

Journal on Ethnopolitics  
and Minority Issues in  
Europe

Vol 20, Issue 1

2021

pp. 24-44

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.53779/HGSF5693>

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Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to Jane  
Cowan, Marika Djolai and  
the anonymous reviewer  
for their constructive  
comments.

## **On Security, Minorities, and Opportunistic Narcissism**

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### **Abstract**

At a global level, the last two decades have consistently witnessed the encroachment of right-wing rhetoric and anti-minority logos, with several states clearly promoting a discourse of fear of minorities. Seeing minorities either as the ‘enemy within’ or a political necessity that must be endured, states are sceptical in how they recognise or incorporate minority identities that threaten ideologies of national homogeneity. Adopting an anthropological perspective and having engaged in long-term research on minorities in Greece and Italy, I argue that the state selectively recognises minority traits that are deemed ‘secure’ enough to be incorporated into the national body of policies and governance in what I term opportunistic narcissism; the process of highlighting minority differences, territorialising them, and finally claiming them for the national corpus.

**Keywords:** Freud; Greece; Italy; minorities; narcissism; nationalism;

In Freud's concept of the narcissism of minor differences, alterity relies upon the degree to which Otherness is, or is not, tolerated. In the same vein, traits of minority identity, evoked from the top-down (state to grassroots) or bottom-up, may promote certain levels of (in)security for minority populations. Is it ever enough for nations to simply recognise the existence of minorities without sustainably implementing policies that make them secure? What form should such policies take? In Italy, for instance, recognition of linguistic pluralism was a positive political step toward secure political representation for minority populations, turning away from classificatory systems intimately associated with the aesthetics of language celebrated under fascism. In Greece, linguistic difference was not deemed secure enough for official recognition, potentially threatening the ideology of national cohesion, yet the state found alternative methods to incorporate difference into national repertoires while avoiding direct recognition of minority groups. In approaching minority security from the perspective of minor difference, there is a fundamental question of belonging premised on a reflexive engagement with the Other.

### **1. The Enemy Within**

On a sizzling Greek summer afternoon at the end of 2008, I found myself in an interesting conversation about the Grecanici, a Greek linguistic minority of Southern Italy with whom I have conducted extensive ethnographic research (Pipyrou, 2016). The two Greek women in my company were interested to know about the origins of the minority, their language, their relations with the Greek state and culture, and whether "they really are Greeks". This last question did not surprise me as it was part of a long narrative cultivated in Greece regarding affinity between Greeks (of Greece) and other 'Greeks' outside Greece, often referred to as 'brothers'. My relatively long response about the influence of Greek nationalism selling a particular version of history, the minority as an autochthonous population that speak a variation of Greek language, and how the Grecanici define themselves (Italian subjects, Catholics) started agitating the women in my company. I was expected (and pushed) to offer a definite and affirmative answer of belonging and clear evidence of origins, to subsequently declare that the Grecanici of Southern Italy are Greeks. In response to my reluctance to succumb to such a demand they became seriously annoyed and argued that "because of people like you, Greece will always suffer". Their argument went that I was a threat to the Greek state and to the security of Greece since I was spreading falsehoods that this population was not Greek, thus defaming the nation.

I was neither surprised nor taken aback by such responses. Fellow anthropologists

before and since have been targeted as anti-Hellenes when they publish work referring to populations in Greece that are ethnically or linguistically diverse (e.g., Karakasidou, 1997). The popular argument against these scholars is that difference does not exist in Greece, that all people are homogenously Greek, sharing one language and one ethnicity. In my case, I had not been subjected to the level of threat (sometimes to life) that other anthropologists have experienced, yet nevertheless it was striking how Greek nationals often perceive minorities. Now totally enraged, the women went into a manifesto of Greekness, mentioning communities all over the world—in Pakistan, Australia, America, the UK, and finally Turkey—who were most definitely Greek. When I suggested that ‘Greekness’ was a significant factor in the 1923 exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece, the answer was that “of course the refugees from Turkey had to return to their place of origin—Greece”, despite the fact that many had never set foot in Greece, didn’t speak the language, and were united only by shared religion.

For those of us raised with the generation of people who experienced the last Ottomans in Greece, terms such as ‘the state’ and ‘minorities’ were not part of the vocabulary for narrating the past. Indeed, not until after World War II did notions of state and minorities become part of the everyday lexicon for discussing belonging. Instead, the narratives of the generation born in the early 1900s and raised in the Ottoman lands of Greek Macedonia was centred around sounds, tastes, commerce, and the struggle of surviving two world wars, a civil war, and dictatorship. These narratives would mention fellow co-workers speaking many languages other than Greek, and people would often be in the position to speak some of these languages—they could even teach their grandchildren how to count or understand simple phrases in Turkish, Pontian, Vlach, Arvanite, Slavic dialects, or what they would call “Vourgarika” (the Bulgarian). Blessed with having had these voices in my life until my 30s, I am reflexively aware of the ways in which individual identity was constructed vis-à-vis the state for the generation of the early 1900s and the difference in political *logos* (and socio-national ideologies) from my parents’ post-WWII generation.

