

DEALING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCE
“ASIA MINOR REFUGEE” AND “MUSLIM MINORITY”
FOLKLORE STUDIES IN GREECE

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a response to an invitation to address the issue of ‘Turkish folk culture studies in post-war Greece’. This general topic, however, is a kind of a paradox. For more than a century, since the middle nineteenth century, folklore studies in Greece were constructively involved in the process of ethnogenesis by showing that the Greek people (*laos*) belong to the Hellenic nation (*ethnos*) (see Herzfeld 1981). Cultural homogenisation was achieved either through the suppression of cultural difference (into silence) or, alternatively, through its imaginative reconstruction into similarity. According to the nationalist ideology it seems that only the folk who belong to the hegemonic national group deserve to have their lore formally acknowledged and studied. Folklore as an academic discipline has to voice the hegemonic nation. The rest, and particularly the groups whose cultural identity is under the patronage of another state, are left without recognized folklore. As an effect, in this project no room is left for minorities. Türks in Greece have not been an exception. Strictly speaking Turkish folklore studies in Greece do not exist because they are a contradiction in terms.

This could have been the conclusion of an exceptionally brief paper. Yet, we decided to extend our study beyond the strict confines of the term ‘Turkish’. In any case, terms that connote ethnic or national identities are part and parcel of our cultural subject matter rather than a straightforward, objective criterion of its classification. To decide the content of such terms we are left with options that are often polarised in pairs of opposites, such as subjective vs objective, indigenous vs analytical or people vs state definitions.¹ As it will become evident in this paper we adopt an eclectic and dialectic view, one that keeps the balance between those alternative options by stressing the socio-politically conventional and his-

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¹ See Danforth 1995, Trubeta 2001: 19-24.

torically variable character that the term 'Turkish' has in the context of modern Greek state and society. On this basis we include in our analysis, primarily for reasons of comparison, two categories of people: 'Anatolian refugees' and members of the 'Muslim minority'. Both categories historically emerge in the course of the 1920's and in the context of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) that provided the legal framework for the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey².

First, we are going to consider the, primarily, folklore and, secondarily, anthropological studies of people who originate from the Anadolu, what is today Turkish Anatolia, or Asia Minor as it is known in Greece. These are the almost 1.200.000 Greek-speaking or Türk-speaking Christians with a Greek national consciousness who came to Greece as refugees after the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-22, the so called 'Asia Minor Disaster', and the exchange of populations. Anatolian refugees have experienced a longer symbiosis with ethnic Turks in the Ottoman context than the rest of Greeks. They are not Turks, yet because their Greek national consciousness has been shaped in the context of late Ottoman empire they are marginal to what may be called post-ottoman studies.

Second, we are going to consider studies of what is officially known as the 'Muslim Minority' of Thrace. The term includes Türk speaking, Pomak speaking and Rom Muslims, citizens of the Greek state, who have a long history of settlement in Ottoman Thrace and have been treated (together with the ethnic Greeks of Istanbul, Imvros and Tenedos) as 'non-exchangeable' by the Lausanne Treaty. The historically flexible connection between religion and ethnic identity, that draws upon the system of *millet* classification, is the basis of their inclusion in our review. Far from being self evident, their inclusion in Turkish studies proper is further supported by the fact that a number of them are self-presented today as 'Türks'. On the other hand, it is complicated by the flexibly negotiable and historically varying character, both of their ethnic categorisation (and allegiances) and of the corresponding state categories of ethnic identification.

This paper surveys the broad spectrum of approaches to the study of culture and society (which we consider as two alternative ways of looking at the same "subject matter"), including more 'modern' anthropological, geographical and social historical ones. More particularly it is a critical evaluation of folklore studies from an anthropological perspective. We are interested in depicting alternative folklore methodologies and assessing the contrasting ways in which folklore studies have been used in the management of cultural difference. The comparison between the "Asia Minor refugees" and the "Muslim Minority"

² This paper is not an exhaustive review of the literature on these populations. Yet, we cover most of the works that employ anthropological and folklore perspectives.

studies is not only suggestive of the varying content of cultural identifications but also of the historically shifting theoretical strategies that contribute to their construction.

