

## CROSSING BORDERS, SHIFTING IDENTITIES: TRANSNATIONALISATION, 'MATERIALISATION', AND COMMODITISATION OF GREEK ETHNICITY IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

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On Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000, the Krasnodar Greek national-cultural organisation (society) held its usual weekly meeting. What was unusual was that the office was full of people; it was too small to accommodate all those who had turned out that evening and the overflow had to stand in a dark corridor. It was obvious that they were waiting for something. When I entered the office the chairperson of the society was speaking on the telephone; he was quite nervous, even annoyed. He almost shouted into the telephone: 'Yes, we are waiting for him! He promised to be here by 6.30...' Listening to conversations in the room, I realised that the office was overcrowded because the people were all waiting for their passports to be returned from the Greek Consulate in Moscow, complete with visas. Since 1999, when the Greek General Consulate in Novorossiisk had stopped issuing visas, people from southern Russia and the North Caucasus had had to apply for Greek visas in Moscow. The crowd at the meeting was very upset over this inconvenience and people were complaining to the chairperson. He replied that from 2001 onwards they would once again be able to obtain their visas from the Novorossiisk Consulate. Moreover, it would even be possible to apply for Greek citizenship there (everyone called it 'dual citizenship', meaning that they were planning to retain their Russian passports as well). The people were very pleased to hear this and, although their passports did not arrive that evening, many went home in a better mood.

When the meeting was almost over, an old man and two women in their late thirties entered the room. The old man asked the chairperson:

Is it possible to join your society?

*Chairperson:* Possible for whom?

*Old man:* Here are my daughter and daughter-in-law – they want to join.

*Chairperson:* But who are you?

*The old man's daughter:* Well, I am the daughter...

*Old man:* [My] surname is *Popandopulo*.<sup>xvii</sup>

*Chairperson:* No. I mean: are you Greeks? ... [I ask] this because if you then [want to] apply for 'dual citizenship', only Greeks can obtain it. You, *Popandopulo*, what [ethnicity] is recorded in your passport? Are you a Greek?

*Old man:* 'Russian' is recorded there, but I have the birth certificates (*metriki*) of my parents [and my] grandfather which show that they were Greeks. And my daughter can prove that she is a Greek by these certificates. Well, as for my daughter-in-law, there is my son...

*The old man's daughter-in-law:* Yes, first of all, my husband has to...

*Chairperson:* Okay.

*The old man's daughter:* Where should we write our names and how much shall we pay for membership? ... (Fieldwork Diary, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2000, Krasnodar)

This story from my fieldwork diary offers a snapshot of practices among former Soviet Greeks who, since the fall of the Iron Curtain, have become involved in transnational migration between Russia and Greece as they deal with the nation-state's attempts to regulate their cross-border movement. The focus of this article is on the impact that bureaucratic regulations governing transnational migration – covering matters such as passports, visas, invitation letters and documents proving the national/ethnic identity of citizens – have on identity construction among the Greeks of Russia. The article also examines how the meanings of citizenship, national and ethnic identity are changed and reinterpreted by people crossing national borders in the shifting conditions of the post-Soviet era.

The article draws on fieldwork research conducted in 2000-2003 among the so-called 'Pontic' Greek population of the two North Caucasian provinces of the Russian Federation – Krasnodar krai and the Republic of Adyghea.<sup>xviii</sup> The main fieldwork sites were the town of Vitazevo and the village of Gaverdovskii, which are the largest settlements of concentrated Greek populations in Krasnodar krai and Adyghea respectively. I also extended my ethnographic investigation to study Greek national-cultural organisations in the provincial capitals of Krasnodar and Maykop and to interview officers in the Greek General Consulate in Novorossiisk. Some interviews and observations were recorded when I visited my informants' families in the village of Severskaia and the town of Gelendzhik in Krasnodar krai and the village (*aul*) of Bzhedugkhabl' in Adyghea.<sup>xix</sup>

Identity can be understood as the site of interplay between structure and agency, discourse and practices, ideology and subjectivity. The identities of individual actors are manifested in their practices (including their discursive practices of representation) when they act strategically in order to achieve particular practical outcomes (Wodak *et al.* 1999: 29-32). Bourdieu refers to such embodiment and encoding of social structures in individuals' actions as the actor's 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1992: 52-56). Applying this concept to the study of everyday nationalism in Greek Macedonia, Karakasidou points out that the appropriation of national identity by individuals indicates their sense of habitus (Karakasidou 2000: 423).

In this article attention is paid to the role which nation-states as institutionalised structures play in the production of transnational identities. Perhaps it is too early to speak about the world of globalisation and transnationalism as a 'post-national' world (Appadurai 1996: 21). Rather, as Sørensen (1998: 262) notes, the transnational space becomes a contested space which contains several national and bi-national identities. Even in the world of globalisation, the nation-state has not lost its capacity to construct the subjectivity of its citizens. However, it has ceased to be the sole source of legitimate identification.

Although transnational communities exist in, and as, a transnational circuit (Rouse 2002), they rarely identify themselves as transnationals and continue to speak about their attachment to particular nations, ethnicities, places and countries (Sørensen 1998: 244). Transnational migrants do not lose their sense of belonging to territorialised nations because they, perhaps more than anyone else, are aware of the nation-state's desire to control its territory and the movement of people across its borders. Being subject to state policies of naturalisation or living illegally in a 'host' country, transnationals routinely deal with the nation-state, while their national, ethnic and cultural identities are constantly being renegotiated. Thus Sørensen argues that transnational migration has not eroded the nation-state (*ibid.*: 262). To a certain degree it may even be asserted that the space of the nation-state has expanded as transnational practices and identities continue to be shaped by state policies and identity politics of both the 'home' and 'host' nations. Consequently, although this article is not concerned specifically with Greek immigration policy or Russian emigration laws, it will also map state regulation of cross-border migration and consular practices concerning the migration of Greeks from the Russian Federation to Greece.

