

Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700

Society, Politics and Culture

Edited by

DIMITRIS TZIOVAS

University of Birmingham, UK

ASHGATE

© Dimitris Tziovas 2009

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Dimitris Tziovas has asserted his moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the editor of this work.

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Wey Court East
Union Road
Farnham
Surrey, GU9 7PT
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington
VT 05401-4405
USA

www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Greek diaspora and migration since 1700: society, politics and culture

1. Greeks – Foreign countries – History 2. Greek literature, Modern – 20th century – History and criticism 3. Emigration and immigration in literature 4. Greece – Emigration and immigration – History

I. Tziovas, Dimitris
325.2'495

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Tziovas, Dimitris

Greek diaspora and migration since 1700: society, politics, and culture / Dimitris Tziovas.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6609-7 (alk. paper)

1. Greece – Emigration and immigration – History. 2. Arts, Greek – 20th century. 3. Emigration and immigration in art. I. Title.

JV8111.T95 2009

304.809495–dc22

2008045273

ISBN 978-0-7546-6609-7

EISBN 978-0-7546-9374-1



Mixed Sources

Product group from well-managed
forests and other controlled sources
www.fsc.org Cert no. SCS-COC-2482
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xv</i>
Introduction <i>Dimitris Tziouvas</i>	1
PART I: SOCIETY AND POLITICS	15
The Emigré Experience: Case Studies	15
1 Tales from the Dark Side: Transnational Migration, the Underworld and the ‘Other’ Greeks of the Diaspora <i>Thomas W. Gallant</i>	17
2 Silent Minority: The Greek Community of Eighteenth-Century London <i>Jonathan Harris</i>	31
3 Greek Merchants in Victorian England <i>Maria Christina Chatziioannou</i>	45
4 Repatriation, Migration or Readjustment: Egyptian Greek Dilemmas of the 1950s <i>Anthony Gorman</i>	61
5 Searching for a Motherland: Slav-Macedonian Political Refugees in the People’s Republic of Macedonia (1944–2003) <i>Iakovos D. Michailidis</i>	73
6 No Place is (like) Home: Mobilities, Memories and Metamorphoses of Greek Migrants in Denmark <i>Anastasia Christou</i>	83

	National Centre and Transnational Periphery	97
7	A Greece for Greeks by Descent? Nineteenth-Century Policy on Integrating the Greek Diaspora <i>Elpida Vogli</i>	99
8	Defining the Changing Boundaries of Greek Nationality <i>Dimitris Christopoulos</i>	111
9	‘Deterritorialising’ the Nation: the Greek State and ‘Ecumenical Hellenism’ <i>Lina Venturas</i>	125
10	The Limits of Political Transnationalism: The Greek-American Lobby 1970s–1990s <i>Alexander Kitroeff</i>	141
	PART II: LITERATURE AND CULTURE	155
11	Indigenous Foreigners: The Greek Diaspora and Travel Writing (1880–1930) <i>Dimitris Tziovas</i>	157
12	Between Language, Land and Empire: Humanist and Orientalist Perspectives on Egyptian-Greek Identity <i>Alexander Kazamias</i>	177
13	The Poetics of Transit: Exile, Diaspora and Repatriation in Stratis Tsirkas’s Novels <i>Eleni Papargyriou</i>	193
14	‘Be it Ever so Humble’: Nostalgia for Home and the Problem of Return in Post-War Greek Novels <i>Gerasimus Katsan</i>	205
15	The Politics of Memory in the Fiction of Greek Political Exiles in Eastern Europe <i>Venetia Apostolidou</i>	215
16	The Return of Nikitas Randos: Satire, Memory and Otherness in the Post-War Poetry of Nicolas Calas <i>Lena Hoff</i>	229

17	The <i>Topos</i> of Home in New Greek-American Writing <i>Martha Klironomos</i>	239
18	Repatriation on Screen: National Culture and the Immigrant Other since the 1990s <i>Dimitris Papanikolaou</i>	255
19	The Diaspora Sings Back: Rebetika Down Under <i>Stathis Gauntlett</i>	271
	<i>Index</i>	285

Chapter 18

Repatriation on Screen: National Culture and the Immigrant Other since the 1990s

Dimitris Papanikolaou

On 18 August 2004 the 17-year-old Ilias Iliadis won the gold medal in the Judo (81 kg category) at the Athens Olympics. The next day both the Greek and international press were eager to tell his tearful story: Iliadis was ‘a Greek Pontic repatriate’, a ‘proud son’ of the community from the Black Sea who ‘had returned to their ancestral homeland’ after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was, in the word-playing title of *Figaro* of 18 August, ‘L’Odyssée d’ Iliadis’, and the athlete was seen by *Le Monde* of 19 August as a typical ‘héros Grec, venu de Géorgie’. Iliadis himself supported this narrative by declaring that his life-hero was Alexander the Great and by dedicating his medal to ‘all Greeks, especially the co-ethnic migrants’ [in Greek: *ομογενείς* (**hereafter: omogeneis**)]. He was also eventually decorated by the Pan-Pontic Organization of Greece, its president announcing that: ‘In him we honour our repatriates [*palinostountes*], the Pontic Greeks from the Soviet Union who came as refugees at the end of the twentieth century to the land of their forefathers.’