2. Anatolian Greek refugees and 'Asia Minor studies'

a. Introductory remarks

The post-war study of social and cultural arrangements among Anatolian refugees in Greece, often in connection with the study of their Anatolian homelands, has evolved in two phases. The first phase is a continuation of internal developments in Greek folklore and lasts till the mid-seventies. During this period, which could be described as the apex of the so-called 'Asia Minor folklore studies', the research focuses on the first generation refugees, the survivors of the so called 'Exodus' from Anatolia and primarily deals with their oral traditions and testimonies about life in their homelands. The second phase, which is connected to the post-war development of sociology and, latter, anthropology in Greece, starts in the seventies and goes on till today. The more recent wave of research shifts the emphasis to the historical present and situates the refugees in their current socio-economic and cultural context.

This schematic periodization sheds light upon a historical succession of two rather disconnected research paradigms, which are respectively inspired by folklore and social anthropology. Yet it should not be taken to suggest an absolute boundary in time: Asia Minor folklore studies, particularly those of an extra-academic character, are still a productive field. Yet as we shall see their institutional framework changed its character and gradually declined.

b. 'Asia Minor folklore studies': The Centre of Asia Minor Studies and the Refugee Associations

Asia Minor folklore studies evolved around two institutional poles, both of which were placed outside the Greek University and, therefore, were marginal to mainstream academic Greek folklore. On the one hand, it is the Centre of Asia Minor Studies (CAMS), a private but highly influential research centre which was founded in the early 1930s in Athens by an ethnomusicologist with strong French connections, Melpo Merlier. On the other hand, are the Refugee Associations (*Syllogoi*) which proliferated in the inter-war period in the major cities of Greece. Established by the urbanised and educated elites of the refugee population, these Associations capitalised on the civic spirit that was so prominent among Anatolian Greeks to provide the necessary social and intellectual environment for the reproduction of Greek Anatolian culture in the form of a discourse about 'the lost homelands' (*chamenes patriðhes*). Both projects had a powerful historical antecedent in the

systematic attempt of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople to collect elements of ethnic Greek popular culture in late 19th c. Ottoman Empire³ and, particularly, to prove the Greekness of Ottoman Cappadocians⁴.

Merlier started her project in the form of an 'Association' (*Sylogos*) for the collection of songs and music of refugees from Thrace and Anatolia. Yet, soon after, in 1933, the folklore material that was necessary in order to put songs in context turned into an autonomous research objective, the objective of the 'Archive of Asia Minor Folklore', later called 'Centre of Asia Minor Studies' (1949)⁵. The Centre of Asia Minor Studies was particularly interested collecting and studying the oral testimonies of the refugees⁶.

Merlier reproduced the research model that the founder of Greek folklore studies, N. Politis, initiated in the context of the so-called Folklore Archive (1918). She privileged a philological (rather than an ethnomusicological) model of documentation, which is reflected in the mode of collecting, through standard questionnaires, classifying and storing evidence. She further applied a tripartite division of research labour. At the upper level, in full command of the research and writing up process was Merlier herself and a group of distinguished, Greek and foreign, scholars from a number of disciplines: folklore, history, literature. Among them were distinguished Asia Minor specialists such as R. Dawkins, distinguished writers such as Nobel Prize winner G. Seferis, folklorists such as D. Petropoulos and D. Loukatos or philologists such as N. Andriotes. At the middle level there was a large group of more than 30 amateur researchers, who handled the questionnaires, producing in the course of 40 years 150.000 handwritten pages of material on the oral tradition of refugees. At the bottom of this research hierarchy were the refugee informants. More than 5.000 refugees from 1375 Anatolian settlements (out of a total of 2163) collaborated in this project. The outcome was really impressive: An 'archive about archiving', as it has been accurately described (Papaelia 2000), the CAMS contains, besides the material from interviews, a rich collection of biographical notes about the informants, and also extremely interesting material on the researchers itineraries.

3The so called "Asia Minor Folklore Studies" initially focused on Ottoman Cappadocia and its ethnic Greek inhabitants. They emerged as a response to Mordam's view that the Greek language has never been the language of the Cappadocian people. See Anagnostakis and Balta 1990: 26. Also see Balta and Kouroupou 1997.