### **Visa regulations and citizenship provisions for 'repatriated' Greeks**

Since the outbreak of recent mass migration of Greeks from the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s to mid-1990s, the policy of Greece towards these migrants has been determined by the history of relations between the Greek nation-state and its diaspora and by political processes within the country, as well as by the increasing influence of the European Union on contemporary Greek foreign policy.

The general trend in this policy can be defined as facilitation of the resettlement of Greek migrants, thereby highlighting the peculiarity of Greek nationalism (Fakiolas and King 1996: 177). Since the foundation of the independent Greek state in 1830, Greek national identity has been based on a combination of two different principles: 1) the 'civic model' of the nation as a state and people who live in its territory, and 2) the 'ethnic model', which represents the Greek nation as a community of ethnic Greeks. The latter principle assumes a Greek-ness based on cultural and 'blood' bonds as the essence of the Greek nation. The governmental department founded in 1984 for 'Diaspora Hellenism' reflects this principle of national identity at the institutional level (Hirschon 1999: 164-170). The Greek state sees Greek diasporas as its potential citizens.<sup>xx</sup> Therefore, the Greek state treated the former 'Soviet' Greeks who intended to migrate to Greece as 'repatriates' from the Greek diaspora and facilitated their entry into the country and their naturalisation (Fakiolas and King 1996: 186; Mestheneos 2002: 180).

Greek Consulates in the former Soviet republics suddenly found themselves on the front line of this repatriation. Until recently they issued so-called 'repatriation visas', which enabled migrants to enter Greece and apply for Greek citizenship within a year of visa issue. Initially, these visas were only issued by the Greek Embassy in Moscow; in 2000, however, it was evident that the General Consulate of Greece which had been opened in Novorossiisk had issued over 8,000 'repatriation visas' by the late 1990s. At the same time Greek officials turned a blind eye to those migrants who entered the country on 'tourist' visas but overstayed them.<sup>xxi</sup> Furthermore, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides these migrants with an opportunity to apply for 'repatriation visas' once they are within Greek territory. In 1990 the same ministry formed the National Foundation for the Reception and Resettlement of Repatriated Greeks, which offered a service facilitating the adaptation of repatriates through the organisation of language courses, employment and housing opportunities on their behalf (Kokkinos 1991: 395). This service, known

among migrants as 'the Programme' (*programma*), became one of the main channels of resettlement for Greeks from the former Soviet Union.

Currently, Greek policy towards the former Soviet Greek diaspora is starting to move towards keeping this 'Greek diaspora' in their present place of residence and preventing a mass return to the 'homeland'. This policy is inspired by the difficulties which returnees have experienced in adaptation. Such a mass influx of immigrants within a very short period caught both the society and infrastructure of Greece unprepared and the adaptation measures became a burden on the country's economy. Another reason behind the frosty welcome given to Greeks from the post-Soviet space is that Greece, as a member of the EU, has to follow European immigration regulations restricting the entry of migrants into 'fortress Europe' (Fakiolas and King 1996: 186).

In practice, this new policy was implemented by abolishing 'repatriation visas' in 2000. Now, Greek Consulates in the Russian Federation are entitled to issue Greek passports to returnees who can become Greek citizens without an actual 'return' – resettlement – to Greece.<sup>xxii</sup> This policy has been implemented since 2001, and it was initially welcomed with enthusiasm by Russian Greeks as an opportunity to hold 'dual citizenship' – as illustrated by my fieldwork observation cited above. However, the procedure for obtaining Greek citizenship is becoming longer and more complicated. It is assumed that an average future Greek citizen has to display his/her cultural and ethnic affiliation with Greece, which requires quite substantial knowledge of Greek national history and the contemporary political situation in the country as well as some fluency in Modern Greek. The Greek origin of the applicant has to be proved by documents showing the Greek ethnicity of the citizenship-seeker or of at least one of his/her parents. A personal interview with the applicant in the Consulate is also part of this procedure. As one of the officers in the Novorossiisk Consulate implied, the purpose of these interviews is to prove 'the Greek mentality' of the applicant, which can include his/her knowledge of Greek cuisine, folklore and traditions. The questions asked during these interviews are designed to check an interviewee's expertise in the 'history, culture, language and politics' of the Greek nation-state. However, as the same Consulate's officer admitted, these questions are often irrelevant to the cultural and historical background of the 'Pontic Greek' population in southern Russia. Local Greeks sometimes fail their interviews because they cannot name the president of Greece or the mayor of Athens and they are unable to identify traditional

Greek dishes, especially if such questions are asked in Modern Greek rather than in their native Pontic dialect or Turkish<sup>xxiii</sup> – or indeed Russian, since that is the only language spoken by the majority of Greeks in this region.

Finally, the official Greek approach to the 'repatriation' of Caucasian Greeks depends on the 'strategic' national interests of Greece and the socio-political situation in the country. Thus, those repatriates who joined the 'Programme' were settled in several 'resettlement centres', all of which were situated in northern Greece in the provinces of Macedonia and Thrace (Kokkinos 1991: 395).<sup>xxiv</sup> Since these northern provinces became part of Greek national territory in 1912, the Greek state has used different waves of 'repatriates' (the first were those Greeks who arrived from Asia Minor after the transfer of populations in 1923) in order to create a 'buffer zone' against external threats and increase the Greek element in this border region where the local population has a significant proportion of ethnic minorities (Slavo-Macedonians, Vlachs, Pomaks and Turks) (Voutira 1997: 118).

