between Tito and Stalin was fatal for the DSE. The Greek communists backed the USSR and Tito ceased his country’s assistance towards them. Markos Vafiadis, being a supporter of Tito, was abolished and taken as a prisoner to the USSR. His position was occupied by the General Secretary of KKE Nikos Zachariadis, a supporter of Stalin. The KKE was fractured and its army demoralised. The last battle of the civil war took place on the mount range *Grammos* at the Greek-Albanian border. The guerrillas were devastated and most of them left the country with their families through Albania.

The civil strife was very destructive. More than 50 000 people lost their lives and about 100 000 left the country, either following the KKE leaders or in fear of retaliation. War hostages were also taken across the border. Many were in a state of near starvation. The country had not yet recuperated from the damages of the Second World War and the civil war made the situation even more difficult.

## ***Journey to the People’s Republics***

The story of the Greek refugees that ended up in Czechoslovakia usually starts with the Second World War. It is not my goal to recount the stories of these people, but I’ll outline a few to better illustrate how some of them came to the Czech Republic and how their lives evolved in the new country.

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<sup>11</sup> Δημοκρατικός Στρατός Ελλάδος, ΔΣΕ

One of the oldest living members of the Greek community in Prague, Marina, was born in 1925 in a village of Central Greek Macedonia. She is of Aromanian origin. Her ancestors chose to stay in Greece while many relatives left for Romania in 1925. She travelled to Czechoslovakia as a children's escort in 1948. She was on the first transport from Buljkes<sup>12</sup>, the Greek migration centre in Yugoslavia. She and her family had moved there in 1946. Their village had been burnt down twice, once by the Bulgarians and the Germans and once by the Greek national army. Without having a place to stay and in fear of their lives, they escaped to Yugoslav Macedonia, where they worked until they moved to Buljkes. There she worked as a waitress. She would wake up at 3 in the morning and work until midnight. In 1948 she was chosen to escort a group of children to Czechoslovakia. Ten girls and two teachers were chosen. Five girls and a teacher were sent to Czechoslovakia and the rest to Hungary. They met with the children in Belgrade and continued by train. Marina worked in eleven boarding schools from 1948-1953. Her family had meanwhile been scattered in Eastern Europe. Her father had an accident and died in Buljkes; her brother was "taken by the fox", which means that he enlisted and was later killed in battle; her mother stayed in Yugoslavia, one sister ended up in Poland and the other one in Tashkent. Many families were similarly torn apart. After many efforts and pleas, Marina managed to transfer her younger sister from Poland to the Czech Republic and her mother to Tashkent to be with her sister. Marina met her Greek husband at the preparatory school for the University. They both obtained University degrees. They had a son together, who got married to a Czech woman and so the whole family stayed in the Czech Republic. She is currently living in Prague.

Ritsa was born in 1946 in Buljkes. Her mother is Greek from the region of Thrace and her father was Pontian, living in West Greek Macedonia. Her parents met in Buljkes and had her and her brother there. They joined the guerrillas together and Ritsa's father was killed in battle. In 1949 they had to evacuate Buljkes and so the children and their mother embarked on a ship in Albania, which took them to Poland. They spent the whole journey in the under-deck. The mother stayed in Poland where she remarried. The children were transferred to Czechoslovakia where they were placed in different boarding schools. They were reunited with their mother in 1953 when she went to Czechoslovakia and with the assistance of the Red Cross she found her children listed under their father's nickname, which he had been using in Buljkes. Ritsa went to a Technical Agricultural Economical School and she wanted to go to

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<sup>12</sup> In the summer of 1945, 1454 functionaries and fighters of ELAS moved in to the depopulated German village of Buljkes in Vojvodina. In the four years of its existence as a Greek community 27000 fighters, 5000 wounded and 22000 evacuating children passed through the village (About Buljkes [online]; Papadopoulos 1999: 29-30)

University in Prague to study Russian and Greek literature. She left without her parents' consent. They were afraid she might lose her moral values in Prague. They had even found her a Greek husband from the area they were living but she left for Prague anyway. She didn't want to marry a Czech man. She met her current husband at a Greek evening in Prague. They have two children together. The son has a Czech wife and is living in Prague and the daughter has a Greek husband and she is living in Athens. Ritsa's mother repatriated in 1976 with her husband and their two children. Ritsa and her husband are currently living and working in Prague.

Kostas was born in 1953 in Hungary. His father was Slav Macedonian and his mother is Greek. His parents were living there as refugees in the *Nikos Beloyiannis* village<sup>13</sup>. His parents had three boys and one girl. They moved to Czechoslovakia after the bloody events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. His father had died shortly before at the age of 28, he had meningitis. He gave blood to his son who was ill and then he died. They had relatives in Brno and so they moved there. There wasn't much space and each family had only a room. His mother had been wounded in the head when she was a fighter in the DSE and she was having epileptic seizures. She couldn't take care of the children and so they were sent to various boarding schools and the family scattered.



Map 1: The Geographical districts of Epirus, Macedonia, Thessaly and Thrace.

They met at their mother's once a year. Twenty years later she got married, she had a daughter and she moved to Greece. Kostas married a Czech woman, he had children and he is now divorced. Only he of his siblings speaks Greek.

<sup>13</sup> The construction of the village started in 1950 and it was meant to shelter Greek refugees in Hungary

Louiza was born in 1945 in a village of Central Greek Macedonia. She is of Aromanian descend. She moved to Czechoslovakia with her mother and brother at the age of 13 in 1958. Her father



Map 2: The prefectures of Kilkis, Pella, Florina, Kastoria and Grevena.

had already been in the country for ten

years. He was with the guerrillas and he was wounded in battle. They loaded him unconscious on a donkey to balance with a wounded nurse. He was thus transferred unconscious to Albania and then to the Czech Republic where he had 17 more surgeries. Her mother was left alone in the village to raise two children. In the beginning her father's letters weren't being delivered to them. When they arrived in Czechoslovakia, the children weren't feeling comfortable to call their father "dad". When Louiza got married (to a Czech man) they couldn't get an apartment and so as soon as they were granted permission to visit the USA, they left and they stayed there. She is currently living in Florida and she is a hairdresser. It was her dream to become a hairdresser but she wasn't allowed to make it happen in Czechoslovakia. Her mother is now a widow and she has been living in Prague since 1968. Her brother is divorced and he is living in Prague as well.

These few stories show how Greeks came to the Czech Republic in various time periods and at various ages. Most of them came from the Greek Northwest, mainly from the Geographic departments Thessaly, Macedonia, Epirus and Thrace (map 1) and particularly from the prefectures of Pella, Kilkis, Florina, Kastoria and Grevena (map 2). These areas were the ones most afflicted by the civil war (Tsivos 2009: 295). Moreover they were ethnically peculiar at the time. The population was a

mixture of Arvanites<sup>14</sup>, Aromanians<sup>15</sup>, Slav Macedonians<sup>16</sup>, a few Turkish families, some Sephardic Jews, native Greeks, and Greeks “from the East”. The latter came from Asia Minor and the Black Sea<sup>17</sup> as part of the population exchange among Turks and Greeks according to the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (Sloboda 2003; Hradečný 2007: 89-90). Each ethnic group had its own history, culture and dialect or language. The people that were transferred to Czechoslovakia were a *mélange* of all these ethnic groups with the Greek speaking prevailing.

### ***The transfer of the children: rescue or abduction?***

Many people were transferred willingly or forcefully from Greece through other countries (mostly Yugoslavia) to Czechoslovakia. In 1948 about 3900 children were transferred to Czechoslovakia. Many other were transferred to Hungary, Poland and Romania. A total of about 25000 children were transferred from Greece. After the Tito-Stalin friction and the capitulation of the guerrillas in 1949, about 1321 more children along with adult refugees were sent to Czechoslovakia. By the end of 1950 the number of political refugees in the country reached 12095 (Papadopoulos 1998: 19).

There is great controversy surrounding why and how the children were taken away. There are two terms used to describe the situation. The first, *pedomazoma* (gathering of children), have come to mean mass children kidnapping and it is widely and negatively connoted in the Greek minds with the Ottoman occupation<sup>18</sup>. The communists consider the actions of Queen Frederica of Greece as *pedomazoma*. She had created 53 shelters for children afflicted by the civil war. Children were being massacred by bombing, they bore witness to atrocities or became victims of such, they were starving and many of them were orphaned. The royalists used the term *pedomazoma* for similar actions of the opposing DSE. The general notion of the royalist-fascists (as the communists called them) was that the children living in refugee camps in the neighbouring communist countries were trained to fight against

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<sup>14</sup> Christian Albanians

<sup>16</sup> The second most populous group of Vlachs, behind modern-day Romanians

<sup>16</sup> Slavs living in Greek Macedonia. They considered themselves to be either Greek, or Slav Macedonian or Bulgarian. About 30% of the refugees in Czechoslovakia declared they had Slav Macedonian ethnicity (Hradečný 2007: 90).

<sup>17</sup> Pontians and Laz people

<sup>18</sup> The Turks used to abduct male Greek children and raise them as Turkish elite soldiers

the motherland. Another explanation is that the DSE was sending the children away so that their parents would be free to fight without worrying about them. Both sides prefer to use the terms *pedofylagma* (the royalists) and *pedososimo* (the communists) for their own actions. Both terms mean saving children.

The disagreement about whether the children were abducted or rescued is continuous. I was reading in the Greek Community's of Prague magazine *Kalimera* (August 2008, pp. 5-9), about the 2008 celebration of the 60 years anniversary of the first children's arrival in the Czech Republic. The cited event took place during the opening ceremony in Ostrava on June 28<sup>th</sup>. It seems that many people were offended when they were welcomed as "*children of the pedomazoma*". The author of the article asks "*who can be behind this attempt to pass on Frederica's legacy and who are "conspiring" to change the meaning of the anniversary?*" People protested and a member of the organising committee had to correct this mistake by saying "*We are not children of the pedomazoma, we are children of the pedososimo*". Obviously one should be very careful in choosing words to describe the events of the civil war.

The truth about what happened lies probably somewhere in the middle. Lysimachos Papadopoulos describes how in one case, the villagers decided to send their children away so to save them (Papadopoulos 1998: 20-23). Of course children didn't want to leave their mothers and it was a painful process for everybody, but they all thought it was better for them. There are many accounts of how dangerous the situation was for everybody. Gritzonas describes the horrors committed by the national army in detail (Gritzonas 1998). The side opposing the DSE, and which favours the term meaning abduction has also its sources. One of the most famous is a very controversial and influential book called *Eleni*, written by Nikolaos Gatzogiannis (Nicholas Gage) about his mother, Eleni, in which he describes how she was executed by the DSE in 1948, because she refused to surrender her children and plotted their escape (Gatzogiannis 1983)<sup>19</sup>. The author maintains that all facts and persons in the book are real.

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<sup>19</sup> The book was made into a film starring John Malkovich in 1985

## *In Czechoslovakia*

Czechoslovakia and other countries with a communist regime agreed to provide shelter for the children until General Markos<sup>20</sup> would win the war and “free” the whole country. The children arrived to Czechoslovakia in horrible shape. They were exhausted, dressed in rags, barefoot, ill and psychologically traumatised. The Czechoslovakian government gave them shelter in about 45 boarding schools mainly in North, North Eastern Moravia, in Silesia and in North, North Western Bohemia. The number of boarding schools was reduced to about 20 after 1950 and they were shut down in 1962. The children were placed in mansions, palaces and recreation homes in the country, formerly belonging to nobles, the Church or the Sudeten German. The Czechoslovakian government spent millions to provide shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment and education for the children. It is estimated that each child cost the state about 600 Czechoslovakian Crowns per month (Papadopoulos 1998; Botu, Konečný 2005).



*The Šilheřovice Chateau, a former residence of the Rothschild family, was used as a boarding school for Greek children in the time period 1949-1962 (Botu, Konečný 2005: 248-252)*

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<sup>20</sup> Markos Vafiadis, General of the DSE.

In Yugoslavia, officials had divided children into age groups and so siblings were often separated. When the children arrived in Czechoslovakia, they were



*Greek boys in quarantine at the reception camp of Mikulov, 1948  
(Botu, Konečný 2005: 41)*

first admitted into temporary reception camps and after receiving primary treatment, they were transferred to boarding schools according to their age group. Later on they moved from one school to another on the basis of their age or a qualification they might have chosen. When the adult refugees from Greece came to the country in 1949-50, they were placed in territories that were depopulated after the 1946 expulsion of the Sudeten German. These were mainly the districts of *Bruntál*, *Jeseník* and *Ústí nad Orlicí* and particularly near the towns of *Krnov* and *Žamberk*. The children were often transferred to schools near their family.

Staying at the boarding schools wasn't always a pleasant experience. Georgios Karadzos describes his stay at the boarding schools as a „*six year military service without weapons*” (Karadzos 2004: 28). Kostas (M, 1950, HU)<sup>21</sup> who attended 5 or 6 different schools said that many go on field trips there and they miss the schools but he doesn't have any childhood memories. He only remembers events that happened after he was 15 years old. He thinks it's a result of the schools. Some recognise him in pictures with his schoolmates but he doesn't recognise anybody. Kyros's (M, 1979, CZ) mother and siblings were being bullied at the boarding school and so his grandparents had to terminate their children's stay there. Marina (F, 1925, GR) who worked in 11 shelters, remembers that some children would pee themselves out of fear when they would see the headmaster. Some people

<sup>21</sup> In the brackets next to the names of the informants one can read their gender (M or F), the year they were born and the country (using international country codes) or place of birth.



have more positive memories from their childhood. Some of the boarding schools were marvellous estates in beautiful landscapes and the activities were amusing



*Children at the boarding school of Bechařov, 1950  
(Botu, Konečný 2005: 133)*

and related to Greece and Greek culture. Ritsa (F, 1946, Buljkes) for example looks back with nostalgia and she often meets with her schoolmates. They all miss those years.

The children didn't have any identification documents when they arrived. Many times they were listed under their parent's nickname or under a wrong identity and so it was often difficult for parents to locate their children or for siblings to find each other. Ritsa recalls how her mother found her and her brother in boarding schools, where they were listed under the nickname of their late father. Many people worked in the shelters and many worked to coordinate the efforts of the People's Republics governments. A key



*Children dancing with their teachers at the Sobotín boarding school, 1949 (Botu, Konečný 2005: 238)*

organisation was EVOP<sup>22</sup>, the Children's Assistance Committee, of which Lysimachos Papadopoulos was president in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovakian Red Cross and the Czechoslovakian-Greek Community, founded in 1946, also played a key role (Botu, Konečný 2005: 17).

There was a shortage of educators and translators but children were being taught in their own language at first and from the fourth grade also in Czech. Czech and Greek teachers were to cooperate while teaching. The Greek teacher was translating the Czech teacher's lesson, which had to be lectured as simply as possible. As a result, children learned Czech quite easily and quickly (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 167). According to the wish of the Greek communist leader Nikos Zachariadis, Slav Macedonian children were taught in their own language at school as well<sup>23</sup>. Education was considered to be of cardinal importance for the preservation of national identity among the children.

## ***The formation of Greek Communities and the Greek minority***

All adults and children that came to Czechoslovakia were first admitted to some temporary reception camp like the ones in *Mikulov*, *Lešany* or *Svatobořice*. They were disinfected, examined and provided with clothing and necessary equipment. They weren't examined only physically but also "ideologically". The KKE members cooperated with the National Security, the *StB*, in order to divide the refugees into politically trustworthy and not. Those in need of convalescence were transferred to hospitals, spa towns and sanatoriums. Those who were judged to be in good shape and ready to work were sent to the territories mentioned above. The communist parties of both countries had agreed to place the refugees in areas that were climatically similar to the ones they came from. Northern Greece is mostly mountainous and so are the districts of *Jeseník*, *Bruntál* and *Ústí nad Orlicí* (map 3). Refugees were evenly settled in villages in those districts. The officials paid special

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<sup>22</sup> Επιτροπή Βοήθειας του Παιδιού, ΕΒΟΠ. It was founded in May 1948 and it was known as *Le Comité Grec "Aide aux Enfants"* (Hradečný 2007: 53).

<sup>23</sup> Zachariadis had formerly promised autonomy to the Slav Macedonians if the DSE won, in order to ensure their military assistance. The position of the KKE towards the Slav Macedonian population of Greece was considered as treason. The Greek government does not recognize the existence of a Slav Macedonian minority in Greece and Slav Macedonian refugees are to this day being denied entry to the country. Some Slav Macedonians maintain that all children and all refugees were of Slav Macedonian ethnicity. This statement can't be historically backed up, since e.g. in Czechoslovakia the census shows that about 30% of the refugees were Slav Macedonians.

attention to avoid concentration of politically untrustworthy individuals in one place. They also attempted to keep families and relatives or people from the same village in



Map 3: the districts of Jeseník, Bruntál and Ústí nad Orlicí.

the same area (Hradečný 2007).

Soon after they were settled, a kind of local administration was created. The EPE<sup>24</sup>, *Committees of Refugees from Greece*, were formed by the KKE members. A coordinating committee was also founded, and it was called the *Greek Committee* (*Řecký Komitét*). Refugees from Greece were supposed to be employed in farming and agriculture just as they were back in Greece. Since their stay was considered to be temporary, the state policy was to concentrate and isolate the refugees. This particular policy proved not to be sustainable because the areas, in which they were concentrated and isolated, couldn't support them and so they started to be transferred for work. When it was obvious that the situation was to be permanent, they let them move freely (Sloboda 2003). First they moved to the cities in the "Greek" districts and later on towards more industrial territories like *Brno*, *Ostrava*, *Karviná*, *Třinec* and other. The communal life of the Greeks was led by the KKE authorities and was centred on events that promoted Greek culture and communist beliefs.

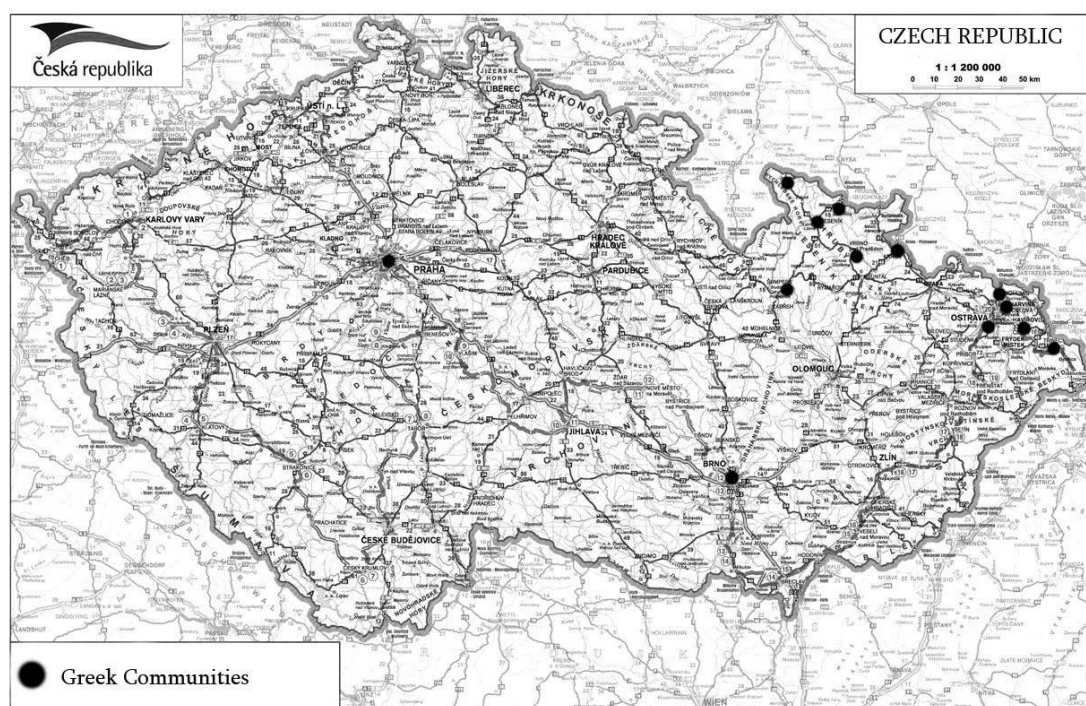
In the areas where the Greek refugees settled, there are institutions called Greek Communities, which were founded after 1990. In the 1970s and 1980s most

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<sup>24</sup>Επιτροπές Προσφύγων από την Ελλάδα, ΕΠΕ.

Greeks repatriated and the funding of the KKE in the Czech Republic was minimised (Botu, Konečný 2005: 470). In 1989 the KKE ceased its function in the Czech Republic. After the political change, the communities reorganised as non-governmental non-profit organisations. In 1990 the *Union of Greek Citizens of Czechoslovakia* was founded (by former members of the KKE organisation), which was shortly after renamed to *Union of Greek Communities* and from 1997 until today it is called *Association of Greek Communities in the Czech Republic* (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 222). We speak of Greek Communities and not of a Community because today there are thirteen Greek Communities in the Czech Republic. They are organised under the Association of Greek Communities in the Czech Republic. The Greek Communities are in *Bohumín, Brno, Havířov, Javorník, Jeseník, Karviná, Krnov, Ostrava, Prague, Šumperk, Třinec, Vrbno p. Pradědem* and *Zlaté Hory* (map 4).

According to laws No. 273/2001 and 320/2002 the Greek community obtained the status of a minority. The minority has the same rights as other minorities do. These are mainly: the right to associate, to use names and surnames in Greek, to give Greek names to official buildings, to towns, streets etc. that are connected with their history and culture, to use Greek in public offices and in court, to be informed on matters of elections in Greek, to be educated in Greek. Greek Communities also have the right to request funding from the state for the preservation of language, culture,



Map 4: The 13 Greek Communities in the Czech Republic

customs and tradition<sup>25</sup>.

## Demographics of the Greek minority

### *“Next year at the motherland”*

As mentioned earlier, a total of about 12095<sup>26</sup> refugees from Greece settled in Czechoslovakia by 1950: 6910 adults and 5185 children (Papadopoulos 1998: 68). In 1962, 15 years after the coming of the refugees from Greece, the Czech Red Cross, in association with the KKE, attempted a census. The census registered 13039 refugees of which 4465 were children and youngsters under the age of 15. A total of 8574 individuals filled up the questionnaires. 8452 declared to have Greek citizenship, 116 Czechoslovakian and 6 did not declare any citizenship. About 6752 (78.74 %) declared having Greek and 1812 (21.73%) declared having “Macedonian” ethnicity (Tsivos 2009: 294; Botu, Konečný 2005: 337). The governments of both countries were communicating in the early 50s about massively repatriating the refugees. A few were allowed to return but many were refused entry in Greece for national security reasons (Hradečný 2007: 149). By 1975 about 1226 refugees (probably Slav Macedonians) left for Yugoslavia, after Tito gave them a chance to settle in the Yugoslavian part of Macedonia. A total of 1703 individuals had left the country by 1975 (Botu, Konečný 2005: 410). Some were leaving but others were also coming to Czechoslovakia from other People’s Republics. According to the 1974 statistics of the Central Committee of Political Refugees, 14087 refugees lived in the USSR, 12013 in Czechoslovakia, 6378 in Bulgaria, 5605 in Romania, 4293 in Hungary, 7700 in Poland and 1493 in East Germany, a total of 51569 individuals (Botu, Konečný 2005: 412).