4 The most systematic attempt to prove the Greekness of Ottoman Cappadocia has been made by the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople in the course of the last half of the 19th century. The Association made a plea to priests, teachers and doctors to collect the "living monuments" that proved the Greekness of Cappadocia.

5 See Merlier 1948 and 1951. The very interesting and insightful works of I. Petropoulou (1995, 1998) and P. Papaelia (2000) have been a valuable source for the construction of the interpretive framework which we present here. Also see Kitromilides 1996 and Yiannakopoulos 1993.

6 See the collections of oral testimonies edited by D. Apostolopoulos (1980) and Y. Mqurellos (1982).

Merlier's methodological borrowings from 19th c. folklore were mixed with influences from ethnomusicology as well as from geographical history and literary modernism. The questionnaires were standardised and applied to all cases despite the evident cultural heterogeneity. A main concern was to depict the cultural similarities between Anatolian and mainland Greeks.⁷ More emphasis was given to religion⁸, as a lower and more basic, common denominator of cultural identity. Language⁹ was also an important concern.

What is particularly interesting is the shaping influence of geography in Merlier's methodology. Merlier was not primarily interested in the cultural idiosyncrasy of the refugees, nor was she inclined to consider the context of their current settlement in Greece. Instead, she gave special emphasis on the geographical details of the Anatolian landscape and the microtopography of settlements. Merlier rested on Roman geographical terminology and on the symbolic standing of particular refugees for particular places. The massive material that was collected by the assistants was classified in geographical terms, according to the Roman (rather than Ottoman, official Turkish or unofficial, 'vernacular' Greek) classification of Anatolia, a classification that of course had to be enriched since not every settlement could be traced in Roman times. These places were symbolically resurrected through the mediation of actual persons. Having lived in these places, and via the medium of orality, the refugee informants were symbolically borrowing their actuality to the taxonomy, they were filling the maps with 'real life', thus turning the place-names into a sort of actual places.¹⁰

It is in the context of these methodological strategies (and stratagems) that the ideological dimensions of the Centre's objective to 'resurrect' the homeland of the refugees become transparent. The researchers work was to transplant the refugee settlements of origin on the Greek ground using informants' narratives as the raw material for this transplantation. Thus Anatolia was reborn as a homogeneous Greek space, it was reconstructed as a place of Greek loss, not of Turkish presence. This further accounted for a greater Hel-

7 This accounts for an undercurrent of theoretical tensions and contradictions in the CAMS project. In the 1950's Merlier was referring with respect and admiration to the "new science of ethnography" or was envisioning a collaboration with Turkological studies. Yet, in a review of the work that has been accomplished in the study of Cappadocia she does not hide her enthusiasm for "attributing to Cappadocia her "Greekness" (Petropoulou 1995: 463).

8 The publications of the Centre include the work of distinguished folklorists of the time, such as Loucopoulos and Petropoulos (1949), Petropoulos and Andreades (1971), who focused on religious aspects of life in Cappadocia, employing the archival material of the Centre. Also see Marava-Hadjinicolaou (1953).

9 The publications of the Centre also include the work of philologists such as Andriotes (1948, 1961), Kessiosoglou (1951) and Kostakes (1964, 1968) on linguistic idioms employed by the refugees. Also see Bouyoukou-Moussaiou (1961, 1976), Caratzas (1954), Loucopoulos and Loucatos (1951) and Mayrochalivides and Kessiosoglou 1960.

10 On this point see the very interesting analysis of P. Papaelia (2000: 78-137).

lenism, which was incorporated within the Greek national narrative, an ideological recuperation of the plan that has politically (and military) failed.