The procedure of 'repatriation' and the granting of Greek citizenship becomes easier before elections to the national Parliament of Greece. The Greek Socialist Party (PASOK), which formed the national government between 1981 and 2004 – the period of mass immigration of Greeks from the USSR –, saw 'Soviet repatriates' as potential political supporters. Some of my informants expressed the view that the Greek Government softened the 'repatriation' regime from time to time and announced certain tax and credit privileges for 'Soviet' immigrants just before elections in order to attract the votes of these 'new citizens'.<sup>xxv</sup>

#### **'Materialisation' of Greek ethnic and national identities via the bureaucracy of emigration**

The Greek ethnicity of potential 'repatriates' is an essential factor in the entire process of their migration to the 'homeland'. Indeed, the Greek-ness of migrants has to be proved by documentation. Yet in actual fact their Greek ethnicity is partly constructed as a bureaucratic concept during the process of obtaining Greek visas and citizenship.

In order to receive 'repatriation visas' and/or Greek citizenship, an applicant has to prove his/her connections with the Greek nation. The most solid evidence of belonging to the Greek nation was Greek citizenship acquired under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) in the 1920s-30s by many Greek refugees who fled to Russia from the Ottoman Empire before and during WWI. This is why the Greeks who were persecuted for possessing foreign

passports and sent into exile in Central Asia during the Stalinist period (in 1942, 1944 and 1949) became the first and most significant wave of 'returnees' (Voutira 1991: 412). However, most of these repatriates were the children and grandchildren of genuine Greek citizens who had died or were too old to emigrate at the time. As a consequence, their descendants have to show evidence of their family ties with Greek nationals and sometimes make archival inquiries in the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs on their way to the 'homeland'. The following quotation from an interview with Semen, who was born in exile in North Kazakhstan, illustrates the smooth naturalisation of those 'repatriates' who managed to prove their genealogical ties with Greek nationals:

Personally, I didn't have [any difficulties with documents], because [the documents] of my father, grandfather, his sister were in the archive [of] the Greek Embassy.

*Question:* [Were they] Greek subjects?

*Answer:* [They were] Greek subjects. [They had passports of] the Kingdom of Hellenes and I had no problems... If you wanted to receive [Greek citizenship] you went to Moscow, at that time, it was only in Moscow. If your documents were there in the [Embassy] archive, you were given all the documents for the Greek passport at once. This is what happened with my family... We arrived in Greece with these documents, went to the police station and they gave us internal Greek passports. And we became entitled to all rights as natives... (Semen, born 1955, Severskaia).<sup>xxvi</sup>

Those migrants who have no Greek citizens among their ancestors, like the majority of the Vitazevo and Gaverdovsk Greeks, have to bring so-called 'additional papers' as evidence of their Greekness. These are Soviet documents with their 'nationality' record, such as the birth certificates of their parents, an internal passport or even a Soviet Army service card (*voennyi билет*). Birth certificates of parents are especially important documents for those who have a record of Russian nationality in their Soviet passport, which was usual for children of the numerous mixed marriages.

The 'Soviet passport' was used as an internal ID in the post-Soviet Russian Federation until January 2004, when it had to be completely replaced by a new internal 'Russian' passport. However, it is such an important document for the issue of Greek 'repatriation' that the General Consulate of Greece in Novorossiisk has urged Russian Greeks to keep their 'old' passport even after receiving new documentation in order to prove their

Greek origin, because the new internal passport provides no record of ethnicity ('Vnimanie!!!' 2002: 1).

The role of the 'Soviet' passport is in no sense less important for the return journey 'home' than for migration to the 'homeland'. Thus, Caucasian Greeks who overstay their 'tourist visas' working in Greece use the Greek 'nationality' record in their 'Soviet' passports on their way home to avoid fines at border checkpoints. The importance of the Greek ethnicity record in economic migrants' passports was graphically explained by Il'ia, who was once a chairperson of a Greek national-cultural association in Russia but has been living in Greece since 1999:

Any citizen of the Russian Federation, not only Greeks, can take a 'tourist visa'... He is treated as a tourist in Greece. And it is useless to shout that your mum, dad, grandpa or grandma [were Greeks]. The only advantage is that when you leave [Greece] if you overstay [your visa] they do not fine you because you are Greek... Thank God, there is still a record of ['nationality'] in the Soviet passport (Il'ia, born 1967, Novorossiisk).

Some migrants have to acquire Greek surnames first and start their trip to the 'homeland' afterwards. In fact, many Greeks from southern Russia have Russian surnames, while the majority of Greek family names from Transcaucasia look Turkic or Muslim.<sup>xxvii</sup> These Russian-like or Turkish-like surnames may undermine the Greek-ness of 'repatriates' in the eyes of immigration clerks and lessen the chances of obtaining Greek citizenship. Even Il'ia, who has a Russified surname which is quite common among ethnic Russians, encountered difficulties proving his Greek ethnicity to Greek immigration authorities despite his reputation as one of the founders of the Greek revivalist movement in the former Soviet Union:

I waited two and half years for my citizenship... Quite simply, they [the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs] saw [my surname is] *Georgiev*, well: 'What is your relation to Greeks?' It is not recorded on my mother's birth certificate that she is Greek. She was born in Kabardinka (a Greek village in Krasnodar krai – AP) but they did not mention ['nationality'] in the 1930s when this certificate was issued... Well, her parents' [surname] was *Aleksandrov*. Who were they? In Greece, it was decided that they could not be Greeks. That's all... [Finally, I proved my Greek origin] when I brought 'additional papers'. The Soviet Army service card is an 'additional factor', because it is usually given at

age sixteen and it has the record of [your] 'nationality'. So it is a very important document... (Il'ia, born 1967, Gelendzhik).

