Contesting national belonging: An established-outsider figuration on the margins of Thessaloniki, Greece

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The Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union

3.1 Pontos and the origins of the Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union

The Crimean peninsula, an area that presently falls within the borders of Ukraine, hosted the earliest Greek settlement in the territories of what once formed the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. Most likely descendants of Byzantine colonists, 'Crimean Greeks' formed a sizeable Christian Orthodox community within a Muslim hinterland. According to the Ottoman census in 1545, this community numbered approximately 18,000 people. This is almost identical to its size in 1778 when the 'Crimean Greeks' were granted privileges by Catherine II to relocate in the Azov Sea region (Hasiotis, 1997). There they founded the city of Marioupol and twenty-one villages around it (Kaurinkoski, 2008). In the same period, more Greek populations from Anatolia and the Greek peninsula migrated to different places of the then newly annexed Russian lands in the north-west Black Sea region (see map I in appendix II, pp. 248).

More extended migrations targeting the Caucasus took place in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (see table 3.1). The history of these population movements is intertwined with the history of the Greeks of Pontos and of the Greeks of the Erzurum Vilayet. The Greeks in Erzurum Vilayet were scattered in several villages around the cities of Erzurum, Baypurt, and Kars (see map 3.1), at the eastern fringes of the Pontic land. They spoke a Turkic dialect and comprised a much smaller community compared to the Greek community in Pontos. Three hypotheses may be proposed for their presence there. The first is that they were indigenous Greek speaking Orthodox Christian populations who assimilated linguistically. The second hypothesis is that their communities were

formed by migration of Greek Christian Orthodox populations from the interior of Asia Minor where the Turkish language was very widespread among Greek Orthodox populations. The third hypothesis is that they were formed by immigration of Greek people from Pontos who assimilated linguistically.[40]

From Easter Anatolia (Erzerum), after the 1828 Russo-Turkish War	42,000 people
From Pontocs after the Crimean War (1856-82)	53,000 people
From Pontos during World War I (1914-1918)	85,800 people

Table 3.1 The three major migration waves to Caucasus from Eastern Anatolia and Pontos. Source Hassiotis 1997

At the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29, the Greeks of Erzurum Vilayet deserted their land, together with local Armenian populations. They followed the withdrawal of the advance guard of the Tsarist troops that had pushed forward into Ottoman territory. Having welcomed the Russian army, they now fled in fear of reprisals by the Ottomans (Artemis Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991) and resettled in central Georgia (see map 3.1).

The largest segment of the Greek migrations to the Caucasus concerned the Pontic Greeks, however. Literally meaning 'sea', Pontos derives from Éfxinos Póntos (Εὔξεινος Πόντος) the (ancient) Greek name for the Black Sea. Pontos denotes a geographical area across the eastern half of the southern coast regions of the Black Sea, defined to a large extent by its Alps (see map 3.1). It is also a meaningful historical category within Greek historiography. The history of Pontos is treated as an integral part of the history of the Greek nation and is cited as an example of its unbroken continuity (Sideri, 2006, p. 234).

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[40] I did not find evidence in the literature supporting any of those hypotheses. According to Jennings, Erzurum did experience extensive Christian immigration during the sixteenth century (1976). He postulates, however, that those migrations concerned Armenian populations (Jennings 1976: 56). Finally, although it is recorded that after the seventeenth century there was significant migration of Pontic Greeks to Chaldia to work in the local mines, no such reference is made for the Erzurum area.

Map 3.1 Pontos and the migrations from Erzerum Vilayet

According to Kitromilides (1990), Pontos was the single region of Asia Minor where a compact Greek society had survived at the time of the Ottoman conquest. Pontos stayed protected from the nomadic raids which dislocated the Greek populations in the rest of Asia Minor during the four centuries of Byzantine-Turkish confrontation, shielded by its physical geography as well as by the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1461 AD) [41]. However, radical changes took place in the empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At that time, as the Ottoman Empire was becoming more decentralized, a new Ottoman aristocracy, the *derebey*, emerged. Acting to a certain extent autonomously from the Sublime Porte, the *derebey* aspired to be the absolute rulers of Pontos. In order to do so they had to annihilate the pre-existing elite families and to build a system of personal relationships and loyalties. In this context, pressure was exerted on local populations to convert to Islam. The religious balance gradually shifted in favour of the Muslims and new Christian Orthodox communities were founded in the mountains of Pontos by populations that tried to escape these religious pressures. Thereafter the Christian Orthodox community remained a minority in Pontos.