Side by side to the the Centre the refugees themselves started publishing their memoirs, first in refugee newspapers and latter in books. This intellectual and publishing activity gradually became anchored to the Refugee Associations that proliferated in various parts of Greece. One of the primary objectives of the so called *Sylogoi*, the most prominent and well organised of which are those of Smyrna and Pontos, was to 'conserve' the history and oral tradition of the 'lost homelands'. Some of the *Sylogoi* had libraries and kept archives of their own, published newspapers, journals, often of a scholarly nature¹¹, as well as monographs on Anatolian villages, towns or whole regions¹². Despite the fact that most Associations worked more with the logic of the museum rather than the archive, and they functioned as social clubs, they contributed to the scholarly production of very rich material on refugee language and folklore (songs, proverbs, tales etc.).¹³

Given the scope, the wide breath and the participatory structure of the Associations activity one could think that they acted as competitors of the Centre of Asia Minor Studies. In fact they functioned more in a complementary manner within a quasi-institutional hierarchy. The Centre exercised a powerful hegemony over its more amateur institutional associates and partners in a common project of 'salvaging' the refugee oral tradition. The Associations contributed to the education, not to say enculturation, of the refugee elite in the research methodologies and literary styles of presentation proposed in practice by the Centre. However, the extensive activities of the Refugee Associations were important and particularly suggestive of the politics of memory that shaped Asia Minor Studies. In the pages of the many journals and books, where the refugees speak themselves about themselves and their places of origin, the rhetoric of remembering, as it relies on the nostalgic contrast between a glorious past and a miserable, thus silenced, present, becomes a powerful reminder of the huge predicament that the refugees faced during the first decades of settlement in the Greek mainland and the islands. As we move from top to bottom, to the refugees themselves, Asia Minor (folklore) studies turns into a huge political project in search for the symbolic means to deal with displacement and marginalisation, a project in search for recognition. It is in this context, in the context of the trauma of displacement to the socioeconomic and political margins of the Greek state that the imaginative reconstruction of 'lost homelands'¹⁴ functions as a means of empowerment and reworking the present in terms of the past. The politics of remembering are the other side of the politics of forgetting.

11 The most distinguished of these journals are *Mikrasiatika Chronika* and *Archeion Pontou*. Also see: *Pontiki Estia*, *Pontiki Stoa*, *Pontiaka Chronika*, *Pontiaka Fylla*, *Mikrasiatika Chronika*, *Mikrasiatiki Ichthi*, *Mikrasiatiki Estia* and *Prosfygikos Kosmos*.

12 See the work of Eustratiades (...) on *Prokopi, Χατζημωσής* (...).

13 For a survey see Meliones 1975.

14 This reminds the telescopic ethnicity of Macedonian *gustarbeiter* in Australia (Danforth 1995) or the great symbolic value attributed to 'villageness' among internal migrants in Greece (see Papataxiarchis 1990).

The gradual development of the social sciences in post-war Greece marked the emergence of a new paradigm in the study of the Asia Minor refugees, a paradigm that shifted the emphasis to the historical present and placed the refugees in their current context of settlement. Sociological, geographical and anthropological studies of refugee economic, social and cultural patterns of accommodation in their new environment went beyond the historically prevailing folklore tradition that has been shaped around the politics of remembering.¹⁵ Aspects of refugee culture were particularly approached not as mere indexes of past ethnic identity but in the context of a "whole" way of life, in connection to gender and family arrangements.¹⁶ These studies systematically described the socioeconomic predicament facing the refugees. They also registered the cultural differences between the refugee populations and the mainland Greeks.¹⁷

3. Muslim minority

a. Introductory remarks

According to the Treaty of Lausanne, religion is the defining characteristic of the minority in Thrace. The 'Muslim minority, as it is widely known, is constituted by a majority of Sunni Türkophones but also by a considerable number of Sunni or heterodox Pomak speakers, and a number of Rom (Gypsies)¹⁸. Academic scholarship concerning these populations, and particularly studies in folklore, ethnology and comparative linguistics, are inextricably involved in the political management of the minority issue through the production of the necessary 'evidence' for the support of political and ideological strategies that fluctuate in time. The historically latent and today more manifest politicisation of this scholarship, have turned Muslim minority studies into a ground of contestation between competing theoretical paradigms. As we shall see, side by side to the militant ethnocentrism of the more traditional folklore studies recently develops a new current of mostly anthropological, sociological and social historical studies of cultural identity which are inspired by social constructionist perspectives.

However, the most striking feature of the literature on the Muslim minority is the differential treatment of its ethnic components. The segment of the minority that is conceived, because of its cultural characteristics, as being culturally affiliated to the neighbouring Turkish State is mostly covered by academic silence¹⁹. Türkophone Sunnies are thought to

¹⁵ For example see Sandis 1973 and Gutenschwager 1971.