Fundamentally, what was communicated through the opposition of the two women that summer afternoon in 2008 was a narrative of “anxiety” as “the key emotional response to danger or threat” (Freud, 1919, p. 236 in Murer, 2009, p. 123) that I and my research posed to them as well as an organisational principal of “ideological and motoric response to threat” (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Minorities, and by affiliation researchers working on minorities, are perceived as a threat to the hegemonic narrative of the nation-state, attacking social cohesion as agent provocateurs, disloyal, traitors. Minorities may be perceived as “substate nationalisms”

(Kymlicka, 2002) operating as living organisms and extensions of other, often competing states with the potential to make claims to rights that seem threatening (Pipyrrou, 2016). As Jane Cowan (2007, p. 141) remarks, within a nation-state the motives for minority assertion will almost always be met with suspicion and viewed as an implicit threat of political separation. National and international agencies as well as NGOs operating around minority protection complexify the relationship between nations, minorities, and security. Such actors may simultaneously be perceived as a threat to the nation and thus security takes existential priority because “if we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or be free to deal with it in our own way)” (Buzan et al., 1998, pp. 23–24). While eager to tackle security anxieties related to minorities within, at the same time states are happy to mask their own irredentist tendencies by branding minorities residing in other states as diasporic. Precisely because minorities can provide tangible loci for meddling in the internal politics of a foreign state, minorities can be subjected to different kinds of discrimination, pressures, and political enticements (Wæver, 1995, pp. 65–71). To secure the flow of information and ideology, the state heavily controls, assimilates, and even obliterates its minorities (Karakasidou, 1997; Van Boeschoten, 2006). Consequently, research on minorities may be censored or simply denied.

In the post-WWI treaties that re-drew national boundaries, the notion of minorities featured as what Schermerhorn termed “a belated supplement” (1978, p. 135) that was also grounded in the same norm of homogeneity: same territory, same blood, same people. However, European nations were, and continue to be far from homogenous, with various linguistic and ethnic groups residing within. After 1945, European policymakers thought it obvious that the minority clauses in the Versailles Treaties did not work and for this reason an incredible amount of people were moved across Europe to “accommodating locations” (Judt, 2005, p. 27). For many decades, European post-WWII governance actively engaged nations in protecting minority rights and cultivated a language of pluralism. For a while, as historian Tony Judt argued, Europe was:

a ‘privileged arena’ within which racist language was frowned upon and recent histories of violence and extermination were vigorously rejected, [which] developed commensurable languages of inclusion and ‘open door’ policies supported by legal conventions. (Judt, 2011, p. 105)

While legal recognition of minorities is admittedly an important step in securing minority rights, relevant policies did not have long-term effects. In fact, projects and budgets supporting

minorities were first to fall victim to austerity politics, leaving minority groups in positions of chronic fiscal insecurity. Especially the last two decades have consistently witnessed the encroachment of right-wing rhetorics and anti-minority *logos*, with several states clearly promoting a discourse of fear of minorities. Against this backdrop, refugees coming to Europe created new minorities who required accommodation and urgent humanitarian responses and generated new security concerns for the host states.

Adopting an anthropological perspective and having engaged in research on minorities in Greece and Italy over the last twenty years (Pipyrou, 2012, 2014, 2016; Zografou & Pipyrou, 2011), I argue here that the state selectively recognises minority traits which are deemed ‘secure’ enough to be incorporated into the national body of policies and governance through a process I term *opportunistic narcissism*.

## **2. Opportunistic Narcissism**

Through numerous publications, Freud developed a way to understand claims to difference arising between groups that share a common identity on one or another level. He noted that there is a strong tendency among neighbouring states, and closely related peoples, to exaggerate their distinctiveness from each other in what he called the “narcissism of minor differences” (Freud, 2010). The bottom line is that similarities and not differences seem to perpetually threaten each group’s sense of identity, thus each one clings to some small distinguishing marks, investing them with disproportionate significance. It is the commonalities between them that drive groups to seek and create differentiation from one another in an attempt to manage “the endogenous unease in human society” (Figlio, 2012, p. 8). Looking into the long-durée of the Bible, Regina Schwartz (1997) sees the development of identity as a product located in the violent distinction between Self and Other. She notes that in the Bible it becomes evident that monotheistic traditions enforce a conceptualisation of identity premised on principles of scarcity; one God, one people. Traits of uniqueness that render groups and identities authentic, identifiable, and distinguishable should be protected and, in the later language of nationalism, secured. In this endless anxiety that scarcity entails, every minor trait must be magnified and branded as the ‘property’ of a certain identity in order to successfully repel the upsetting facade of the familiar (Brooks, 2002).