Concerning language, although several communities in the western and the south-eastern borders of the Pontic land assimilated to Turkic dialects, the

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[41] The Empire of Trebizond was one of the three empires established by Byzantine nobility after the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade.

majority spoke Pontic-Greek, which continued to be the mother tongue of several Muslim Pontics too. Pontic-Greek is a Greek dialect characterized by the retention of features of earlier forms of the Greek language which have disappeared from other modern Greek dialects, as well as the integration of several Turkic elements, primarily in the realm of vocabulary. Being the most distant dialect of the modern Greek languages, it is almost unintelligible to speakers of modern Greek (Mackridge, 1991).

In the nineteenth century, favourable economic circumstances in the Ottoman Empire reinforced the Pontic-Orthodox economy and fostered substantial cultural and political development. During that century, Pontic Greeks, especially the affluent ones and those educated in the urban centres, became increasingly estranged from the Ottoman government at the Porte and from the patriarchate in the Phanar, which was loyal to the sultan. From 1829 'they were exposed to two new and external distractions, neither of which could endear what was now described as a millet to the Ottoman state, and neither of which were in a position to help Pontic Orthodoxy when the time came' (Bryer, 1991, p. 327).

Those two external factors were the establishment of the Greek state and the expansion of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus area. Although rather insignificant at the political level and situated far from Pontos itself, the small Greek Kingdom proved to be very influential at the ideological level. The Greek state's export of new ideas such as national identification and historical determinism, and their internalization by Pontic Orthodox populations, gradually drew them into the larger community of the Greek nation. Their new collective identity bound their destiny with a distant and vaguely known state (Kitromilides, 1983). As Bryer argues, a Pontic Orthodox Christian in the beginning of the nineteenth century might describe himself or herself by reference to his village, and then as a Rum (Roman), an Orthodox subject of the sultan. By the end of the century he was calling himself a Greek and, after the population exchange when he met other Greeks in the Greek state, a Pontic-Greek (Bryer, 1991).

The influence of Russia on Christian Orthodox populations in Pontos preceded the penetration of the national ideologies of the Greek state. After the empire's expansion to the south, its presence on the eastern borders of the Ottoman Empire induced liberation fervour among segments of Pontic Orthodoxy, and Russians were welcomed with enthusiasm during the Russo-Turkish Wars.[42] At the same time, the colonization strategy of Tsarist Russia aimed to attract

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[42] Even in the Greek peninsula as early as the sixteenth century, belief in prophesies about a fair-haired race from the north that would liberate the Orthodoxy from the Muslim oppressor was widespread among orthodox populations (Clogg, 1992).

Christian populations to the newly acquired areas in north and east Black Sea; the aim was to alter the religious demography of the newly occupied dominions.

The Russians became the rulers in an area with which Pontic Orthodox populations had historic ties. Contact between Pontos and the Caucasus had existed since time immemorial (Sideri, 2006). Immigration gradually increased in these new circumstances, due to the fact that the Russians established Orthodoxy as the dominant religion in the area and provided economic privileges in exchange for colonization, as well as the fact that the Russians were already hosts to Greek colonies in Crimea. Already in the late eighteenth century, in periods of unfavourable economic conditions, several Pontic-Greeks had left for Crimea (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997b) and throughout the following century the Russian consul-general in Trebizond invited Pontic Orthodox emigrants to build the infrastructure of Tsarist rule in the Caucasus (Bryer, 1991). Besides continuous small-scale emigration, mass flights from Pontos took place in two phases.

Migrations after the Crimean War   Migrations in the period of WW I

Map 3.2 The two major migration outflows from Pontos

The first emigration wave took place after the Crimean War (1856). During that period, the Russian army violently pushed the Circassians and other Muslim ethnic groups that had resisted the Russian expansion in the Caucasus into the Ottoman Empire. Their settlement in Pontos influenced negatively the living conditions of the local Pontic Greeks.[43] In this context, the benefits offered to prospective colonizers by Tsarist Russia appeared attractive to a large number of Pontic Greeks; migration acquired large dimensions from late 1850 until 1882.[44]

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[43] Land was confiscated to cover the needs of the refugees, taxes were increased, while the order in the area was threaten by brigand bands (Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1991).

[44] The migration flows resulted in a de-facto population exchange which was later regulated by the Berlin Convention in 1879 (A. Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997a).

The second and largest migration outflow took place during the turbulent period during and after World War I. In this period Pontic Greeks completely deserted their ancestral home, fleeing to Russia or being permanently expelled to Greece as part of the 'population exchange' envisaged by the Lausanne convention (for historical details see appendix I.2, pp. 244). Tens of thousands Pontic Greeks perished as victims of labour battalions, deportation, massacres, diseases, and hardships on their way to Russia and Greece, or were killed in guerrilla conflicts (Samouilidis, 2002).[45] Of the remaining populations, more than 200,000 fled to Greece and approximately 85,000, primarily from East Pontos, went to Russia. The decimated Pontic Orthodoxy was thus divided between two new homelands.