Based on the agreement between the “Mountain Government” and Czechoslovakia, the refugees’ stay was to be temporary. After the DSE was defeated, the post civil war Greek Government revoked the refugees’ Greek citizenship. They were thus cut off from all the social, economical and political aspects of their former

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<sup>25</sup> Information available on the web page of the Czech Republic’s Ministry of Interior

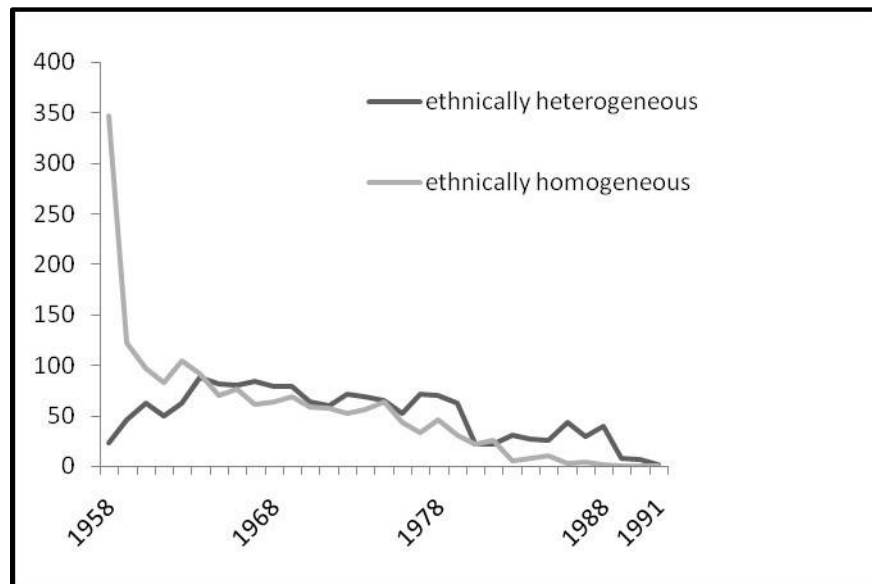
<sup>26</sup> Pavel Hradečný mentions 12100 refugees of which 3900 were men, 3000 women and 5200 children (Hradečný 2007: 88). Tassula Zissaki-Healey mentions 14000 Greek refugees coming to Czechoslovakia in 1948-49. (Zissaki-Healey 2003: 127). Botu - Konečný mention the same number as an estimate of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior (Botu, Konečný 2005: 366).

life and were not allowed to return to Greece without facing sanctions. Despite their loss of citizenship, they still wished to return and at each gathering the toast *ke tu hronou stin patrida* (next year at the motherland) was performed. Their entire communal life in the Czech Republic, starting from education in boarding schools until 1962, and proceeding with the organisation of Greek festivals later on, was targeted on preserving Greek identity and love of Greece and on keeping alive the wish for return. Even though the Czechoslovakian communist government didn't make it easy for the refugees to preserve ties with their families in Greece either, since relatives weren't granted permission to visit, their love for Greece and their wish for repatriation were so deeply embedded, that most Greek refugees applied for repatriation with the first chance they got (Tsivos 2009: 299; Hradečný 2007: 150).

The choices they made while considering marriage and family were highly influenced by their wish to return to Greece and by their attempt to preserve Greek culture. As my informant Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) recalls, his uncles tried to talk his mother out of marrying a Czech man, his father; because she would have less chances to return to Greece. Marina (F, 1925, GR) was also not very happy that her son married a Czech woman. Her husband, she and her son were christened Christian Orthodox, even though they didn't believe in God, hoping it would help them to be granted permission to return to Greece. Their only son's marriage made them stay in the Czech Republic. Her grandson was also christened but he doesn't follow Greek customs despite his grandmother's efforts. The reason we met was that she thought my brother and I would be a good influence on her grandson, since she saw us at a Greek community festivity. The older generation refugees preferred intermarriage. Marina met her husband in Czechoslovakia, Vasoula's (F, 1952, CZ) parents and Aliki's (F, 1954, CZ) parents also met in Czechoslovakia and they all came to the country as adults. On the contrary, second generation immigrants, like most of the people I know or their parents, married Czechs. However, many second generation Greeks got married to Greeks, like Ritsa (F, 1946, Buljkes) or Koula (F, 1964, CZ). The chart below shows the relation between ethnically heterogeneous and ethnically homogeneous marriages during the time span of 1958-1991<sup>27</sup>. We see that in the early years the former were much more than the latter, but from the 60s and on the latter prevailed.

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<sup>27</sup> Data derived from Botu, Konečný 2005: 367.



Mostly Greek men got married to Czech women (Tsivos 2009: 298). To present a Czech escort at a Greek community festivity was a major accomplishment for a Greek man. One couldn't say the same about Greek women who were considered to be "lost" if they married a Czech man (Otčenášek 2001), like Nikos's (M, 1979, CZ) mother. In some cases the whole family returned to Greece or in other cases, like in the case of the parents a former student of mine, whom I was teaching Greek, the Greek husband left his Czech wife and 3 children behind and returned alone. I can't speak about the whole minority since there aren't any statistics, but most of the Greeks living in the Czech Republic that I know, have ethnically heterogeneous families.

## The repatriation

After the refugees' Greek citizenship was revoked, their status was very peculiar. The laws of the Czechoslovakian government didn't allow a double citizenship and since Greeks didn't want to accept the Greek government's decision, they didn't have any legal citizenship, which made their communication with Czechoslovakian authorities complicated. The refugees started massively accepting the Czechoslovakian citizenship after the 1967 right-wing coup d' état in Greece. When the "Government of the Generals" was abolished and KKE was legalised, they started applying for return. The year 1974 was crucial for all Greek communists because after the dissolution of the dictatorial "Government of the Generals" the

“National Unity” government voted for the legalisation of KKE<sup>28</sup>. After these events, immigrants started applying for return permits at the embassy. The Greek government froze the enthusiasm of the immigrants in 1975 by passing law 233/1975, which ratified all former restrictions concerning political refugees. Refugees kept applying for return permits and considered the law as a violation of their civil rights. Communication with Greek authorities wasn’t easy, since the civil servants at the Greek embassy weren’t particularly helpful. Many had to prove they were Greek. Karadzios describes how a Slav Macedonian friend of his family was not granted a visa to visit Greece because her name didn’t sound Greek (Karadzios 2004: 95). The Greek government was afraid many Slav Macedonians would return and create a minority that could claim autonomy according to what Zachariadis had promised them<sup>29</sup>. Most of the repatriates had to sign a declaration of repentance. The refugees were allowed free entry to the country after the socialist government of PASOK granted them amnesty on 29.12.1982<sup>30</sup>. According to the repatriation committee’s report a total of 9898 Greek citizens left the country during 1954-1990 (Botu, Konečný 2005: 416).

The repatriation of the majority of Greeks in the Czech Republic left behind those who chose to stay. They left for Greece with the best intentions and expectations, but reality there was much different than what they had been taught. The repatriated ones went through hardships because in many cases their land had been confiscated by the state or taken by neighbours and relatives, some had a hard time in getting their degrees acknowledged, some couldn’t get a job or send their children to school because they weren’t accepted as Greeks, police would check up on them almost every month, some were incarcerated in spite of the amnesty. The locals didn’t embrace them as they expected and nor did the state. In many cases they didn’t have anything or anybody to return to. They had to do work that wasn’t adequate to the education level or the specialisations they achieved in Czechoslovakia. Some decided to stay and fight the situation, others returned to the Czech Republic mainly after 1989, some committed suicide or became alcoholics. Marina (F, 1925, GR) presented her

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<sup>28</sup> KKE had been illegal for 27 years and on the basis of law No. 509 many communists and their sympathisers were incarcerated, tortured, executed or exiled. This law was nullified on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, on the same day that KKE was legalised (Rizospastis, September 23, 2000 [online])

<sup>29</sup> To this day many Slav Macedonians who formerly lived on Greek territory are not allowed entry to the country and Slav Macedonians living in Greece are not being recognised as a minority by the Greek state. They have a political party called *Виножито* (Rainbow) or *Ουράνιο Τόξο* in Greek, based in Florina, a former Slav Macedonian city. The Greek State refuses to acknowledge a Slav Macedonian minority because it is afraid it might have separatist tendencies.

<sup>30</sup> The amnesty excluded ethnic Slav Macedonians.



brother in law as an example. He started selling lottery tickets in Thessaloniki and he had to walk so much that his feet were swollen, sore and aching. They did manage to buy a house though, in the same village their house used to be before it was burnt down.

These people returned to Greece to find a completely changed, capitalist country where for the natives they were *oi prosfyges* (the refugees) or *oi tsehoi* (the Czechs). They had to start over again only this time without the benefits they had in Czechoslovakia and without the moral support of fellow refugees. They were scattered all over Greece and they couldn't find consolation in each other. Sometimes not even their own family members were willing to assist them. When Kostas (M, 1950, HU) first drove his mother to their village in Greece, her brother and his family turned off the lights and shut the windows in order to avoid them. They spent the night in the car in some fields. Inheritance issues got in the way of communication among family members. The repatriated Greeks miss the Czech Republic. The daughter of a repatriated man told me that even though her father had only spent his childhood in Czechoslovakia, he considered himself to be Czech by the age of about 50. Repatriated Greeks go to Czech style pubs in Greece, they miss poppy seed cakes, dumplings, Czech beer and they hold the Czech people in high regard. Some consider native Greeks to be primitive, uneducated and narrow-minded. Both those that stayed and those that left feel grateful to Czechoslovakia for giving them shelter and education.

## Today

According to the 2001 census, 3 219 persons of Greek nationality are currently living in the Czech Republic. The Greek minority isn't solely consisted of political refugees and their offspring. Many Greeks came to the Czech Republic as students and remained in the country because of work or marriage. Others came to the country because of business opportunities. The 2005 issue of the Czech Statistics Office considering foreigners in the Czech Republic documented 792 individuals from Greece in 2004 (of which 31.7% were women)<sup>31</sup>.

On the web page of the Czech Government one can read that the Greek minority estimates its own population to be around 7000. The difference in numbers is considerable. To understand it we must realise who the Greek government considers to be of Greek nationality. According to the *Government Gazette of the Hellenic Republic*<sup>32</sup>, Issue number 217, 10 November 2004, one acquires Greek nationality by

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<sup>31</sup> *Foreigners in the Czech Republic*, ČSU, 2005: 32-35

<sup>32</sup> Information available on the web page of the Hellenic Ministry of Interior

birth. All children of at least one Greek parent are considered to be Greek. The conveyance of nationality is thus infinite. If the Greek nationals are not Greek citizens they are called *omogeneis* (co-ethnics, of the same birth, race). There can thus be many Czech citizens who even though are aware of their parents' nationality, they probably don't feel like sharing it or they don't want to. There are many such cases of "lost" Greek children, who have no connection to Greece other than the sanguinary. In 1983 the *General Secretariat of Greeks Abroad* (GSGA) was founded by the Greek Government. According to the numbers provided on the GSGA web page, the total of the Greek Diaspora is about 4 million<sup>33</sup> and of those there are 2500 living in the Czech Republic. If we add the 2500 *omogeneis* to about 800 Greek citizens, we conclude that there are about 3500 Greeks in the country<sup>34</sup>.

There are 13 Greek Communities in the Czech Republic. Not all Greek nationals are members of the Communities. If we visit the web page of the Greek Community of Prague, we are informed that there are 180 members of approximately 800 Greeks living in Prague<sup>35</sup>. In 2002 the Association of Greek Communities, including Prague, had 697 members (Liolios 2002). The numbers are not thrilling but one can imagine that people don't become members of associations for personal, ideological or maybe even financial reasons (they don't want to pay the membership fee). There are also some Czech members of the Communities (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 223)

According to the 1991 census, there were 3379 Greek nationals in the country and only 10% were under the age of 14. Sloboda estimates that the core of the minority will be deceased within 20-30 years. This makes the future of the minority uncertain and it is highly probable that it will assimilate and vanish (Sloboda 2003).

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<sup>33</sup> Information available on the web page of the G.S.G.A.

<sup>34</sup> This number coincides with the information given on the web page of the Greek Community of Prague.

<sup>35</sup> Information available on the web page of the Greek Community of Prague

# Greekness

In order to avoid “groupism”<sup>36</sup> and the reification of ethnic groups, we have decided to analyse the ethnic group in question as to its “groupness”, which means *“thinking of ethnicization, racialization, and nationalization as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes...And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the “group” as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable”* (Brubaker 2004: 11). Speaking of the Greeks in Prague as a group would obliterate all differences among its members and it could also cause speaking of them as we would speak of Greeks in general. Therefore, in our study we shan’t analyse a “Greek group” but we will attempt to analyse “Greekness” as expressed by the group’s institutions and by members of it.

We mentioned earlier one aspect of the Greek State’s definition of who is Greek: it is enough to have one parent of Greek origin. According to the Greek minority's claims, if this definition was shared by the people, 7000 individuals in the Czech Republic would declare to be Greek. They didn’t, so they probably don’t feel Greek. Relation by blood is important for the state institutions and it serves the purpose of homogeneity, but it obviously isn’t always an indicator of allegiance to a group for individuals. Greekness, as the essence of being Greek, is what makes somebody feel Greek. This feeling can be cultivated and expressed institutionally and individually. In this paper we contemplate on the way the Greek minority in the Czech Republic preserves and experiences Greekness on an institutional level, and how Greeks in the Czech Republic - particularly in Prague - experience and manifest their Greekness on an individual level. Institutionalised forms and cultural idioms will serve as categories for our analysis since through them, Greekness is manifested.

In the case of institutions, such as the Greek Communities, we shall review their goals and activities also in relation with what the Czech state’s requirements from acknowledged minorities are. In the case of individuals, we shall analyse their sense and manifestation of Greekness with the help of cultural elements, which serve as a means of identification for Greeks. Since our goal was to describe the way our subjects of study manifest Greek culture and not describe Greek culture itself, our

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<sup>36</sup> *“The tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts and fundamental units of social analysis...The tendency to treat ethnic groups as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes”* (Brubaker 2004: 8).

scope of cultural elements was delimited by fieldwork research. Barth writes “...*the classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting the particular traits of the culture*” (Barth 1998: 12). We are not interested in whether membership in the ethnic group is valid or not, but in the way this membership is experienced and exhibited or not, by the members of the ethnic group. In accordance with Barth we consider “*ethnic groups as categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves...*” (Barth 1998: 10). Therefore, we shall attempt to illustrate that Greekness can exist in various forms and as an abstract feeling of allegiance to an ethnic group, but it can’t be reified because its content is subjective and situational.

In this paper we are interested in those cultural elements that the Greek minority has preserved or is attempting to preserve, the ways this attempt is being processed individually and institutionally and the possible reasons certain cultural elements have survived or were transformed. In the following sections we will look into what the official aims of the Greek communities are and therefore we will notice what Greekness is considered to consist of institutionally. We shall also look into cultural elements, which are considered to be distinctive for Greeks, as they appeared through fieldwork, and examine whether and how individuals experience Greekness. We shall offer examples of the meaning these cultural elements have in Greece, and illustrate the difference between the Greek and the Czech-Greek experience of Greekness. However, we must firstly clarify some terms, crucial for social sciences, such as culture, tradition and identity, always in relation with Greece and Greeks in the Czech Republic.

## Culture and tradition

In this study culture serves as an analytical category. Culture itself isn't specifically analysed. We only analyse institutional or individual manifestations of cultural elements such as religiosity, language and folklore. For the purposes of this study then, it is sufficient to use Tsaousis's definition of culture as "*the entire social heritage of a group, in other words everything created by a group and transmitted from generation to generation not by biological but by social procedures*" (Tsaousis 2001: 17). Institutions such as the Greek Communities are aiming towards the preservation of Greek culture among their members and the propagation of Greek culture in general. The Greek culture in question was defined by the Greek state in the process of its establishment. According to Gellner (1993) the nationalist request of congruency between the *political and the national unit* is a condition that requires a homogeneous nation with one "high culture", safe guarded and perpetuated by the state through a centralised educational system. This high, common and highly evolved culture is based upon a common language, through which it is communicated to the nation. Gellner connects nationalism with the necessity for homogeneity that emerged with industrialisation and modernity. The new division of labour often demanded moving from one occupational position to another and so a shared, literate, sophisticated high culture was necessary. This high culture pervades the entire society and it needs the support of the state. Greece is a special case since the nationalist processes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had probably little to do with the industrialisation of the country. The process was most possibly a mirroring of the general situation in Europe since the Greek countryside wasn't industrialised before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This could be one of the reasons why characteristics of the agrarian society, according to Gellner, such as the importance of the Church, are still present. Nevertheless, an all pervasive, "high Greek culture" was established, with the help of Western Europe and especially the Germans and their idea of what Greek culture should be, as Herzfeld and Friedman would point out (Herzfeld 1989; Friedman 1992).

The Greek Communities preserve elements of "high culture", as it was institutionalised by the Greek state through the educational system. There of course are certain modifications, which in an institutional level are not very obvious. For example they hold dance festivities to celebrate October 28<sup>th</sup> and March 25<sup>th</sup>. These dates are quite important in Greece because they remind the Greek people of

historical events. However, in Greece there aren't any evenings with Greek music and dance connected with these dates. In Greece there are army and school parades. Festivities are organised at schools during which children dance traditional dances, recite poems or perform relevant school plays. Similar festivities were being organised in the boarding schools where the Greek children were sheltered and educated in Czechoslovakia. Greek minorities abroad have taken the opportunity to organise Greek dance evenings, probably in order to meet and celebrate "as Greeks". Such celebrations are specific for the Greek minorities abroad<sup>37</sup>.

Greece, just as many other states, underwent a nationalisation process in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and new traditions were "invented" as "*ritual and symbolic complexes, attempting to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.*" According to Eric Hobsbawm (1992) "*Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past*". Greece in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after years of being a part of various empires (Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman) was naturally a quite ethnically and culturally diverse territory. The newly founded Greek state had to engulf various peoples speaking various languages, having various traditions. New traditions had to be "invented", strictly Greek traditions with ritual and ideological content. These were based on the Christian and the Classical past of Greece (Herzfeld 1989).

The flag of the state alone as part of a *symbolic complex* points towards the Christian tradition<sup>38</sup>. The symbol of the cross is dominant on the blue and white flag. The other tradition, the ancient Greek Classical tradition, which was probably forgotten by most Greeks by that time, was on the contrary admired and evoked by the European philhellenes. The Greek scholars, who took it upon them to form the Greek state, were educated in Europe and very much influenced by the way Europeans viewed Greece. They turned towards cultural classicism. Herzfeld points out that "*from the standpoint of the Greek intelligentsia at the time of early statehood, demotic (vernacular) Greek thus became another instance of cultural*

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<sup>37</sup> Even in Norilsk, a city above the Arctic circle in the Russian Federation, where about 200 Greeks reside, they celebrate the 28<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of March with Greek evenings [online]

<sup>38</sup> The first Greek flag was blessed and raised at a monastery on the island of Skiathos in 1807 and the leaders of the revolution against the Ottomans swore to it. Its background was blue and it was divided into four squares by a white cross. The white cross symbolises the Christian tradition of Greeks and it still exists on the modern version of the Greek flag [online]

*incompetence...the leadership succeeded in promoting katharevousa...By identifying with the absolute values of European romanticism, Greek scholars sought to gain admittance to Europe as cultural as well as political equals”* (Herzfeld 1989: 52). The romanticised Greece of the European scholars had little to do with Greece as it was<sup>39</sup>. Subsequently, the *Eurocentric* Greek state attempted to purify tradition, starting with language. According to Herzfeld this tendency pervaded all culture and Greeks started “*treating Turkish elements in it as its worst failing – as a source of cultural pollution*” (Herzfeld 1989: 29).

Greek culture was thus defined in the space created between the Christian and the Classical tradition, which makes Greek identity a somewhat problematic issue. Not only because the Christian and Classical traditions often ideologically oppose each other, but also because not everything in Greece has a Christian or Classical ancestry and not everything Turkish was dismissed. Greek music and Turkish music are very much alike and so is food for example. Folklore is also highly influenced by the surrounding peoples. There are Greek traditional dances and songs very similar to other Balkan states’.

However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when scholars first started to “scientifically” study folklore, according to A. Nestoros-Kyriakidou, the inhabitants of Greece were considered to be a homogeneous people by the scholars. It obviously served the nation-building nationalist ideology. The people were treated as a metaphysical idea and weren't studied as they were in reality but as a symbol. The tradition of the people, who being isolated in the rural areas were considered to be more pure than the people in the cities, was perceived as a continuation of ancient Greece. Folklore was viewed as a remnant of ancient glory, preserved by the illiterate people. Popular tradition became a symbol of conservation, while literacy symbolized change. According to Nestoros-Kyriakidou, in reality, the illiterate people and folklore kept adapting to the ever changing conditions of life (which is obvious in the fact that the vernacular language emerged), while the intellectual tradition denies any change and it is isolated (Nestoros-Kyriakidou in: Tsaousis 2007: 249-256). According to Tsaousis, Greekness is the defining element of Greek people and so folklore became an indispensable aspect of it (Tsaousis 2007: 22).

The Greek Communities are meant to propagate Greek culture. However, Greek culture was institutionalised by the Greek state during the process of nation-

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<sup>39</sup> After visiting Athens in 1870, the Czech poet Jan Neruda wrote : *Never go to Athens if you like your dream* (Nechod' vůbec do Athén, je-li ti milý sen) [online]

building. The Greek state was culturally founded upon Christianity and the Classical era. Language and folklore were manipulated in order to prove that Greek tradition is undeniably continual. The same practice is noted in relation with the Greeks abroad. There should be proof of continuity and thus various “invented traditions”, such as the 25<sup>th</sup> of March and 28<sup>th</sup> of October, were institutionally adopted by the Greeks of the diaspora, and folklore and language are being institutionally preserved.

In the case of Greeks abroad, one could say that elements of Greek culture and tradition have been compiled in a way suitable for the situation. As such they are being reproduced and a different version of Greek tradition is being created. This point of view coincides with Shils's theory about tradition. According to Shils *“in its barest, most elementary sense, it means simply a traditum; it is anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present...It is something which was created, was performed or believed in the past, or which is believed to have existed or to have been performed or believed in the past”*. The identity of these transmitted things isn't static: *“Constellations of symbols, clusters of images, are received and modified. They change in the process of transmission as interpretations are made of the tradition presented; they change also while they are in the possession of their recipients. This chain of transmitted variants is also called a tradition...As a temporal chain, a tradition is a sequence of variations on received and transmitted themes...A sense of identity and a sense of filiation with earlier recipients of a tradition are different things from the actual reception of a tradition...The sense of identity and the sense of continuity do not require that there be an identity of the traditum recognisable by an external observer”* (Shils 1971:12-14).

If we apply Shils's theory on the Czech-Greeks, who are the subjects of this study, we can see that they are successors of the Greek tradition. An external observer can identify differences between their perception of Greek tradition and Greek tradition in Greece, but this doesn't mean that Czech-Greeks don't have the right to call their version of Greek tradition Greek. Since the late 1940's, various elements of tradition have been altered in Greece as well. These alterations were different in Greece and in the Czech Republic, since the influences on tradition were different in these countries. The Czech-Greeks are different, but this doesn't necessarily mean they are not Greek. Cypriots for example are considered to be Greek and they are different from “Greek” Greeks as well. A common tradition is present but it has taken different form due to different influences. If people in Greece try to understand the



situation which led to the change they might realise that they could act the same way<sup>40</sup>.