An impressive amount of scholarship has been produced discussing nationalism and the ways in which nation-states pursue security through the promotion of homogeneity while “participants in nation building, raise their voices to and against one another as they try to imagine just representations and strategies for the distribution of rights and obligation in a

nation of ‘brothers’” (Williams, 1991, p. 4). I suggest that we can scale-up Freud’s insights in relation to the ways in which states transform difference from minor to major and vice-versa as a politically calculated program that responds to fear of Otherness within. The struggle for authentication and nation building often appeals to commonalities shared between nationals. However, at the same time, the institutionalisation of commonality or the recognition of difference within secure frameworks do not necessarily imply a fair distribution of material opportunities and evaluation criteria upon which such classifications are made. Therefore, groups that find themselves identified with the less powerful criteria of belonging pursue models and strategies of evaluation inextricably bound with “interpretations of the essence of that overpowering single ingredient, however bitter the aftertaste” (Williams, 1991, p. 11).

Anthropologists such as Anton Blok (1998) and Paul Sant Cassia (2006) have taken the concept of the narcissism of minor differences and tested its validity in anthropological research. Through qualitative and historical contextualisation on a group or national level, their studies qualified the thesis that a) in the search for authenticity and self-determination minor differences can operate as the distinguishing principle of identity, b) very often, fear of sameness leads to violence, c) clear and coherent differential systems may reduce risk of violence and even promote peaceful coexistence and, d) nationalism is ontologically premised on difference (explicit in Sant Cassia, 2006). Such insights formulate the basis for putting forward the thesis of opportunistic narcissism and looking at the relationship between nations and their minorities within. Implicitly drawing on Freud’s theory of narcissism whereby the ‘Self’ must be an ‘Other’ in order to be loved, I ask what happens when these minorities are different but not different enough to the nations within which they reside? (Freud, 1990 in Blok, 1998, p. 35). The emphasis here is on how nations handle manifestations of distinction and similarity vis-à-vis minorities and the ways in which they politically appropriate elements of minority difference that are deemed ‘secure’ enough to be incorporated into the corpus of national identity.

Therefore, I particularly take security to refer not only to actual threat but also to narcissism. What form does a response to fear, risk, and security take when the nation deals with that which is not completely unfamiliar or new but secretly familiar and thus frightening and threatening? (Freud, 1973, p. 245) (what Freud refers to as the ‘uncanny’). Here I explore how difference is materialised in Greece and Italy in relation to specific minorities in order to show that the state aims to present itself as both homogenous and unique by encapsulating minority difference that can be successfully claimed as national “stuff” (Barth, 1969). In so

doing, states such as Greece and Italy may invest in promoting traits of minority identity for security reasons and purposely cultivate a framework within which particular aspects of differentiation are claimed for all nationals in a form of opportunistic narcissism. This is to say that states find a way to accommodate difference in a framework which is non-threatening to the national project. The interest lies not in recognising minorities, per-se, but in quashing dissenting voices against state ideologies of homogeneity by providing just enough room, on the state's terms, for difference to acceptably exist. National security is thus maintained while minority claims to difference are controlled in a manageable way.

### **3. The Greek Case: Pontian Refugees from Anatolia**

Since its foundation in the 1820s the Greek state claims itself to be a distinct and homogenous body of people who share the same language, religion, education, and history. Conscious to stay away from associations with the Ottoman Empire of which Greece was part until 1821 (and some regions until as recently as 1923), Greek national governments fervently engage in a historical constructivism (Faubion, 1993) that promotes certain parts of Greek identity and history while masking or aggressively obliterating others. The years that preceded the fight for independence from the Ottomans in 1821 were crucial for shaping a particular image of Greece as descending directly from Ancient Greece with all the grandness of such connection. Internal and external forces—mainly France, Britain, and Russia—portrayed Greece as the cradle of democracy from which the light of politics shone on Europe, and also as a victim under the sword of the Ottoman conqueror. Almost 200 years later, this connection with Ancient Greece is still the stronghold of Greek nationalism and is steadily supported by a number of educational, religious, and military institutions.