Only a couple of days later did it emerge that Iliadis was actually born and raised Jiarji Zviadaouri in Tbilisi, the son of a Georgian family with no Greek connections. He had emigrated to Greece only a couple of years before the Olympics. Having been formally adopted by his coach, Nikos Iliadis, himself a ‘repatriate’ of Pontic origin from Tbilisi, he had taken the family name. To all intents and purposes, Zviadaouri/Iliadis was an immigrant athlete, fighting for a European country in need of (and ready to pay for) gold medal winners. In symbolic terms, he had to be presented as a long lost returning son.¹

The questions I will address in this chapter are encapsulated in this incident. What makes Greeks (and apparently not only Greeks) prefer to see repatriates instead of immigrants? What is the role of stories about the Greek diaspora and repatriation in today’s multicultural Greece? Do these stories have an impact on the way new immigrants to countries such as Greece are treated and, perhaps more importantly, represented?

¹ Quotes and details of the Iliadis case are drawn from articles in the Greek national daily newspapers *Ta Nea* 18 and 19 August 2004 and *Eleftherotypia* 19 and 28 August 2004.

It is not difficult in the first instance to see why stories of repatriation and 'return' may be appealing in today's national contests and contexts. They are easily readable, as they confirm (rather than challenge) stereotypes (e.g. *the Greek hero*), symbolic narratives (*the return of Odysseus*) and more stable accounts of collective identity (*the originary homeland*). The case of Ilias Iliadis shows that stories of 'co-ethnic repatriation' can also be used to overshadow other stories, the ones related to new migratory movements, which are often pushed aside in the national economy of representation, even though they are central to the current economic growth of a European nation state such as Greece. Coverage and official representations of these very Olympic Games, that saw Zviadaouri/Iliadis win his gold medal for Greece, are a case in point. They were full of references to diaspora Greeks, while lacking any mention of the multiculturalism of today's Athens or any acknowledgment of the thousands of non-Greek immigrant workers who laboured (and, in some cases, died) in order to prepare the event on time.

I do not want to argue, in this chapter at least, that a focus on the diaspora simply takes the space, literally elbows out of the picture the non-ethnic immigrants who have been living in Greece since the 1990s. Rather, what I am suggesting is that, if we want to review the cultural representation and the discourses related to immigration to Greece after 1990, we will need also to investigate a distinction that often passes unnoticed as a subtext in these discourses, that is the distinction between 'Greek diasporic subject vs. non-Greek immigrant', or 'ethnic (migratory) self vs. immigrant other'. This distinction rests, of course, on a number of oversimplifications and narratives about the Greek diaspora, in which the geography and temporality of different migrations from the recent to the remote past, as well as their social specificity, collapse to reiterate primordial narratives about the ethnic self. The conceptual border that is thus enforced between 'Migrant Us' and 'Immigrant Them' eventually produces very topical and persistent, if at times unnoticed, ideological work.

David Eng has argued that 'precisely because culture in our postmodern era of "late" capitalism has been especially burdened with managing the contradictions of the nation-state, it is often on the terrain of culture that discrepancies between the individual and the state, politics and economics, and the material and the imaginary are resolved or, alternately, exposed' (in Desai 2002: 65). Keeping this in mind, in the second part of this chapter I will turn to the two most acclaimed recent Greek films on immigration: *Eternity and a Day* by Theo Angelopoulos and *From the Edge of the City* by Constantine Giannaris (both released in 1998). After positioning them in their larger cultural context, I will theorise these films' complex take on the relationship between Greekness, national culture and discourses about migration. I will show how both films engage with recognisable patterns of representing the new immigrants to Greece in the 1990s, especially in the way they interweave the presence of new immigrants with the (spectral) apparition of the Greek repatriate. In their own ways both films alternately negotiate and expose the discrepancies between the imaginary national homogeneity (often projected on

the figure of the co-ethnic returning migrant) and the feared heterogeneity that the non-Greek new immigrant is symbolically seen as introducing.

‘Migrant Us’ vs. ‘Immigrant Them’ and Representation

It is well documented that since the late 1980s Greece, along with other Southern European countries such as Spain and Italy, has seen itself turn from a country exporting immigrants to one receiving them. Triggered by the collapse of command economies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the main influx of immigrants occurred in the 1990s. This is the reason why sources often refer to people who came to Greece in that period and afterwards as *new immigrants*. Less than 20 years after this new wave of immigration Greece’s immigrant population was estimated at just over one million people, the vast majority of whom were born in Albania and the former Soviet Union (figures from Gropas and Triantafyllidou 2005, who review the main sources). The number of non-Greek nationals in Greece in the first decade of the new century accounts for about 9 per cent of the total resident population, a figure which, strikingly, is very similar to the percentage of Greeks who emigrated to Central Europe and America after the Second World War (cf. Kubat 1979, King et al. 1997, King 2000).

The larger background against which I want to position my analysis is dominated by the argument that has tended to follow ‘naturally’ from this analogy between ‘Greece as formerly an exporter of emigrants’ and ‘Greece as currently a receiver of immigrants’. Indeed, progressive political discourse has often assumed that the very experience of Greece as a ‘nation of emigrants’ would make it much easier for the country to become a host to new immigrants. The underlying assumption here is that Greeks can understand the plight of the immigrants better, because migration has been central in the national narrative. This is also an attitude often shared by officials and emulated uncritically by cultural policy-makers. Recent state-supported cultural gestures, such as the big retrospective on ‘Immigration in Greek Cinema, 1956–2006’ organised by the Thessaloniki Film Festival, tend to group together and purposefully conflate older representations of Greek emigrants with recent representations of immigrants to Greece. The assumption underlying this tendency is that there is a seamless continuity linking the narratives of Greek emigration, of longing for the Greek homeland and of repatriation, to the representation of the new immigrants who have been coming to Greece since the 1990s. It is also implicitly argued that the archive of cultural texts and images related to emigration from Greece can function almost as an educational platform for Greeks to understand, welcome and help integrate new, non-ethnically Greek, immigrants (Kartalou et al. 2006, Tomai-Konstantopoulou 2004).