Hellenisation of family names is part of the broader cultural process taking place among Caucasian Greeks, namely the rediscovery of their Greek identity. This new Greek identity has proven to be different to the previous Soviet one. It came about in a situation where new ethnic and national boundaries were being drawn in previously uninterrupted Soviet space and at a time when the post-Soviet Caucasus and Black Sea regions were becoming less isolated from neighbouring areas of the Balkans and the Middle East. Adjusting to such shifts in national borders, people had to change their identities and they did this quite literally by changing their names and ethnicity in their identification documents. For instance, the children of Russian fathers and Greek mothers insisted on putting their Greek 'nationality' into their 'Soviet' passports in order to be 'true' Greeks, despite their Russian or Ukrainian surnames and the 'tradition' of inheriting the ethnicity of the father.<sup>xxviii</sup> The power of documented ethnicity is so strong that it could overwhelm individual self-identification. During the most recent demographic census (October 2002), for example, one of my informants declared his ethnicity to be Russian (as recorded in his passport) in spite of his clearly Greek surname, his active participation in the local Greek society and the recognition of his Greek-ness by his colleagues and neighbours:

*Question:* How did you answer the question about your 'nationality' (*natsional'nost'*) in the forms for the [demographic] census?)

*Answer:* Of course, I answered 'Russian' in accordance with my passport (*kak po pasportu*). (Vadim, born 1954 (o.e.), Gaverdovskii).

Thus, Greek ethnicity needs to be proven by bureaucratic documents in order to be considered sufficient for obtaining Greek nationality. Indeed, without such documents ethnic identity is seen as something incomplete and even in danger.<sup>xxix</sup> In the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, as well as in the practice of Greek Consulates, it is not enough to have self-identification or to be identified by others as a member of a certain ethnic group; what counts as true identity for officialdom needs to be fixed, to be based in some sense on material proof. Thus, ethnic identity is materialised in the form of ethnicity records in documents of different sorts and constitutes an integral part of the post-Soviet individual as a subject of state bureaucracy.<sup>xxx</sup>

### Greek-ness as a commodity

The 'materialisation' of Greek identity in documents makes it, in some respects, the precursor

of the 'commoditisation' of documented Greek-ness.<sup>xxxi</sup> Indeed, documents proving Greek origin are seen as the equivalent of hard currency, convertible into the valuable emblem of Greek citizenship, which also takes a quite material shape – the Greek national passport. This passport enables the holder to be a migrant to Greece and at the end of the day brings wealth. It also supplies people with a feeling of security in the uncertain Russian environment.

In fact, Greek nationality is acquired via financial transactions which vary from the payment of Consulate fees for 'repatriation' or 'tourist' visas to the bribery of different official institutions for lacking but desperately needed 'additional papers'. For instance, the church marriage certificate of parents is included in the list of documents required for issuing 'repatriation visas'. Church marriages were very rare during the Soviet period, and if they did take place it was unlikely that any certificates would be issued at the time. Consequently, Greeks seeking to emigrate to Greece had to pay substantial sums to Russian Orthodox priests in local churches for these certificates, even if their parents were never married in church:

There was a standard list of documents for repatriation. First of all, it was the birth certificate, then, the birth certificate of parents, the marriage certificate of parents, plus, there were absolutely stupid documents such as the church marriage certificate of parents and [your certificate of] baptism in [Orthodox Christianity] *Question:* But people couldn't have such documents, could they?

*Answer:* As a matter of fact, nobody had these. It was your problem to get these [certificates] by paying bribes. How many priests became fatter in Russia because of this?! They should send a telegram of thanks to the President of Greece (Denis, born 1970 (o.e.), Novorossiisk).

The other side of such commoditisation of Greek identity is the fear that documents proving Greek-ness can be faked and Greek identity can be purchased by non-Greeks. This can devalue one's documented Greek-ness and undermine Greek people's social and economic positions, achieved via the conversion of credible and well-documented Greek ethnicity into valuable European passports and imagined easy access to stable Western currencies.

Such fears are probably justified. Numerous cases in which non-Greeks obtained 'repatriation visas' through the General Consulate in Novorossiisk were investigated by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1999-2000. During the time of this investigation the Novorossiisk Consulate stopped issuing visas and Greeks from all south Russian and

North Caucasian regions had to go to the Greek Embassy in Moscow in order to get their visas. This made the trip to Greece more expensive and time-consuming. But all such inconveniences seem to pale in importance next to the damage done to the trust which had grown up between the local Greek communities and the Consulate. Relationships between the Consulate and local Greek national-cultural societies, for example, first cooled and then became increasingly hostile. The deputy chairperson of the Vitiazovo Greek organisation mentioned this distrust in relations between the Consulate and Greek societies in his interview:

There are many Chechens of 'Greek extraction' now in Greece... [The Greek Consul] let many of the Chechens and Armenians in for some token of appreciation. They are caught there and asked: 'Where did you [get your visa] from?' – 'From the Novorossiisk Consulate...' And they started to check [the Consul's work]. The investigator came here from there. They invited [the chairman of our Greek society] to come, to the Consulate... And the investigator questioned him there... But he [the chairman] told them: 'You had better question your own people. This is all their business. We didn't send anyone [who were not Greeks to Greece]' (Andrei, born 1950 (o.e.), Vitiazovo).

Finally, attention should be paid to the role which regional xenophobic discourses play in Greeks' perception of the threat to their 'right' to migrate to Greece. Although the Ministry's investigation highlighted some instances of corruption among the Consulate clerks, the local Greeks' fear that their 'privileged' Greek-ness could be adulterated also reveals local xenophobic attitudes towards migrants from other North-Caucasian regions and Transcaucasia. In fact, the stereotype of these migrants as people engaged in criminal and/or commerce-oriented activities is widespread in post-Soviet Russia and particularly sharply articulated in Krasnodar krai and the Republic of Adyghea (Savva and Savva 2002: 73-74).