Moving forward, after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, Turkey and Greece exchanged populations on the basis of religion and both states saw the influx of a large number of refugees. Greece received almost 1.5 million Christian refugees and Turkey around 500 thousand Muslims (Pentzopoulos, 1962). Similar to other refugees from Anatolia, Eastern Thrace, and Asia Minor, the Pontians—displaced from the Black Sea region—settled in Greek Macedonia, critically affecting the “region’s ethnic tapestry” (Karakasidou, 1997, p. 142). The displaced populations were by no means homogenous. Despite the fact that they had a common religious faith they spoke different languages and dialects, had their own varied customs, rituals, and distinct identifications. According to Nikos Marantzidis:

the myth of the dilemma ‘language or religion’ successfully accommodated identity

issues during the Ottoman Empire especially when national identities were under construction. It further contributed critically to the incorporation of the refugee populations into the Greek national state, thus operating as a tool towards the transformation of their identity. (2001, p. 33)

Accordingly, the national government readily identified Christian refugees from Asia Minor as Greeks and as a “critical resource of Modern Greece’s national development” (Voutira, 2006, p. 397).

The reception of displaced people on the local level was often negative. Perceiving refugees as threats to their limited resources and community fabric, local populations very often adopted a hostile attitude and tended to dismiss them based on ethnic and ideological criteria, labelling them as ‘Turks’, ‘Turkseeds’, or ‘leftists’ (Kirtsoglou, 2003) as in the case of the Pontians who, during the Russian–Turkish wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had moved farther into the Caucasus and eventually found their way to Greece. At the same time, the refugees themselves often promoted a discourse of superiority in relation to mainland Greeks while sustaining a rhetoric of ‘paradise lost’ in respect to their lost properties and places of origin in Anatolia, cultivating concepts of lost homeland for decades after their displacement. Subjected to the nationalistic processes of the Greek nation-state, the Pontians, like other refugees, felt the pressing need to ‘belong’ to the national corpus and to this end they engaged in selective remembrance and a re-shaping of their identities as simultaneously privileged and disadvantaged members of Greek society.

Over the following decades, the Pontians reconstructed their collective system of representation by shaping categories of identity relating to national Greek history, language, and dance. In so doing, they engaged in historical constructivism from below; appropriating and engaging with Greek nationalistic history in order to claim a place in the Hellenic narrative (Zografou & Pipyrou, 2011). Pontian civic groups simultaneously promoted Pontian identity traits and cultivated commonalities between Pontians and Greeks, thus critically influencing the ways in which belonging was historically and politically imagined. A very telling example of this process relates to dance.

Pontians in Greece are adamant that their *Serra* dance is the Ancient Greek Pyrrhic dance. This belief probably originates in the state’s decision to revive the ancient Delphic celebrations in 1927, with the encouragement of the prominent Greek poet Aggelos Sikelianos. During this revival, the best Pontian dancers were invited to re-enact the ancient Pyrrhic in their performances of the *Serra* dance. The moving bodies of the dancers represented then at once



the continuity of the classical cosmos and its connection to the present. At the time of arrival in Greece, Pontic dances seemed very exotic to the eyes of the local populations due to the nature of performance and music; however, the martial character of the *Serra* dance, and its popularity in the geo-cultural environment of the Black Sea, made it the perfect candidate for the articulation of an ideological and practical claim of continuity and belonging to the Greek nation (Zografou, 1989).

At the same time, in their attempt to negate the negative stereotypical assumptions about their origins, Pontians concealed and deliberately excluded from their ‘official’ dancing curricula those dances that could render evidence of their Ottoman past. Thus, dances such as Male-Male (*horos me ta mantilia*, lit. scarf-dance), performed by the Metetzidiotes living on the frontier of Cappadocia, or dances shared with Armenians, were excluded from the new Pontic dancing repertoire. This effort to incorporate a different past into a common present shared with the rest of the Greek nation resulted in a homogenisation of the dancing style. Regarding the structure of the dancing product, Pontic dancing identity has been fabricated in regulated forms that underemphasised the depth of their variation, while highlighting their commonalities. From a Pontian perspective, difference was carefully downplayed in order to fit and secure national belonging (Zografou & Pipyrrou, 2011).

In the 1980s, Greece came face to face with European modernisation. Having survived World War II, a civil war (1946–49), the effects of the Cold War on Greek politics, and a military junta (1967–74), the nation entered a period of political and cultural extroversion. The coming to power of a socialist government in 1981 initiated an era of political and cultural awareness as well as identity-making in relation to Greece’s European counterparts. In this context, local communities engaged in an even more dynamic manner with cultural and political activity, employing their historical resources to meet ‘sophisticated’ European standards. Under socialist leadership, “the ideology of returning to [its] roots” as the safest stance from which Greece could face Europe, became ever stronger (Clogg, 1992, p. 44). The new socialist government was favoured by the Pontians and, as Richard Clogg (1992, p. 45) notes, it was the social rhetoric combined with an uncompromising policy toward Turkey that “struck a responsive chord with a significant segment of the electorate”. More than that, the socialist prime minister himself, the late Andreas Papandreou, visited the monastery of Panayia Soumela (the par-excellence Madonna of the Pontians) as an act of publicly acknowledging the support that his party received from the Pontians in the general elections of 1981. This visit successfully promoted the importance of the Pontian Madonna in the Greek national conscience, thus

connecting a particularistic religious symbol with a national political discourse.