3.2 Greeks in the Soviet Union

For analytical purposes, we may group the Greek communities in the late Russian Empire into three clusters, which were established under different historical circumstances and hosted populations with different characteristics. As already described, the oldest concentration was founded on the north coast of the Black Sea, the Azov coast, and Crimea. There, settlers were granted substantial economic privileges and the population was more urbanized than in the Caucasus. It also included a significant number of affluent families, primarily in Odessa as well as in other port cities. From this economically dynamic population an ethnic elite had emerged which took on the political and educational leadership of the Greek diaspora. In terms of language the Greek communities of Ukraine were characterized by great linguistic diversity. Sizeable segments of the populations spoke Tatar and Greek dialects, a minority spoke Modern Greek while assimilation to the Russian language was widespread, especially among more wealthy families (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997).

A second concentration of Greeks was located in central Georgia, west and south of Tbilisi, and was composed of the Turkic-speaking Greeks of Erzurum Vilayet (from here onwards referred to as Turkophone Greeks). Settlement in that area had started from the beginning of the nineteenth century but the majority of villages were formed by refugees who fled the eastern and northern border areas of the Ottoman Empire after the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-29 (Aggelidis, 1999). The refugees were provided land to settle on, but not the economic and other privileges offered to the Greek colonizers in northern Black Sea region (Karpozilos, 2002). Tsalka, a mountainous region which had been deserted by its

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[45] In this turbulent period approximately 25% of the total Ottoman populations perished (Clark, 2006; Marantzidis, 2001).

local populations after the Persian and Ottoman invasions, hosted most of the Greek settlers and other villages were founded in an area extending from Tsalka to Dnamisi to the south and Marneouli to the east.

The third cluster was the Pontic-Greek communities which as described were formed as a corollary of the colonization policy of Tsarist Russia, primarily after the mid nineteenth century, in different areas in the Caucasus. Communities were founded in a huge area stretching from Kuban and Stavroupol to the east coast of the Black Sea and the Kars region.[46] The settlers were provided with more privileges than the Greeks in Central Georgia but less than those on the north coast of the Black Sea (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997). They were Pontic-Greek speaking and originated from various parts of the Pontic land. Similar to the Greeks in central Georgia, the majority was concentrated in rural areas. Yet Sokhumi and Batumi, in Ankhazia and Adzharia respectively, hosted sizeable affluent Greek communities (Hasiotis & Xanthopoulou-Kyriakou, 1997).

During World War I and after the October Revolution, substantial demographic changes took place. As already noted, 85,000 Pontic Greeks from Eastern Pontos took refugee in the Caucasus area, primarily in the Russian ports of the eastern Black Sea and Tbilisi. Moreover, in 1919 the recapture of Kars and Ardahan by the Ottomans was followed by a mass flight of Greek populations to the Russian territory to escape persecution. The same year a delegation from the Greek Welfare Ministry went to Batumi to administer relief to the Greek populations. In the period 1919-1921, 52,878 Greeks were transferred via the post of Batumi to Thessaloniki in Greece. Three quarters of them were refugees from Kars and Ardahan (Vergeti, 1991). Another delegation which was sent to Odessa in Crimea, organized the transfer of approximately 10,000-12,000 Greek residents from the city.

The unsuccessful participation of the Greek army in the Allied Anti-Bolshevik campaign in Ukraine and southern Russia had put the Greek populations in the area in a precarious situation. Despite the assurances of the Bolsheviks, many Greeks, including the majority of the affluent families, decided to leave for Greece. In the Caucasus the desire for emigration to Greece remained strong, especially among the refugees who had escaped Pontus after World War I. However, due to diplomatic obstacles and the unwillingness of Greek governments to receive the refugees,[47] the number of 'repatriations' was kept

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[46] A small number of villages, such as Tetritskaro and Bortzumi, were also founded in Central Georgia. A considerable number of Pontics also concentrated in Tbilisi, which had been already hosting Greek populations from the early nineteenth century (Socratis Aggelidis, 2003).

[47] As already mentioned, the unwillingness of the Greek governments was related to the difficulty

relatively low; in the period from 1922 until 1929, approximately 20,000 persons moved to Greece.

After the Revolution

The population movements after the Revolution resulted in a change in the composition of the Greek population in the newly formed Soviet Union. People of Pontic origin became the numerical majority: more than half of the Greek population, which at the end of 1920 was estimated at around 250,000 persons (Maos, 1992), was now formed by Pontic-Greek communities. Of the remaining population, one third comprised the communities in Azof and Crimea, and the Turkic-speaking communities in Central Georgia formed a smaller segment.