The legacy of communist ideology is still powerful and commerce is seen as shameful and parasitical.<sup>xxxii</sup> The word *spekuliant* (profiteer) remains the scornful name for private traders everywhere in the post-Soviet space (Humphrey 2002: 59). The ability of migrants to buy and sell everything at a profit is exaggerated in xenophobic hate speech, where the asserted threat is that strangers (migrants are usually assumed to be ethnically different from the locals) will buy up the local land or,<sup>xxxiii</sup> as in the Greek case, obtain Greek identity through bribery.

### **The emigration business of Greek national-cultural societies**

The Greek national-cultural societies established throughout post-Soviet space since the early 1990s in those towns and villages with substantial Greek populations take an active part in the management of Greek migration to and from Greece. The aforementioned dispute between Greek national-cultural organisations and the Greek Consulate is a reflection of their rivalry for control over the movement of Caucasian Greeks between Greece and Russia. In this competition, Greek ethnicity is employed by both sides as an instrument through which to impose this control and as a commodity for use in the accumulation of social and economic capital.

The Greek organisations in Russia maintain the ideology of pan-Hellenism which represents Greece as the historic homeland and the cultural centre for the Greek diasporas all over the world. At the same time, because it is critical for the construction of ethnic and national identities among former Soviet Greeks, the connection with Greece has always been important for the economic survival of the Greek cultural revivalist movement throughout the former USSR. Financial and material support for cultural projects run by Greek organisations in the former Soviet Union has been provided by governmental institutions working with the Greek diaspora as well as by non-governmental Pontic cultural associations in Greece. Teachers and textbooks for Modern Greek language classes and illustrated handbooks on Pontic folklore have been sent from Greece to the Greek societies in Russia. Humanitarian aid directed from Greece to support the needy Greek population in the former Soviet Union is also distributed through the network of these organisations. This cross-border collaboration at the institutional level has gone hand-in-hand with the re-establishment of contacts with relatives who emigrated to Greece before WWII and their descendants at the individual level. This Greek renaissance has been accompanied at both levels by economic activities which vary from petty shuttle trade and seasonal labour performed by Soviet Greeks in Greece while visiting their relatives to the establishment of joint venture enterprises (*sovmestnye predpriiatia*) with business partners from Greece by the leaders of Greek national-cultural organisations. A similar process is documented by Georgios Agelopoulos (this issue) among the 'Krasiot'-Greeks in postsocialist Bulgaria in their relations with their relatives from 'Nea-Krasia' across the border in Greece. In the case of the Bulgarian Greeks, due to certain structural reasons (Bulgarian and Greek state policies and the size of

the diaspora populations) as well as the limited exchange value of Greek ethnicity at the level of individual actions, the initial euphoria of the 'revival' soon died out and cross-border relations between 'Krasiot' communities have become institutionalised and state-controlled. In southern Russia, the Greek revival movement apparently continues to play an important role in the economic, political and cultural activities of the local Greek population.

The relative success of the Greek identity revival in Russia (commoditisation of this identity might be seen as one of 'side effects' and indicators of this success) cannot be attributed solely to the importance of Greek ethnicity for navigation of the transnational circuit by former Soviet Greeks that has been outlined in previous sections of this article. The local context in which meanings of Greek ethnicity are (re-)produced and (re-)interpreted also has to be taken into account. It seems that, as in the case of the 'failure' of the Greek revival in Bulgaria, the analysis of its sustainability in Russia also reveals the process of identity construction as a complex intersection of structure and agency.

At the structural level, the legacy of Soviet ethno-federalism and institutionalised forms of individual ethnic self-identifications of citizens might be partly responsible for the growth of ethno-nationalist movement in the post-Soviet period (Brubaker 1996: 30-31). Greek identity was, for instance, enhanced by the Bolsheviks' policy of 'indigenisation' (*korenizatsia*) through establishment of the Greek national district (*raion*) in Krasnodar krai in the 1930s. Subsequently, Greeks victimised by Stalinist repression and exile as an 'unreliable people' were forced to take their ethnicity (and, indeed, nationality) seriously. The effect of ethnicity records in Soviet internal passports on the process of identity construction and representation among the post-Soviet Greek population has been already discussed in this article. This essentialist understanding of ethnicity was interwoven into the social fabric of the Soviet Union and after the dismantling of the ideological monopoly of the Communist Party ethno-nationalist movements became the most visible political force in the post-Soviet space as well as in many postsocialist societies of Eastern Europe (Verdery 1996: 83).

The increasing influence exerted by ethnic (national-cultural) organisations on the everyday life of local communities also highlights the significant role that the issues of ethnicity and nation play in the process of the (re-)construction of postsocialist social identities. In the Russian Federation, ethno-national organisations have also often been viewed by the state in an essentialist way as ethnic communities themselves (Osipov 2004: 60). The state tries to

control and manipulate them in order to secure the governing of the country which, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has been increasingly divided into ethnic and regional entities. In a situation where former Soviet political and social institutions have disappeared or become weak, national-cultural organisations are delegated certain rights and obligations to engage with the populations that they represent. The Greek national-cultural societies working in Vitiazhevo and Gaverdovskii, for example, are involved in providing social services to the local population, including community welfare and public security, and sustaining so-called 'traditional' culture as well as the physical and 'moral' health of the locals. They take part in consultative meetings organised by regional and local authorities on a regular basis. The leaders of these organisations act as mediators in disputes between Greeks and representatives of other groups. As legal entities (*iuridicheskie litsa*), Greek organisations even run their own businesses. However, they justify these economic activities by the moral imperative of work in the interest of the whole community; this community is assumed to be a predominantly Greek one.