This positive climate boosted Pontian cultural matters at the national level. Next to the already existing and institutionalised national dancing associations, new ones were created with the aim of displaying and promoting local dance identities through a re-enactment of ‘traditional’ culture. In this socio-historic framework, Pontian dance identity started materialising on the national level as a celebration of difference-*cum*-part of the nation. The incorporation of Pontic dance into the school curriculum was a major advance of the era with enormous political connotations. Additionally, after great pressure from the Pontian associations, Pontic dance was included in the closing ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games, officially displaying to the world that Pontian culture was, finally, considered Greek (Zografou & Pipyrou, 2011).

For decades after their displacement, the Greek state was opportunistically selective in recognising parts of Pontian identity that were secure enough to be openly adopted. At the heart of Greek nationalism is an opportunistic narcissism—the assumption that minority traits which do not pose a threat to the nation can be adopted on the premise that it is the Greek nation that reaps the political reward; this is a hard boundary that can never be crossed. For Pontians and any other minority group to feel secure in Greece, they must declare their belonging by leaping into the collective fantasy of the state.

Opening up discussions of diaspora and belonging along different routes, the case of Pontic Greeks of the former Soviet Union who were ‘repatriated’ to Greece after 1991 provides a twist to the manner in which the concept of diaspora informs a top-down and bottom-up political discourse. What was termed a ‘reverse’ diaspora relates to a process of identity formation which consciously and proudly embraces elements of identification of the previous country of origin (in this case, Russia) (Voutira, 2006). Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union also challenged the government’s labelling of them as ‘repatriates’, adopting as a term of self-ascription the predicate ‘refugees’ and thus building on a familiar and affective discourse of displacement. With Europe currently at the centre of intense media attention and political debate about the mass movement of people from circa-Mediterranean conflict zones, more than ever we require detailed studies of the lived consequences of displacement and how humanitarianism is linked to security risks identified by host states.

#### **4. The Italian Case: The Grecanici**

From neighbouring Italy, we have a similar story which has been developed in my work with

the Grecanici in Reggio Calabria, South Italy (Pipyrou, 2014, 2016). With twelve languages officially recognised by the state, Italy can boast the greatest diversity of regional and minority languages in Western Europe. The legal framework concerning the governance and protection of linguistic rights is drawn directly from the European Union and the Council of Europe (CoE). Moreover, under the auspices of UNESCO and other international bodies, the debate over the preservation of endangered minority languages has gained momentum in the past twenty years. With an ever-increasing engagement in recording endangered languages and promoting linguistic rights of minority populations all over the world, there is a fundamental need for anthropological research to investigate the links between purely linguistic research, the social and political interests of linguistic minorities, and the various levels of governance at which minority politics are realised.

Speaking Grecanico, a language categorised by UNESCO as “severely endangered”, the Greek linguistic minority of Calabria is one of two Greek speaking populations in South Italy. Italian citizens and devoted Catholics, Grecanici are multilingual. They speak Grecanico (also termed Griko and Greco), which is comprised of archaic Doric, Hellenistic, Byzantine, as well as local Romanic and Italian linguistic elements, while also speaking the local Calabrian dialect and the official Italian language. The Greek presence in Calabria begins with the colonisation of South Italy and Sicily between the eighth and sixth centuries BCE and with the foundation of the first cities of Magna Graecia (Greater Greece): Reggio Calabria, Sibari, and Croton. This period is highlighted by the Grecanici as their time of origin, and they claim identity as being direct descendants of the Greek colonisers. After the fourteenth century CE, the Greek language rapidly receded, mainly due to political and economic instability provoked by a succession of conquests in Calabria. The decline of the Greek language during the following centuries was further associated with the abolition of the Christian Orthodox denomination.

At the time of the unification of Italy (1861) the Greek language was spoken in twelve villages in Aspromonte, dropping to nine by the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 1970s German linguist Gerhard Rolfs noted that the language was not in use anymore in a further four villages. Referring to the considerable publicity and tourist marketing of the area within and outside Italy, Greek anthropologist Christina Petropoulou bitterly notes that “if the motive to visit *area Grecanica* was to find Greek speakers then the visitor will be disappointed since the language is hardly spoken anymore” (1995, p. 152). Petropoulou refers here to the regular disappointment generated during tourist excursions to the *area Grecanica* by Greek nationals who expect (and regularly demand) that local populations respond to them in Grecanico.