When Greek refugees repatriated, both sides realised the difference. Greeks didn't accept the returnees as Greeks in the same sense they were. They referred to them as "the Czechs" or "the refugees". The Greek refugees from their part realised that Greeks and Greece had little in common with the idealised version they had been trying to preserve throughout the years of longing for return. Some noticed that the language they were taught in the Czech Republic was different than the way it was spoken in Greece. Some Czech-Greeks have a foreign accent when they speak Greek. Their version of Greek culture and tradition was obsolete. Czech-Greeks consider themselves to be Greek and in many cases they got into fights when they were being called "Czechs" by the local Greeks. They feel they are more Greeks than the locals because they were taught to cherish what the locals take for granted (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 191). Even though Greekness is primarily the feeling of being Greek, it is measured in discernible factors. If one doesn't behave like Greek but feels like being Greek there are little ways to convince others of the way one feels. One has to prove it by doing everything the majority of Greeks do the way they do it. Many repatriated Greeks thus started going to church, even though they were raised as atheists.

On the example of the originally solo male dance called *zeimpekiko*, as we shall later discuss as well, we see how as an external observer aware of the way this dance is danced in Greece, I was surprised by the way I saw it being danced in the Czech Republic. The same way, someone could be surprised by watching it being danced by women in Greece. The dance simply underwent different changes in the two countries. The fact that it is performed differently by the people in the Czech Republic doesn't mean that they themselves don't consider it to be Greek and a part of Greek tradition. This dance is being danced in a circle in the Czech Republic, even though members of the Greek community know that it originally is a solo dance. However, Czech people don't know much about it, they probably can't distinguish it from other dances, or as was explained to me they are too eager to dance and so they dance it in a circle, performing steps from other dances to the *zeimpekiko*.

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<sup>40</sup> Barth (1998: 13) example of Southern and Northern Pathans is similar. He explains how Southern Pathans thought their Northern brothers to be "no longer Pathan". By "objective" criteria, their overt pattern of organisation seemed closer to that of Panjabis. Barth found it possible, by explaining the circumstances to the North to make Southern Pathans agree that these were indeed Pathans too, and grudgingly to admit that under those circumstances they might act the same way.

As we shall see later on, the Greek community in the Czech Republic is highly influenced by the Czech people. It is possible that the multitude has gotten used to the new way and thus the tradition of dancing *zeimpekiko* in a circle may be slowly established. We shall notice that Czech-Greek variations of traditional Greek cultural elements have prevailed in the Czech Republic. According to Shils's theory it doesn't mean that this modified tradition isn't a Greek tradition. It's the tradition of the Greek diaspora and the Greek immigrants are considered to be of Greek ethnicity, even though they are different from the Greeks in Greece. As mentioned earlier when it comes down to formally deciding who is Greek and who isn't, Greek blood<sup>41</sup> is the main criterion and not tradition or knowledge of it.

An external observer unaware of Greek traditions in Greece might view Greek traditions in the Czech Republic and not recognise the differences. Sometimes the differences are not even sought after because Greeks are thought of having a homogeneous culture. What is Greek is considered to be common for all Greeks. Subsequently, when a community is called Greek, observers sometimes don't even bother to look into its individual version of Greekness. Methodological nationalist thinking which considers the society and the state as one and the same, silences variety and variability. Our conception of Greekness coincides with Brubaker's conception of "groupness": a *contextually fluctuating conceptual variable*. In the case of the Czech-Greeks, the fact the community is Greek is undeniable but *how* it is Greek should be looked into as well. Tradition as a part of culture in general, plays an important role in preserving a sense of affinity with the motherland and in defining the identity of a group. We shall look more closely now into the problem of identity, which is a very delicate subject, especially for Greece.

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<sup>41</sup> Oddly enough, various Greek nationalists have come to believe that there is a substance present in the Greek blood, transferable only by males, which is called *IHOR (IXOP)*, mentioned by Homer and Plato and other famous Greeks. This substance makes Greeks differ from everybody else in the planet. Some believe that this is because Greeks are the descendants of a people that came from the Andromeda Constellation and first inhabited Sirius and then Earth and particularly the area, which they named Hellas. There are numerous discussions over the subject on internet blogs, on TV and in magazines.

## Ethnic identification

As Brubaker puts it: *“identity” tends to mean too much, too little or nothing at all*. He provides alternatives for the use of “identity” as an analytical category and he questions the essentialist and constructivist understandings and uses of the term. The essentialist or “strong” conception of “identity” *“highlights fundamental or abiding sameness and preserves the commonsense meaning of the term – the emphasis of sameness over time or across persons”*. The constructivist, or “weak” conceptions of “identity” *“break consciously with the everyday meaning of the word and they characterise identity as multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated and so on”*. According to Brubaker the strong conceptions of the term accord well with the way it is used in most forms of identity politics. The weak conceptions are favoured by theorists. None of these conceptions are adequate since the first doesn’t reflect reality and the second opposes the very meaning of the word, which is persistency and sameness over time. Brubaker suggests a different strategy: *“to unbundle the thick tangle of meanings that have accumulated around the term “identity”, and to parcel out the work to a number of less congested terms*. These are: *Identification and Categorisation, Self-Understanding and Social Location, Commonality, Connectedness, Groupness*. *Identification as a processual, active term lacks the reifying connotations of “identity” and it invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. There is relational (identification within a web of relationships) and categorical identification (membership in a class of persons sharing a categorical attribute). There is also a distinction between self-identification and the identification and categorisation of oneself by others. Self-Understanding is a dispositional term that designates what might be called “situated objectivity”: one’s sense of who one is, of one’s location, and of how one is prepared to act. “Commonality” denotes the sharpening of some common attribute, “connectedness” the relational ties that link people, and “groupness” is the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group*” (Brubaker 2004).

It is difficult to avoid the use of constructivist or essentialist conceptions of identity, especially in quoting works of social scientists. To avoid using the terms identity or identities is close to impossible and to place them in quotes, almost every time we use them (as Brubaker does) is close to hypocrisy. Even though we agree with Brubaker that to “construct an identity” is an oxymoron, our approach is a

constructivist one since the identity or identities we are examining are existent and persistent in the particular time and space of our research. We are researching the *how* a particular identity which is *now* presented to us was constructed. Nevertheless, to describe the process, we shall partly use Brubaker's strategy and terminology.

As mentioned earlier, the refugees from Greece were of various ethnic origins. Not all referred to themselves as Greeks, when they arrived in Czechoslovakia. Greek national identity wasn't a notion they all identified with. Some of the territories they came from had only been a part of Greece for a few decades and some people (the Slav Macedonians) even wanted autonomy. The Greek state's policy tended towards the formation of a homogeneous people governed by a sovereign state, and those who opposed it or put it in jeopardy (communists, Slav Macedonians) were forced to either conform or leave the country. The Greek state was rather drastic in the measures it employed to achieve its purpose but it was quite successful. One could say that by the 1990s, when immigrants started massively arriving to the country from former Communist countries and especially Albania, the goal of homogeneity had been achieved (Triantafyllidou, Veikou 2002). These days the Greek state is again in national identity turmoil, since the pressures for multiculturalism from the part of the EU and other institutions are large. The Greek people are, for the time being, unwilling to negotiate whatever it is they consider that their identity is built upon. They are unwilling to accept as equals people, which they can't identify with everything that is considered to be Greek. With new generations of immigrants growing up in the country, it will be difficult to sustain what Greek identity is considered to consist of, without being accused of being racist.

Tsaousis, and we translate and paraphrase, maintains that the identity of a social group cannot be static but it must be dynamic. Identity keeps redefining itself according to external (social surroundings from which it needs to differentiate itself) and internal factors (cultural elements that form the basis of differentiation). Greek identity has been going through a crisis in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Tsaousis it is the result of the transformation of cultural to political identity. The Greek-Orthodox identity, which evolved during the Byzantine and Ottoman years, was a cultural identity. The new, national identity is a political one and it has a tendency towards forming Greece as an independent nation state. During the years of 1821 – 1923 when there was an effort to make state and nation borders coincidental, the transition from cultural to political identity wasn't immediately obvious. The

cultural identity formed the foundation ground of the political one. Greekness is thus always the defining criterion of the Greek people. According to Tsaousis, this way we can understand the existence of various forms of cultural classicism in the Greek State and among the Diaspora, the existence of religious fanaticism and the hypertrophy of folklore. We can also understand why in the process of the Europeanisation and Westernisation of Greece a rupture was created: the cultural identity is turned inwards and the political outwards. The author proposes we view Modern Greek history as a disconnection process between cultural and political identity. The author describes how after 1923, when the state borders were defined, a transposition of emphasis from “nation” to “people” occurred. When the identity of the “people” was finally defined a new division was created among the Greek people in Greece and the Greek people outside of Greece. The relationship between the “inside” and “outside” Greeks is undefined since they both represent some individual form of Greekness (Tsaousis 2001:17-25).

Michael Herzfeld in his book “Anthropology through the looking glass” speaks of two models providing symbolic material for identification in Greece. These are Christianity on the one side and the Classical era on the other. Herzfeld mentions a *“balance between two models of Greek identity that derive from the Classical and Byzantine-Turkish models, respectively...It is the difference between a normative and idealized Hellenism – official history – on the one hand and a roguish Romiossini on the other...When the model of Hellenism begins to acquire the sheen of a universal model, this is because official interpretations adopt the rhetoric of western historiography, which makes ancient Greece the fount and origin of all civilization worthy of inclusion...Romiossini, by contrast, represents the internal, practical history of Greece. It, not Hellenism, is the difference that constitutes Greek identity”* (Herzfeld 1989:93). Tsaousis also claims that the defining criterion for Greeks is Greekness, which is basically the expression of their cultural identity, of *Romiossini*; it is the essence of being Greek in practice and not on paper.

J. Friedman used the example of Greece to illustrate how identity is subject to global processes. Friedman's point is that *“all identity is a historical process...The constitution of Greek national identity cannot be viewed as a local evolution. It is the result of a complex interaction of identifications in an arena in which regions were in a process of transformation with respect to one another and, as a result, in a process of internal transformation...Greek nationalism was an aspect of the incorporation of*

*Greece into an expanding West and into a world of modern Western values of which Classical Greece was the appointed ancestor. Greek identity was simultaneously a product of its separation from the Ottoman Empire. The process was one of global reorganisation of the economic and political map of Europe*” (Friedman 1992: 840-848).

Both Herzfeld and Friedman (mostly alluding to Herzfeld) point out the impact Western Europe's perception of Greece had on the formation of Greek identity. They also note the attempt to differentiate from the Occident. As Friedman most eloquently puts it *“the constitution of identity is an elaborate and deadly serious game of mirrors. It is a complex temporal interaction of multiple practices of identification external and internal to a subject or population”* (Friedman 1992: 853). The Greek state, in its attempt to form a national identity acceptable by Europe, mirrored its expectations and romantic ideals and it differentiated itself from everything that was considered to be non-Greek. Herzfeld assumes that *“perhaps the best measure of western cultural and political hegemony was its eventual success in persuading the Greeks to adopt the Turks as their natural enemies, and to treat Turkish elements in Greek culture as its worst failing”* (Herzfeld 1989: 29). The constitution of identity by mirroring external viewpoints isn't apparent only on a national level. We can notice it even on an individual level.

Greeks in the Western world have turned to cultural classicism most possibly in order to better manifest their Greek origins in ways others could recognise. It is obvious in architecture, as many of the houses or restaurants of Greek immigrants resemble ancient Greek temples, in the decoration of the restaurants, their names etc. They have also turned to religiosity as some of them define their identity on the basis of their religion. The case of the Greeks in the Czech Republic is different since they couldn't overtly express any religiosity and they couldn't build houses resembling the Parthenon during the communist era. However, some expressed their pride for Greece's ancient history even during that time. Petros Cironis for example, a Greek living in the Czech Republic, expressed it in a literary manner. He named a book of his *“Children of Hellas”* (Cironis 1976) and not *Children of Greece* and in his second book (Cironis 1994) he explains why he uses the term *Hellas* and not *Greece*: The term *Hellas* and all its derivatives are used by the natives and so he doesn't use any term used by foreign peoples. He writes that for more than 3000 years the country has been called *Hellas* and its inhabitants *Hellènes* and that these are the terms that should

be used and not the terms by which foreign tribes called the *Hellénes*, such as Greeks for example. Cironis thus attempts to link his work (at least its title) to the ancient Greek tradition, without actually realising that this particular tradition was invoked by Europe.

Most of my informants expressed admiration and pride toward ancient Greece and a couple of them even showed inclination towards Orthodoxy. Nevertheless, they realise that Greece isn't "The Promised Land" and so a critical point of view toward the Greek state, its people and the Church wasn't absent from the conversations we had. On an everyday life basis they mostly preserved elements of cuisine and Greek language. Some of them also listen to Greek music. On a community presentation basis they emphasise folklore elements. Greeks in Czechoslovakia couldn't identify politically with Greece since they were considered to be traitors. They went against their country's political leadership, which in turn shunned and disowned them. Their political identity was mostly defined by the Communist Party's policy. Moreover, people in the Czech Republic were refugees. This had been their identity for a long time: Greek refugees whose single prevailing dream was to return to the motherland.

Zissaki-Healey maintains that the process of preservation and cultivation of Greek identity among Greeks in the Czech Republic can be divided into five phases. The first (1948/49-1962) was marked by intense cultivation of Greekness through education in the boarding schools, where children, surrounded by Greek and communist symbols, were taught (partly in Greek) about Greek history, culture, customs, traditions and most of all they had to learn the Greek language and acquire Greek values. This ethnocentric education was in accordance with the KKE guidelines since the plan was for the children to return as "educated future leaders to assist in the rebuilding of their country". The second phase (1962-1975) begins with the shutting down of the boarding schools and ends with the fall of the junta in Greece. Without the closed environment of the boarding schools, Greek education wasn't as intense. Inter-marriage and Czech language began prevailing and children began to feel comfortable within the Czechoslovakian environment. The third phase (1975 – 1990) was marked by the repatriation of about 10000 Greeks. Meanwhile, Greekness was being preserved by Greek Festivals and national celebrations, by taking part in music and dance groups, by learning the language. All these activities were organised by the KKE, which was dissolved in Czechoslovakia in 1989. The regime change and the dissolution of the organisation of the Greek community caused great confusion to

those who didn't repatriate. In the fourth period (1990-2004) Czech-Greeks started visiting their motherland often and showed active interest in reorganising, so that Greek identity could be preserved in the next generations. They thus founded Greek Communities and formed an official minority. Zissaki-Healey considers the 2004 membership of the Czech Republic in the EU as a landmark for a 5<sup>th</sup> phase, since Greeks and Czechs became equal members of a larger Union and many legislative problems were solved.

Zissaki- Healey considers that there are chances for the preservation and advancement of the Greek community in the Czech Republic. However, she notes that the third and fourth generation members have begun to assimilate and despite the attempts of the Communities, Greek environment isn't present within families or organisations. According to Zissaki-Healey, even though there is danger of assimilation in the third generation and a kind of "Czechification" of the second generation, there are enough possibilities and chances to preserve Greek language and identity among Czech-Greeks. She doesn't feel that a partial assimilation with the Czech culture and way of life means the loss of national identity (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 217-233).

Cultural assimilation may not necessarily mean loss of ethnic identity now, but there certainly is great chance it will happen in the next generations. The first and second generations won't be able to continue their activities for much longer and the almost assimilated third and fourth generations are not showing much interest (apart from a few exceptions).

Without wanting to diminish the importance of "*Nostos*", which is a Greek word expressing the longing of the immigrant for the motherland, from Zissaki-Healey's account it is apparent that those who repatriated were the good communists, who acted in accordance with the party's policy. The KKE had been moulding the refugees' identity toward preserving Greekness and loyalty for the KKE. When these people repatriated, they fulfilled the role they were prepared to play. As Eleni Zissaki, the repatriated daughter of Greek political refugees in Bulgaria writes "*I am proud that despite the hardships I remained Greek, I am in my Country and I gave something to Greece. I owe it to Bulgaria and to the KKE, which not only managed to preserve our Greek identity but it also taught us to love books, science, to believe in a life of high values and to the real essence of things*" (Zissaki-Healey 2009: 194). Perhaps the right wing theory of why the children were taken away was true - they



believed they were taken away in order to be raised as communists and return to fight. They were raised as communists with their sole purpose being to return as educated leaders. The KKE probably realised that war wasn't a possibility and decided to take the bloodless way of politics. One shouldn't wonder why the Greek government made their return quite difficult and denied them their rights for a long time.

The Greeks in the Czech Republic today are those who chose to stay or the ones who chose to return to the Czech Republic. They are Greek but they choose to live in the Czech Republic and they do so without complaining, because nobody forces them to be in the country any more. Some of them feel quite blessed since they have the possibility to enjoy both countries. As far as the extent to which they feel to be Greek or Czech, then we must state that it is up to the individual. During my research I noticed that my informants' identification was of a negative nature. They pointed out what they consider negative in Greeks and Czechs and they distanced themselves from it. Some cannot say they are either Czech or Greek because they are both, and some say that they are citizens of the world. It's either an interchangeable identity or a universal identity, none of which is definite. Each person's identity, just like national identity, is dynamic and it mirrors external projections and expectations. As Barth puts it: "*ethnic identity is a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction*" (Barth 1998: 6). Some Greeks may behave in a certain way because Czechs expect from them to do so, since they are Greek. Some people have a tendency to differentiate themselves from their surroundings and so they enhance the cultural elements that differentiate them. This can be the case of many members of the younger generation who tend to behave more like "Greeks" in the Czech Republic and are energetic in various activities of the Greek community. One cannot judge whether this is an artificial tendency to differentiate or a true expression of the individual's inner soul, one can simply observe.

Ethnic identity is constructed and influenced by various factors such as politics and social interaction and by economical or psychological factors. As noted above, the KKE policy played an important part in forming the ethnic identity of the group's members in the past. Today, in order for a minority to be acknowledged by the host state, it has to fulfil certain conditions. These conditions serve as a way of ascribing an ethnic identity to the group. The minority has to interact with the host state and other minorities while professing a certain identity. The Greek Communities, as institutions of the Greek minority, must fulfil all the conditions and

they must try and transmit them to the group's members in order to form and thus preserve their ethnic identity. The members of the group must ascribe to themselves an ethnic identity but also others must be able to ascribe the same ethnic identity to them.

In the following sections we will analyse some elements of Greek culture and tradition and we shall examine to what extent the Czech-Greeks express their ethnic identity through them. As we have discussed above, Greek identity was shaped in the space between Classical Greece and Orthodoxy. Therefore, we will look into cultural elements, which according to the Greek point of view link modern Greece with the Classical tradition, such as language and folklore. And we will also examine religiosity and some customs and traditions connected with it, which link Greeks to the Byzantine-Turkish tradition. We will attempt to show whether and how aspects of these two formative elements of Greek national identity are expressed by the Czech-Greeks. This way we will try and uncover what constitutes the Greekness of individuals, beyond the rigid "guide lines" of official institutions.

### ***Czech-Greeks: differentiation rather than identification***

According to an ethnological paper about the Greek immigrants at the Czech border (Heroldová 1986), when the two peoples encountered some impressions were made. What impressed the Czech people was the fact that men wore long military coats and older women wore black clothes. The refugees liked to eat mutton, a lot of vegetables and in particular peppers, tomatoes, beans and olives. The Czechs thought the Greeks cooked strangely. They were impressed by the Greeks' hospitality, their good neighbourly manners, the fact they were good workers and they were politically engaged<sup>42</sup>. When it comes to family relations, Czechs noticed that women were subordinate to men and when it comes to folklore they noticed the dances were circular. Heroldová notes that the relationship between the two populations wasn't originally good, despite the fact that the newcomers assisted in surpassing the working hands deficit. Nevertheless, after the war there was a problem with supplies in the areas where the refugees settled. This made the locals ask why the state is

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<sup>42</sup> The paper was written before 1989 so work ethic and political engagement had to be taken under consideration.

bringing those foreigners there when they alone don't have enough to eat (Heroldová 1986: 135). At that time the cultural difference between the locals and the newcomers was apparent. Difference was tangible then but today, after so many years has passed and intermarriage prevailed, the situation is changed. My informants differentiate themselves from the both the majority of the Czech and the Greek society by pointing out what values and social practices they don't identify with.

I asked my informants about their relations with Czech and Greek people. It was one of the subjects they talked about the most. Marina (F, 1925, GR) said that Czech people are like people everywhere, there are good ones and bad ones. She feels grateful to the Czech state for accepting and saving them. Kyriaki (F, 1919, GR) has been living in the same flat since 1968. She has very good relations with her neighbours. They pay visits to each other and she bakes *pita* for them. Ritsa (F, 1946, Buljkes) is still close with her Czech schoolmates and teachers. She wasn't encountered with racism. People called "gypsies" only the darker Greeks but according to her not in the villages, only in bigger towns. Vasoula (F, 1952, CZ), **who grew up in Prague, remembers that Czech people called them "gypsies" not because of their colour but because of their behaviour. Her parents would have loud music playing even after 10 pm, they were noisy and they generally attracted attention. Her brother was ashamed of his parents. She and her siblings didn't** want to differ from Czechs so that they wouldn't be called "gypsies". She thinks it's one of the reasons all three siblings got married to Czech people. Admittedly there are people in the Czech Republic who don't like difference and so they called the Greeks "gypsies" for various reasons. Eventually Greeks were integrated to the majority, in spite of the colour of their skin. The nickname of Nikos's (M, 1979, CZ) brother is "*černoch*", which means "black guy" but it is used in a friendly, humorous way by his Czech friends. Apart from racism Greeks were also encountered with xenophobia. Aliko (F, 1954, CZ) remembers that an "evil" neighbour said to her: "*What are you doing here? You are eating our Czech bread!*" Marina (F, 1925, GR) also recalls being afraid about her husband's life because he was working very fast. Two Slav Macedonians had been murdered by Czechs because they were raising the quota. Kyriaki (F, 1919, GR) was also called names such as "Greek harlot" at the factory where she had been working.

All these incidents belong to the past. The Greeks that stayed in the Czech Republic adjusted their behavior to the majority's expectations and so they are not called "gypsies" anymore. By not taking in mind the fact that the Greek minority has assimilated and by taking for granted that the Greek minority bears unchanged the

attributes of Greek culture, we could make false assumptions about Czech society. Konupková makes this particular mistake in her thesis, where she comes to the conclusion that we are seldom encountered with xenophobia and racism in the Czech Republic (Konupková 2007: 57).

People who don't mistake Greeks with other ethnic groups use other stereotypes. A common one is, as we shall call it, the stereotype of "*Zorba the Greek*"<sup>43</sup>, a free spirited creature who loves to sing and dance. *In a very famous part of the movie, the "syrtaki scene", the Englishman who has hired Alexis Zorbas, asks him to teach him how to dance. Zorbas takes off his jacket, throws it on the ground and begins the dancing lesson right there, on the Cretan coast. The music becomes faster, Zorbas says something funny and he starts laughing, the Englishman laughs too and Zorbas says to him: You can laugh too huh? Hey, you laugh! The Englishman then throws his jacket away, loosens up his tie and they continue dancing*<sup>44</sup>. Most foreigners have found or are looking for their "Zorba" in Greece. They want to throw their jackets away, loosen up their ties and dance on the beach. However, this is what a foreigner will experience in Greece during the summer holidays<sup>45</sup>. It is possible that "Zorba the Greek" bears some admirable characteristics as an individual, but those who admire Greece tend to forget the rest of the book or the film, which is very critical of Greek society. One might say that this belongs to the past and that much has changed since the book was written, but the problem still remains: Greece isn't just about singing, dancing and having an opinion.