In the conditions of contemporary Russia, where institutionalised ethnic organisations often become a mediator in relationships between citizens and the state, individual actors develop strategies which enable them to use their ethnic origin as an additional, but sometimes vital, social and economic resource. In Vitiazhevo, for example, taxi drivers who were ethnically Greek but not formal members of the local Greek 'society' asked the leader of this organisation to bring his influence to bear on the district authorities and help protect locals from the cavalier actions of the traffic police when they were working outside the town's borders.

The involvement of Greek revivalist organisations in the transnational migration of the former Soviet Greeks is a good illustration of Bourdieu's idea that 'practical classifications (Bourdieu sees ethnicity as one such classification – AP) are always subordinated to practical functions and oriented towards the production of social effects' (Bourdieu 1991: 220). In southern Russia local Greeks find it 'practical' to use Greek national-cultural organisations – which constitute a semi-controlled and state-manipulated form of post-Soviet 'civil society'<sup>xxxiv</sup> – in their cross-border movement to Greece. The Greek organisations have become channels for the transnational flow of ideas and goods as well as people. The management of this movement is now the most important part of these societies' activities. Using established contacts with governmental agencies and Pontic associations, the

local Greek societies regularly send children to summer camps in Greece and enlist their young members into the student exchange programmes for enrolment at Greek universities. The Greek national-cultural organisations also help people with visas and transportation to Greece.

By assisting with migration to Greece, the Greek national-cultural organisations gain both social and economic capital. In the early and mid-1990s the Greek societies in southern Russia were commissioned by the Greek Embassy in Moscow to collect the passports of those local Greeks who wished to obtain visas for visits to the country. Migrants who applied for visas through these societies had to pay additional money to the Greek organisations as reimbursement for transportation and other expenses along with the visa fee. This mediating service proved to be quite a profitable business, which significantly improved the financial situation of Greek non-governmental and non-commercial organisations.

Since the General Consulate was opened in Novorossiisk Greeks from Krasnodar krai and Adyghea have applied directly to this office for visas. As a consequence, the visa business of local Greek organisations has declined in these regions. However, it still remains important for the Greek organisations in Stavropol' krai and the North Caucasian autonomous republics, which are remote from both the Greek Embassy in Moscow and the Consulate in Novorossiisk.

Sometimes, visa issues overshadow other (social and cultural) activities on the agenda of the Greek societies. This leads to rumours and suspicions within the Greek revivalist movement that some organisations are 'trading' Greek ethnicity to outsiders.<sup>xxxv</sup> On the contrary, the local Greek societies in Vitiazevo and Gaverdovskii emphasise the social importance of their involvement in migration activities. For example, they play the role of mediators between the local Greek population and Greek tourist firms which organise a regular coach service between southern Russia and Greece.<sup>xxxvi</sup> They keep in touch with the owners of these firms, inform local Greeks about the coach schedules and reserve seats on board for them. On the way back to Russia, the Greek organisations also collect parcels sent by emigrant Greeks to their relatives.

These societies distribute visa application forms among locals who intend to visit Greece and help them to fill out these forms correctly. In so doing, as the deputy chairperson of the Vitiazevo Greek society insisted, they further the public interests of their communities without any financial benefit to themselves:

Here we only fill out applications for receiving tourist visas...Quite simply, if they [the local Greeks] fill out this application in the Consulate, they are charged two hundred and fifty roubles for each application. Because [the Consulate clerks] complete these applications on their behalf. We lighten this burden on our citizens, we do all this free of charge. (*Question*: These applications have to be made in Greek, don't they?) Yes, we fill them in Greek and in Latin (sic). We do all this... So, we lighten the burden on our people (Andrei, born 1950 (o.e.), Vitiazevo).

Even if the local Greek national-cultural organisations do not make money from the assistance they give to migrants, they undeniably increase their political influence on the local community by providing facilities for transnational migration – a service which is vitally important for the economic survival of the Russian Greeks. As the following quotations from interviews demonstrate, the Greek societies' help with migration to, and contacts with, Greece is often seen by the local Greeks as their most valuable activity, although facilitating the 'repatriation' of the 'Greek diaspora' is never mentioned in the official programmes of the Greek national-cultural associations.

*Question*: I am interested in the [Greek] society. What do they do? What are their main activities?

*Answer*: There are activities... From time to time they help people, they send children to Greece, for example. Such things as visas, well, they help with these things.

*Question*: Have you ever turned to them?

*Answer*: I turned to them once. It was when I sent my passport for a [Greek] visa through this society... (Gavriil, born 1957 (o.e.), Gaverdovskii).

*Question*: Have you ever been in contact with the [Greek] society?

*Answer*: I went to Greece via this society two years ago. They helped and gave me money to pay visa expenses... (*Question*: Well, what are their [the Greek society's] other activities?) I don't know. Ask them what their duties are, what they do (Lazar, born 1923, Vitiazevo).

*Question*: Do you know what the [Greek] society is doing here?

*Answer*: No, I don't know. I haven't a clue [what they are doing]. Probably, if someone needs some documents, he [the chairman of the society] helps to prepare them.

*Question*: What sort of documents [are you talking about]?



*Answer:* For example, if [someone] goes to work [in Greece], [or] people go there for permanent residence (*na postoianno mesto zhitel'stvo*), [the chairman] helps to organise all these... (Iosif, born 1929, Gaverdovskii).

This close familiarity of the Greek societies with Greece and migration issues makes these organisations popular among people who plan to make the journey to Greece. The educational programmes put on by the Greek organisations, such as lessons in Modern Greek, are viewed as useful for cultural adaptation in the 'historical homeland'. The members of ethnically mixed families, or people with a Russian ethnicity record in their 'Soviet' passports, see their enrolment in Greek national-cultural organisations as a public declaration of their self-identification with Greeks. They might also suppose membership of a Greek society to be a first and necessary step on their way to Greece. Perhaps the members of Popandopulo's family introduced at the beginning of this article were about to start their own transnational circuit. Although they had a recorded Russian 'nationality', they possessed a proper (Pontic) Greek surname, valuable documents that could prove their Greek genealogy and were prepared to pay for their membership of the Greek society.