*Area Grecanica* is known in Greece as *Ta Ellinofona* (the Greek-speaking areas), and the Greek public has become familiar with the area since the various publications of philologist Angela Merianou in the 1960s. At first these publications created an idyllic, exotic, and generally distorted picture of the populations and their living conditions. Notions of common race and kinship were put forward as important links emphasising the relatedness between Grecanici and Modern Greeks. In a nutshell, Grecanici were portrayed as “brothers” descendent from an “Aryan race” (the Ancient Greeks) who, living among the “barbarous” populations (other Calabrians), managed to preserve their “Homeric Greekness” and their “immortal Greek soul and splendor”. They were further coloured as “blessedly backward” with qualities such as hospitality “unique in the whole world” and philosophical, poetical, and musical dispositions. The extremely harsh conditions of Grecanici life and the *miseria* (socioeconomic poverty) that plagued them before and after World War II were romanticised and ultimately misportrayed (see Pipyrrou, 2016).

Grecanici felt “in their skin” what it means to be second-class citizens. Narratives of victimhood of the early 1900s are systematically circulated in Grecanici civil society and families, communicating feelings of bitterness and ambivalence. At the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially under Mussolini’s policies that fiercely promoted monolingualism, minorities in Italy posed a consistent security threat for the fascist government (Cavanaugh, 2009, pp. 159–160). Alloglot Grecanici children were often the target of discrimination and abuse from teachers who spat in their faces, feeling repelled by the language. Subsequently, many parents avoided speaking Grecanico in front of their children to shield them from further stigmatisation. The Grecanici migration from ancestral villages in *area Grecanica* to Reggio Calabria in the 1950s highlighted once more the degree of prejudice and the divisive line between urban and rural populations in Italy (Teti, 1993). Uneasiness looms within every narrative regarding those years. Domenico, 54, remembers:

We were called *paddhechi*, *parpatulli* and *tamari* (all derogatory of peasantry). To an extent people still call us these derogatory terms. Until the beginning of the 1970s there was a street in my neighbourhood called Lu Strittu di Paddhechi (The Street of the Peasants). Despite the fact that the majority of us are educated and have money we are still perceived as second-class citizens. Paradoxically, the language that once brought such problems is now worthy of praise. We must feel proud of our language for it is the language of the Ancient Greeks of Magna Graecia. Others want to capitalise on our language. They want to claim it for

themselves. Once they were spitting in our faces, now they want to claim all the privileges of this language. (see Pipyrou, 2014)

Responding to the exoticism cultivated in Calabria and Greece regarding their ‘origin’ and ‘heritage’, Grecanico cultural associations founded at the end of the 1960s in Reggio Calabria engaged in profound historical constructivism in order to address what they termed the *Questione Grecanica* (the Grecanico Problem). The *Questione Grecanica*, understood as the salvation and protection of the Grecanico language and culture, was a hot political topic of local, national, and international import debated by the Grecanico cultural associations. Their policy advocated new outreach initiatives to engage with as many Grecanici as possible—both in the city of Reggio Calabria and the Grecanico villages—and proposed a new ideology regarding Grecanico language, heritage, and patrimony (Palumbo, 2003; cf. Herzfeld, 2009, 2011). The Grecanico language being considered superior (due to its Ancient Greek elements), the Grecanici were encouraged by the associations to embrace their roots and origins. They further aimed to initiate substantial links with the Greek-speaking populations of Puglia and to evoke an emotive response from the Greek public regarding the minority status of their ‘brothers’ in South Italy. During the same decade, further associations were formed in Greece with the aim to ‘help’ the ‘Calabrian Greeks’ who are constantly threatened morally and financially. These associations put forward irredentist propositions based on diasporic arguments promoting Greece as the motherland and conceptually expanding the borders of the nation. As a result, the Grecanici were, and still are portrayed in Greece as Greeks of the diaspora and brothers ‘of the same blood’, but scarcely as an autochthonous Italian population.