However, research has shown that the advent of new immigrants has been largely met with a steep rise in xenophobia in Greece, resulting, crucially, in more intense expressions of ‘defensive nationalism’ (Papataxiarchis 2006: 46–50). New immigrants have been the victims of negative representation by the Greek media,

especially during the 1990s when most of them remained in the country 'without papers' and illegally (Karydis 1996, Pavlou 2001, Venturas 2004b). And Greek audiences seem to have drawn strict conceptual borders between the cultural archive of Greek migrations and the cultural representations of new immigrants on offer.²

These reactions can be better understood in the context of the more general observation that contact with new immigrants in today's Fortress Europe results in a tendency to reinforce perceptions about the cultural homogeneity of the host population. Instead of the old rhetoric of racial differences, anti-immigration discourses today define the immigrants by their exclusion, their externality, their otherness, their cultural difference constituted as a threat. Hence the rise of 'a rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion that emphasizes the distinctiveness of cultural identity, traditions, and heritage among groups and assumes the closure of culture by territory' (Stolcke 1999: 2; see also Christopoulos 2001: 89–91, Venturas 2004b).

It is in this context that *the typified figure of the Greek migrant* comes to play a key role in the projection of a homogeneous, solid and resilient Greek identity. Greek migrations are largely thought of as unique, and there has been a very uneasy reaction to efforts to compare the public's negative treatment of new immigrants in Greece today with the phobic attitudes that Greek emigrants had to face in their host countries earlier in the twentieth century.³ The figure of the Greek migrant has not (and cannot) be effectively used to promote an openness towards new immigrants, simply because it plays such a key role in conceptualisations of what constitutes 'primordial Greekness' – common ancestry, culture, religion and language (Hirschon 1999: 176; cf. Kitromilides 1990, Triantafyllidou 2000).

Stories of migration, displacement and 'return' are presented as permeating the very texture of Greece's cultural fabric, from the demotic song tradition to the literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the popular cinema of the 1960s and the popular music of the 1960s–1970s. Thus a folk song about migration from the nineteenth century comes to inhabit the same cultural space as a story about refugees from Asia Minor in 1922, a popular song from the 1950s and a film about Greek immigrants in Germany in the 1960s. These are all, of course, representations of very different population movements, undertaken in very different historical

² On public attitudes towards the immigrants see Triantafyllidou 2000, 2001, Petrakou 2001; for a similar discussion on Italy, see Mai 2003.

³ A series of articles published in the newspaper *Eleftherotypia* in 1998 compared early American phobic views about the criminality of Greek immigrants to the USA with the dominant perceptions about Albanian criminality in 1990s Greece. The articles caused widespread reaction especially because, as Lina Venturas points out, they aimed to undermine the powerful 'stereotype of fellow countrymen who always excel abroad and the myth about the "particularity" of Greeks'. The heated arguments that followed demonstrated that 'the past and its perception constitute an issue related to the contemporary polemic on migration but also on the "identity of Greeks"' (2004a: 121).

circumstances, archived in very different forms of cultural text. What makes them resonate together is their subsequent use to support the idea of 'common fate' and 'common experience' of a unified 'migrant Greekness'. Turned in this way into an atemporal national fixture, the migratory narratives promoted by contemporary national culture perform a dual function. On the one hand, they map Greekness by underlining those aspects of identity that migrant subjects safeguard as Greek. On the other hand, they become celebratory assertions of the ability of Greekness to survive, even under pressure and displacement.

The centrality of the figure of the Greek migrant in conceptions of Greekness is further reinforced by the Greek state's conceptualisation of the Greek diaspora and the official state policies towards diaspora Greeks' 'right of return' and right to claim full citizenship under the *jus sanguinis*. Yet this does not mean that all the people who have benefited from these policies as *palinostountes omogeneis* (co-ethnic returnees), especially after the 1990s, have found an unconditional welcome in the country. Their co-ethnic status does not mean that they are not taxonomised by xenophobic discourses into more and less welcome, or, even, more or less Greek, often by state procedures themselves.⁴ Actually, what often happens is that *omogeneis* are instrumentalised in exclusionary narratives of migration (which posit the 'good' migrant as the returning co-ethnic migrant), narratives by which they might also ultimately be judged and excluded (as not co-ethnic *enough*).