### Conclusion

The informants' experience of dealing with citizenship and immigration regimes demonstrates that the ethnic and national identities of Greek transnational migrants are constantly being negotiated and contested in the course of their migration to Greece. The Greek-ness of the repatriates is shaped by the immigration bureaucracy; it is also instrumentally employed in the migrants' cross-border economic activities. Passing through official immigration procedures, this Greek ethnicity is manifested in the form of different documents, and is sometimes seen as a commodity by people involved in transnational migration. The formal requirements of citizenship and visa regimes are fulfilled or overcome by the Greek migrants using informal approaches and connections which include local Greek organisations, friends and family.

Participating in the transnational circuit, the migrants customise and reinterpret meanings of citizenship and nationality in such a way that they can more or less successfully adapt to, and utilise for their own benefits, new regimes of international frontiers which have been emerging since the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the enlargement of the European Union. The outcomes migrants anticipate from their actions are deeply rooted in their structural positioning by the nation-

state as 'diaspora', 'repatriates' and descendants of Greek nationals, etc. Thus the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1996: 441) is reproduced but also customised and shifted through the practices of transnational migrants.

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### Notes

<sup>xvii</sup> For the sake of anonymity, all the surnames which I use in this article have been changed. Popandopulo is one of the most common and stereotypical surnames among (former) Soviet (Pontic) Greeks. The actual surname of this old man also sounds typically Pontic Greek.

<sup>xviii</sup> In the Western academic tradition, the Greek population of the former USSR is defined as 'Pontic Greeks' (see for example the [special issue of the] *Journal of Refugee Studies* 1991) on account of its history as a group originating from the Pontos. The Pontos (or Pontus), a region on the south-eastern coast of the Black Sea, stretches from the Turkish city of Sinop eastwards to Batumi in Georgia and is separated from inland Anatolia by the Pontic Alps (Bryer 1991: 316). Such historical and geographic identification developed during the twentieth century among those Greeks from the Pontos who resettled in Greece in the course of its population exchange with Turkey in 1923. As I have written elsewhere, this Pontic identity was 'imported' to Russia only recently, when the Soviet Greeks started their transnational circuit and their national-cultural organisations established contacts with the Pontic cultural clubs in Greece (see Popov 2003).

<sup>xix</sup> The data gathered in the course of this fieldwork constituted part of the empirical foundation of my doctoral thesis on the cultural production of identity as 'transnational locals' among Greeks in southern Russia.

<sup>xx</sup> The ethnic model of the nation was fully employed

in order to fulfil the conditions of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) when almost all ethnic Greeks resettled in Greece in the course of the population exchange with Turkey. However, the definition of ethnic Greek-ness was not all that clear at the time. During the Ottoman period the population of the Empire was divided into religious *millets* based on different confessions (Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Armenian-Gregorian and Jewish). This *millet* system shaped the social identity of the imperial population according to a social hierarchy based on religion, whilst often ignoring existing ethnic differences. Consequently, those who arrived in Greece from Turkey in the course of the population exchange included people practicing Orthodox Christianity and classified by the Ottoman administration as Rum-Greeks, but who were Turkish speakers.

<sup>xxi</sup> According to official statistical data, as of 1999 over 34 percent of all repatriated Greeks from the former USSR – or 49,139 persons – had outstayed their ‘tourist’ visas (*Upourgeio Makedhonias-Thrakis Geniki Grammateia Palinnostounton Omegenon* 1999).

<sup>xxii</sup> A significant amendment to the new regulations on the obtaining of citizenship by ‘Soviet repatriates’ has been made for those former Soviet Greeks who had ‘repatriation visas’ in their passports but did not apply for Greek citizenship within a year. These people are entitled to submit their documents for Greek citizenship on the territory of Greece, although free entry visas may be issued to them only after interviews in Greek Consulates (‘Vnimanie!!!’ 2002: 1).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Turkish is a mother tongue for most recent Greek migrants from Georgia, where their ancestors resettled in the nineteenth century from eastern Anatolia (mainly from the Erzurum *paşalık* of the Ottoman Empire) (Kolesov 1997: 91). The mass migration of Georgian Greeks to Greece and Russia in the 1990s was partly determined by a sense of ethnic alienation and socio-economic degradation that Greeks experienced as a ‘non-titular nationality’ in conditions of growing ethno-nationalism in the newly independent Georgia. The majority of my Gaverdovsk informants were born in Georgia and they speak Turkish as well as Russian. Local Greeks in Vitiazevo, for the most part a locally-born population, are Russian-speaking, although elderly and middle-aged people also know the Pontic Greek dialect. The core of the Greek population of Vitiazevo is composed of descendants of migrants from the Pontos, i.e. from the *vilayet* of Trebizond in the Ottoman Empire, who emigrated to Russia in the

second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>xxiv</sup> In 1999 about 75 per cent of all ‘repatriates’ from the former Soviet Union, i.e. 106,347 people, lived in the northern Greek provinces of Macedonia and Thrace (*Upourgeio Makedhonias-Thrakis Geniki Grammateia Palinnostounton Omegenon* 1999).

<sup>xxv</sup> The decree issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs granting ‘repatriates’ from the former USSR the opportunity to receive housing credits was released on the eve of the parliamentary elections in April 2000. The opposition party ‘Nea Demokratia’ accused PASOK of buying more than 100,000 votes from the ‘repatriates’ through this edict and thereby securing its victory in the elections (‘Pravaia Pechat’ Gretsii’ 2000: 1). At the same time, the ‘Greek diaspora’ in the post-Soviet space was well informed about the political situation in Greece via the local Greek newspapers which published pro-PASOK articles (see for instance ‘Simitis-Karamanlis 1:1’ 2002: 4).