As in the case of Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union, diaspora refers to enclaves of linguistic and ethnic minority groups that reside outside the territory of their ‘historic homeland’ thus politically ‘stretching’ the borders of the state. It has been suggested that the notion of diaspora “denotes displacement in the sense that one lives outside one’s primary land of attachment” (Laguerre, 1998, p. 8; see also Clifford, 1994). It refers to “individual immigrants or communities who live outside the legal or recognised boundaries of the state of the homeland, but inside the reterritorialized space of the dispersed nation” (Laguerre, 1998, p. 8). Strictly speaking, the Grecanici are not a diasporic people, in the sense that they are Italian citizens, are not immigrants, and have deep historical roots in the region. Yet the existence of the Modern Greek nation-state as a point of reference and the relations it fosters with the communities creates conditions similar to those of a diaspora (Pellegrino, 2013). Very often Grecanico associations self-present as diasporic, thereby appealing to

essentialist notions of ‘home’ and historical tensions between routes and roots (Ballinger, 2003, p. 285; Clifford, 1997; Gilroy, 1996). This tension is located in an existential search for authenticity. In the rhetoric of the Grecanico associations, authentic Grecanico culture is always rooted in a mythical past that provides the “space wherein which the competing claims of ethnic particularity and universal humanity can be temporarily settled” (Gilroy, 1987, p. 154). Grecanici communities are approached by the Greek state as diasporic since they seem to act as living cultural capital that “expands the space of the nation beyond the borders of the state” (Laguerre, 1998, p. 8).

It should be noted that the extensive publicity given to the Greek-speaking communities in both Calabria and Puglia by the Greek mass media has managed to generate strong feelings among the Greeks in Greece for ‘our brothers’ in Calabria. Discussing my work among the Grecanici with people in Greece, I realised that perceptions of collective suffering are shared with circles that are aware of the Grecanici of Calabria. “Imagine how much they must have suffered from the suppression of the Italians”, it is often argued. The specific climate around a Greek ‘diasporic and suffering civilization’ has been cultivated for decades in Greece since the first publications on the *area Grecanica* in the 1960s. For years, through specific journals, cultural associations in Greece expressed their anger and frustration about the “nationally insensitive Athens who permits the language of an Ancient Greek civilization to perish”, the “Greek state that has eaten Greekness”, and the “pure neglectfulness of the Greek state towards its forgotten children” (Petropoulou, 1997, p. 264). The opening vignette of this paper speaks directly and/or indirectly to such dispositions against anyone or any group which does not necessarily empathise. My own work, coinciding with a period where the name of Macedonia in Greece made people jump, added another layer of discontent and sense of insecurity. Back then, and equally more recently, it was deemed unproblematic to negate the existence of minorities in Greece while welcoming and fervently supporting Greek minorities elsewhere, thus emphasising the malleable nature of diasporic groups as existential threat to the host nation.

The triumph of Greek historical constructivism is apparent not only in history, architecture, and other forms of cultural expression (Herzfeld, 1987, 1991; Yalouri, 2001), but also in ‘living human artefacts’ and ‘traditional neighbours’. The Greek tendency to approach the Grecanici communities as diasporic is further illustrated by the frequent visits of prominent Greek political figures to the communities and by the emphasis given to issues of immaterial heritage such as language and common cultural and historical frameworks of reference like Magna Graecia and the Byzantine Empire. Both the Greek state and the Grecanico associations

work toward the idea that ‘old things’ could act as transnational mediators of one and the same idea—that of *grecita* and *ellenismo* (Greekness and Hellenism).

In Italy, minority recognition came after many decades of struggle as linguistic minorities increasingly played an important role in local and national politics (Cavanaugh, 2009), cumulating with the controversial Law 482/19997 which promised linguistic promotion and protection (Coluzzi, 2007, pp. 57–58). The prioritisation of language over other markers of identification, such as ethnicity or race, circumscribed minority recognition within a linguistic framework, clearly stripping other threatening references from legal import (Andeva, 2013). This created the opportunity to link linguistic minorities in Italy directly with local self-government. After the demarcation of their territories by the provincial councils, minorities recognised by Law no. 482 were granted the right to use their languages in the field of education both as a medium-language and as a subject in nursery schools, in primary and secondary education, in public meetings, in place names, in the media, and with public administration and judicial authorities. Local populations and institutions were determined to make the most of the newly found recognition that went some way to addressing the suppression of minority languages rooted in Italy’s era of fascism.