For instance, the two most significant groups of new immigrants to Greece, the members of the communities in Northern Epirus that formed the Greek minority in Albania (*Voreioipeirotas* = Northern Epirotes) and the Pontic populations from the former Soviet Union, have largely been welcomed as fellow Greeks by the Greek state that granted them special status and easier routes to naturalisation (Diamanti-Karanou 2002, Triantafyllidou and Veikou 2002). However, it is surprising how easily *Voreioipeirotas* become 'Albanians' in xenophobic discourses. Something similar happens with the Pontic Greeks from the Soviet Union, who are called '*Pontioi*' (Pontics) when their co-ethnic status needs to be underlined, and '*Rossopontioi*' (Russian Pontics) when the emphasis falls on their immigrant status.⁵

The two films I will now turn to are important for an understanding of the discrepancies in the cultural representation of migration in Greece precisely because they focus on characters who can claim to belong to the category of 'co-ethnic returnee'. Both films show how these characters negotiate between the positionality of the new immigrant and that of the returnee: between the 'repatriate *Voreioipeirotis*' and the 'clandestine Albanian immigrant' in the first case, and between the 'returning Pontios' and the 'Rossopontios' in the second. I will argue that, by so doing, both films offer new ways to critique and think through the complex intertwining of the national, the cultural, the nation state and the new challenges immigration has been posing for Greece since the 1990s.

⁴ For an analysis of such tactics see Baltsiotis 2004; cf. Pavlou 2002.

⁵ On Pontic Greeks, politics and identity, see Voutira 2006.

Buying Cultural Closure: Theo Angelopoulos's *Eternity and a Day*

Theo Angelopoulos's *Eternity and a Day* narrates the story of Alexandros (Bruno Ganz), a terminally ill Greek poet on his long journey to hospital, on what seems to be the last day of his life. While on a memory-evoking journey around his native Thessaloniki, the poet comes across an immigrant boy begging on the streets. The gradually emerging friendship between poet and boy helps the poet in his journey to self-awareness, becoming the catalyst for the epiphanic ending of the film.

It seems that Angelopoulos had been working on a script about a dying poet on the path to self-revelation when stories describing the harassment and exploitation of young immigrants ('the children of the traffic-lights' scandal) shocked Greece in 1996. He decided at that stage to integrate the subplot with the immigrant boy as a comment against the mistreatment of immigrant children.⁶

One of Angelopoulos's most typical films, *Eternity and a Day* is a highly accomplished meditation on time, creativity, memory, love, art, history, presence, absence, travel and death. Yet when it comes to the story of the immigrant boy and the hardships faced by those who find themselves clandestine immigrants in contemporary Greece, the film seems both to want to document and shy away from the issue. In the larger narrative economy of the film the boy's story ends up functioning only as a catalyst. Its aim is to bestow closure on that larger meditation on personal and national identity with which the film seems to be concerned.

We never find out the boy's name in the film, just as we are never told where exactly he comes from. We only see him teaming up with other immigrant friends, one of whom has the Muslim-Albanian name Selim. All seem to be clandestine; without papers or permanent homes, they are often harassed by older people-traffickers, have to constantly flee the police and at one point are apprehended by a gang that tries to sell them on for adoption. Crucially, though, unlike the rest of his friends, this boy (he is referred to in the credits as 'the small boy of the traffic lights') has ethnic Greek links. We first see the boy using his links to Greekness as a survival tactic: when the poet Alexandros decides to send him back to 'his village over the border', the boy starts singing a Greek folk song on migration ('*Xenitemeno mou pouli*' ['My little migratory bird']) in which the Greek word '*korfoula*' is used idiomatically to mean 'little flower, new plant'. The word, once uttered, not only attracts the interest of the ailing poet, it also triggers a much deeper connection between the two characters.

The boy's double status as a clandestine immigrant *and* an ethnically Greek participant in the body of the nation will from that moment on become instrumental in the unfolding of the story. It is the boy's suddenly apparent Greek ethnic

⁶ On the inspirations for *Eternity and a Day* and the script's development, see Angelopoulos's interviews in Fainaru 2001: 101–22, esp. 114. It is interesting that in these interviews, as well as in the reviews that appeared upon the film's original release, the young boy is alternately called 'Albanian', 'Greek Albanian', 'refugee from Albania', 'immigrant', and 'Northern Epirote'.

background that strengthens his relationship with the dying Alexandros. Moved by his idiomatic use of language, the poet asks the boy to teach him more rare Greek words used in his village – a village that Greek audiences would assume is in Southern Albania (Northern Epirus), but which, significantly, is also never named in the film. In a gesture presented as highly symbolic, the ailing poet even offers payment every time a new word is introduced by the young boy. Two more new words will be introduced that way, enough for the film to achieve a climax of sorts: *xenitis* and *argadini* [‘a migrant everywhere in the world’ and ‘too late’]. Defamiliarising, if not strictly speaking idiomatic, these words, like the folk songs in which similar words are often used, function as easy signifiers of local identity, understood by a pan-Hellenic audience as ‘authentic’, culturally specific, nationally significant. The film builds on them further: these words end up exemplifying a primordial meaning and, therefore, a hidden riddle in the meditation on identity that Angelopoulos tries to develop.

The ‘uncorrupted Greek language’ spoken by the boy slowly becomes a metonymy of the authentic Greek soul. In this particular context the film introduces a metadiegetic level involving the story of Greece’s national poet, Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857). An Italian-educated nobleman from Zante who spoke Italian much better than he did Greek, Solomos followed his Romantic impulse to write national literature and, legend has it, used to go around villages in order to collect ‘authentic’ Greek words and phrases from the lips of the people.⁷ Earlier on in *Eternity* we have learned that a lifelong project for the poet Alexandros had been to fill in the gaps of Solomos’s most ambitious but unfinished masterpiece, *The Free Besieged*, which incidentally happens to be a canonical poem on the Greek War of Independence and one about clearly defined boundaries demarcating insiders and outsiders. Finishing this task had been impossible for Alexandros. As a bourgeois intellectual with a European education, he was also, like Solomos, ‘missing the right words’. Such words, it is implied, he is now able to ‘buy’ from the young immigrant he meets on the streets on what is probably the last day of his life.