If one spends more time there one might get a more complete picture of what it means to live in Greece. There is of course a big difference between the two big cities, Athens and Thessaloniki, and the rest of the country. Most Czech visitors experience the islands and the coast in the summer, as tourists. In case they spend more time in Greece their opinion changes. I was conversing with a Czech woman once, who had fallen in love with a Greek islander. She went to live with him at his village. Five years and a child later, she divorced him and returned to the Czech Republic. I asked her why and she said that she discovered him because he wasn't on the same level as she was. He didn't have a University degree and he kept wondering why she kept reading and studying. She didn't

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<sup>43</sup> The Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis wrote the book in 1941-43 and it was first published in 1946. It was made into a movie, directed by Michalis Kakogiannis, starring Antony Quinn, in 1964 [online]

<sup>44</sup> The "syrtaki scene" is viewable on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) [online]

<sup>45</sup> This doesn't mean that Greeks aren't happy to play and dance *syrtaki* for the tourists, even though *syrtaki* is a dance made up by other dances (namely *hasapiko*) for the movie "Zorba the Greek". The Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis composed the well known melody that along with Manos Chatzidakis's "Children of Piraeus" are probably the most famous Greek melodies.

have a good relationship with his sister and she was bored of discussing, what she would cook each day. He also had had an affair. Admirably, they are in good terms and they visit each other for the sake of their child. Other people (mostly women) I spoke with, who have lived or are living in Greece, complain about the hospitals being in a bad shape, about the locals' lack of respect toward animals, about the disorganisation, the bad state the education is in and much more. Most of them don't want to raise their children there.

Czechs who interact with Greeks more often, like tourist guides for example, consider Greeks to be nice people but not well enough educated, loud and spoiled. These can of course be characteristics applying for all tourists. Being a tour guide I often converse with bus drivers, shop assistants or waiters. Some of them have called Greeks and Cypriots "gypsies" because they are loud. From their part, Greek tourists don't like Czech people much. They consider them to be cold and rude.

I asked local Greeks what they think of Czechs and Greeks and I noticed that the older the people are, like Marina (F, 1925, GR) and Kyriaki (F, 1919, GR), the more positively they speak of them. Members of the older generation have positive comments both for Greek and for Czech people. Perhaps they would change their mind if they had lived in modern Greece for a longer period, as many of their relatives have, but the long longing for the lost motherland is stronger. They can't be negative about Greece after their desire for return has been the light motif of their lives for so long and they feel gratitude towards the Czech people because they gave them shelter. Most of them remained in the country because their children chose to stay, like Marina did, otherwise they would return to Greece just like many others did.

The second generation members are those who were born in or arrived to the Czech Republic at a very young age and so they didn't have memories of Greece. They grew up during Communist era and so they couldn't visit the country for a long time either. Some spoke Greek and engaged in activities connected with the country but for some reason (mixed marriage, job opportunities, studies etc.) they remained in the Czech Republic or they left and returned after 1989. These people are the ones who made a choice. Their parents were expelled from Greece and they didn't have a choice, but the second generation members that remained in the country chose to do so. They are the ones who went to Czech schools, spoke Czech better than Greek, they had and have Czech friends. They almost assimilated. Greekness, in their case, is more like an asset that can be used, even though most of them don't take advantage of

their possible double identity. Their relations with Czech people are very good. Most of them are married with Czech people and some of them even feel to be more Czech than Greek.

However, getting along doesn't mean not having an opinion. Ritsa (F, 1946, Buljkes), who has Czech friends and wasn't a victim of racist comments, says that Czechs are cowardly, that they are backstabbers and they complain too much, on the other hand they are civilised and educated. She believes that there is a distance between Czechs and Greeks and that their characters don't match. Vasoula (F, 1952, CZ) doesn't like that Czechs don't express an opinion. She thinks they don't have an opinion. She remembers how she had always differed at school because she would always say what she thinks. Her different approach got her into trouble with her husband's family and his relatives were saddened because their son got married to a "barbarian". She believes she should have gotten a divorce a long time ago. However, Vasoula had some critical comments about Greeks as well. She considers them primitive because they are tactless. When she first visited Greece in 1980 she was surprised by the constant inquiring and the curiosity of the villagers. It always takes her some time to get used to it but she feels sad when she has to leave. Aliko (F, 1954, CZ), who is divorced, believes that the mentality is different. She believes that Greek women need authority and that Czech men are not "men" enough for them. They don't comply with the fatherly images they have from home. Kostas (M, 1950, HU) is also divorced and he believes that it is not a matter of ethnicity or mentality. He believes that divorces in general have to do with lack of belief and materialism. As far as Czechs are concerned he doesn't like it that they are apolitical, indifferent, that they are not patriotic enough and they are oriented towards profit. As far as Greeks are concerned he doesn't like their consumerism and their lack of education. The countryside, where he visited his father's village, seems primitive to him and Athens reminds him of cities in the Middle East.

Second generation members expressed themselves more extensively about Czechs and Greeks. Since they've been living in the Czech Republic they had more to say about Czechs always excluding their person from what is Czech. They also spoke of the Greeks without necessarily identifying with that category either. Czech-Greeks are somewhere in the middle. Maybe they don't uphold Greek traditions and customs and they do uphold Czech traditions and customs, but they don't identify with either the Czech or the Greek society. As far as values are concerned, even though it wasn't explicitly said, it seems that what negative aspects of Czech people they notice, are considered to be the opposite of aspects of Greek people. My informants expressed to

me what they consider to be different among the two peoples but they mainly spoke of the Czech people. They consider me to be Greek and so it wasn't necessary to name all the positive aspects of Greeks.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> generation immigrants, the grandchildren of the refugees, have been in contact with both cultures from a young age. They have associated the Greek element with their grandparents. Their parents mostly spoke Czech to them and so the knowledge of Greek language almost disappeared among members of this generation. There are exceptions of course, since some do speak Greek very well. In most cases though, it is due to their own individual efforts. Some had the chance to attend a few primary school grades in Greece, which provided them with the basis of Greek language. Some speak Greek because their grandparents or relatives repatriated and they often visited them in Greece during the summer. Others learned it by taking courses in the Czech Republic and in Greece or by working in the tourism industry with Czech tourists in Greece. Some members of the younger generation have studied or are studying Greek literature in Brno or Prague; some have written papers on the subject and are active members of the Communities and of the dance groups. Others are simply not interested and are living their lives as Czech citizens. Some feel to be more Greek and some feel to be more Czech.

Members of the younger generation's comments about Czechs and Greeks are similar to those of the previous generation. Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) says that Czech people tire him and that one is good for them only as long as they need one. If you want something it turns into a problem. He thinks that Czech people don't share their belongings, they don't help people and that men are weak and avoid conflicts. They only function according to rules and laws. He thinks that Czech women are "cold", authoritative and they aren't too feminine. Kyros spoke mostly positively about Greek people; he only said they are chauvinists. He doesn't like it when people speak badly of Greeks or of Greece. I once witnessed a discussion between him and Nikos (M, 1979, CZ), during which Nikos mentioned negative aspects of Greece and Greeks and Kyros defended Greece. He says he doesn't have illusions about Greece but he believes one shouldn't talk about it, especially in front of non Greeks. Nikos, unlike Kyros, has had some negative encounters with Greek people. He was disillusioned at a very young age as the following story he narrated illustrates: *His mother was studying to be a school teacher but she didn't graduate. She became a seamstress to make some money. With that money she was buying Czech crystal objects, which she was every month sending to a fellow Jehovah's Witness in Greece. She had promised her she would accommodate her and her children and*

that she would take them to the sea every day. When they went to Greece in 1985, she accommodated them but she took them to the sea only once. As if it wasn't enough, Nikos's mother had taken crystal objects with her because she wanted to sell them and buy presents to bring back to Czechoslovakia. When the woman saw the crystal objects she immediately thanked her, she took them and gave them as present to her niece. She gave Nikos's mother three watermelons as an exchange. Nikos's mother was inconsolable. One shouldn't wonder why Nikos has a critical point of view both toward Greeks and Czechs. He doesn't like it that Greece is disorganised and that in public offices and at the University in Thessaloniki, where he went for a semester to learn the language, he was treated as a foreigner. The Greek students wouldn't even speak to him. He believes that Greeks are in general shrewd and stupid. However, he doesn't want to get married to a Czech girl. He would prefer a more traditional woman and Czech girls aren't very traditional. He would marry a Czech girl that would have some connection with some foreign country. He wouldn't marry a black girl, even though he hangs out with some, because he doesn't know whether he would stand the pressure of the Czech society.

Němcová (2005) researched the construction of identity of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Greeks living in the Czech Republic. She notes that her respondents consider themselves to be Greek and that their identification is more of an internally felt connection with Greek culture and Greek lifestyle. In that sense, any foreigner can feel to be Greek as long as one has the adequate mentality and lifestyle. She summed up what her respondents consider Greek characteristics to be: they have dark eyes and hair, they enjoy life, they are proud, open, warm, frank, willing, energetic, sentimental and sensitive and hospitable. These young Greeks are active in matters of the Community (they are all members of the *Akropolis* dance group). They live in the Czech Republic because they were born here, but they would gladly go live in Greece. However, they don't because they are not satisfied with the conditions of living there. At the same time they are very critical of Czech people. They consider them to be hypocritical, fake, closed, cold, not showing sentiments, egocentric and xenophobic. Czechs lack positivity and energy, they are stingy, jealous, consumerist, apolitical.

The depiction of mental values and qualities of both Czechs and Greeks can be considered to be stereotypical. The respondents have adopted the image of "Zorba the Greek" for Greeks and the image of "čecháček", "the little Czech man" (Holý 2001) for Czechs. This, as we shall argue later, only points out that Czech-Greeks have adopted the Czech point of view in their characterisations of both nations. They see



what's good about Greeks, as tourists experience Greece, but they see what is bad about Czechs as Czechs experience it. What is interesting is the fact they notice practical differences among the two peoples. The Greeks have good taste and take care of themselves while the Czechs don't care about what they look like, they don't use deodorant, they wear sandals with white socks and they bath in dirty rivers and lakes. Practical differences can serve as means of self-identification, which in this case is more like differentiation and they can serve as identification factors by others.

Third generation members, like Nikos and Kyros, have witnessed their parent's marriages dissolve. Not only them, but most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Czech-Greeks I know wouldn't marry a Czech person, on the other hand they wouldn't go to live in Greece either. They are in a situation where they have experienced and can discern negative and positive aspects of both nations and they are in a position where nothing forces them to identify with either. Nikos said he is a product of globalisation and Kyros said he is a universal man who loves Greece. We notice then, that as far as identification is concerned, the 1<sup>st</sup> generation identified with Greece, in spite of the ethnic melange of Northern Greece. The 2nd generation was confused by the pressure of the surrounding Czech society and the pressure for preserving Greek identity. The third generation is no longer under pressure. Those that are bicultural can operate within both cultures without having to choose or identify, although some choose to do so for their own reasons.

In the years after 1989 an economical and educational evaluation of the double identity was noticed, which required an adequate accentuation of Greekness. However, none of my informants currently living in the Czech Republic considers returning to Greece permanently. The Czech Republic suits them, it's their home, and Greece is a lovely place they can visit whenever they want, if they have relatives there. Moreover, today, the stressing of their Greekness reflects the admiration locals have for Greece. It is possible that one of the reasons that members of the younger generation have turned towards Greece, is the fact that they have realised Greece is considered to be special by Czech people. Their parents didn't have the chance to feel this admiration Czechs show towards their lost motherland, because Czech people didn't have the chance to visit Greece and to get to know the country and its people before 1989. Only the 1<sup>st</sup> generation, the grandparents, had an idea of the life in the country, but how could they transfer it to their children since the children grew up among Czechs who mostly didn't know anything about Greece? It must have been

very difficult for the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation to be viewed differently at school, to be called “gypsies” or to be made fun of for eating differently. It is only natural that those who didn’t get married to Greeks and got married with Czech citizens and stayed in the country assimilated or almost assimilated.

After 1989, when Czech people started travelling to Greece and it became an adored destination, Greeks started being admired by the locals and were viewed positively. Czech-Greeks somehow started serving the same purpose as souvenirs from Greece do. Members of the second and third generation have started to take advantage of this situation and creating businesses and university titles. Why not? Since there is a demand for anything Greek they give the Czech people what they want: good mood, singing, dancing, food, language, and travels to Greece. The younger generation grew up at a time when Greece is in fashion, automatically Greek identity is also in fashion and so they began stressing their biculturality.

There are also cases of 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Greeks who didn’t have a chance to grow up with their Greek parent (cases of divorce) and are now looking for their roots, learning the language and travelling to Greece. They feel to have been robbed of an opportunity. From this point of view it is important to have some institutions in the Czech Republic that make it possible for people with Greek blood to be in contact with whatever is considered to be Greek. It is not the same like in Greece, but it is at least something. On the other hand one could question the necessity of such institutions since these days one can get on a plane and be in Athens in a little over two hours. One can have satellite TV; one can listen to radio shows or watch Greek newscasts, films and shows on the internet. Some people are more active in their contact with Greece and whatever is Greek. It always depends on whether they have relatives there with which they are in good terms. Those with relatives in Greece visit them at least once a year and are in constant communication via telephone.

## Figuring out Greekness in the Czech Republic

Two groups of people - the descendants of Greek refugees from the mountains and the Czech fans of Greece - with a rather shallow knowledge of Greece, which is limited to what a tourist can experience, are working together in perpetuating Greekness in the Czech Republic. The way the Czech state and the Czech people viewing Greekness has drawn the guidelines of the way it is expressed by the Greek minority. The way Czech-Greeks experience Greekness individually and institutionally has been influenced by the fact that most of them are half Czech, who have Czech friends and live within the Czech Society. Czech-Greeks are entitled to present Greek culture to the Czech people because they have Greek blood and therefore they are Greek. Without wanting to underestimate the influence of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation and the influence of visits to Greece, we must state that to some degree, the members of the Greek minority have encompassed in their identities, aspects of Greekness as they are experienced by the Czech people.

The Greek minority's capability of preserving Greekness in the Czech Republic was mostly affected by two historical changes: the first was the repatriation of the majority of the Greek political immigrants and the second was the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The repatriation was a major factor since the more populous a minority is, the more chances it has in preserving its ethnic identity. Nearly 10000<sup>46</sup> Greeks repatriated, which left behind only a handful. It was difficult for them to continue in the previous activities of the Greek minority since the civic status of the members of the Czech-Greeks was changed<sup>47</sup> and the funding was minimised. After 1989, institutions such as the Greek Communities were founded as an attempt to institutionally preserve Greekness. As we have already pointed out their members are not many. Greeks that remained in the Czech Republic remained by choice and thus many of them are probably not interested in Greece and Greekness.

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<sup>46</sup> During 1954-1990, 9 324 or 9 898, depending on sources, repatriated (Botu, Konečný 2005: 416).

<sup>47</sup> Since 1987 they legally ceased to have the status of the political emigrant. By 1990 they had to choose whether to apply for a Czech citizenship or live in the country as foreigners (Botu, Konečný 2005: 358-359).

The political change was decisive not only because even the Greeks that chose to stay in the country could freely visit their motherland and their friends and relatives, but also because Czech people could discover the beauties of the country. Greece is today among the top (if not the No.1<sup>48</sup>) holiday destinations for Czech people. Greeks and everything Greek became fashionable in the Czech Republic. Some of the almost assimilated Greek immigrants refashioned themselves to please the idea Czechs have about Greece and offered Czechs what they were looking for: Greek food, music and dance.

In a paper about Greek immigrants in Canada we read that “*According to traditional assimilation paradigms, Greeks, like other European ethnic groups were well on their way to integration into dominant Canadian society by the late 20th century. The cultural and ethnic identity which had survived, and was nurtured by multiculturalism, was fondly referred to as “song and dance” ethnicity. That is, that European ethnic groups had lost their customs and values while retaining only superficial cultural elements such as songs and dances and cuisine*” (Panagakos 2000). The situation of Czech-Greeks isn’t far from the one described in the cited paper. As we will attempt to illustrate, Greek customs and traditions aren’t widely practised by the Czech-Greeks (at least in Prague). Some elements have been preserved next to the adopted Czech traditions and most of them have been modified to fit what Czech Republic has to offer. “Superficial cultural elements” like song and dance, are being preserved institutionally for the Czech-Greeks. Cases of individual attempts of preservation of Greek song, dance and cuisine are mostly targeted towards Czech people, who got to know Greek culture as tourists and thus superficially.

Discernible expressions of Greekness in the Czech Republic are being preserved institutionally through the Communities and other organisations, and individually as a mirroring of the Czech people’s admiration for the country, or as a way of self definition (the origin of which may lay in an attempt to differentiate from the Czech people or to identify with the Greek people). On a personal level it is a highly individual matter and each case is different. Some speak Greek and some don’t, few are religious and most of them are not, some cook Greek food or combine elements of Greek and Czech cuisines together and others don’t, some listen to Greek music and others listen to Czech, international or all kinds of music. Some feel Greek, others feel Czech and others feel like citizens of the world. Few are making efforts to

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<sup>48</sup> Information available in an article about the Czech people’s holiday preferences [online]

institutionally and individually propagate Greekness and Greek culture but as the numbers of the minority aren't very high, it is scattered all over the country and it lacks a social and ideological centre, it is quite possible the efforts will cease.

Before 1989 the minority was ideologically centred around communism and the idea of repatriation. Today, those who wanted to repatriate already did it and communism isn't a widely accepted ideology anymore. Modern Greece has been demystified with its pros and cons and since Czech-Greeks aren't religious and weren't educated in Greece, they can't identify with everything Greece is supposed to represent. The Greek minority is now held together by institutions such as the Greek Communities, whose main role is to attempt to reserve bilingualism and to propagate "superficial cultural elements", which are mostly admired by Czechs but are otherwise not very useful in preserving Greekness among Czech-Greeks. Their utility lies in preserving ties among members of the community, who every now and then meet to dance and listen to Greek music. Religion<sup>49</sup>, as far as meeting and preserving a sense of unity, would be more useful since the church provides a social centre and religious ceremonies and festivities are often followed by celebrations accompanied by dancing, singing and eating traditional meals. To use Brubaker's terms, the case of Czech-Greeks is a case of categorical rather than relational identification.

The Greek minority, lacking a source of self definition and identification, started defining itself based on external views. These views are the Czech state's official policy about minorities, the Greek state's official policy concerning the Greek emigration and the Czech people's expectations. The Czech state demands the minority to prove it is homogeneous with the motherland, the Greek state promotes a sense of identity among the homeland and the diaspora and the people have learned to treat nations as homogeneous. Greek people are supposed to be "Greek" everywhere.

## ***Methodological nationalism***

We shall now review two unpublished University papers about the Greek minority. One was written by a third generation Czech-Greek and the other by a Czech. We will use them to illustrate the theoretical results of methodological nationalism and what we tried to avoid in our research. "*Methodological nationalism*

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<sup>49</sup> It is possible that one of the reasons the Jews have preserved their identity through historical changes and difficult situations because their national identity is a religious one.

*is the naturalization of the global regime of nation-states by the social sciences...Scholars who share this intellectual orientation assume that countries are the natural units for comparative studies, equate society with the nation-state, and conflate national interests with the purposes of social science*" (Glick Schiller, Wimmer 2003). In both papers, Czech and Greek society and cultures are compared and in both cases the minority itself was disregarded. The results of the papers please both the Czech state's policy considering official minorities and the Greek state's policy towards the diaspora.

The first paper is a diploma thesis and the author's major was Theory and Philosophy of Communication. The thesis is called "*The problem of intercultural communication: the Greek community in the Czech Republic*". The author speaks of intercultural communication in general only in one chapter (a bit more than 1 page) without attempting to shed some light on the actual communication between Czechs and Greeks. She only mentions that "*even though Greeks are fully integrated in our (the Czech) society most of them still preserve consciousness of their Greek nationality...*" (Konupková 2007:1). Then the author thoroughly describes the Greek civil war and the historical background of the community. She speaks of the communities and other organisations propagating Greek culture, the repatriation and how problematic it was. Then she goes on to describe the specifics of Greek culture after first clarifying, that some Czech-Greeks are not interested in it. She describes Greek traditions connected with Easter, Christmas, engagement, marriage and christenings. She speaks of Greek cuisine and traditional dances. After thoroughly describing all of the above she comes to the conclusion that "*intercultural communication in the Czech Republic is on a high level and unlike other advanced European states, we are seldom encountered with xenophobia or racism*" (Konupková 2007:56). In her conclusion, she forgets to note that intercultural communication is on a high level because the foreign ethnic is well integrated and almost assimilated, which of course doesn't make the communication so intercultural anymore. The author of this paper doesn't even attempt to notice whether there is a difference between intercultural communication of Greeks and Czechs and of Czech-Greeks and Czechs. Describing Greek culture and saying that Greeks in the Czech Republic are aware of their Greekness doesn't necessarily mean they practice it or that they experience it the same way Greeks do.

The other paper, a bachelor thesis, is called "*Greeks in the Czech society*". The author first outlines characteristics of the Czech society and the official characteristics of a minority. Then she speaks of the history of the Greek minority. In the part called "*Greeks in the Czech society*" she speaks of the generations of emigrants, various organisations and institutions of the minority and then about Greek traditions and customs (Easter, Christmas, engagement, marriage, christenings, name days), Greek cuisine and traditional dances. She also outlines a small survey (four structured interviews) she performed to find out how Greeks in the Czech Republic are living. Her result was that Greek traditions and customs are truly alive, in the case of the informers, and there definitely isn't a fading tendency. The aspect of tradition with which they definitely identify is Greek food (Brožková 2009: 60-62). She of course states that these results cannot be applied on the entire minority. However, these informants are a minority inside the Greek minority. Three of the subjects she briefly questioned are active in matters of the community. The fourth informant is a Greek lawyer, who moved to the Czech Republic because his wife is Czech and it is only natural he preserves Greek traditions and customs since he grew up in Greece. The members of the dance groups are a few and the active members of the Greek Communities are also not many. Some Czech-Greeks don't even like Greece. For example, the 3rd generation Czech-Greek boyfriend of a Czech student of mine even refused to visit Greece with her, which resulted into her moving to Athens and him staying in Prague. Moreover, the author fails to differentiate between a Greek respondent and Czech-Greek respondents, automatically assuming that they are "Greek" the same way.

What is important for us, in both papers, is that when it comes to Greek culture, it is presented as being homogeneous. When speaking of a Greek minority, Greek traditions and customs are being described as they are generally performed in Greece. This generalisation not only obliterates possible variations of tradition within Greece but it also prevents an insight to the actual situation of the minority. The information about Greece is of a folklore character and as we mentioned earlier, folklore studies weren't uninvolved in the nation-building process in Greece. We notice that the same mode of approaching a group is being repeated. Folklorists in the past had an idea of what was Greek and they abolished everything they considered as external pollution. A crystal clear Greek culture was thus described and subsequently perpetuated, which however, wasn't adequate to reality but was designated to form

reality. Methodological nationalism forms a theoretical depiction of reality that suits the state's requirements, since it considers the state and the society as being the same.