Classified by UNESCO as severely endangered, it is the notion that the Grecanico language is distinctive and rich yet ‘in danger of extinction’ that mobilised national and international organisations to approach Grecanici as people rather than a linguistic anomaly. Since the 1970s the Association Internationale pour la Défense des Langues et Cultures Menacées (AIDLCM), argued that Grecanico “could enrich everybody ... the loss of which would be irreparable ... and constitutes a part of the heritage for which Italy is responsible”. In 1975, AIDLCM claimed that:

the Greek culture of Calabria lives its last decade ... the last Greek shepherds live their last humiliation. The Greek community of Calabria constitutes an island colonized economically and culturally, in a region itself underdeveloped and colonized ... a fact for which the Greek community is not responsible. To leave things as they are at the moment ... would be to bear the burden of a real cultural genocide. (AIDLCM, 1975 quoted in E. Nucera, 1984/5, p. 41)

Apart from highlighting the contribution of Grecanico language and culture toward a general Italian public good and the danger of extinction, AIDLCM claims compensation from the Italian state on the grounds that Grecanico constitutes an inextricable part of Italian heritage. A considerable number of national associations for the protection of endangered and minority

status languages in Italy, such as the Lega per le Lingue delle Nazionalita Minoritarie (LeLiNaMi) and the Comitato Nazionale Federativo Minoranze Linguistiche d'Italia (CoNFeMiLI), talk of the Greek linguistic minority of South Italy as occupying an *isola* (island). The metaphor of an island existing within inland Italy is a strong cognitive sign that captures notions of marginalisation, economic and social isolation, and victimhood.

## **Epilogue**

Recent studies on minorities have shed light on the historical and political genealogies of what is meant by minority status in Europe (see Cowan, 2000, 2010). Scholars have examined the historical predicament of developing a comprehensive UN framework toward the protection of minority populations after 1918. Looking at the issue of the minorities from a top-down perspective, these studies delve deeply into the logics of treaties and the thorny position of minority recognition and protection on a pan-European level. Under the auspices of the European Union, the CoE, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other international actors, debate over the preservation of endangered minority languages has gained momentum in the last two decades (Schmidt, 2008). Subsequently, after the Copenhagen Council of 1993, nation-state recognition of minorities became a criterion of identification and EU membership in accordance with a vision of a multicultural Europe (Cowan, 2010). For such reasons, as language is intimately attached to minority status, minority recognition that can no longer rely on linguistic identification requires a clear legal framework that protects minorities within states.

From a bottom-up perspective, other studies in Europe have highlighted the precariousness of the term 'minority' for the inclusion of alloglot, religious, and ethnic populations as meaningful constituents of the national fabric. As a minority trait, language acts as a semantic web of collective identification which may be interlinked with xenophobic evocations of 'second-class' citizenship, violence, fear, and exclusion. Yet, language recognition instead of ethnic recognition is a far less dangerous marker of classifying minorities within many states.

As the two cases from Greece and Italy demonstrate, attempting to belong from a minority perspective is not necessarily premised on objective resemblances but is often tailored to fit. From a state perspective, narcissistic opportunism involves calculated strategies of branding minority traits as pan-national; but this only pertains to traits that are deemed secure enough not to pose a threat to ideologies of national homogeneity. An ontological principle of



sameness—a fundamental feature of narcissism which allows the state to see the ‘Self’ in the ‘Other’—acts as the driver behind nationalism, and so, minorities within unavoidably represent a disturbing challenge to the claim of homogeneity. Minorities pose a constant political dilemma for nations in Europe. A political principle of EU inclusion urges nations to recognise and include minorities in their constitutions. However, inclusion would always entail a fear of being replaced by the Other and thus becoming a replica of the Other—the minority (Volkan, 1989). To avoid this, nations develop their agendas through an operation of opportunistic narcissism; the process of underscoring minority differences, territorialising, and finally nationalising them. Difference is acknowledged within a framework deemed ‘safe’ to governing bodies. Furthermore, minority difference is appropriated so as not to produce a rupture or strike a boundary between the state and Otherness, but rather to create secure spaces within which the state can continually control difference while persisting to fantasise sameness and homogeneity.

The narcissism exemplified by the Greek or the Italian state is therefore not just a matter of exaggerated perceptions of difference (i.e., the state is always different from the minorities within) but involves the appropriation of threatening ‘minor differences’ that could otherwise be magnified and turned into conflict. Pontic dance, as opposed to Pontic language, was a secure enough element to be added to the national Greek educational curriculum—albeit many decades after 1922. At the same time, the Greek state readily recognises Greek linguistic minorities in Italy as Greek diaspora while it avoids attending to or recognising linguistic particularity within Greece itself. In Italy, recognition of linguistic pluralism was a positive political step away from classificatory systems intimately associated with the aesthetics of language celebrated under fascism. The intention of Law no. 482 of 1999 was to promote linguistic pluralism as a ‘correction’ of the fascist regime that so brutally suppressed alloglot populations in Italy and pursued nationalistic dreams of uniformity. Yet, such recognition premised on language leaves out questions concerning markers of minority identity such as ethnicity and race that may pose a threat to security. Finally, I propose that in order to sustainably secure minorities, the state should go beyond seeing minorities as the enemy within or an excess that threatens ideologies of homogeneity, but rather decolonise the manner in which belonging is premised and lived.

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