<sup>xxvi</sup> Informants are referred to by their pseudonym (that is, their changed given name), year of birth and the name of the place where the interviews or conversations were recorded. During my fieldwork I did not always ask my informants’ exact year of birth and, indeed, it was not always ethical to make such enquiries. In these cases I make my own estimate of the informant’s age. In this article such estimates are indicated as ‘o.e.’ (‘own estimate’).

<sup>xxvii</sup> In the nineteenth century, those Greek migrants from the Ottoman Empire who became subjects of the Russian Empire were usually recorded in official documents under surnames in which the Russian endings *-ov/ev* or *-in* were added to their Ottoman/Turkish family name or to their Orthodox father’s name.

<sup>xxviii</sup> The rather ‘traditional’ view of ‘nationality’ as a sort of patrilineal phenomenon could affect the official practices of recording ethnicity in internal Soviet passports. In 1953, for instance, Vera (born 1937), a Circassian Greek from the *aul* of Bzhedugkhabl’ (Adyghea) whose mother was Russian, had not been permitted by the local police office to choose her mother’s ethnicity for the record in her internal passport. However, her son, whose father is Russian with a Ukrainian surname, pointed out his Greek ‘nationality’ when he received his passport in the late 1980s, while his brother retained his father’s Russian ethnicity.

<sup>xxix</sup> The absence of an ethnicity specification in the new Russian passport has provoked a heated discussion in the media and political circles, as well as among the broader population of the country.

Heavy criticism of this passport reform has come from the ethnic intelligentsia who assess the abolition of 'nationality' in new passports as a step towards the cultural and ethnic assimilation of minorities (see for example Khatazhukov 2004). Russian nationalists also see the disappearance of the ethnicity record from passports as an indication of a conspiracy against Russia which threatens the existence of the Russian people (*russskii narod*) itself. Finally, the former Ministry of Federal Affairs, National and Migration Policy challenges the passport reform, suggesting that without a 'nationality' in the passport it becomes difficult to control interethnic relations in the country (Kuznetsova 2001: 4).

<sup>xxx</sup> The identification of an individual via documents which he/she possesses is, probably, one of the most powerful legacies of the Soviet past. As Humphrey points out, 'a fully integrated Russian person' has to get a range of papers which guarantee his/her rights and entitlements in society. Deprivation of one or another document is seen as a loss of official status which can threaten 'the unraveling of the whole edifice, that is, descent into the wilderness of having no entitlements at all' (Humphrey 2002: 26-27).

<sup>xxxi</sup> From the perspective of social anthropology, a commodity is a universal phenomenon which exists via transactions involving the exchange of things. A thing becomes a commodity if 'it has use value and can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart' (Kopytoff 1986: 68-69). Such exchanges can be direct or indirect, that is, achieved by means of money.

<sup>xxxii</sup> As Kaneff shows in the context of the Bulgarian village as it survives postsocialist transformations, those involved in the new market economy which contradicts the ideologically promoted collective 'production' of the cooperative during socialism – see their market activities as a dramatic loss of the individual's social status and generally a shameful activity (Kaneff 2002: 40).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Until recently the land-use legislative system adopted in Krasnodar krai restricted the regional property market to local dwellers only, justifying discriminatory practices towards migrants as measures to protect the 'Kuban' land from being sold to 'foreigners'. Elsewhere I analyse in greater detail how Greek migrants deal with the regional regulation of property relations (Popov 2003: 355).

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Recently, anthropologists have criticised civil society debates as being 'too narrowly circumscribed by modern western models of liberal-individualism' (Hann 1996: 3). Critics have pointed out that civil society institutions – which have been perceived by

apologists of the 'transition theory' as a necessary instrument and product of a working 'democracy' and market-oriented economy and as a counterbalance to the state – do not work well and sometimes have opposite effects and characteristics in the non-Western context, including postsocialist societies (Hann 2006: 153-176, Hann and Dunn 1996, Kalb 2002, Layton 2006, Mandel 2002). As a form of post-Soviet civil society, the ethnic NGOs which I observed during my field research in southern Russia similarly do not always conform to the theory. The Greek organisations in Vitiazhevo and Gaverdovskii which are involved in such collective projects as church building or the support of elderly and young members of the communities are viewed by locals as defenders of the moral values of communal solidarity – which is often associated with the Soviet era – in the face of the increasing atomisation of post-Soviet society. Although these organisations develop some strategies of resistance to the ethno-nationalism of the regional regimes in both Krasnodar krai and Adygea, they owe their very existence to a significant extent to the state which regards controllable ethnic organisations of citizens as part of its 'nationality policy' (Osipov 2004). Moreover, national-cultural organisations in both provinces use and reproduce xenophobic discourses and ethnic discrimination practices when they employ regional migration and nationality policy to their own ends in the competition with other groups over political and economic resources.

<sup>xxxv</sup> In May and July 2002 leaders of the Greek national-cultural organisations of the North-Caucasian region voiced strong criticism of the General Consulate's visa-issuing policy during meetings of the Russian Association of Greek Public Organisations (AGOOR). At the same meetings some chairmen of Greek societies from Stavropol' krai were accused of reducing the functions of their organisations to visa affairs and of supporting the General Consulate ('Zasedanie Prizidiuma Soveta AGOOR' 2002: 3).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> These tourist firms were founded and are run by Greeks who emigrated from the former Soviet Union. The cheapest way of travelling from the Northern Caucasus to Greece is by coach. In 2002 the cost of a one-way coach ticket was \$120, whereas the price of a return flight to Salonica from Anapa or Krasnodar was \$400. The itinerary of these services runs through cities and towns in the region with a significant Greek population.

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