The migration outflows also signalled the decline of the Greek urban populations (Agtzidis, 1997; Hasiotis, 1997). Since the urban population had a leading position in its educational and ideological organization, the Greek diaspora became deprived of its traditional elite. This gap was filled in the 1920s by a new elite that emerged from communist intellectuals and Party members (Agtzidis, 1997). In contrast to the pre-revolution leadership, which was completely oriented towards the 'national centre', that is the Greek nation-state, the mission of the new elite was to integrate the Greek minority into the Soviet Union. Aiming to infuse the Greek communities with Communist ideals, separate divisions of the regional Party organizations were formed, as well as professional and cultural associations. However, these initially met with limited participation (Hasiotes, 1997).[48]

Cultural activities were organized and a substantial number of newspapers and academic books as well as general literature were published in Greek in order to disseminate and propagate the Communist world-view. In addition, a network of 'Greek Soviet schools' was founded (Agtzidis, 1997). In the context of the Soviet national policy of the 1920s, minority languages were used as a means to promote the socialist cultivation of minority populations. For the Greek Communists, the

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they faced in accommodating the massive inflow of 1920s refugees, but also to their fear that Greeks from the Soviet republics would spread the 'virus of Bolshevism'.

[48] The October Revolution had found the Greek communities divided and their leadership ambivalent. In the Pannhellenic congress in Taganrog, held in the summer of 1917, the majority of representatives voiced caution and adopted a 'wait and see attitude' (Karpozilos, 2002, p.142). Most Greeks were rather negative or maintained a neutral position. A minority collaborated with the Bolsheviks and a smaller group in Georgia joined the Mensheviks. According to Agtzidis (1991), the reluctant attitude of Greeks towards the Bolsheviks related to their well-rooted traditions of free enterprise and their strong religiousness.

issue was whether to strive for the socialist cultivation of the diaspora in Modern (demotic) Greek or in Pontic Greek. Eventually, it was decided that demotic Greek should become the official language.[49]

According to Karpozilos (1991), although propagandistic in essence, the activities of the Communist leadership fostered the ethnic identity of the Greek minority. Artistic expressions in the Greek language were supported as long as they aligned with Soviet principles,[50] and in some cases even the study and practice of folk practices was encouraged (Karpozilos, 1991). At same time, the expansion of the Soviet Greek school network reduced levels of illiteracy (Hasiotis, 1997; Karpozilos, 2002).[51] At the beginning of the 1930s, Greek, together with Russian and Abkhaz, was the official language in those areas of Abkhazia with sizeable Greek populations. Moreover, three Greek 'National Soviets' were formed in the Azov area, and a small Greek region was instituted in the northern Caucasus with its 'capital' in the town of Krymsk (Hasiotis, 1997).

However, the small demographic size of the Greek minority and its geographical dispersion made impossible the establishment of an autonomous Greek administrative unit within the Soviet Union. At the ideological-symbolical level, the fact that Greeks did not form an indigenous population made their position weaker. As will be described in what follows, the Greek community was particularly vulnerable to the change of nationalities policy when Stalin became general secretary of the Communist Party in 1929.

The change of 'nationalities policy'

The Russian Revolution took place in a multiethnic empire at a period when national feelings by indigenous populations and colonial subjects were strong. Lenin reconsidered his views on the centralization of the Soviet state (Sideri, 2006, p.77). Fearing that the Revolution might be endangered by ethnically motivated opposition, adopted a liberal national policy, allowing for the self-determination of the 'nations' as long as they endorsed the Soviet ideals. The policy of Korenizatsiya, literally the process of rooting, was designed in contrast to the repressive practices of the Tsarist colonial power. Promoting the interests of

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[49] In addition, the simplification of orthography and the introduction of phonetic spelling were decided upon.

[50] Besides the development in Greek literature, the Greek State Theatre in the city of Sokhoum is a notable example of the cultural development within the Greek community.

[51] Before the Revolution, Greek schools existed only in cities where there were organized communities (Karpozilos, 2002). Those schools continued to exist for a short period after the revolution, when they were substituted by the more extended network of Soviet Schools.

the ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, it aimed to harmonize their relationship with the Soviet regime. The main beneficiaries were the big indigenous nationalities of the empire which formed the autonomous or independent republics of the Soviet Union. However, as in the case of the Greeks, even the so-called 'small nations' were given space for self determination and cultural development.