Two separate modern Czech Universities have accepted papers, which are meant to speak of the Greek minority but are actually speaking of it only in terms of history and not in terms of culture. As far as the latter is concerned they give a general notion of Greek culture. The authors are looking at the community from the outside and they automatically apply the idea of Greek culture on everything that is labelled as Greek. The minority itself isn't given a chance to even non-consciously articulate its variability. This kind of handling of subjects only perpetuates already established notions and doesn't leave space for novelties, or the truth for that matter, to come out. This misunderstanding is not only a methodological, scientific misunderstanding but it also is an institutionalised misunderstanding.

As already mentioned the state's policy considering minorities, outlines the areas in which the minorities must expand and be active in order to receive the status of the minority. The state thus implicitly forms the expression of each minority's essence, which subsequently has an impact on the essence itself. Moreover, the state appears to be accepting ethnic groups and their difference, but the condition of Czech citizenship shows that it accepts only foreigners that are "Czech". Greekness was defined through nationalist cleansing of culture and it is being perpetuated as a differentiation and identification factor for the Greek people. The Czech state demands from the minorities to prove they are propagating their culture and the Greek state provides the minority with the cultural elements it should propagate. This institutionalised attempt forces the active minority members to unknowingly follow certain guidelines. In case the minority members aren't active and aren't attending the institutions' events, then their self-understanding and expression of identity takes its own individual way.

### ***Czech-Greeks: integrated and bicultural***

It is very difficult to speak of the Greeks in the Czech Republic in terms of some migration theory. First of all they originally weren't immigrants, they were political refugees. Their own, the KKE's and the Czechoslovakian state's goal was to preserve Greek national identity and to stay isolated from the Czech people because



they were supposed to return to Greece. The state didn't apply any politics of "*forced assimilation*" or "*benevolent integration*" on them since it didn't want to have them absorbed into the host nation. The Greek community didn't want to be absorbed either, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation members who went to Czech schools and grew up among Czechs, weren't always so keen on going back, especially in case they were married to a Czech person. Finally, when Greeks got the opportunity to return to their motherland they did it and those who stayed in the Czech Republic integrated or assimilated. The Czechoslovakian state, most possibly in order to "assist" the integration/assimilation process, gave them the opportunity to obtain Czechoslovakian citizenship and live as equals of the Czechoslovaks. Many did it, but later on when laws allowed a double citizenship, some applied for the Greek citizenship<sup>50</sup>.

The older, assimilation theory is not a useful theoretical tool for this case. The theory that assimilation is "*the process by which the characteristics of members of immigrant groups and host societies come to resemble one another*" was developed in the USA (where everybody except for the native Indians is an immigrant of some generation) and thus we cannot use it for our case, since a small group like the Greeks in the Czech Republic, can hardly affect the host society. The Czech Republic is not a "melting pot". In the case of the Czech-Greeks, those that assimilated have been absorbed by the host society without seriously affecting it and without preserving Greekness. They are the "lost" children with Greek blood but without Greekness. Classic assimilation theory which "*...expects those immigrants residing the longest in the host society, as well as the members of later generations, to show greater similarities with the majority group than immigrants who have spent less time in the host society...*" (Brown, Bean 2006) doesn't apply in this case either since in the case of the Czech-Greeks, those residing the longest and some members of the younger generations are the ones who feel more strongly their Greekness.

Some have completely assimilated and others are strongly propagating their Greekness. Němcová (2005) concludes that "*Within the third generation of Greek immigrants living in the Czech Republic there are people, who despite the completed process of integration in the Czech society, are purposely building a feeling of ethnic difference, meaning that they are protecting their feeling of national identity...they have connected their identity with Greek mentality and Greek lifestyle*" (Němcová 2005). After 1989 as we have stressed earlier, Czech-Greeks had the opportunity to be

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<sup>50</sup> Others did it for economical reasons (pensions, inheritance rights) and others due to a consciousness of Greek identity.

in close contact with Greece. Especially after the repatriation of many friends and family members, ties with the motherland became stronger. Thus, they encountered Greek mentality and Greek lifestyle and some chose to adopt it. The author's field research concentrated on a group of young Czech-Greeks, who are members of the *Akropolis* dance Group. Among this group, there are young people who have spent their childhood or summers in Greece and so they were and are in close contact with the country. They are, to some degree, experiencing what Glick Schiller and Wimmer mention as a "*long distance nationalism...which links together people living in various geographic locations and motivates them to action in relation to an ancestral territory and its government*" (Glick Schiller, Wimmer 2003: 597). They all speak Greek, some are studying or teaching Greek, they socialise with Greeks, they dance Greek traditional dances, one of them criticises the Jews, Americans and the Catholic church (just like most Greeks), they criticise the Czech people's habits and mentality and, according to the author, they use them as a mirror through which they constitute their own difference and identity.

Their individual relation with Greece could be described as somewhat transnational, since they preserve ties with relatives in the motherland. However, the whole minority can't be characterised as transnational since the Greek immigrants have been living in the Czech Republic for a long time and their ties with the motherland were severed for many years. They don't belong in both societies since their contact with Greece is mostly limited to relatives, people who repatriated, and Greek or Cypriot citizens living in the Czech Republic. The Greek minority isn't transnational even though ties with the motherland are preserved.

It is true that some have assimilated but not all. For those who haven't assimilated we can use the term *biculturalism*. They have encompassed elements of both cultures in their daily lives. It sometimes happens that one culture is prevalent over the other, but this doesn't mean the person isn't bicultural. If one can operate in two cultures it means they are bicultural. Biculturalism is a sign of healthy integration and in the case of the Czech-Greeks it is obvious that their integration is healthy, since they have been living in peace among and with the Czech people for more than 60 years.

## **Institutional and individual manifestations of Greekness**

So far we have analysed how members of the Greek community in Prague understand and identify themselves theoretically, by ascribing values and individual and social characteristics to Czechs and Greeks and by identifying and differentiating themselves in relation to them. Now we shall look into more practical identification factors and examine whether and how these serve the Czech-Greeks on an institutional and individual level. We shall now see how Greekness is being manifested. We will first analyse the efforts of the Greek Community in Prague and the Association of Greek Communities and then we shall look into Greek cultural elements preserved by the Czech-Greeks and the form in which they are preserved.

### ***Greek Communities as institutional transmitters of Greekness***

The refugees that came to the Czech Republic as adults were naturally more connected to Greece than the orphaned children, who hadn't had the time to get to know the ways of their country before they had to leave it. Since the orphans didn't have a family that could transmit Greek culture and traditions to them, it was the role of every Greek adult to do so, originally within the institution of the boarding schools and later on through various organisations, mostly directed by the KKE. Since the original plan and everlasting wish of the refugees was to return to Greece, it was apparent that "the Greek ways" should be preserved. However, the preservation and transmission of Greekness proved to be problematic. Being so far away from a country that had disowned them and residing in a country so different, Greek refugees couldn't continue living the way they used to. As a consequence some customs and traditions faded and others were altered. After the political change of 1989, the Greek Communities were founded as institutions that would help preserve a sense of unity

among Greeks in the Czech Republic. We shall now review the ways they attempt to do so.

## The Greek Community of Prague

Even though the Greek Community of Prague is a member of the Association of Greek Communities, it has an independent status: “*The Hellenic Community of Prague is an autonomous member of the Association of Hellenic Communities, with its own Constitution and its own bank account*” (Zissaki-Healey 2003: 128). Its activities<sup>51</sup>, according to the web site of the organisation, are concentrated on Greek language courses, on propagating Greek culture, publishing a magazine in the Greek language, publishing books, organising lectures and trips “*following the trail of Greeks in the Czech Republic*”. The Community’s aims are partly concentrated on Greek culture and partly on the history and life of the Greeks living in the Czech Republic. The emphasised Greek cultural elements are language, folklore, literature, history and cuisine. On the Community’s web page one can find information about its activities, one can view photographs from various events; obtain information about the *Akropolis* dance group and Greek dance and language courses. One can find out more about the Community's activities in its magazine, the *Kalimera*.

The *Kalimera* quarterly is published in Greek and it is funded by sponsors, subscriptions and the Czech Ministry of Culture. Some issues



<sup>51</sup> The aims of the Greek Community of Prague [online]:

- Teaching the Greek language and culture by both Greek and Czech teachers
- Propagating Greek culture by organising “Greek days” in Prague, photography exhibitions, Greek products etc and by artistic dance and song performances
- Publishing the quarterly “Kalimera”, which is the only journal in Greek in the Czech Republic and which describes the life of Greeks living in the Czech Republic
- Publishing books about the history and the life of Greeks living in the Czech Republic
- Organising lectures about Greek literature, history, culture, Greek cuisine etc.
- Organising trips following the trail of Greeks in the Czech Republic

of the magazine are accessible on the internet. Publishing this journal is one of the most important activities of the Community. We shall review a randomly selected issue of the magazine in order to illustrate its contents.

It is the April 2008 issue No. 39. On the front cover there is a map of Greece coloured red (we won't comment on the choice of colour and possible symbolism and association with communism), partly covered by the Greek flag and a smaller geopolitical map of Greece. The contents of the magazine are in black and white, only the front and back cover are in colour. On page 1 there is an advertisement of a book about a Greek 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary and excerpts from a famous poem he wrote. On pages 2-9 the news of the Community are outlined by its president and chief editor of the magazine Tassula Zissaki-Healy. The headline reads: *"From our club...the (little) news are offered by Tassula"*. There are pictures and brief news from various celebrations and events such as the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, the New Years "cutting of the pie" and the Community elections, the 65 years anniversary since the foundation of EPON (the communist youth organisation), and a photography exhibition, organised for the 60 year anniversary since the arrival of the first Greek Refugees in the country. There are comments by the editor such as *"those of you who didn't come, missed a lot"* or *"our oldest generation is worth it for you to try and make it at least once a year to see them (we see them often, I'm saying this for you, those who go and tell anything you want to anyone you want...I don't want to say things that it is not proper to say)"* or *"For those who keep "talking" and saying we are not doing anything, it would be good to take part in our events. If they don't like it they should organise their own"*. Obviously there are people who are opposing the Community's leadership and Tassula, the president, doesn't miss a chance to comment on the subject. The most common reason for criticism I encountered amongst informants is that they oppose the communist ideology spread on the pages of

the magazine by its editor and president of the Community Tassula Zissaki-Healey. I heard

The cover of the April 2008 issue of *Kalimera*.

comments such as "she is a major communist", "the magazine is an instrument of the KKE", "the magazine is a means of self-assertion for Tassula". Page 10 is devoted to a Greek girl from Brno who made it to the finals of the Miss Czech Republic pageant. On page 11 there is an interview with the mayor of the Greek city *Stylida* who had come to visit a friend living in Prague. Page 12 is about the healing abilities of the olive tree leaves. On pages 13 and 14 there is an interview with a Greek chef living in

the country since 2004, who also gives a recipe for a traditional Greek sweet. On page 15 there is an unsigned report from Thessaloniki about two homeless men dying in Athens. The reporter notes how these events were not very emphasised by the media and goes on to show how the capitalist state doesn't help the people. The USA and Germany are mentioned as primary capitalist states with many homeless and unemployed citizens. To conclude the report the author writes with capital bold letters that *"The barbaric capitalist system is responsible for all the menaces of the people. The only way to heal this inhuman system is to overthrow it and replace it with a people's power, which will place in its centre (of interest) the human being and the real needs it has."* Communist ideology isn't at all hidden in the unsigned text. The rest of the pages of the journal are devoted to the history of the Greeks in the Czech Republic. There is archival material, letters from readers and a narrative from a member of the community recounting her experiences as a fighter for the DSE and a children's escort. On page 27 there is an advertisement about a Greek TV channel offering satellite service and on the last page there is an extract from an unknown book. The extract is about an incident among Greeks and Bulgarians during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

The magazine gives an account of the Community's activities, which is of course proof of the fact that the Community is active and as such it can justify its existence. One can characterise as negative the fact that communist ideology is undeniably present in a magazine, which is partially funded by the Czech Government. The Community is supposed to be apolitical and its magazine should be too. Despite the fact that most refugees were communists one cannot say that this line of thought is still prevalent. Political beliefs can cause friction among members of the Community, which is negative for the community as a group. Another negative aspect is the fact that the authors of the articles are not professional journalists and they work voluntarily, which also applies for the graphic designers. The contents of the magazine are thus at an amateur level. It is also very peculiar that the authors of some articles are not mentioned. There's also a lack of structure, objectivity and there are some spelling mistakes.

When I first stumbled upon the magazine at the Greek embassy in 1999, the title struck me as somewhat strange. The word *kalimera*, even though it has a positive meaning, it somehow has a "touristy" feel. It is the word most tourists remember after visiting Greece. They all know how to say *καλημέρα* [*kalimera*] – good day, *γεια σου*

[*ja su*] – hi and *γεια μας* [*ja mas*] - cheers. I asked the founder of the magazine about the title and he said that he chose *Kalimera* because it is the word most Czechs remember after visiting Greece. The choice of the title of the magazine was subject to the way Czech people view and experience Greece as tourists, which as we have already seen, largely influences the way Czech-Greeks experience their ethnic identity in the Czech Republic. However, taking in mind what these people have been through and how much their lives have changed since the repatriation of the majority of their community, we shouldn't be too hard judges. Apparently they are doing what they can. The magazine gives the people a sense of unity and it informs them that there are people who for some reason, are trying to preserve this sense of unity among Greeks in Prague and in the Czech Republic, even though the active members of the Community are not many. On the other hand if the magazine was more professional and serious and less politically oriented it could attract more people to the Community's events and more people would probably subscribe.

## **The Association of Greek Communities**

The Association provides a legal and institutional framework to 13 Communities in the Czech Republic (the one in Prague is an independent member). The Association's headquarters are in the north-eastern Czech Republic city of *Krnov*, which is considered to be the “capital” of the Greek minority. It is also called “Czech Athens” by the local Greeks. The Association is trying to preserve Greekness and so it is interesting to view what Greekness consists of from their point of view as well. The Association has some goals outlined on its web page<sup>52</sup>, which are quite similar with the aims of the Community in Prague, with the additions of *supporting friendly relations between Czechs and Greeks* and *developing relations with the motherland*. The Association's web pages give the reader an account of activities, such as organising the “Greek days of *Krnov*”; organising meetings of children focusing on Greek tradition, dance, song and conversation; organising Greek language and dance courses, sporting and cultural events and Greek evenings.

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<sup>52</sup> The aims of the Association of Greek Communities [online]:

- *Supporting friendly relations among the Greeks living in the Czech Rep. and Czechs in the field of culture and society.*
- *Development of the Greek identity through cultural and educational events.*
- *Preservation and development of Greek language.*
- *Development of relations with the mother land including the social and financial help.*
- *Arranging of lectures and courses leading to learn more about the traditional and modern Greek culture.*
- *Arranging of folk and dance events, sports events, publishing and working with children and youth.*

Under the tag *Traditional Greek culture*, we can read, and we translate and paraphrase, that “*Greece is a country of strong traditions and the meaning of Greekness is strongly embedded in the minds, customs and everyday life of the inhabitants. Even though the youths drink coca cola and eat pizza, even these youngsters dance to the catchy traditional Greek beats, sing traditional songs and follow the national traditions and customs just like their parents. Many customs and traditions are connected to Greek Orthodoxy and the church plays an important role in everyday life*”. There are a few traditional fairy tales listed, the lyrics of two traditional songs and a few words about Greek traditional dance and music. Under the tag “*Traditions*” we find a catalogue of what is mostly celebrated in Greece with some details about each occasion: name days, betrothal, weddings, christenings, the Carnival, Easter, Christmas, March 25<sup>th</sup> and October 28<sup>th</sup>. There is also an account of modern day life in Greece. On the pages one can also find information about Greek language courses and Greek cuisine with some recipes and pictures.

Judging by the content of the Association’s web page we can say that it serves as an introduction to Greece. People who are interested in this country can find out more about it through the web page of the Association. The web page isn’t very informative about the actual Greek minority existing in the Czech Republic. Apart from outlining the organised events and activities of the Association, the authors of the web page don't mention anything specific about the minority. The history of the Greeks in the Czech Republic is completely absent and Greek history as well. There is nothing about Greek language except for the time table of the courses and there is nothing about Greek Orthodox religion, even though in the section about tradition most events described are connected with religion. Folklore, language and cuisine are emphasised not only in the part concerning Greek culture and traditions but also in the outlined activities of the Association.

## **The Czech Republic's official minority policy**

One of the aims of this paper is to show how the activities of the institutionalised aspect of the minority are subject to what the Czech state expects from any minority. In the previous paragraphs we looked closer at the goals of the Greek Communities and now we shall look at what the Czech state requires from a group of people in order to consider them a minority and subsequently provide the



group with funds and acknowledge it certain rights. According to the official national minority policy of the Czech Republic documents<sup>53</sup>:

- *A national minority is a community of citizens of the Czech Republic who live on the territory of the present Czech Republic and as a rule differ from other citizens by their common ethnic origin, language, culture and traditions; they represent a minority of citizens and at the same time they show their will to be considered a national minority for the purpose of common efforts to preserve and develop their own identity, language and culture and at the same time express and preserve interests of their community, which has been formed during history.*
- *A member of a national minority is a citizen of the Czech Republic who professes other than Czech ethnic origin and wishes to be considered a member of a national minority in common with the others who profess the same ethnic origin.*

It is obvious that the policy of the Greek minority, as it is projected through the Greek Communities, coincides with the policy of the Czech state considering minorities in general. In both cases there is emphasis placed on common ethnic origin, identity, language, culture and traditions. In the Czech state's declaration it is also required that the community of citizens shows a will to preserve identity, language and culture. The Communities must thus show that they are organising events which are meant to preserve Greek identity, language and culture. The Association's web page is directed towards describing elements of Greek culture to ensure that the continuity of tradition and identity between the Czech-Greeks and the "Greek" Greeks won't be questioned. It can be said that the national institutions' requirements affect the activities of minorities, which in order to achieve a certain status and acquire grants, tend to preserve tradition and certain cultural aspects dictated by the host state's minority policy. Thus, traditionalism is propelled and maintained within minorities.

Through the legal article cited above, the Czech state appears to be interested in supporting the preservation of various ethnic identities. However, this interest is limited to citizens of the Czech Republic. The Vietnamese community for example, which is the third most populous community of immigrants in the Czech Republic

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<sup>53</sup>Information available on the web page of the Czech government in Czech [online]. In English: *National Minority Policy of the Czech Republic, Key documents*, p.14-15, Prague 2003.

was until recently denied the status of a minority. If the Czech state was really interested in the preservation of the ethnic identities of the immigrants living in the country, it could have acknowledged the Vietnamese immigrants as a minority a long time ago<sup>54</sup>. The condition of citizenship indicates a long stay in the country and subsequently also possible assimilation. It is highly probable that the Czech state gives certain rights to minorities which can easily assimilate with the host society, or are on their way to do so. The Vietnamese community is known for not assimilating and maybe this is one of the reasons the Czech state didn't want to assist in preserving their ethnic identity. We see then that even though the state appears to be supportive and it gives funds and grants, there is always some kind of policy in the background.

It is now in place to pose a question as to how many members of the Greek minority do actually know, like and are willing to preserve what is considered to be Greek. In some cases even the loyalty of Czech-Greeks to Greece can be questioned. Some of them have noticed all the negative aspects of Greeks and Greece and prefer to live in the Czech Republic as Czech-Greeks or as Czechs. One of our goals was to demonstrate that Greeks in the Czech Republic are producing and reproducing their own version of Greekness, which is subject not only to the Czech governmental institutions' point of view, but also to the Czech people's point of view. Memories of Greece and experience from later encounters with the country and its people have given the basic material, which was moulded to its current shape in a mould provided by a Czech viewpoint.

We shall refrain from making the methodological nationalist mistake of taking for granted that culture is homogeneous. The fact that Greeks in the Czech Republic are of Greek ancestry doesn't necessarily mean we can equate them with the majority of the Greek people and consider their experience of Greekness the same as the experience of other Greeks. In the next sections we will see what is "left" of Greek culture, how and in which form. We shall analyse the effect of the institutionally carried out cultural elements and we shall discuss the impact of the absence of religiosity on the formation of the ethnic identity of Greeks in the Czech Republic. Thus we will show how Greekness is experienced by the Greek people in the Czech Republic, despite the efforts of institutions and states to homogenise culture and obliterate difference.

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.literarky.cz/component/content/article/1204-cizinci-nebo-menina> [online] [accessed May, 2010]; <http://www.cvs-praha.cz/> [online] [accessed May, 2010]

## *Language and dance: ethnic education*

### **Language**

Historians have established that Greek language has been spoken in the area of Greece since the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. It is the language in which Homer narrated the Iliad and the Odyssey, in which Socrates conversed with his fellow Athenians and the language in which the New Testament was written. It has undergone tremendous changes since then, but it is still a source of national pride for the Greek people. It establishes continuity among the “new” Greeks and the “old” Greeks and as such, it is an identification factor. During the process of nation-building the “language question” was of the utmost importance. The linguistic purism pursued by the intellectual elite alluded to ancient Greece, shunning thus the common people's language and ensuring continuity with the chosen past (Herzfeld 1989). As noted in a previous chapter, a common language and a centralised educational system are very important for creating a sense of common national identity among the people (Gellner 1993).

In the Czech Republic this centralised educational system was represented by the boarding schools. The children were educated by mostly untrained teachers. The people that came to the country as adults weren't very educated. Some of them were completely illiterate<sup>55</sup>. There were about 20 professional teachers among the refugees and some more were trained in exile (Papadopoulos 1998: 54). They cooperated with Czech teachers in their effort to educate the children (Botu, Konečný 2005: 94). They were taught their language, history and geography in Greek (Papadopoulos 1998: 42). Due to the inadequacy of the Greek teachers, it was decided in 1951, that the children should start going to Czech schools and so the hours of Greek language were reduced and Czech language was more emphasised. Later on, only the subject of Greek language was taught in Greek. Other subjects were taught in Czech.

After all the boarding schools were shut down in 1962, the new generation of children went to Czech schools from the first grade. Greek language courses were arranged by the KKE committees in areas where more Greeks lived, but the education was always connected with the KKE ideology. Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) remembers that his mother spoke Greek with him and his siblings at home until their father forbade it. When they started attending Greek language courses, the teacher wanted a 20 Czech Crowns contribution

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<sup>55</sup> According to the 1962 census, 1224 Greek adults (over 15) in Czechoslovakia were illiterate, which makes a percentage of 14.27%. The percentage was higher originally but was reduced thanks to the efforts of both the Czechoslovak and the Greeks (Tsivos 2009: 303).

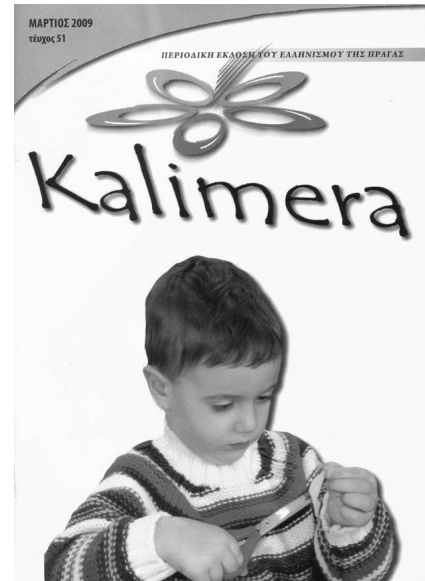
to the KKE. He still remembers the banknote and the teacher noting him for not having it. His mother didn't want to give the money, but she did so that her children could learn Greek. People considered language of the utmost importance for preserving ties with Greece and Greekness. Some Czech-Greeks realised the importance of language at an older age. Kostas (M, 1950, HU) recalls how he learned Greek for the second time. He spoke it with his mother at home until he was 6-7 years old. When the family got separated and the children went to boarding schools in Czechoslovakia, they forgot how to speak Greek. Then he had to learn it all over. He thought it wasn't right not to speak Greek. He translated words from "Rizospastis<sup>56</sup>" with an English-Greek dictionary. He translated about 40000 words to Czech but it still wasn't enough. When Greek and Czech cities started fraternising, he became an interpreter for the delegations. He was learning words, mostly communist terminology. He said he learned it like a parrot. He didn't know grammar well but he was learning slowly. Now he listens to the Greek Church radio. He notes that thanks to the Greek language he became Christian Orthodox. Only he of his siblings living in the Czech Republic speaks Greek. Others, like Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) and Ritsa (F, 1946, Buljkes), attended special programs in Greece in order to improve their knowledge of the language. Nikos also worked with tourists on Greek islands for some years and so his Greek became even better.