¹⁶ A good example is Hirschon 1989.

¹⁷ For an interesting comparative comment on the implications of forced migrations see Loizos 1999.

¹⁸ For a geographical overview see Dalégre 1997. Also see Andreades 1956.

¹⁹ A characteristic example are the Proceedings of the First Symposium on the Folklore of Northern Greece (including Thrace), organised by the Institute of Balkan Studies in 1974.

be under Turkish patronage, and, therefore, their study should be a Turkish and not a Greek concern. There are very few exceptions to this predominant view²⁰. Pomaks and Gypsies, on the other hand, and despite the fact that their education is specially regulated according to the Lausanne Treaty, because they are considered by many as not 'disposing' a national state with which to preferentially associate, they have been a popular 'object' of study by Greeks, Türks and Bulgarians²¹.

b. Pomak and Rom folklore and anthropological studies

The cultural identity of Pomaks, the slav speaking Muslims of Thrace is an amalgam of characteristics that from the viewpoint of the dominant national ideologies are considered to be contradictory. This has invited a lot of attention to the Pomaks. From a Bulgarian perspective and on the basis of their language they have been considered as islamised Bulgarians. From a Greek perspective they have been represented as an ancient Thracian tribe, the original inhabitants of Thrace. Finally, from a Turkish perspective they are viewed as descendants of Türkoman tribes that settled in the Balkans in the 11th century. A number of important studies²² have recently shown how Pomak identity is constructed and reconstructed in the course of this century and in the context of the changing landscape of interstate relations in the wider region. These studies also suggest that the inclusion of the Rom population of Thrace in the Greek ethnocentric discourse about the region has been constrained by the fact that the discussion of their origins could not merge with the trajectory of "ancient Greek ancestry"²³.

During the last two decades, the Pomaks, together with other ethnic groups, are being 'rediscovered'. On the one hand, the changing strategies of the Greek state and the wider interest in ethnic diversity created an environment that encouraged the study of cultural 'others'. For example, programs of intercultural education in Thrace provided a context for a rigorous critique of ideological and methodological ethnocentrism.²⁴ On the other hand, and probably as a reaction to these developments, Pomak studies turned also into the site of the revival of most conservative forms of folklore. In this literature the Pomaks (sometimes together with the Rom population) are depicted as the cultural other to the Türkophone Sunnis, as the 'most Greek' (and in logical juxtaposition, as the 'less Türk') of the Greek Muslims.

20 See the musicological study by Empeirikos and Mavronmatis 2000.

21 One particular aspect that has attracted considerable attention is heterodox Islam. For example see Popovic 1994a, 1994b and Zengin 1988 and 1991.

22 See Tsiiridou (2000) and Trubeta (2001).

23 Trubeta 2001:193. On the Rom population see Lithoxoou 1991, Zengin 1994 and Yiannakopoulos 1974.

24 See Fragoudaki and Dragona 1997. Also see the work done by KEMO. On education among the Pomaks see Frangopoulos 2000.

A number of these folklore studies apply 19th century methodologies, often in a 'modern' disguise²⁵. Aspects of the Pomak social and cultural life, with a special emphasis on religion and music, are depicted primarily through the use of standardised questionnaires. The collected material is cited in an additive fashion and without reference either to the wider context or to the context of the research itself. Thus material that is collected in different periods is grouped together. The resulting image is placed within the wider comparative frame of Greek folklore proper, so as to suggest similarities between the Pomaks and Christian Greeks. Studies on Islam are selectively used to contextualise aspects of Pomak life that are considered as indicative of cultural underdevelopment (e.g. low position of women). And the Pomaks themselves are either kept into silence or their voices are selectively and carefully edited.