During the same period, economic reform was also enforced in a less radical way. The so-called New Economic Policy (NEP) allowed a certain co-existence between a market economy and a centralized state (Nove, 1992). The NEP was, however, considered a deviation from the revolutionary agenda. Collectivization, which was imminently implemented by Stalin, was supposed to progress the actual economic and political aims of the revolution. This policy was implemented in two main ways: by creating *kolkhoz* (collective farms) and *sovkhoz* (state farms), and depriving wealthier farmers, the kulaks, of their privileges (Nove, 1992). A radical anti-religious policy was also implemented (Hasiotis, 1997).

Concerning the nationalities policy, Stalin considered Korenizatsiya as having been successfully and sufficiently implemented. Thus, the ultimate aim of national and linguistic unification and the creation of the Sovetskii chelovek, the Soviet person, was pursued. In practice, this shift gradually led to overt Russification and the victimization of certain ethnicities. These were largely the non-indigenous nations, especially the ones that were affiliated with 'enemy states'. Party rhetoric and practice became strongly against the expression of national affiliation, and a large segment of the Greek population was persecuted through the common accusation of being *enemies of the people*.

The persecutions

In the Soviet Union the ethnic origin of people, *natsional'nost'*, was mentioned in most official documents including their passport on top of their Republican citizenship (Ginsburgs, 1983). Offspring of mixed marriages had to choose one of their parents' nationalities. However, not all Greeks had Soviet citizenship. The non-holders of Soviet passports, belonged into two categories: those who had acquired Greek citizenship from the Greek consulates,[52] and stateless people who had declared themselves Greeks to the Soviet authorities. The latter were registered as Greeks in the registers of the Greek consulate in Moscow yet remained people without official documentation. During the early period, the

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[52] As described in chapter two, the expansion of the Greek consular network initiated the ungrudging distribution of citizenship to members of the Greek Diaspora.

Soviet authorities did not support the acquisition of Soviet citizenship by the Greek population. Aiming to reduce their numbers, pressure was exerted on Greeks to emigrate; this was especially the case in Abkhazia, an area that had received a large number of refugees from the Ottoman Empire in the period 1917-1918.

As far as the populations were concerned, declaring themselves Greek was initially to their benefit. As foreign citizens, they were exempted from participation in the Kolkhoz and allowed to keep their property (Hassiotis, 1997). Moreover, they were exempted from conscription into the army. In the following decades, however, the situation changed drastically. Greek citizenship became a major constraint not only because it evoked suspicion about loyalties, but also because it meant exclusion from participation in several fields of social political and economic life.

Tensions between the Greek communities and the authorities started with the enforcement of collectivization. In several areas the process was met with opposition and the authorities reacted with forced resettlement and persecution. Emigration to Greece became highly desired and applications for repatriation escalated, especially after the great famine of 1931-33, which resulted in millions of deaths. However, the Greek governments firmly maintained their position of discouraging 'repatriation'.[53]

Persecution of the Greek populations became worse in the period that followed. The failure of collectivization and the primarily intra-party conflicts led to the Stalinist purges of 1936-1938. In a climate of growing suspicion, any contact with foreigners was potentially espionage and could result in immediate arrest (Sideri, 2006). Tens of thousands of people were displaced, sent to concentration camps in Siberia, or executed. Moreover, faced with accusations of anti-Soviet and anti-socialist propaganda, most of the Greek schools were closed, the press was suppressed, all kinds of publications in Pontic and demotic Greek were banned, and every form of artistic or other cultural activity was stopped. Nearly all the Greek intelligentsia, including Party members, were executed (Agtzidis, 1991). For a short period the Greek government changed its attitude towards 'repatriation' from the Soviet Union and emigration was allowed, primarily for the victims of persecutions and their families (Hasiotis, 1997).

Persecutions continued before, during, and particularly on the eve of World War II, when a number of Greeks from Crimea, Kuban, and the Caucasus were deported to Siberia and North Kazakhstan. Although Greeks participated in the

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[53] In the period 1929-1933, approximately 7,000 people emigrated.

Great Patriotic War and the anti-Nazi resistance in areas occupied by the Germans, this was not considered sufficient to prove their loyalty to the Soviet Union (Sideri, 2006; Agtzidis, 1991; Hasiotis, 1997). The Cold War was about to begin, and their actual and imagined homelands would be located in opposing camps. The largest-scale and most systematic deportations took place in June 1949. State security special forces encircled Greek villages, herded populations to various locations, and conducted them to railway stations (Karpozilos 2002; Agtzidis 1991). The majority of Greeks on the eastern Black Sea coast, including the whole Greek population of Abkhazia and half of the population of Adzharia, were deported to Central Asia.