Significantly, after a long excursus around Thessaloniki, poet and boy end up in the harbour, where the latter – his Albanian friend Selim having already been killed in an accident – leaves for an unspecified destination, handsomely swept out of view (and most probably out of Greece). The ailing poet will go back to his deserted ancestral house by the sea which will now be transformed, in the last shot

⁷ Angelopoulos explains the slightly exaggerated version presented in the film as follows: ‘While it is true that [Solomos] collected the language of the people, it is not true that he actually paid for words. So that must have evolved in my imagination, and since it seemed to me to be a very poetic idea, I left it in. ... The metaphor is clear. Our mother tongue is our only real identity card. To quote Heidegger: our only home is our language. Every word opens new doors for the person who acquires it, but to go through that door, you have to pay’ (Fainaru 2001: 108, 121).

of the film, through a flashback to the memory of its heyday, when it was all new and vibrant. And, in symbolic terms, exclusively Greek.

The use of the immigrant boy as a vessel of 'authentic' Greek culture taps into the larger discourse that has related co-ethnic repatriates with the notion of 'deep Greekness'. The film intensifies this allusion through another character, that of the poet's housekeeper, a Pontic Greek. In a long sequence we even watch the elaborate ritual of her son's traditional Pontic marriage in the harbour of Thessaloniki.

In actual fact, *Eternity* uses the character of a young Greek-Albanian boy as a catalyst in order to tell a multiple story of return(s). On the highest level it is the story of the poet returning to his loved ones, his personal memories, his house and his deep understanding of life. At subordinate narrative levels, it is the figure of *the Greek migrant returning* that looms everywhere, as, for example, in the metadiegetic scene with Solomos which starts with him in Italy exclaiming: 'Ho preso la mia decisione. Parto per la Grecia. Non posso più rimanere qui' ('I have taken a decision: I am departing for Greece; I can't remain here anymore'). Similarly, we learn that the poet Alexandros had to live abroad for long periods, though always returning home in the end. He sums up the challenge of the film in a poetic monologue, triggered by both his memories and his meeting with the young immigrant boy. Alexandros cries: 'Why did I live my life in exile? Why was it that the only times I was able to return were when I was granted the grace to speak my language? My own language? When I could still recover lost words, or retrieve forgotten words from the silence? Why was it that that was the only moment I could hear the sound of my steps in the house? Why?'

To be fair, return is an overarching theme in Angelopoulos's poetics. It runs through many of his films – in which ethnic Greek *Gastarbeiter*, directors, poets, actors, writers, journalists, political exiles, return to the Greek homeland – and is organically paired with a return to memory, childhood and the trauma of history. This *poetics of return* is also one of the key aspects supporting Angelopoulos's status as the essential national auteur in New Greek Cinema. What interests me is that, in *Eternity and a Day*, return also engulfs the story of an exploited immigrant boy in 1990s Thessaloniki. It is precisely the formalist handling of Angelopoulos's filmic storytelling that permits this critique. In the highly aestheticised narrative of *Eternity*, the *migrant* boy triggers a familiar set of stories of return, before he is shipped off to an unknown destination. Thus the film disposes of the only characteristic that remained unredeemed within this story of returns: the boy's status as an *immigrant* in contemporary Greece.

It is not coincidental that Alexandros had been aiming all his life to write a conclusion to one of Dionysios Solomos's unfinished masterpieces. Solomos, the Romantic national poet, left most of his poems, even the ones that later became the centrepieces of Greek identity such as *The Free Besieged*, unfinished. Angelopoulos, the modernist filmmaker, strives to complete the missing links, to give an order and a meaning to fragments. It is exactly in this process of creative search that the young immigrant's ethnic background becomes instrumental. The young boy's presence, understood as the return of the authentic and migratory Greek self, fills

the gap left by the nation-building process. What *Eternity* establishes is that in order for a modernist, aesthetically circular account of Greekness to be celebrated in the late twentieth century, a return of the migrant Greek self has to be symbolically effected. Yet the moment such a return becomes central in the search for identity, the otherness of the immigrant within the Greek space is effaced. As soon as the narrative of co-ethnicity, '*omogeneia*', is called on, the actual heterogeneity of the real situation is symbolically dropped. It is important to understand here what is achieved at the expense of the immigrant's otherness: the departure of the boy, together with all his friends and the issues related to their clandestinity, from the harbour of Thessaloniki, symbolises the active disposal of the 'noisy' elements in the body of the 'homoge-nation'.

To push the interpretation a step further, Angelopoulos's film expresses in a subliminal way a very real situation: the presence of new immigrants reinvigorates the modern Greek state in economic and social terms, in the same way that the presence of the young boy gives the last breath of life and a promise of rejuvenation to the dying poet in the film. In Angelopoulos's modernist poetics the boy means form, missing links with the past and the self, and the promise of a new aesthetic order. In Greek reality the immigrant, as much needed workforce, means the fulfilment of a process of modernisation that has been constantly celebrated, especially in the urban Greek landscape since the 1990s (with new highways, train and metro lines, the new Athens airport, stadiums and the 2004 Olympics). But in order for this process to be narrated within the aesthetic order of national identity, the dissonance, the otherness of the immigrant, have to be airbrushed from the picture. Idealised narratives of Greek migration, co-ethnic return (*palinostisi*) and co-ethnic diaspora (*omogeneia*), can also be used symbolically to that effect.