My informants all spoke Czech and Greek but we used both languages in our communication. With most of them we conversed only in Czech since they felt more comfortable with the Czech language and some of them were used to speaking Czech with me. It is very reassuring to know, that when a word doesn't come up immediately in one language, one can use its equivalent from another common language, and continue communicating without interruption. It is common among the Czech-Greeks to combine phrases or words from both languages. Most of them speak Czech at home since they come from mixed marriages and they speak Greek with native Greeks. Alikí (F, 1954, CZ) for example didn't speak Greek to her children because the task was left to her alone, since her ex-husband and father of her three children is Czech. Only one of her children speaks Greek now. On the other hand Ritsa, whose husband is Greek, said that it was natural for her when her children were born to speak Greek to them. Even the oldest of my informants use the Czech language to communicate with their family and friends. Some speak Greek well but they are not very familiar with the grammar, which is very complicated, and with currently used Greek expressions. Some have an accent. When Alikí was explaining to me why she chose to stay in the Czech Republic and take the

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<sup>56</sup> A Greek KKE newspaper

Czech citizenship, she mentioned that until 86' she didn't know where she belonged. She was a foreigner everywhere, she was uprooted. In Greece they were asking her: *Where are you from? You don't speak perfect Greek*. In the Czech Republic she had the status of a foreigner, she had permanent residence. In 1986 she preferred the Czech citizenship over the Greek (double citizenship wasn't allowed at the time by Czech law). Now her Greek is close to perfect because she has been guiding Greeks in Prague for more than 12 years.



The cover of the March 2010 issue of *Kalimera*

There are efforts to preserve bilingualism among the Greek community. Courses are taught in areas where the Greek community is more populous. In Prague the courses are led by Greek teachers and are partly financed by the Greek state. They are for free for Greeks and they cost 1000 CZK per semester for Czechs. Teaching the Greek language is considered to be a way of preserving Greek identity. Greeks who have small children living in the Czech Republic are worried about them not learning Greek or about them not socialising with other Greeks. Greek language is considered to be so important that some Greek businessmen in Prague have hired private teachers for their children. Many other drive their children to the House of Minorities once or twice a week to the Greek language and dance courses. At the end of 2009 a few mothers (Czech married to Greeks and Greek women) started arranging meetings for their children at the House of Minorities in Prague. Their attempt is meant to strengthen the ties among the parents and to create ties between the children. The children also learn Greek at the House of Minorities and they are learning how to dance Greek dances. The children get the chance to be among Greeks and to communicate in Greek. In the case of the children we see that apparently, learning a language is not enough to create ties. More activities are necessary. Therefore the children started attending dance lessons and a Christmas meeting was also arranged where the children made wishing cards<sup>57</sup>.

Greek language is essential in the process of identifying with the Greek nation but one cannot say that Greeks in the Czech Republic are working on the continuation

<sup>57</sup> *Kalimera*, March 2010, issue 51.

of Greek language among their progeny for national identity reasons only. It is also essential in the communication with family members in Greece who don't speak Czech, and bilingualism is also an asset that can be utilised later on in life. In the case of Greeks in the Czech Republic we see that language is important firstly as a means of identification with the mother nation, secondly as a doorway to everything else that is considered to be ethnic and can be accessed in the national language, and thirdly the learning of a language can be a means of socialisation with people with the same interest. However, language alone is not enough for the creation of feelings of connectedness and groupness. Relational ties must be created and the feeling of belonging to a bounded group must emerge. A group must be therefore present not only on paper but also in practice. It must provide its members with the possibilities to create some relational ties. These possibilities are provided for by those who are authorised and must be interested in keeping a group bounded. In our case these are the Communities whose activities we explored in a previous chapter. In the next sections we shall look more closely into events organised by the Community, namely the Greek evenings.

## **Community events**

When the boarding schools were shut down, the communities took over their role and started organising festivals and Greek evenings during which people could sing and dance Greek songs. Today, the events that the Greek minority organises through its Communities, in various parts of the Czech Republic (*Prague, Krnov, Šumperk, Brno* etc.), are rooted in those that took place after their arrival. All these events were organised by the KKE in the past and their purpose was to keep the community together and to preserve Greekness, because they were to repatriate. Greek national holidays and occasions connected with communism were celebrated. When the KKE was abolished in 1989 and the regime changed, the renewed organisation of the Greek community continued to celebrate the national holidays and to organise a festival in *Krnov* once a year. The content of the celebrations has been preserved from the past, as folklore and music are the elements of Greek culture mostly emphasised.

In 1949 and 1950, children choirs from the boarding schools first performed at certain occasions. These were local internal elections of the minority, the anniversary of the revolution against the Ottomans (25.03.1821), various conferences, events

commemorating *Nikos Beloyannis*<sup>58</sup>, the anniversary of the foundation of the KKE and the EPON<sup>59</sup> etc. The Greek children choirs and dance groups performed Czech<sup>60</sup> and Greek songs and traditional dances. Festivals of the Greek immigrants in Czechoslovakia were also organised. They began locally in the late 1950s and in 1965 a state-wide festival was organised in Ostrava. Greek immigrants living in other socialist countries attended as well. In 1970 special committees were founded to overlook the organisation of festivities, anniversary commemorations and the activity of the traditional dance and music groups. In June 1974 a meeting of the Greek youth took place in Brno. During the three days it lasted, sporting (football, chess, table tennis) and cultural (music and dance performances) events took place. It ended with a dance evening that went on until 5 am., which is something highly unusual in the Czech Republic but quite common in Greece. Youth meetings were held every year and contests for the best traditional costume and dance group were organised. In larger cities such as Prague, *Brno*, *Ostrava*, *Jeseník* and *Krnov*, Greek evenings were organised every month (Botu 1982: 49).

Greeks in Prague organised dance festivities to commemorate the day of the “*OHI*” (28.10.), the revolution against the Ottomans (25.03.) and the foundation of the KKE. The earnings were to be donated for the support of the KKE (Botu, Konečný 2005: 341-343). Louiza (F, 1945, GR) and her brother Antreas (M, 1948, GR) remember celebrating these



*Greek children from the boarding school of Nové Hradý at the 1st of May parade in Trhové Sviny  
(Botu, Konečný 2005: 83)*

<sup>58</sup> A Greek communist and resistance leader. He fled after the DSE defeat but in 1950 he returned to Greece in order to re-establish the Athens organization of the KKE that had been declared illegal. He and his comrades were arrested and sentenced to death. He became globally known as the “*Man with the Carnation*” and as such he was depicted in a famous Pablo Picasso sketch [online]

<sup>59</sup> The United Greek Youth Organisation, Ενιαία Πανελλαδική Οργάνωση Νεολαίας (ΕΠΟΝ), was founded on 23.02.1943[online]

<sup>60</sup> As Karadzos describes, children weren’t introduced only to Greek but also to Czech culture. They actively prepared and attended 1<sup>st</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of May festivities, even though they originally didn’t know the meaning of these dates (Karadzos 2004: 73-74).

events and that sometimes the Greek community in Prague got organised on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May and they went to *Letná*<sup>61</sup> waving Greek flags.

I asked my informants about Greek celebrations and gatherings. A common appreciation was that the situation changed dramatically after the repatriation of the majority of the Greek immigrants. Marina (F, 1925, GR) said that in the past they used to meet often and there were more of them. Now many have died and many have left. She is a widow and a pensioner and so she gladly goes to any organised event, when she is able. She attends the Greek evenings organised by the Greek Community of Prague twice a year (October 28<sup>th</sup> and March 25<sup>th</sup>), she goes on organised trips to various places where Greeks had lived or are still living. She is very fond of reciting poems about Greece that she learned in school and which she still perfectly remembers. Sometimes, when she can't sleep, she keeps recalling and repeating the poems she remembers from school. She also attends events organised by other organisations propagating Greek culture<sup>62</sup>. Marina is very active when it comes to matters concerning Greece. She values the efforts of the current president of the Greek community in Prague (Tassula Zissaki-Healey) and says that without her it would all fall apart. Other people I spoke with don't share the same verve as Marina. Some are too busy with children and work, some are in bad terms with the current leadership of the Community, others disagree with its leftist policy. Some, like Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) and Aliki (F, 1954, CZ), put aside ideology and personal preferences and subscribe to the magazine or attend the Greek festivities just to keep in touch with the Community and support it.

We can understand how the repatriation affected the minority more clearly if we look at the magazine the Greeks used to issue until 1977. It was established as *Agonistis* (Fighter) in 1954 and it was later renamed to *Laikos Agonistis* (People's Fighter). It was issued by the KKE of Czechoslovakia and the last issue was in 1977. There is a letter written by the editors of the magazine addressed to its readers in the last issue, explaining that since “*the political change in Greece has made it possible for us to return to the beloved homeland*”, they would cease their function on 5.7.1977. The authors of the letter summarised the magazine's role in the past years: “*it contributed to keeping the Greek political refugees concentrated in*

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<sup>61</sup> People used to celebrate 1<sup>st</sup> May at a park called Letná, in Prague.

<sup>62</sup> Apart from the official Greek Communities, there are other organisations propagating Greek culture in the Czech Republic:

- The Society of Friends of Greece, *Klub přátel Řecka*
- The endowment Fond *Hellenika*, *Nadační Fond Hellenika*, founded in 1994 in Brno
- The Lyceum of Greek Women in the Czech Republic, *Lyceum Řekyň v České Republice*
- The Society of friends of Nikos Kazantzakis, *Společnost Přátel Nikose Kazantzakise*



*Czechoslovakia around the KKE, it informed the readers about international events and events in Greece, about the lives and activities of compatriots in Czechoslovakia and other socialist countries and it gave information about the political line of the KKE and the international communist and workers' movement. It assisted in the patriotic and fighting education of the refugee family's youths.”* (Laikos Agonistés 1977). It is no secret that the magazine's content mirrored the Party ideology. Going through various issues of the magazine one can also notice it depicted Greece and situation in Greece with the worst kind of examples. Apparently since it was planned for all Greeks to return to the motherland, as it had been agreed upon in the first place, there was no reason for the magazine to exist. The interruption of the magazine's issuing might also have been a way to make people realise that there was no reason to be in Czechoslovakia anymore and that it was time to go back.

It is obvious then, that approximately until 1977 the Party's policy was to preserve all Greekness and hold the community together. When repatriation began, the Party “washed its hands”. Those who chose to stay in Czechoslovakia were “on their own” and they could accept Czechoslovakian citizenship. Since most of the so far organising members of the community had left the country, Greeks had to reorganise. Alikí (F, 1954, CZ) was one of those who tried to reorganise the community. She remembers that from the age of 15 and until she was 25 years old she danced Greek dances with a group. She used to think she would return to Greece but she broke up with her Greek boyfriend and then got married to a Czech man and she stayed in the Czech Republic. In 1977 all her family returned to Greece. Only she and her grandmother remained in Czechoslovakia. She was an active member of the Greek community. She quit mainly because of her work. With two of her friends they had established a Greek magazine. They wrote and issued the first two numbers all alone. They didn't even have sponsors. She also is one of the co-founders of the Friends of Greece Club. She used to go to the Greek evenings. Now there are too many Czechs. She thinks the Community is ruined. The old generation is interested but they are too old. Only the older ones go to the House of Minorities. She's never been there. Alikí thinks that even though the Community organises something, in the past Greek evenings were held every month and now it's only twice a year and they are somewhat “cold”. When Greek Communities were founded, they institutionally took over the preservation of the Greek community's traditions but people don't show much interest, not even those who had spent a lot of time in the past in trying to preserve what was considered to be Greek.

The Greeks that stayed in the Czech Republic tried to continue the tradition of Greek evenings with dance and music and the tradition of a Greek magazine, even though most of their friends and family members had been gone. By continuing the previous activities of the community they aimed at preserving Greekness, even though after 1989 they could travel freely to Greece and there wasn't a need to fill a gap anymore. The necessity to continue also expressed a longing for the activities of the Greek community of refugees in the Czech Republic. Many Czech-Greeks remember how large the celebrations were in the past and that they were held in the luxurious *Žofín* hall. Now they don't even feel like the celebrations are Greek anymore. Repatriated Greeks also miss the past. In 2008, at the 60 years anniversary celebration, many repatriated Greeks visited the Czech Republic and especially *Krnov* where most of the celebrations were held. In the interviews they gave to TV crews they expressed how moved they were for being back in the Czech Republic and for seeing again all those friends they lost when they repatriated. A woman even wished it could all be undone<sup>63</sup>.

## **Greek dancing**

### ***Hotel Belvedere: a Greek evening for Greeks***

To preserve "groupness", the Greek community in Prague organises Greek celebrations, usually twice a year. Anyone can go to these celebrations and so many Czech admirers of Greece go there too. I heard that at a recent meeting at the House of Minorities the subject of whether Czech people should be allowed to such evenings was put to vote. Everybody who agreed for Czechs to be "banned" raised their hands. Of all the people (it wasn't specified to me how many) only two men didn't raise their hands. When they were asked why they said: *because there will be no one there!* So the subject was put aside. As I mentioned earlier I went to such an event which marked the beginning of my practical "field" research. There were more Czech than Greek people there. Apart from meeting and talking with various people I made some observations about the way Greek traditional dances are danced in Prague. Moreover, due to the presence of the Cretan high school students, the difference between Greece and Greek migration was even more striking.

When the music group started playing Greek songs, the dance floor was slowly occupied by people holding hands and dancing, trying to form circles or spirals. In Greek

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<sup>63</sup>[online]

traditional dances, the first dancer leads the way and the rest follow the same path. If somebody wants to join it's not necessary to go to the end of the circle, one can simply join by breaking the circle at whichever point. All the dancers can be in one "circle" or various circles can be formed. At some



*A Greek teenager is dancing zeimpekiko in the middle, while her schoolmates form a circle around her, clapping their hands to the beat. In the back we see Czechs and Czech-Greeks dancing zeimpekiko in a circle, holding hands.*

point the Greek teenagers went down to the dance floor and they started dancing, forming their own circle. The dance floor was slowly divided into areas where the teenagers from Greece danced and areas where all the rest danced. For some reason a feeling of commonality between the local dancers and the dancers from Greece wasn't established.

Even though I don't really enjoy traditional dancing I went on the dance floor myself for a while, when the group played a *kalamatiano*, since it's the only dance that I think I can still remember from school, and my brother's girlfriend wanted me to teach her. The people dancing, knew only one or two steps, while at school we were taught many variations. There was a strange feeling of uniformity in the dancing, which I didn't expect. They all danced the *syrta* steps to dances that have different steps. I never learned how to dance *syrta* or *hasapiko* and so I didn't take part in these dances. Even if I knew how to dance *syrta* it would be odd for me to dance *syrta* to the *zeimpekiko* rhythm for example (which is a solo dance). There was also confusion as to how hands are supposed to be held. In circular dances, the dancers either hold hands straight down, or up at shoulder height either still, or moving their fists in circles. They can also hold each other by the shoulder. At hotel Belvedere one could see all of these variations in a single circle during one dance, which doesn't happen in Greece. The high school students preferred holding each other by the shoulder.

I was watching everybody performing the same *syrta* steps, while dancing to *zeimpekiko* and when one of the Greek teenagers danced *zeimpekiko* the way it is danced in Greece, I was enthused, even though I have associated this dance with aspects of Greece that

I don't like, such as entertainment at the *buzukia*<sup>64</sup>, where plates are being smashed by the dozens, people dance *tsifteteli*<sup>65</sup> on the tables and spend ridiculous amounts of money on flowers, which they throw on the singers or on women to show appreciation. Despite my personal reservations concerning this aspect of Greek culture, I welcomed *zeimpekiko* being danced as I got used to it from Cyprus and Greece. I expected from the members of the *Akropolis* dance group to lead the dances but on the contrary, when their show was over they got changed and they sat around the table drinking and smoking, not even once getting up to dance. The same goes for most members of the Greek community. The dance floor was used mostly by Czech people and the Greek teenagers.

The Greek evening was nothing like the *buzukia* in Greece, no plates were smashed and nobody was covered under a heap of flowers. Everything was civil, even though older people complained about the music being too loud. Admiringly the older people stayed until quite late. Members of the community may think that if Czech people weren't there, the Greek evening would resemble the *buzukia* more. It would be more spontaneous and "hotter" and not "cold", as some characterise these evenings. However, I didn't notice any efforts from members of the Greek community to spice things up. Most of them were sitting on their chairs talking and smoking. Very few danced and one sang. At least the Czech people appeared to be enjoying the evening. If the members of the community don't try to set the tone they wish the evenings to have, the majority of attendants (the Czechs) will. The Greeks in Prague were a minority even at their own party. Many think that the "soul" of these evenings is gone because of the diminished number of Greek attendants, but it is also possible that the Greeks in the Czech Republic would wish for the evenings to be as they are in Greece or as they used to be in the past, but they don't have it in them anymore to turn them into such.

### ***Klub Lavka: a Greek evening for Czechs***

My Greek language students, who came with me to hotel Belvedere, were enthused. They had been telling me of attending Greek evenings almost every month, so I couldn't quite understand their enthusiasm, until I went to such an evening with them. Two Greek singers, who became famous in Czechoslovakia in the 70s-80s, Martha and Tena Elefteriadu, organise, almost every month, Greek evenings at *Klub Lavka*, near Charles Bridge, in Prague. I arranged it with my students, who booked a table, and I joined them at such an evening in April 09. There was an entrance fee of 200 CZK but I thought it was for free and as it was dark and I

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<sup>64</sup> *Buzukia* are night clubs where popular Greek music is being performed.

<sup>65</sup> The Greek version of belly dancing.

didn't really know where I was going, I didn't notice the counter and so I didn't pay. I was late again and the singers were already on stage and many people were dancing. The singers were escorted by a guitar player and a *buzuki* player. Apart from those on stage, I didn't see any other Greeks there. Most of the attendants were Czech women and so I realised why my students were so excited at the other evening, they had finally seen some Greeks! When Martha went on a break, people started conversing with her. I was surprised by the friendly mode of behaviour. I couldn't understand how it was possible for her to know all these people. As I realised from the brochures left on the tables and by inquiring with the girls, Martha teaches Greek dances. Martha and Tena are both very loved among Czech people who also love Greece.

I noticed that people were dancing in a particular way I had noticed at Belvedere too. As was noted earlier, what especially appeared to me as strange was the way they danced *zeimpekiko*. *Zeimpekiko* is a “one man show” kind of dance but here they danced it in a circle holding hands, performing the *syrtaki* steps. Most traditional dances are danced in a circle but not *zeimpekiko*, probably because it isn't a traditional dance. *Zeimpekiko* is an improvisational dance through which the dancer expresses his feelings and individuality. It was a dance originally danced only by men but now women dance it as well. It might be an improvisational dance but I had never seen it being performed in a circle. I asked a member of the Prague Community's dance group, why this dance is danced this way. She explained to me it's a mistake of course and that probably somebody made the steps up and the locals use them to dance everything they don't know how to dance. They think it is all *syrtaki*, which is probably because they can't distinguish among the various tempi that Greek dances have. Martha Elefteriadu explained to me that when she teaches Greek traditional dances, she explains to her students that *zeimpekiko* and *tsifteteli* are solo dances and she doesn't teach these dances, because they are not traditional.

At *Klub Lavka* I noticed they even danced *tsifteteli* in a circle. *Tsifteteli* is a somewhat Greek version of oriental dancing. I told my students that in Greece it is all different and I wish I could show them but I couldn't, since I wasn't raised dancing this kind of dances. At school we were taught only the traditional traditional dances. *Zeimpekiko* and *tsifteteli* are danced at parties and at the *buzukia*. They are not part of the official conception of Greek culture, which coincides with the dances taught during gymnastics hour at school. *Zeimpekiko* and *syrtaki* (*syrtaki* is a dance that was made up for the movie “Zorba the Greek”) are taught at private dance schools and *tsifteleli* (and *zeimpekiko*) are learned by watching other people dance. *Tsifteteli* in

particular is a traditional Turkish dance called *Çiftetelli*<sup>66</sup> in Turkish, which infiltrated the culture of areas formerly occupied by the Ottomans. The Greek state attempted to clear Greek culture from Turkish elements but *Çiftetelli*, in its Greek version of *Tsifteteli*, survived and it is one of the most popular dances in Greece.

I often wondered why I cannot dance *zeimpekiko* or *tsifteteli*, even though I grew up on Cyprus, where almost everybody knows how to dance both dances. Even when I tried to dance these dances, they seemed foreign to me. It wasn't something that "just happened" as in the case of my high school schoolmates. I wasn't taught these dances at school and since my mother is Czech and never showed an interest in learning how to dance anything traditional or popular, I wasn't in contact with these elements of culture at my family environment. I therefore didn't grow up watching my parents amuse themselves in this way and these dances remain foreign to me to this day.

Greeks in the Czech Republic were likewise taught traditional dances at boarding schools, but dances that don't fall under the category "traditional" couldn't have been developed. If someone isn't a professional dancer one has to be raised within a certain cultural environment in order to absorb and "incarnate" cultural elements that are not taught. Second and particularly third generation Greeks grew up in a predominantly Czech environment and so their knowledge of Greek culture is mostly the official one.

This way many differences among Greeks in Greece and Czech-Greeks can be explained. Greeks in Greece grew up surrounded by a living culture, a melange between official culture and popular culture. Czech-Greeks grew up with the official version of Greek culture and with second hand memories of the popular one. Another major differentiation factor is that the ancestors of the Czech-Greeks came from various rural areas with their own individual local culture. The culture that prevailed in Greece is city culture, since more than 50% of the population lives in the big cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. *Zeimpekiko* and *tsifteteli* are dances that were more popular in the cities, where the majority of the political refugees from Asia Minor, who introduced these dances to mainland Greece, settled. As a result Czech-Greeks attempted to preserve the official culture but missed out on the evolution culture underwent in Greece, which was significant. When they repatriated they didn't find

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<sup>66</sup> "double stringed; to move like a snake" [online]

what they expected in Greece and Greeks considered their Greekness to be dated and foreign.

By attending this second evening I started understanding the uniformity in the dance moves I had noticed at hotel Belvedere. Apparently most of these people had attended some Greek dance courses, where they were taught how to dance certain dances. Petra, a



*Martha and Tena on stage at Klub Lavka*

Czech woman who used to be a student of mine, goes to Greece almost every year on holiday. She was trying to learn Greek for about 4 years, but the language is difficult and so she quit. Last autumn she decided to attend Martha's dancing class. Petra was instructed 8 dances, of which she says she doesn't remember much. Last time we spoke she wanted to go and refresh her memory at *Klub Lavka* at the next Greek evening. It would be her first time there. These Greek evenings are an opportunity for Czech people (mostly women) to practice what they have learned and to entertain themselves "the Greek way". The organisers have tried their best to make everything remind of Greece.