Map 3.3 The Stalinist deportations to Central Asia

The reasons for this systematic deportation remain controversial. Various interpretations have been suggested, such as the end of the civil war in Greece and the defeat of the communist forces, the need for manpower in Central Asia to support the new five-year plan, the Georgianization of Abkhazia, and the attempt by the Soviet authorities to clear the border areas of 'non-reliable populations' (Hasiotis, 1997; Sideri, 2006; Agtzidis, 1991). Interestingly, not all Greek populations were affected to the same degree. For instance, the Turkophone Greeks and other Greek communities around Tbilisi as well as the Greeks in Marioupol were excluded from deportation, whereas in Abkhazia and Adzaria the deportations even swept up party members, men who had fought in

the Great Patriotic War, and families that had lost members in the war (Hassiotis, 1997). Providing a single clear explanation for this is difficult.

As a result of the deportations, a new cluster of Greek communities was formed in the steppes of Central Asia. The uprooted were forced to disembark in various train stations where they initially accommodated themselves in tents or underground houses. Later they were resettled in already existing kolkhozes or remained in their newly built settlements (Vergeti, 2000). The majority were concentrated in Kazakhstan, in particular in the Chimkent region and in Kentau, a new city built by the exiles. In the early years they had to report to the authorities every week and their movement was restricted to within a radius of 5 km from where they lived and worked (Karpozilos, 2002). The majority worked in exhausting conditions in mines, construction, industry, and agriculture. After Stalin's death in 1953, restrictions gradually lifted and life conditions ameliorated.[54] In 1956, they were officially allowed to return to southern Russia and the Caucasus. Although the state authorities claimed they could not restore their property, in practice a minority did manage to reclaim what was theirs (Vergeti, 2000).

Greekness and assimilation

Meanwhile, Khrushchev, who succeeded Stalin as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, implemented a policy of liberalization of the social sphere. This included the loosening of restrictions on ethnic self-definition and cultural expression for Greeks. Theatres were recreated in the Caucasus and Central Asia and a small movement towards the restoration of the Greek language and education took place in Tbilisi (Agtzidis, 1991; Hasiotis, 1997). At the same time, a restricted number of Greek publications were printed and a newspaper was published by the Greek partisans of the Greek Civil War who had fled to the Soviet Union after their defeat in 1949. These Greek political refugees were accommodated by the Soviet authorities in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, where they formed a new Greek community.[55]

Fifteen years later, de jure of a bilateral agreement between Greece and the Soviet Union, 13,500 members of the Greek diaspora in central Asia took the opposite route (Karpozilos, 1991). The agreement allowed for a limited number of people of Greek descent (henceforth 1960s Soviet Greeks) to settle in Greece annually,

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[54] Regarding those from Abkhazia, for whom data is available, less than half of the deportees returned (Ioannidis 1991 as cited in Hasiotis 1997).

[55] At the end of the military dictatorship in 1974, the political refugees were allowed to repatriate. By the beginning of the 1990s the vast majority had returned to Greece.

although migration was halted by the imposition of dictatorship in Greece in the late 1960s. It should be noted that in this period the economic conditions in the Soviet Union had greatly ameliorated and social life had stabilized. As a result, the desire to 'repatriate', with the exception of the Greek communities in Central Asia, was not as intense as in the mid-war period.

During the Brezhnev period, the liberalization of cultural expression of Greeks was gradually scaled down. In any case, the earlier modest ethnic revival should not be overstressed. After the Stalinist Purges, the Greek diaspora in the Soviet Union lacked both ethnic leadership and the institutional organization which could directly or indirectly have worked in favour of the ethnic fortification of the Soviet Greeks. Initiatives were sporadic and their impact was restricted to the local level. However, nationality remained a formal state categorization. The Russian ethnonym, Greki, written in the internal passport of Soviet citizens of Greek descent, was an identification marker. This continued to have a constraining impact in several domains of social life, especially for the minority who still retained their Greek passports. According to Agtzidis (1991), secret orders forbade the promotion of Greeks to high positions in the political, national, military, and trade-union hierarchy.

Besides exclusion from top positions in 'sensitive sectors', achieving upward socio-economic mobility was also harder for Greeks. 'Nationality' played a key role in the networks of personal relations (Sideri, 2006). Being members of a minority that was dispersed and persecuted due to ethnic descent, Greeks largely lacked access to privileged networks. They were not only disfavoured in relation to Russians but also in comparison to the 'nationals' of the Soviet Republics. After Khrushchev's reforms, many central powers were transferred to the periphery, and 'local party elites' local parties and elites extended their powers as mediators between the centre and the republics. Following the legacy of Korenizatsiya, the titular [56] nationality of each republic dominated the administration of the republic's representation within the Party; access for other nationalities was difficult (Sideri, 2006).