'My name is Pond, Russo-Pond': Constantine Giannaris's *From the Edge of the City*

The ideas about migration, national identity and aesthetic order that we saw at work in *Eternity and a Day*, form the set of sublimated assumptions against which, I will argue, Constantine Giannaris's *From the Edge of the City* positions itself. Still a subcultural hit with audiences around the world but never a box office triumph in Greece, the film engages with and actively subverts the narratives I have so far been analysing, thereby also demonstrating their power and pervasiveness. In it another repatriate takes centre stage, this time only to disrupt the narrative of *omogeneia* and homogeneity and provide a powerful statement of otherness and alienation.

From the Edge of the City centres on 17-year-old Sasha and his group of friends, most of them presented from the outset as petty thieves and rent boys. All the boys have emigrated to Greece from the former Soviet Union and identify (not without a certain degree of self-irony) as Soviet Pontic Greeks. Often treated by the media as 'returnees to the land of their forefathers', these members of Pontic Greek

communities from the Black Sea, displaced in parts of the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century (and then further displaced in accordance with Stalin's nationalities policies) have emigrated to Greece in large numbers in the 1990s. Even though officially welcomed as kin and offered faster tracks to naturalisation than other immigrants, Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union soon became '*Rossopontioi*' in common parlance, had difficulties finding jobs suited to their education and training, and most of them had to make ends meet by trading household items from the former Soviet Union.

Giannaris's film establishes its position regarding the narrative processes of 'repatriation' and return very early on. Facing the camera and in playful mood, Sasha, played by the real life Pontic Greek returnee Stathis Papadopoulos, mimics the James Bond catchphrase and announces: 'My name is Pond, Russo-Pond'. In this way director and subject locate themselves: the young man watches the camera watching him and 'plays the actor', imitates and etiolates a cinema cliché while poking fun at the word *Rossopontios*, the immigrant category he has been interpellated to fit. At the same time the director emerges as the one who re-narrativises this playful moment as meaningful (one realises this incident may have come after workshop experimentation, and then been kept in the editing by Giannaris). We are in completely different territory here: the *omogeneia* is defied as just a posture, the phantasmatic homogeneity supported in Greek cultural discourses subverted from the outset. Significantly, the boys in Sasha's group will continue mixing Russian and Greek in their conversations for the duration of the film (while the Greek-Albanian boys in *Eternity* speak between themselves only in heavily accented Greek).

From the Edge of the City is about exclusion, about the subculture of a group of immigrant youths and their life (on the verge of lawlessness and on the outskirts of urban Athens). It is about their play with identity, their interaction with other groups of legal and illegal immigrants – an important part of the film is also occupied by a sex-trafficking subplot involving a Russian prostitute. This group of Russian/Greek youths forms a web of relations that maps, partially but vividly, a city beneath the city, the Athens of new immigrants, a system of life with its own hierarchies, market forces and rules.

Crucially at no point in the film do we see the Athens we know, the city of official representations. No image of any of the city's landmarks appears: most scenes in central Athens are shot at night, revealing vibrant underground urban locations, dodgy hotels, bars, bordellos and pick-up squares. The morning shots are uncharacteristic, but obsessively focus on the city in all its modern-day expansion. Repeatedly filmed from the geographically marginal viewpoint of the poor suburb of Menidi where the boys live, the Attica basin emerges as a conglomerate of concrete and glittering solar panels. The boys' Greek patrons and clients, men but also women, are seen living in exuberantly modern apartments, fully accessorised with the latest gadgets. Travelling in the city, the characters constantly come across huge building sites and roadworks – workplaces for the new immigrants. The 1990s Athens depicted from its margins is caught up in construction fever,

keen to catch up on its modernisation signalled by Greece's participation in the European Monetary Union and its staging of the Olympic Games. In the meantime, the young group of friends is filmed hanging around taking drugs, fantasising about easy money, dancing in pre-choreographed routines, travelling in fast cars, sharing jokes in Russian and negotiating their own version of uneven urban reality.⁸

From the Edge of the City was originally conceived as a 30-minute documentary, a format that survives in the interviews between the central character and an unseen interviewer, the director himself. This helps the film expose a series of negotiations from which representation results. Most characters are played by real-life immigrant youths, yet, in its final form, the film is eerily unsettling, with most of the non-professional actors, playing a version of themselves, 'reading' their lines as if this were a game. The viewer realises very early on that this is the story as told by the director, a narrativisation not of the characters' exclusion, but of the director's own negotiation with it (and with them). Even the occasional 'flashbacks', where the central character is dreaming of an idyllic childhood in the golden wheatfields of Kazakhstan, with their cinematic referencing of Parajanov and Tarkovski, as well as their idealistic representation of rural life, look like they come not from the characters' imaginary, but from the director's fantasies about them. These scenes are not, as their counterparts are in *Eternity* (in particular the scenes with Dionysios Solomos) a form of soul-searching for the authentic ethnic self. They stand, rather, as subtle critiques of the constructedness of such fantasies of ethnic authenticity, memory and belonging.