It was quite dark but the stage was illuminated in shades of purple and ancient Greek Corinthian style columns stood in front of the stage<sup>67</sup>. There was a Greek food menu which consisted of small dishes - more like appetisers or *mezedes* as they are called in Greece - like fried aubergine, pepper stuffed with cheese, *mussaka*, *tzatziki* and Greek salad. They also offered *baklava* and *kadaifi* for desert. The beverages menu consisted of a narrow offer of Greek wines, Metaxa and Ouzo. The setting reminded of ancient Greek ruins, the food and drinks were traditional, the music and the musicians were Greek. There was a chance to eat, drink and dance. If it wasn't for the lack of sun and sea and Greek men, one might think they are in Greece! Just like my former student Petra and my students that escorted me to the Greek evenings, Czech people spend a few summers in Greece as tourists or working at bars and restaurants, they learn a few words in Greek, they

<sup>67</sup> The columns are a permanent element of the club's decore, they are not placed there just for the Greek evenings.

think it's an easy language to learn, they adore the food and the nice, smiling people, they enjoy the entertainment and so when they return to the Czech Republic they desire to learn how to speak, how to dance and how to cook. They want to feel that Greece and their next holidays are near. Czech-Greeks and other Greeks living in the Czech Republic are assisting them in their attempt.

The Czech element is very strong at the occasions described above as most of the attendants are Czech. They are Czech people who like Greece for some reason or more. By going to the Greek evenings, both at *Klub Lavka* and at Hotel Belvedere one might get the false idea that there are so many Greeks in Prague who are interested and are attending these events. The truth is that most of them are just fans of Greece. As we demonstrated earlier, the Greeks in the Czech Republic were cut off from their motherland and so they didn't have the chance to adjust what they remembered to be Greek to what Greece was becoming. Greek culture and traditions in the Czech Republic underwent an integration/assimilation procedure and the Greek element started to fade. Even though it continues to fade, especially in mixed marriage families where Czech traditions prevail, some people have started utilising their knowledge and connection with Greece. Some went to Greece and took Greek language courses in order to be able to teach Greek, some started guiding Greeks in the Czech Republic, others opened restaurants and Greek delicatessen shops and others are teaching Greek traditional dances or are performing Greek music. This is to show that these days the Greek element in the Czech Republic is subject to the way Czechs view Greece and to what Czechs expect from Greek people. It is also subject to economical factors since the people who are covering the Czech demand of what is Greek, don't do it for free.

### ***Music and food: self-identification***

Czech people who love Greece are attempting to re-enact their "Greek experience" mainly by listening to Greek music and by going to Greek restaurants. Why music and why food? As Pokorná (2009) alluding to Sutton (2001) puts it: "*synaesthesia is a term used in the anthropology of food for the capacities of food to evoke the past in its sensual totality*". Both music and food are physiologically and psychologically connected with senses and emotions and with the memory of them.



Therefore both food and music have the capacity to evoke the past. Immigrants can listen to the music of their motherland and cry of nostalgia or rejoice as if they were “at home” and they can taste or smell their ethnic food and remember particular events from their past. We shall now view whether Czech-Greeks listen to Greek music and whether they cook or eat Greek food and what it means to them.

### **Music**

In general, Greek music is the kind one can sing and dance to and it evokes *kefi* (good mood) in people. People dance to and listen to both traditional and popular music. There are of course more “serious” genres as well and some Greek composers are internationally acknowledged, but what most people listen to is a melange of traditional and popular music. Greek people adore their music and some of them can’t live without it. Greek tourists in the Czech Republic often ask whether there is a *buzukia* place, where they can go listen to Greek music and dance. When I tell them we don’t have such a place in Prague their usual reply is: *how can you live without buzukia?* They are usually shocked when I tell them I don’t listen to Greek music. In March 2010 I was escorting high school children who had come to Prague on field trips. In one technical high school, there were more foreign names on the name list than there were Greek. I couldn’t even pronounce their surnames. I spoke with a teacher and he told me that about 60% of the children were children of immigrants. They all spoke Greek perfectly and when their mobile telephones rang, they had Greek popular songs as ringtones. Apparently music and the entertainment industry in general is a way for immigrants to integrate into the host society or the opposite. For example I often go shopping for groceries in various Vietnamese shops in Prague and I noticed they only listen to Vietnamese music and they only watch Vietnamese TV.

Music is an important means of identification. It expresses identification with a group sharing the same (not only) musical preferences. As mentioned earlier, when Greeks came to the Czech Republic they formed choirs and music groups and they performed at various occasions. These assisted in creating relational ties and in preserving ethnic identity and “groupness”. These days there are some music groups performing at the Greek evenings, at Greek restaurants or whenever there is an opportunity. It is widely understood that when something is labelled as Greek, Greek music should be present as well. Songs are sung in the mother tongue and traditional dances are danced to them. Language and popular tradition are factors of identification and overall expression of Greekness, and music is a combination of

both. It can be identified as different by others and therefore on a community presentation level it is a means of identification by others.

On an individual level, music evokes emotions and it becomes a means of self-identification. However, this doesn't mean that whoever listens to Greek music is Greek or that whoever doesn't listen to Greek music isn't Greek. I don't listen to Greek music when I don't have to and in the beginning I couldn't understand why my Greek language students brought me lyrics to help them translate and when they told me they loved Greek music. I understood it of course when they explain to me that it reminds them of Greece and their holidays there. Apparently Greek music doesn't appeal only to Greeks. It seems to be a matter of individual taste (I know many Greeks who don't listen to Greek music) and individual memories.

Some years ago I met Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) at an event at the exhibition site in Prague and he offered to drive me to the city centre. When we sat in the car and we started driving he turned the music player on and Greek music started playing. I asked him: *do you listen to Greek music?* And he replied: *I **only** listen to Greek music, don't you?* It seemed odd to me at the time, since I didn't know his personal history well, and so I asked him about it when we got the chance to sit down and talk. He confirmed that he only likes Greek music (even though he was raised in the Czech Republic). He was a little over ten years old at the time of the Velvet Revolution and he remembers that by then they had been listening to two tapes over and over. Not everything was allowed during the previous regime and music from Greece wasn't accessible. They listened to the music of Xarkhakos, Demis Roussos and Nana Mouschouri, which was accessible through France and to Mikis Theodorakis, who was then a communist and his music had a revolutionary content. When I asked Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) whether he does something typically Greek in his everyday life he replied that he listens to Greek music. He said that his mother used to listen to it and so it reminds him of his childhood. Only these of my informants clearly stated they listen to Greek music. Vasoula (F, 1952, CZ) remembers her parents listening and dancing, Marina (F, 1925, CZ) said her husband had many records and tapes but that she gave it all away after his death. Both of them don't listen to Greek music and so do my other informants. I guess it is possible they don't listen to any kind of music or that they are listening to classical or other kinds of music.

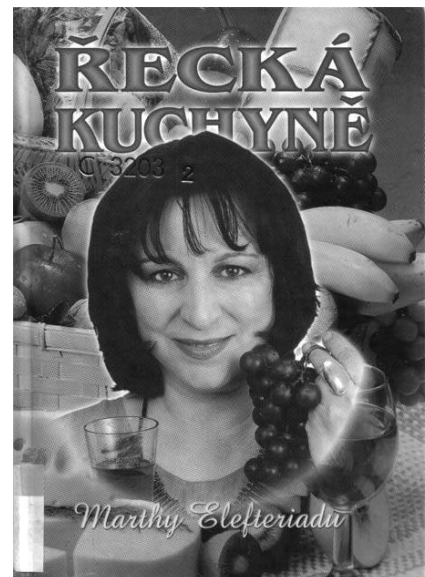
Music evokes emotions and brings back memories on an individual and collective level, but there can be all kinds of associations present. Based on this particular research we can only say that since music evokes memories, people who listen to Greek music probably associate it with something positive (who would want

to evoke bad memories!). It is not necessary that listening to Greek music is an expression of Greekness; it can be the expression of longing for some person, or for some good years. It may also be an expression of having something in common with the majority of Greeks, and as such it is a factor of self-identification and an expression of Greekness for those who practise it. On a communal level it may create a feeling of commonality among members of the group, since it evokes the memory of the homeland, which they all miss. It can also evoke a sense of belonging to a greater group, which listens to the same music. Music is apparently an important factor of identification, but since just like food it is subject to personal taste, not all people express their Greekness through it.

## Cuisine

When it comes to food, Greeks can be quite nationalistic. It is for example an ongoing subject whether the way coffee, as it is being prepared in Greece, is a Greek or Turkish invention. The Greeks call it Greek coffee; the Turks call it Turkish and the Cypriots Cypriot. The same problem appears with *baklava*, *tzatziki* and other foods that are quite similar in most Balkan countries. Sometimes, claims of a certain food originating in a certain country have caused demonstrations and official incidents. A nice example is the “*baklava war*” in Cyprus. In May 2006 the Cypriots managed to get *baklava* acknowledged as a Greek-Cypriot food by the EU, which caused a major unease amongst the Turks.

On the example of cuisine one can show how Greeks turn back to ancient times to look for the origins of their cooking and eating habits, which makes food a way of identifying with the past and thus demonstrating a continual tradition. Martha Elefteriadu begins her Greek cuisine cookbook by giving an account of Greek banquets from the Classical era. She mentions the “*Deipnosophistae*”, a literary work from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in which a few recipes appear that are being prepared the same way to this day (Elefteriadu 2004: 9-15). The Byzantine era is mentioned as well not only in the aforementioned cookbook but also in the “*baklava*



*The cover of the cookbook by Martha Elefteriadu*

war” incident. In their effort to prove that *baklava* is Greek, Greek journalists went back to the Byzantine years and discovered that *baklava* was the favourite sweet of the Byzantine court, with the difference that it had another name. Food is quite important in the case of wanting to establish some kind of identity, not only national but also local (local dishes or local variations of dishes) or individual (vegetarian, vegan etc.). In the case of the Czech-Greeks the situation wasn’t always favourable towards this particular end.

“*Food as a sign of cultural identity of the Greek community in Prague*” is the title of a study attempting to show that “*peculiarities of their diet and food habits are among cultural signs with which present-day Prague Greeks are building up their identity*” (Čermáková 1999: 142). In this brief article the author notes that traditional Greek foods have been modified and innovated and that they are served along with Czech dishes. Greek foods are often prepared at various occasions like Christmas. The Greek element is usually represented by some Greek dish, such as *pita*. The Czech-Greeks are people who stayed in the Czech Republic and most of them are, as mentioned earlier, involved in or “products” of mixed marriages. Czech traditions prevailed and Czech-Greeks like Czech cuisine too. Their preference of Greek meals or their cooking habits are practised in the privacy of their homes. One could say that Greek cuisine helps in preserving a Greek environment within the family, but it is more of an allusion to Greece. Eating habits cannot differentiate them from the Czechs, unless they go around Czech restaurants loudly complaining about the sauces and proclaiming that Greek cuisine is better. Eating habits, just like music, are a way of self-identification which is, however, subject to personal taste.

Two of my informants, the oldest ones, offered me *pita* when I went to see them at their homes. *Pita* is a pie filled with feta cheese and one or various green plants such as leek and nettle. They and other Greek women bake *pita* for Christmas or other occasions. They cook both Czech and Greek dishes and they like both. Alikí (F, 1954, CZ) learned how to cook Greek dishes from her mother and grandmother. They had to add Czech elements because of lack of materials. She prefers Greek cuisine because it's healthier and it tastes better. Obviously at a time when Czechoslovakia's import was limited to “friendly” countries it must have been difficult to get food to which Greek people were used to. Olive and orange trees, for which Greece is famous, don't grow in the Czech

Republic<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) mentioned that Czechs used to make fun of his family and say “they eat like animals” because their mother used to pick chicory from the fields and make salads. Martha Elefteriadu also mentions a similar incident in her part of the autobiographical book she co-wrote with her sister Tena. She remembers picking chicory in the fields with her mother and Czech people asking whether they were picking it for their bunnies. Martha begged her mother not to tell anybody that the leaves they were picking were for their own use (Elefteriadu, Elefteriadu 2007: 17). It is possible that the mocking of the Czech people forced some Greeks to give up on their habits, which resulted to not transferring them on. However, this is definitely not the case of Martha Elefteriadu, who as we mentioned earlier issued a Greek cuisine cookbook. Nikos also likes Greek cuisine and he once complained to me about a Czech girl not putting the right condiments (olive oil, vinegar, salt) in a tomato salad. She put vinegar and sugar as Czechs are used to and Nikos **didn’t like it**.

Greeks probably had a hard time getting used to Czech cuisine. Karadzios describes how when along with other 150 children he was taken to the boarding school of *Skokovy*. They were welcomed with dinner, which consisted of dill sauce and dumplings. It is a traditional Czech dish, which of course the Greek children had never heard of or seen before. They all pushed their plates away (Karadzios 2004: 28). Today they are used to Czech cuisine and nobody would say no to a good *svíčková* or *vepřoknedlozelo*<sup>69</sup>. Czech cuisine has not only been accepted by the Greeks but it is also being missed by those who left the country and returned to Greece.

When the Greeks came to the Czech Republic they didn’t know how to cook anything other than the meals they used to cook in the territories where they came from. Their peculiar eating habits made them differ from the natives but one cannot claim that it was intentional. Greek refugees missed their homeland and they at least tried to “taste” it. When Giannis (M, 1970, CZ) thinks of his childhood in *Krnov*, he remembers his grandfather eating olives and the smell of olive oil and tobacco in the room. The refugees sometimes received certain goods through post. A scene in George Agathonikiadis’s<sup>70</sup> film “Returning in autumn” is highly illustrative: *A young boy’s, the protagonist’s, grandfather receives a jar of olives in a package from Germany. He*

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<sup>68</sup> However, one should also take into account the particular eating habits of the areas the Greek refugees came from. Maybe they didn’t have olive oil or orange trees.

<sup>69</sup> Czech traditional meals.

<sup>70</sup> “*Podzimní návrat is very obviously an autobiographical film. The director was sent to Czechoslovakia as a two-year-old and after a brief stay in children’s home, was raised by his grandparents in Brno*”[online]

*gives the boy an olive to taste but the boy is disgusted and throws it away. Then the grandfather tells the boy: "You are not Greek unless you eat olives!" and when the grandparents go to bed the boy forces himself to eat olives until he starts liking them.* In Greece one cannot say that somebody isn't Greek if one doesn't like olives; it simply means that someone doesn't like olives. In the case of the Greeks abroad certain foods, like olives, are surrounded by an aura of significance, which through memory of the homeland served as a means to build up an identity. Some aspects of this phenomenon have survived to these days, like in the case of the older women offering me Greek style *pita* when I went to visit them, but what definitely prevails is a kind of syncretism when it comes to everyday life: the same woman that offered me *pita*, a few hours later offered me *šunkafleky*, which is a common Czech dish.

Greeks in Czechoslovakia didn't even have the chance to open Greek restaurants, for which Greeks became famous in the West and which proved to be essential in keeping the family and the community and traditions together. After 1989 many Greek restaurants were established in the Czech Republic and members of the Greek community started meeting there at various occasions such as Christmas or Easter. The owners of these restaurants had to import Greek ingredients from Germany, where there are more Greeks and Greek restaurants. Lately, many shops selling Greek products have opened in Prague, mostly because many Czechs have fallen in love with Greek cuisine. By looking at all these Greek delicatessen shops, all the Greek restaurants and the once a month Greek evenings at *Klub Lavka*, one might think that the Greek community in Prague is so populous and so active that all these businesses are meant for them. This is not the case because the market targets for these business endeavours are Czechs. Czechs who just like most people, whose countries don't have sea, love Greece and Greek products.

Gastronomic encounters and stories can be quite interesting but the fact is that one cannot cook foreign dishes if one doesn't have the right ingredients. One tries to discover ingredients that resemble the ones missing or make new creations by combining various elements of national cuisines. This is somehow what happened with most Greek customs in the Czech Republic. Obviously one cannot look for purity of tradition, if something like this exists, among people who have been cut off from their homeland and lived in such a different environment for so long. The influence of this barren, concerning Greek traditions, environment is obvious on a family level. Not only Greeks in the Czech Republic speak Czech at home, they also

cook Czech food and as we shall later illustrate, they follow Czech customs. However, as we have earlier discussed, situational modifications in tradition don't mean the lack of it.

Elia Petridou, by studying the Greek students' in London eating habits *“illustrates how the sense of fragmentation and discontinuity caused by displacement finds expression in judgments of food, which further extend to the judgments about the social order. In the process of making sense of the new environment and themselves within it, the displaced draw on their past experiences constructing as they do a concept of home against which they construct their present situation...Food serves as a material form, which mediates, objectifies and shapes understandings of difference...”* (Petridou in: Miller 2001: 89-90,101). Petridou illustrates how students, by assessing eating habits, sometimes feel to be “better” than others who are not as clean, as tidy and eat microwave food. Greeks in Prague, unlike the students Petridou mentions, are not displaced; they are at home in the Czech Republic. Greek food reminds them of their ancestors' home. However, food is important for its immediacy. It is an immediate factor of identification / differentiation. In situations that are beyond routine, like meeting with someone for an interview or like holidays and Greek evenings, music and food can serve as a means of self-identification and identification by others. These means of identification are direct and universal. Any person can *feel* the difference. People can express their Greekness without words, by showing they can cook something Greek, which was presumably transferred to them from previous generations.

One may wonder what is the difference between a Czech person who loves Greece, who learned how to speak Greek, who cooks and eats Greek food, who listens to Greek music, and a third generation Greek immigrant who also enjoys and learned how to do all of the above. Apparently members of the third generation have thought of this question too and they say that what makes them Greek is a subjective feeling of connectedness with Greece and what is Greek, they feel it in their hearts (Němcová 2005). In the case of food, what makes the Czech-Greeks differ from Czech people practising what is “Greek”, is an authentic link with Greece. Some Czech Greeks learned how to cook Greek foods from their parents and grandparents who were “original” Greeks. Food can serve as means of self-identification but it is not very illustrative as means of identification by others, since food is subject to personal taste. It is an immediate expression of Greekness, but it must be evoked, since Czech-

Greeks eat and like Czech food too. The subjective sense of Greekness can be manifested through food and identified by others when necessary.

The fact that Czech-Greeks are bicultural can serve them in the sense that they can be identified by others as Czech or as Greek depending on the situation. The same people that are now longing for Greek music and food can long for Czech sauces and beer when they are in Greece. We don't want to object the fact that eating habits can be an important means of identification/differentiation but we mustn't forget that in our particular case, the minority is fully integrated into the Czech society and has accepted and embodied Czech eating habits. Identification factors, such as food and music can be easily evoked in particular situations, when a direct identification is necessary. A researcher can be fooled as to the importance of music and food as means of ethnic identification. On the contrary, an excessive emphasis on profane cultural elements, which don't require any particular belief or ideology, such as music and food, can signify the lack of the latter. In Greece the Greek Orthodox religion provides a framework of ideology, belief and practice, within which one can perform identification. As we have pointed out and we shall illustrate, the majority of Greeks cannot conceive Greekness without religion and so religious practice is a way of manifesting Greekness.



## Religiosity and religious tradition: the missing link

### *Religiosity*

As it is very well known, religion and communism don't go well together. The Greek refugees were communists living in a communist state, which means that they probably didn't mind the lack of opportunity to go to church or celebrate Christian holidays. The problem created is that religion is a major factor of identification for Greeks. In Greece, religion is presented as an institution which helped in preserving Greekness during the dark years of the Ottoman occupation. Everybody who went to school in Greece has deeply embedded the image of the priest, secretly teaching children the Greek language at the "*kryfo sholio*", the secret school. According to history school books, a priest (*Palaion Patron Germanos*) raised the flag of the Greek nation on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 1821 to mark the beginning of the uprising against the Ottomans<sup>71</sup>. Lately, facts challenging the role of the Church in the uprising are coming to the surface and therefore, one can only assume that the role of the Church had to be accentuated by historians and therefore other facts were disregarded. More facts – not only of a religious character - are now being challenged by modern historians who want history school books to be more objective. The history school book for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school, issued by the Ministry of Education in 2007, was criticised by most Greeks since it attempted "*to silence the role of the Church during the uprising*". The government and the authors of the book were being charged with "*attempting to alter Greek history for the purposes of multi-nationalism*". They were accused of "*propagating leftist ideology and of taking money from American and other countries' institutions whose purpose is to harm Greece*"<sup>72</sup>. The book was finally withdrawn from schools in September 2007 and replaced with the older one

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<sup>71</sup> This is being challenged by modern historians, who point out that the flag of the revolution was raised by *Panagiotis Karatzas* on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1821

<sup>72</sup> [online]

until a more suitable book will be written. A similar discussion took place when the state was considering taking religious icons off the walls in school classes, and when individual religion was not to be printed on new identity cards.

The Greek people consider any kind of intervention in religious matters as an attempt to alter Greek national identity. The Christian Orthodox Church has been a factor of identification for Greeks for a long time. It protected them from assimilating with the Turks and now it differentiates them from the immigrants living in Greece, especially Albanians and Muslims. It also differentiates them from Europe. Most European states are secular but Greece has an official religion. From the Greek point of view, religion is a unifying and differentiating element and as such it must be protected.

Some Greeks of the Western world diaspora also share the same ideas about religion. They view it as an identification and unification factor. Oddly enough I met a woman in Prague, Louiza (F, 1945, GR), who lives with her Czech husband in Florida. I asked her about the Greek community there. There are about 12000 Greeks and 3 churches where she lives. She is not religious but she went to church a few times. She sometimes helps in fund-raising for the Church. Apparently they organise festivals and they cook various Greek delicacies at the church, which they later sell to anybody who is interested. It seems that the church is the social centre of the community, which is something that the Greek minority in the Czech Republic lacks. The role of the Church is being discussed extensively in a study about the Greek community of New York (Scourby 1980). In this study an attempt has been made to measure ethnic identity among three generations of Greek Americans living in the larger area of New York. In the survey there was an effort to classify the immigrants either as ethno-religious (ethnicity rooted in religion) or as ethno-cultural (ethnicity rooted in cultural values). These categories of classification don't even come to mind when we speak of Greeks in the Czech Republic. Most of them were communist and so they didn't hold religion in high regard. Some loathed the "fat priests", the "billy goats" as Marina's (F, 1925, GR) husband called them, even when they were in Greece. Our Czech-Greeks could be thus classified as ethno-cultural.

Greek Church played an important role during the civil war by covering "*the spiritual part of the fight against communism*" by the side of the government army. This "cooperation" later led to the dictatorship motto: *Ellas Ellinon Hristianon*, Greece of Greek Christians (Giannaras in: Tsaousis, 2001: 247). The Greek

nationalist ideology maintains that whoever isn't Christian Orthodox isn't Greek. This nationalist ideology is partly supported institutionally, since Greece isn't a secular state and there is an official religion set by the Constitution. Presently it is a major subject of debate since there are many foreigners permanently living in Greece who are not Christian Orthodox. From the Greek nationalist point of view, Greeks in the Czech Republic are not Greek unless they are Christian Orthodox.