The lack of social capital had to be compensated for by education. Since native-language schooling was not provided for the Greeks, education had to be pursued either in Russian or in the language of the titular nation. In 1938, the Russian language had already become a required subject of study in every Soviet school. Its use as the main medium of instruction accelerated further after Khrushchev, who substituted a number of schools of small nationalities with Russian schools.

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[56] The term 'titular nationality' was used in the former Soviet Union to denote the dominant ethnic group in a Republic, which typically gave its name to the Republic itself.

Greeks, like other non-indigenous minorities, were likely to choose education in the language which guaranteed communication skills that cut across the ethnic mosaic, so enhancing their prospects of a professional career. Russian was not only the lingua franca of the Soviet Union, but was the most prestigious language as well. Being the state language it was presented as an international language closely related to the achievements of Russian science. Russian universities enjoyed a prestigious position within the Soviet educational landscape; its symbolic capital meant opportunities and social mobility (Sideri, 2006, pp. 161-165).

Concerning the mother tongue of the diverse Greek linguistic communities, it was transmitted through family and in areas with a substantial Greek population, and sustained through interaction within the ethnic borders. Pontic-Greek was widely spoken in various villages in Central Asia, Georgia, and the south Caucasus, while the Turkic idiom remained the dominant language in the Greek communities in central Georgia, and a small number of communities in Ukraine still spoke Rumeika and Tatar dialects.[57] However, Russian, being the lingua franca and the dominant language in education, became the first language of the majority of Greeks born after World War II, and gradually prevailed as the dominant language of the Greek diaspora. In the Soviet census of 1970, only 39.3% of the Greeks declared Greek as their first language (Hassiotis, 1997). Apart from the political refugees who spoke Modern Greek, the rest spoke the aforementioned dialects. Probably, the Turkic and Tatar dialects were counted as Greek languages, too. Excluding those, one may estimate that the different Greek dialects were the first language for less than one third of the diaspora, and the numbers of Greek-speakers must have declined further during the following decades.[58] After the reshuffling of populations that resulted from the Stalinist deportations, many Greeks found themselves living in new linguistic settings, or else their place of residence became increasingly multiethnic. As a result the linguistic plurality of the Greek diaspora became yet more diverse.

Endogamy had been the norm within Greek communities, but intermarriage with other nationalities of the same religion increased and in the late Soviet period became rather widespread. This development was despite the fact that family resistance against 'marrying out' continued to be strong, and arranged marriages were common. In fact, social control remained prominent and effective in rural

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[57] The Tatar dialects and Rumeika were still spoken in the Marioupol area.

[58] Greeks, like other dispersed populations, were much more prone to linguistic Russification. The vast majority (more than 90%) of the non-Russian peoples in the 1970 Soviet census declared their 'national' language as their first language.

areas, while mixed marriages were a concomitant of the growing urbanization of the Greek communities (Sideri, 2006).

Migration to the city for educational or professional reasons meant moving to a social environment with very few Greeks, if any, and endogamy was improbable if an arranged marriage did not take place or was rejected (Hassiotis, 1997). As Sideri (2006) argues, in some cases those mixed marriages could create the conditions for Greeks to participate in networks that transcended the borders of their nationality, thus providing them with wider access to resources. At the same time, they made a reality of the Soviet ideology of the 'rapprochement of the Soviet peoples': the intermingling of different nationalities (Sideri, 2006).

Greekness, besides being a formal and imposed state category in the context of Soviet nationalities, was also a self-ascribed identification. Its significance varied between individuals, depending on personal and family histories. Furthermore, its content differed between the various Greek communities that were scattered across the Soviet Union in small cultural enclaves. Greekness in several communities was practised and experienced through traditional dances and music, as well as several customs linked to the religious rites of wedding, baptism and funeral, and other religious feasts.

In areas without compact Greek populations and in urban centres, Greekness was largely stripped of its cultural element and became what Gans (1979) terms in relation to third-generation immigrants in the United States 'a symbolic identity'. As such, it was mediated by state education which placed emphasis on the teaching of classical period (Vergeti 1998). Being heirs of a glorious past, which was celebrated by Soviet education, was a source of pride for Greeks and comprised symbolic capital in their interaction with other Soviet 'nationals'. At the same time, 'the Soviet people' (*sovetskii narod*) ideology gradually became a reality through their growing identification with the entire population of the Soviet Union (Popov, 2010). Greeks gradually developed a sense of 'membership in a multi-national community', partaking in the most inclusive and superordinary category, that of the Soviet person, and incorporating the Russian culture which was the dominant and most strongly promoted state culture – the one that supposedly best embodied the communist world view. Their incorporation of the Russian culture had long been underway, while the adoption of Soviet identity became possible after the ceasing of persecution of the Greek community, the stabilization of social life, and the gradual restoration of trust towards the Soviet regime.