Giannaris posits, in the subtlest of ways, that any contact with the other is potentially always already a manipulation, and that representation is instrumental in this manipulation. His camera follows the boys obsessively, listens out for their jokes, teases their bodies, eroticises them, plays with their availability. The strategy gives way to a complex game of belonging and identity. Instead of being proud members of the Greek diaspora, these youths seem to express, as José Arroyo has noted, a sense of 'diasporic alienation, of belonging to several places and nowhere at all' (Arroyo 2000: 43–4). Yet, I would argue, they are not represented as suspended 'between here and there', suspended between countries, trying to integrate and belong to the Greek motherland but unable to do so. These youths are watched negotiating both the 'here' and the 'there', playfully changing versions of both, juggling identity-positions just as the central character returns to play (and negotiate) with the camera in his 'interviews' with the director.

I need to stress here that in formal terms Giannaris effects a break with the characteristics of the cinematic style of Angelopoulos, widely imitated in Greece to the point of being considered the central characteristic of a national school of New Greek Cinema. If there is such a thing as a New Greek cinematic language, Giannaris's extremely fast pace and jumpy editing in *From the Edge* is defiantly 'un-Greek' and shows a different direction in cinematography. It is no coincidence that the film was the first its director shot in Greece after having worked for more than

⁸ For a solid analysis of the film and its reception, see Mini 2006.

a decade in the UK, close to Derek Jarman and a group of directors acknowledged by *Sight and Sound* in the 1990s as the British version of 'New Queer Cinema' (Bell et al. 1992). Interviewed for the 1992 special issue on the trend, Giannaris declared: 'What I am trying to grapple with now is whether my sexuality has any relevance to the broader world. How does it allow certain insights ... I want to use these formal devices, that outlook and sensibility to look at a wider society ... It's taking on taboos, saying the unsayable – to me that's what queerness is' (Giannaris in Bell et al. 1992: 35). Made five years after this statement, *From the Edge of the City* can be seen as successfully putting this idea into practice. Reread in this light, one can claim that a central part of the film's subversiveness is exactly the thinly veiled positionality of the director's gaze. The immigrant 'subjects' of the film are there to negotiate their marginality with a narrating viewpoint that is itself self-expository, marginal, strange, queer, and ready to 'say the unsayable'.

On the level of form, with constant references to Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, as well as to Derek Jarman and Isaac Julien, *From the Edge* associates itself with a 'new queer' aesthetic instead of conforming to a poetics of national culture. Decidedly post-nationalist, framed by desire and the fluidity of identities, the film adopts an aesthetic code that allows it to expose and critique the dominant narratives of repatriation, migrant return and homogeneous modernisation, which I showed at work in *Eternity and a Day*.

If, in order to tell the story of a new immigrant, a film such as *Eternity* decided to attach it to a narrative of repatriation and return, Giannaris adopts a new queer framework that allows him to expose and dismantle the fictiveness of national and gender identities, the personal, the ethnic, the historical, the depth and the surface. In doing so, his work understands the immigrants as subjects who negotiate their otherness with the range of discontinuous identities that populate the fictitiously homogeneous modern Greek self. In *From the Edge of the City*, immigrants are Greek in that they are both different and real, loud, heterogeneous and here to stay.

Conclusion

In their two very different films, *Eternity and a Day* and *From the Edge of the City*, Angelopoulos and Giannaris expose and mediate those tensions and inconsistencies evident in the reception of new immigrants to Greece since the 1990s, albeit pointing in different directions. Angelopoulos seems to propose a national culture that will re-engage with the themes of otherness, movement and identity on its own terms, thus accommodating the fast-changing human geography of Greece in order to reinvigorate itself. However, the cultural vocabulary Angelopoulos uses, including the consistent framing of his film as part of the oeuvre of a national auteur, becomes instrumental in effacing the potential (cultural and social) challenges posed by the presence of new immigrants. *Eternity* shows how difficult it is to escape a vocabulary of national culture that celebrates returnees and erases

immigrants, especially since one of its key roles has been the formation/projection of a homogeneous Greekness. This is why it was important to underline how *From the Edge of the City* effects a break with the narrative (and the expected form) of a homogeneous national culture, in order to give representational space to its characters as immigrants rather than returnees.

In the final analysis, the recent discursive tension between 'ethnic Self' and 'immigrant Other' in Greece needs to be seen in the larger context of the discrepancy between the heterogeneity of contemporary Greek society and the homogeneity of the imaginary projections that support Greekness. In the films I have analysed, one can see this discrepancy at work: it ultimately shapes representation, ready to be exposed even when the narrative mediates to resolve it.

References

- Arroyo, José (2000), 'Review of *From the Edge of the City*', *Sight and Sound* 10 (3), 43–4.
- Baltsiotis, Lambros (2004), 'Ίθαγένεια και πολιτογράφηση στην Ελλάδα της μετανάστευσης: (αντι)φάσεις μιας αδιέξοδης πολιτικής', in Miltos Pavlou and Dimitris Christopoulos (eds), *Η Ελλάδα της μετανάστευσης*, Athens: Kritiki, 303–37.
- Bell, Will, Dodd, Philip and Field, Simon (1992), 'New queer cinema', *Sight and Sound* 2 (5), 30–9.
- Christopoulos, Dimitris (2001), 'Το τέλος της εθνικής ομ(οι)ογένειας: Παραδοσιακές και νέες μορφές ετερότητας στην Ελλάδα', in Athanasios Marvakis, Dimitris Parsanoglou and Miltos Pavlou (eds), *Μετανάστες στην Ελλάδα*, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 57–80.
- Desai, Jigna (2002), 'Homo on the range: mobile and global sexualities', *Social Text* 20 (4), 65–89.
- Diamanti-Karanou, Panagoula (2002), 'Migration of ethnic Greeks from the Former Soviet Union to Greece, 1990–2000: policy decisions and implications', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 3 (1), 25–45.
- Fainaru, Dan (ed.) (2001), *Theo Angelopoulos: Interviews*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Gropas, Ruby and Triantafyllidou, Anna (2005), *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Greece*. Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg 2005, online, available at: www.uni-oldenburg.de/politis-europe/download/Greece.pdf (February 2005; last accessed April 2008).
- Hirschon, Renée (1999), 'Identity and the Greek state: some conceptual issues and paradoxes', in R. Clogg (ed.) *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, London: Macmillan, 158–80.