If one asks people in Greece if they are religious or not, almost everybody will proudly answer that they are religious and they are Christian Orthodox. Czech-Greeks differ in this matter and their difference is apparent in everyday practice, since they don't form the sign of the cross, they don't pray, they don't kiss the icons in the church, they don't kiss the priest's hand etc. By not performing all these little details, which are common practice in Greece, they are immediately recognised as different by Greeks. Karadzos (2004: 33) describes how during a visit in Greece locals were wondering how come he doesn't pray and he doesn't believe in God. He had to explain to them that he grew up under different circumstances and that as a surgeon he couldn't possibly believe in God. Similarly, my informant Vasoula (F, 1952, CZ) often had to explain to Greeks in what sense she isn't religious. She tried to explain that at school they were taught to love nature. And that since God is the Universe, the planets; one doesn't even have the right to kill the dew because it is like killing God. Vasoula explained to me that she tried to show that she is not a complete unbeliever, that she just has a different faith. She thinks that our minds cannot grasp it, we don't understand it. God is infinity, the unknown, we know nothing about Him.

When I asked other informants about religion I mostly got a clear "no" from them. Marina told me I wouldn't find out anything about religion. They were all communists. Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) said he is religious and that he has a personal belief. When I was speaking about religion with Louiza (F, 1945, GR) she looked at the library in the room where we were sitting. She looked at her father's picture surrounded by religious icons on the shelf. She said her father's bones would be turning in his grave if he saw it. Her father had given her and her brother books in which the creation of the world was explained scientifically. She accepts it but her brother doesn't. He is the only "believer" in the family. He said he doesn't think it all just started without a stimulus. They used to go to church in the village back in Greece and they explained to me that judging by the surname of the family some ancestor of theirs was probably a priest. Their father became an atheist in Czechoslovakia. Louiza went to church in Florida with her cousin but it didn't mean anything to her. She viewed it as a social affair.

I sometimes got stories of religious experimentation: from atheism to Buddhism to Orthodoxy to abstract religiosity. Nikos (M, 1979, CZ) for example says he is more of a Buddhist and he even went to Sri-Lanka to meditate. He had been raised as a Jehovah's Witness by his Greek mother, who had been influenced by his Czech father's friends. When she died he was twelve years old and he started reading about Buddhism. He approached the Orthodox Church as well but according to him, it resembles a company more than a Church and its representatives are hypocrites. Kostas (M, 1950, HU) was raised an atheist but when he was 35 years old he wanted his wedding to be recognised by the Greek authorities and so he got baptised at the Orthodox church in Prague. It didn't mean anything to him because, as he put it, he was living materialistically. At some later point in his life he started reading some Eastern philosophy (Sai Baba) whose main ideological representative quoted Greek thinkers. Kostas then asked himself why he, who is of Greek origin, is looking for "the meaning" in India. So he started learning more about the Greek Orthodox religion and is now a practicing Greek Orthodox Christian. He would like to go to Greece and join a Greek Orthodox monastery at some point in his life.

There is obviously confusion surrounding the subject, which isn't far from the religious confusion Czech people experience after so many years of religion being tabooed. However, Czech-Greeks are faced with a strong tradition connected with their particular national religion, and so they contemplate at some point in their life to become religious and to get baptised as Christian Orthodox. Some do and others don't. Nevertheless, some of them don't view religiosity as a way of identifying with Greece. Louiza for example considers herself to be more Greek than her brother whom she characterises as 100% Czech, even though she is an atheist and he is religious.

## ***Religious practice***

In Greece, various occasions for family celebrations and gatherings such as christenings, name days, birthdays, weddings and funerals are closely connected with religious belief. There are religious services performed at christenings, weddings and funerals, and name days are based on the Christian Orthodox Calendar. In a picture of 1960, (Botu, Konečný 2005: 343) we see a Greek Orthodox priest sitting among children. According to the label, the picture was taken after a christening in *Krnov*. Apparently some priests had arrived with the refugees but obviously religion and religious belief couldn't survive in a communist country, especially when those who were supposed to be religious were communists. It wasn't possible for religious acts

to be performed but this doesn't mean that the celebrations following such events couldn't take place. Koula (F, 1964, CZ) for example has a godfather and she knows from her parents that her christening celebration took place but the christening didn't. The social institution of the godfather was preserved but the religious aspect was eliminated (Botu 1982: 49). Koula doesn't remember her grandparents or parents ever performing religious acts, not even forming the sign of the cross, which is quite common in Greece<sup>73</sup>. However, her parents moved back to Greece and when her mother died, a religious ceremony was preformed. The same as with christenings applies for other religious ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. No religious ceremonies were performed but the customs of inviting all friends and relatives, and of celebrating till morning hours were preserved.

According to Heroldová *“Orthodox religion played an ambivalent role in the life of the Greek immigrants. Members of the Communist Party didn't profess it. Some people did profess it overtly in the beginning and covertly later on (e.g. secret christenings). Religious education, which took place during the first three years, after the coming of the refugees, at schools, was terminated by external intervention and the importance of religion degraded due to the long stay of the immigrants in the country...The importance of religion increased in relation with their pending repatriation”* (Heroldová 1986:137). Partly due to communist beliefs and partly due to conditions in the Czech Republic, religious practice wasn't common. Christenings and weddings only had a utilitarian meaning for Czech-Greeks.

Religious ceremonies are currently being performed but one cannot say that Greeks in the Czech Republic are religious or that they are Christian Orthodox for that matter. In 1999 in Prague I first went to the Greek restaurant *Olympos*. As I mentioned earlier I had no idea about the history of the Greek immigrants in the Czech Republic at the time. At some point the owner came to our table and he started talking with the people. I don't remember how but they started talking about religion at which point the owner said he would never kiss a priest's hand (quite common in Greece) and he openly spoke against the Church. I remember thinking that this man may speak Greek but he can't be Greek. Naturally, being raised in Cyprus as an atheist, I had noticed how disturbed people would get when somebody mentioned that there is no God. I didn't know any other atheists on Cyprus, even communists go to church there, and so I got confused when I heard somebody from Greece denouncing

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<sup>73</sup> Religious Greeks even cross themselves whenever they pass a church.

the Church. The same way Greek refugees adapted to the Czechoslovakian secular environment they re-adapted to the Greek environment upon their repatriation. Many started going to church in order for them not to differ, especially those who lived in smaller communities.

The political situation, which suppressed religiosity in the past, is now different and so everybody can believe anything they want and they can travel to and correspond with the motherland as often as they want. They can get christened, married or buried with a Christian Orthodox ceremony in the Czech Republic. My younger, still unwed informants aren't contemplating on getting married in a church. Even Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) who had both his sons christened is not married, in spite of family pressures. Some Czech-Greeks have started arranging religious ceremonies. In 1998 a Greek style church was built in *Šumperk*, funded by the local Greek community and the Greek Church. In 2004 a Greek style wedding was performed there, between a former inhabitant of *Šumperk* and her Athenian husband. The regional internet journal informed its readers about the details of the wedding and the christening of their baby, which took place on the same day<sup>74</sup>. However, such events are not often.

I asked my informants about how and what they celebrated in the past and in the present, but I didn't receive many clear answers or longer narrations. What most described can be understood as a Czech-Greek fusion of customs and traditions. In order to grasp the subject correctly we must first contemplate on these people's ideological, economic and territorial origins and on the dramatic changes that occurred in their lives.

Communities in Greece were very tight and interconnected, which of course doesn't mean they all loved each other. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War and the civil war, communities were torn up and many times old disagreements, jealousy and prospect turned people against each other<sup>75</sup>. People were mostly illiterate and poor and communist ideology made its way to the Greek mountains by making promises of a better life. It obviously succeeded since the conditions under which the people lived were very bad. Kyros (M, 1979, CZ) for example recalls his grandmother telling him that she had to go to school barefoot every day. They didn't have electricity, heating, running water, any kind of machinery; they didn't even have beds and they slept on the floor.

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<sup>74</sup> Information available online

<sup>75</sup> Gatzogiannis (1983) describes such a situation in "Eleni", where he quotes his father saying that his mother was killed by "the village"

A fragment from a narration in *Kalimera* illustrates the situation: “*I was impressed by the heat in the room. No heater, no stove, no fireplace and yet it was warm. I went toward the window where it was warmer. I placed my hand under the curtain to find out where the heat was coming from. I was too proud to ask, I didn’t want them to think we didn’t know of these things in Greece*”<sup>76</sup> In this narration, Artemi Orphanidou, speaks of her flee from Greece to Albania as a children’s escort. She was entrusted with 32 children, which she escorted to Czechoslovakia. In Albania, where she and the children were first sheltered, she was impressed by rooms lightened with chandeliers, central heating, the cinema, the confectionery pastry and electricity.

These people who had been living a pre-industrial way of life suddenly found themselves in industrial Czechoslovakia. Not only it was a completely different way of life concerning practical matters, but also concerning social matters. Their social networks were destroyed and their social life as well. The village structure was important. Everybody knew where everybody lived, what their status was, their family history and background. Everybody met at the church, men met and talked at the *Kafeneion*<sup>77</sup>. These people were uprooted from their well known surroundings and their traditional way of life and things changed irreversibly. They had to leave and they had to live next to strangers in a foreign, colder country, inhabited by an unknown race speaking a foreign language, eating strange meals with sauces. What kept them together was their common fate and origin. New friendships were created but the longing for return shows that everybody missed their life back in Greece.

Families were scattered all over Europe, men and women had to engage in activities unknown to them so far like working in factories, and children were away in boarding schools. Most importantly, the religious and national holiday calendar was different and churches and priests weren't around. How could they then celebrate everything the way they used to in the past? Even if some families managed to stay together or were later reconnected, the differences between Greece and the new country were so vast that it was impossible to fill the gap.

What is very important in the case of these political refugees is the fact that they were disowned by Greece. They became unwanted persons and both governments, the Czechoslovakian and the Greek, were screening and limiting their communication with the motherland. It would be thus a mistake to look at the Greek minority in the Czech Republic the same way as we look at other Greek minorities in

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<sup>76</sup> *Kalimera*, April 2008, pp. 26

<sup>77</sup> Coffee house

the Western World. Greeks in the Czech Republic didn't have the chance to visit their homeland and live in any way they wanted. Gatzogiannis's father had immigrated to "America" and when he wanted to get married he found a woman from his village. Every now and then he would return, spend a lot of money, procreate and leave again (Gatzogiannis 1983). Greeks in the Czech Republic didn't have the possibility to live this way. Subsequently a distance was created between the Greek way of life and the younger generations' way of life in the Czech Republic.

We attempt to map this distance by pointing out how Greek traditions have been altered in the Czech Republic. This way we avoid making the mistake of taking the presence of Greek traditions for granted among the Greek community in the Czech Republic. As my informants said, they have Czech-Greek customs. They provided me with some examples of how the Czech and the Greek tradition are represented at various occasions such as Christmas, New Years and Easter, which are important institutionalised holidays celebrated by both religious and non-religious people, by both Czechs and Greeks.

Christmas is an occasion most Greeks in the Czech Republic celebrate on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December just like Czechs. This is probably a result of intermarriage and since Czech families are very serious about Christmas, the Greeks embraced Czech customs. In an internet article about Greeks and Slovaks celebrating Christmas together we read a Greek man's answer to the question of "how do you celebrate Christmas": *"We have conceived Christmas the Czech way or basically the Czechoslovakian way. We celebrate it the same way. We have kept something of the Greek way but carp, in my family in particular, must be there and the potato salad as well"*<sup>78</sup>. The reporter who wanted to know how Greeks celebrate Christmas had to point out that Christmas are not celebrated on the 24<sup>th</sup> in Greece like in the Czech Republic, in order to get to some answer about Greek Christmas. Christmas isn't a very important occasion in Greece and most of all it is celebrated on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The fact that most tourists from Greece visit Prague during Christmas time, shows, how Greeks take the opportunity to leave Greece and that it is not a big family gathering occasion like it is in the Czech Republic. I often heard many of my fellow guides complaining about not being able to spend Christmas Eve at home with their family, eating carp and potato salad, even though they are of Greek origin. I originally

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<sup>78</sup>Information available online



couldn't understand how it is possible to be Greek and consider Christmas so important. I was at the time not aware of the history of the Greeks in the Czech Republic. Some of my informants said they sometimes cook *pita* on Christmas but everything else is performed the Czech way.

The Greek custom of New Years *Vasilopita* (St. Basil's pie) is being officially carried out by the Communities, at least by the Greek Community in Prague. After the holidays, when everything is back to normal, the Community members are invited to "the cutting of the pie" as it is called. This pie is sweet and it obtains a coin. The finder of the coin is promised good luck for the rest of the year. It is a very old Greek Orthodox custom (since the times of St. Basil the Great, 4<sup>th</sup> century AC). The members of the Greek Community of Prague consider this an opportunity to meet with old friends with which they usually don't have the chance to see, especially the older ones. This custom is carried out at home only by most of my informants. Women spoke more about eating habits, but still they only mentioned *pita* and *vasilopita* with relation to holidays.

Czech traditions have prevailed not only when it comes to food but also considering the importance people ascribe to various occasions. In Greece, Easter is the most important holiday of the year. Few Greeks leave the country, despite the fact they have enough days of vacation. In the Czech Republic, only Easter Monday is a holiday. In any case the Czech-Greeks just like Czechs don't pay much attention to Easter and they don't even go to church. Even I, who was raised as an atheist, go to church once a year on Easter. Even Greek tourists go to church when they are in Prague on Easter and after church they start looking for restaurants, where they can go and eat the traditional dishes that are cooked for this occasion. From the ranks of the Greeks living in the Czech Republic, I mostly see in church those who were born in Greece. The immigrants that grew up in the Czech Republic don't go to Easter mass, perhaps because it ends after midnight, but most possibly because they are not used to going there. They not only have a communist ideological background, but most of them also grew up in a secular, former communist country. The fact that they don't go to church on Easter, which is the most important religious holiday of the year, illustrates the distance that has been created among Greeks and Czech-Greeks.

In Greece there are various dishes prepared on Easter which have not been preserved among Greeks in the Czech Republic. These dishes are served after the Big Saturday Easter mass which ends after midnight. The Greeks in the Czech Republic

know of the customs connected with Easter but they don't practice them. It is somehow understandable since Easter customs are interconnected with religious practice. The Czech-Greeks are also not used to eating this late or eating mutton and soup made of various internal organs. Czech cuisine, with which they grew up, doesn't include these tastes. It would also seem odd in the Czech Republic if somebody would start roasting a lamb in open air on Easter Sunday. It was enough they made fun of them for eating chicory. Moreover Greeks in Greece have time off and so they can prepare for Easter and go to church every day during the Holy Week. Even if some older Greeks remembered the customs connected with Easter and wanted to preserve them in the new country, it would be impossible since there weren't any churches where they could go. I guess a lamb would be found to roast but it would seem odd and it would be difficult to get the family together and make preparations since there was no time off. Another problem would be that the Greek Easter is celebrated according to the Julian calendar, which means it is usually on a different date than the Czech Easter, which is celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar.

One custom that my informants told me they have kept is the custom of red (dyed) hardboiled eggs. Czech people also colour eggs for Easter but Greeks, who are a playful lot, have created an "egg cracking" contest. After the Holy Saturday midnight mass, during the late night meal with which the long fast is broken, each picks a red hardboiled egg, trying to choose the strongest and they start cracking their eggs against one another's to see who ends up with the whole egg. The one holding the last whole egg is deemed the lucky one. The Greeks in the Czech Republic colour hardboiled eggs just like Czechs on Catholic Easter but they prefer to colour them red, like in Greece, and in some cases they added this fun Greek egg cracking game.

Czech-Greeks have combined elements of both traditions, they made best of what they had. They accepted Czech traditions and they added whatever Greek element they could to it. One could say that Czech traditions served as a formative element and Greek customs became a supplement to Czech customs. The elements of Greek tradition that survived are the ones that can be combined with the Czech and don't seem odd. This assimilation tendency is notable in children, because they didn't want to look different. Martha Elefteriadu describes in her autobiography how on Easter, a couple of boys from school appeared at their doorstep with *pomlazky* (braided whips made from pussy willow twigs) in order to whip them, according to

the Czech custom, and how they had to undergo a long conversation with the girls' father who demanded from the boys to explain and show to him, what exactly they were planning to do and how. The girls were willing to take part in this custom since, as they explain in the book, in general, they didn't want to differ from other children (Elefteriadu, Elefteriadu 2007: 15-22). Elimination of difference naturally leads to assimilation. This way, Greek children who were raised in the Czech Republic embodied Czech traditions present in their environment and Greek traditions found in their Greek home (when there was one).

As noted in a previous section, the Greek Community (at least the one in Prague) lacks a social and ideological centre, which would keep it together. Not all Czech-Greeks can be members of a traditional dance group so that they can meet every week. By interacting twice a year at the evenings organised by the community, where moreover not all Czech-Greeks go, relational ties cannot be preserved. The Greek Community as an institution is attempting to provide occasions for ties to be created, but there is lack of interest from the part of the people. At individual homes, where the Czech element is strongly present, the Greek element finds it hard to survive and where it does, it is more of a remnant, a souvenir from an ethnic identity, which Czech-Greeks are failing to transmit to younger generations. Religion as common ideology and as practice could serve in keeping the community together. It could play the part the KKE played in the past. Moreover, since religious practice is overt, the Czech-Greek people's difference would be identified by Czechs and simultaneously they wouldn't be identified as being different by Greeks. Relational ties would be stronger and connectedness could be created. The Greek community in Prague, as it is now, is a group only theoretically. In practice, there are very little occasions for social interaction and so the feelings of groupness and connectedness cannot be cultivated. As we have illustrated, not being Christian Orthodox doesn't mean not being Greek. It only means one has more limited ways in preserving Greekness, which by lacking the overt and tactical practice of religiosity, create a Greekness which is subjective and as such it is difficult to be manifested. This way self-identification and identification by others becomes more difficult and as a result ethnic identity is slowly being lost.

## Conclusion

My original goal, when I began seriously contemplating on writing a paper about the Greek minority in the Czech Republic, was to show how important religion is in preserving national identity. My idea was to illustrate it on the hypothesis that since Greeks in the Czech Republic aren't religious, they have thus lost or are losing their Greek national identity. I came to know this fundamental difference among Greeks in the Czech Republic and Greeks in Greece by socialising with them. By doing research about them, entering their houses and discussing with them, I was surprised at how "Greek" some of them feel and how hurt they are when they are not treated as equals by Greeks in Greece. By assessing the material I gathered and by writing it down, I came to the conclusion that they are Greek, only in a different way. The research gave me a new perspective of looking at Greeks abroad: outside the frame I had learned to place them in, which was produced by the automated comparison among them and the Greeks in Greece. What I hadn't realised was that, what I was comparing them with, was the version of Greekness embedded in me by living and being educated on Cyprus, by frequently visiting Greece and by working with Greeks. A different version of Greekness doesn't mean the absence of it. It only makes it more difficult to convey. Therefore, younger Greeks turn towards Greece in order to find ways to build their Greekness instead of turning towards their parents and grandparents. However, by doing this, they don't differ much from Czechs that may be doing the same thing. The bloodline is continued, but it is void of all the innate connotations it has, when someone is born and raised in Greece. Greekness becomes subjective with little practised manifestations.

Greeks in the Czech Republic may not behave like Greeks, but they may feel like being Greek and nobody has the right to deny it. The fact whether Greekness is sustainable or transferable to other generations is a different matter. To some extent it is, but one needs the tools to do so. These tools should be provided by culture as *"the entire social heritage of a group, in other words everything created by a group and*

*transmitted from generation to generation not by biological but by social procedures*” (Tsaousis 2001: 17). In the case of Greeks in the Czech Republic, culture is safeguarded mainly by the Greek Communities. However, the Greek Communities can’t provide the social mechanisms necessary to transmit Greek culture. The aspects of it that are more actively propagated (language, folklore) are not useful on an everyday life level and they don’t contribute in keeping the community together. They are mostly information, which isn’t a lived experience and there is little chance for it to turn into such. Officially propagated culture cannot transmit Greekness, i.e. the feeling of being Greek, to the generations that are born in the Czech Republic, that are raised in a Czech environment, which is only partly Greek solely within the family.

By analysing various cultural elements on the level of individuals, we have come to the conclusion, that Greek culture and traditions aren’t very much alive when it comes to the everyday lives of the community’s members. Some Czech-Greeks are bilingual but they mostly use the Czech language. Czech traditions and customs prevail and they are only “spiced up” by the Greek element. In cases of highly emphasised Greek identity, the aspects of it that are accentuated are the ones Czech people admire about Greeks. Greekness is either experienced or not by Czech-Greeks and each one experiences it differently. A universal version of Greekness experienced on an individual level, as it is taken for granted in Greece, isn’t possible in the Czech Republic since the community doesn’t have an ideological or social centre. The connection among the members of the community is mainly one of a common origin and history (refugees). The historical connection the members of the community share amongst them and with Greece is weakening since history is, by nature, unsustainable.

In our approach, we attempted to go beyond historical ties and methodological nationalism. We tried to let the minority speak for itself and draw conclusions from personal experience, narrations, written and visual material and participant observation. Under this light we have seen the Greek community not as a community of Greeks but as a community of individuals sharing a sense of Greekness. We didn’t “measure” Greekness on the basis of methodological nationalism since, according to Glick Schiller and Wimmer (2003), under the influence of methodological nationalism “*generations of migration studies measure and scrutinize the cultural differences between immigrants and nationals and describe pathways of assimilation into the national group*”. If we had simply looked at whether Czech-Greeks are

different from the Czechs and how different they are, we would have come to the possible conclusions, that in some cases there are differences; that some people have assimilated and some haven't yet, or that Czech-Greeks are preserving their national identity. Bypassing methodological nationalism we have attempted to let the Greekness of these people reveal itself. We didn't focus on comparing Czech-Greeks and Czechs and we didn't make the mistake of culturally and socially comparing Greeks and Czechs. We attempted to show in what way Czech-Greeks are different from Greeks in Greece and that despite this they are still Greek, but in a different way. We focused on *how* they are experiencing Greekness their own way and how this particular perception was formed.

We deliberately analysed cultural aspects which are considered to be particularly differentiating (language, aspects of folklore, music, cuisine, religion) in order to better illustrate how - even though on a minority presentation level these may appear to be alive - on an individual level they are almost impossible to preserve. Greekness, as presented by the Communities, does not originate from the people. It is the expression of the idea of Greekness, which is to be preserved and handed downward to the people, according to the guidelines of the Czech and Greek states and the European Union. The idea of Greekness, which coincides with the Greek nationalist notions about Greek identity and culture, doesn't necessarily coincide with individual experience. As an idea, Greekness is burdened with symbolism: language, folklore, religion and even cuisine all allude to some symbolic concept (Classical Greece – *romiosini*) connected with the Greek nation. Since anthropology is a science dealing with human beings, as its name illustrates, our interest lies in giving human experience the possibility to appear beyond ideas, symbols, institutions. By analysing individual experience we have attempted to deconstruct the concept of Greekness and show the way Greekness is experienced, if at all.

The Greekness of the people has been affected by the practical conditions of their lives in the Czech Republic and it therefore can't fill the requirements of the official version of Greek culture. A chasm has been created between official institutions and reality since Greek culture, as propagated by the institutions, is a theoretical symbolic concept without a practical application in the Czech Republic. Greekness has been preserved as a feeling of affinity but not one of identification with a country, its people, its culture, its tradition. By using aspects of Greek culture as a mere reference point in our research, we have attempted to reveal its real and not its

ideal content in the case of Greek political refugees and their offspring in the Czech Republic.

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**Note on translations:** All material in Czech and Greek languages was translated to English by the author of the thesis.