On the other hand, we have a growing anthropological and sociological literature, which is committed to an anti-essentialist programme. Here we can distinguish two categories of studies. First, we have mainly anthropological studies with a narrow focus on a particular community. These studies apply the methodology of participant observation and the holistic approach in order to analyse the complex interconnections and linkages between spatial arrangements, kinship and the family²⁶, gender, economic, and social and religious practices²⁷, all set within the wider context of Pomak cosmology. Some of these studies analytically conceive culture as 'being everywhere'. Others adopt a more sociocentric view and give lesser attention to culture. Second, we have mainly sociological studies that analyse the construction of Pomak identity in its historical context, giving special emphasis to the role of the state and thus privileging methodologically 'a view from above'²⁸

4. Conclusion: time, space and the 'other' in Greek folklore studies

As an academic discipline, but also as popular practice, folklore has been historically involved in the management of cultural difference. More particularly, in the Balkan case folklore assumed the status of a state discipline because it was directly involved in the process of national formation. Folklore studies historically served the cause of national homogenisation by furnishing the cultural materials, which were necessary in order to 'prove' the essential identity of the nation. Yet this was done in a variety of ways. The case of 'Turkish folk culture studies' in Greece is highly suggestive of this variation. In this concluding section we would like to pursue further the comparison of the two fields, 'Asia Minor' and

25 For example see Varvounis 1996,1997. On Pomak folklore also see Mitsakis 1979,1983 and Theocharidis 1995.

26 See Tentokali (1988) and Tsibiridou (1986, 1994, 1998). For an earlier example see Vernier 1981. Also see Yiannopoulou-Roukouni 1983.

27 See Fragopoulos (1996).

28 An excellent example is Trubeta (2001).

'Muslim Minority' studies, giving a special emphasis to the contrasting ways in which folklore is implicated in the management of cultural difference.

19th c. and early 20th c. Greek folklore dealt with the popular culture of diverse groups who lived within the Greek state. The places where these groups lived, Roumeli, Peloponnese and the islands were firmly established as Hellenic since they were under the sovereignty of the Greek state. What was at stake were the Hellenic origins of their inhabitants. The task of cultural homogenisation was accomplished by folklorists with arguments about cultural continuity and a methodological emphasis on time and origins. In 20th c. Greek Anatolian folklore, what was at stake is primarily space. As we saw, the massive project directed by Merlier was organised in the form of a huge call: numerous settlements, villages and towns declared their presence through the voice of particular individuals who came forward and with their energetic memory filled the gap. The work of memory symbolically reappropriated the lost space, turned Turkish Anatolia into Hellenic Asia Minor and offered the refugees a firm basis for identification with the rest of the Greeks.

Put otherwise, the folklore of Anatolian refugees was in the usual business of cultural homogenisation. Yet the exceptionally participatory structure of this massive project, its marginality within the academia plus its merging with the Refugee Associations created a tension between means and ends. This tension accounts for an eventually differentiating outcome of the whole project. In refugee folklore studies considerable room was left for refugee voices. These voices increasingly registered difference within similarity thus undermining the objective of homogenization. This trend became more marked after the seventies, when the Centre's hegemony declined and decentralised, non-academic forms of folklore developed in connection to a resurgence of localism.

The liberating potential of the Centre's archival practices, that strongly anticipates the reflexive turn in anthropology as well as 'demotic' forms of folklore that flourished after the 1970s, strongly contrasts with the methodologically archaic and politically suppressive overtones of more recent Pomak folklore. At first sight, Muslim minority folklore seems to be a unique departure from the homogenisation project. (Turning Muslims into Christians seems to be an extreme, not to say impossible task, even for folklorists!) Indeed, what is at stake here, at least in programmatic terms, is the demonstration of difference. Yet that difference is tailored in accordance to the bipolarity between an essentially Greek and an essentially Turkish identity. The rigid, intellectually authoritarian character of this project, the use of archaic, 19th c. methodologies that privilege 'a view from above' and deny space (and voice) to the Pomak other eventually cancel any attempt to systematically study Pomak otherness. The depiction of cultural difference with ethnocentric means is a contradic-

tion in terms. This contradiction totally undermines the scientific credibility of this project and unveils the political and ideological agenda to which it is committed.

If refugee folklore started as a process of cultural homogenisation to end as a process of differentiation, the opposite is true about Pomak folklore that through a rhetoric about difference came to serve the programme of homogenisation and suppression of otherness. The way out of the methodological predicament that Pomak folklore studies face lies in the adoption of more reliable methodologies. It also rests in the capacity of scholars, folklorists, anthropologists and other students of culturally constructed identities, to keep their distances from state ideologies and projects and, why not, try to be critical and reflexive.

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