- Kartalou, Athina, Nikolaidou, Afroditi and Anastopoulos, Thanos, (eds) (2006), *Σε ξένο τόπο: Η μετανάστευση στον ελληνικό κινηματογράφο 1956–2006*, Athens: Aigokeros.
- Karydis, Vassilis (1996), *Η εγκληματικότητα των μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα: Ζητήματα θεωρίας και αντεγκληματικής πολιτικής*, Athens: Papazisis.
- King, Russell (2000), 'Southern Europe in the changing global map of migration', in Russell King, Gabriella Lazaridis and Charalambos Tsardanidis (eds), *'Eldorado or Fortress?': Migration in Southern Europe*, London: Macmillan, 3–26.
- King, Russell, Black, Richard and Fielding, Tony (1997), 'The international migration turnaround in Southern Europe', in Russell King and Richard Black (eds), *Southern Europe and the New Immigrations*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1–25.
- Kitromilides, Paschalis (1990), 'Imagined communities and the origins of the national question in the Balkans', in Martin Blinkhorn and Thanos Veremis (eds), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality*, Athens: ELIAMEP, 23–64.
- Kubat, Daniel (ed.) (1979), *The Politics of Migration Policies*, New York: Center for Migration Studies.
- Mai, Nicola (2003), 'The cultural construction of Italy in Albania and vice versa: Migration dynamics, strategies of resistance and politics of mutual self-definition across colonialism and post-colonialism', *Modern Italy* 8 (1), 77–93.
- Mini, Panayiota (2006), 'A life and identity in flux: Young Pontian Greeks in Konstantinos Giannaris's *From the Edge of the City*', *Ariadni* 12, 215–28.
- Papataxiarchis, Efthymios (2006), 'Τα άχθη της ετερότητας: Διαστάσεις της πολιτισμικής διαφοροποίησης στην Ελλάδα του πρώιμου 21ου αιώνα', in Efthymios Papataxiarchis (ed.), *Περιπέτειες της ετερότητας: Η παραγωγή της πολιτισμικής διαφοράς στη σημερινή Ελλάδα*, Athens: Alexandreia, 1–85.
- Pavlou, Miltos (2001), 'Οι "λαθρέμποροι του φόβου": Ρατσιστικός λόγος και μετανάστες στον τύπο μιας υποψήφιας μητρόπολης', in Athanasios Marvakis, Dimitris Parsanoglou and Miltos Pavlou (eds), *Μετανάστες στην Ελλάδα*, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 127–62.
- Pavlou, Miltos (2002), 'Greek state policy from "irredentism" to "home-coming/immigration": The case of two repatriated kin-minority groups', in *The Protection of National Minorities by their Kin-state*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 195–207.
- Pavlou, Miltos (2004), 'Οι μετανάστες "σαν κι εμάς": Όψεις της απόκρισης στο μεταναστευτικό φαινόμενο στην Ελλάδα και την Ευρώπη', in Miltos Pavlou and Dimitris Christopoulos (eds), *Η Ελλάδα της μετανάστευσης*, Athens: Kritiki, 39–88.
- Petrakou, Ilektra (2001), 'Η κατασκευή της μετανάστευσης στην ελληνική κοινωνία', in Athanasios Marvakis, Dimitris Parsanoglou and Miltos Pavlou (eds), *Μετανάστες στην Ελλάδα*, Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 31–56.

- Stolcke, Veronica (1999), 'New rhetorics of exclusion in Europe', *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159), 25–35.
- Tomai-Konstantopoulou, Foteini (2004), *Η μετανάστευση στον κινηματογράφο*, Athens: Papazisis.
- Triantafyllidou, Anna (2000), 'Racists? Us? Are you joking?: The discourse of social exclusion of immigrants in Greece and Italy', in Russell King Gabriella Lazaridis and Charalambos Tsardanidis (eds), *'Eldorado or Fortress?': Migration in Southern Europe*, London: Macmillan, 186–206.
- Triantafyllidou, Anna (2001), *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Triantafyllidou, Anna and Mariagela Veikou (2002), 'The hierarchy of Greekness. Ethnic and national identity considerations in Greek immigration policy', *Ethnicities* 2 (2), 189–208.
- Venturas, Lina (2004a), 'Divergent routes to the study of the diaspora in post-war Greece and the USA', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 30 (1), 121–42.
- Venturas, Lina (2004b), 'Εθνικισμός, ρατσισμός και μετανάστευση στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα', in Miltos Pavlou and Dimitris Christopoulos (eds) *Η Ελλάδα της μετανάστευσης*, Athens: Kritiki, 174–204.
- Voutira, Eftihia (2006), 'Post-Soviet diaspora politics: The case of the Soviet Greeks', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 24 (2), 379–414.