3.3 The post-1989 migration

Perestroika and ethnic mobilization

The trajectory of the Greek population in the Soviet Union towards acculturation and assimilation was reversed during the period of *perestroika* (1986-1991), when a Greek 'ethnic revival' took place. The developments during the presidency of Shevardnadze in Georgia in the early 1980s were forerunners of this process. Greek language started being taught in a number of Georgian schools, training seminars for Greeks teachers were organized by the state, and a Greek youth club engaging in cultural activities was set up in the context of Komsomol in Tbilisi (Hasiotis, 1997).[59] Those isolated developments were followed by much more radical and ubiquitous changes that took place in the late years of *Perestroika* and *Glasnot*, when the economic liberation and political openness implemented by Gorbachev was also reflected in culture (Voutira, 1991).

In a period of cultural liberalization and emerging ethnonationalist movements, associations aimed at preserving Greek cultural life in the Soviet Union, including music, dance, and theatrical groups, were founded in most places of Greek settlement. According to Voutira (2006) who conducted fieldwork in the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, elements of an Soviet Greek 'cultural revival' were evident at different levels of daily life and Greekness was also promoted institutionally. The Greek mayor of Marioupol inaugurated a museum of Greek traditional life in the city and instituted the *Méga Yiortí* in 1990, as an annual dancing celebration in the first week of September (Voutira 2006). Moreover, a festival was introduced at Anapa, among the ruins of Goripya, 'whose Hellenistic legacy provided the background for new memorabilia among the youth clubs that competed in the amphitheatre among themselves for prizes in Greek dancing and singing' (Voutira 2006, p.393).

Freedom to move to Greece was officially restored and the Greek consulate in Moscow announced that from 1984 onwards, Soviet Greeks wishing to emigrate could initiate the procedures of 'repatriation' (Agtzidis, 1997).[60] In practice, however, bureaucratic hurdles constrained emigration, which remained limited

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[59] Such developments were restricted to the Georgian Soviet Republic. Before *perestroika*, similar initiatives in other areas of the Soviet Union were met with opposition.

[60] Until 1983 repatriation was only allowed for political refugees and permission was granted after the individual examination of each case. A new law in 1983 implemented so-called free repatriation, paving the way for the mass 'return' of the political refugees and later on the FSU Greek diaspora (Vergeti, 2000).

until 1989. Soviet Greeks took political action and an organization with the proclaimed aim 'to strive for the legal recognition of the human right of free movement to the homeland' was set up in the mid 1980s in Sokhumi. Emigration to Greece was once more highly desired by a considerable segment of the Greek populations in the Soviet Union; in its prime, the 'Return' (Vozvrashenie), as the organization was named, numbered 5,000 members in different areas in the Soviet Union.

The economic stagnation of the Soviet economy began to have a negative impact on people's lives from the beginning of the 1980s,[61] and in its twilight years 'economies of shortage' permeated the Soviet Union. In such conditions, the system of redistributing the restricted economic resources depended on networks of kinship and friendship and thus was largely channelled within ethnic borders (Verdery, 1993). In the Soviet national republics, the domination of the titular nationalities provided their elites with easier access and control over economic resources and everyday survival in the economic crisis became increasingly difficult for non-titular nationalities (Popov, 2010). At the same time, growing nationalism in the Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia led to the political and social marginalization of Russophone and other pro-Russian minorities, with whom the majority of Soviet Greeks had identified (Kessidis 1996). However, Greekness was no longer solely a constraint. As Voutira aptly describes it, similar 'to other non-indigenous and '"less privileged nationalities"' under the Soviet regime [Greekness] was becoming a "competitive resource" in light of the prospects of emigration it entailed for its members' (2006, p.393).

It was in this period that voices began to be raised in Greece concerning the moral duty of the fatherland towards the forgotten Soviet Greeks. The interest was not expressed from governmental ranks but from native Pontic Greek cultural associations, which had been formed primariy by the descendants of the 1920s population exchange. Ever since union with Greece had come true, albeit via the bitter path of forced migration, the native Pontic Greeks had changed their cultural and political orientations. They were no longer nationalists fighting to rejoin their fortunes with the homeland, but rather ethnicists struggling to maintain their identity within the wider contexts of Greekness (Fann, 1991).

The 1980s was a period of growing mobilization by Pontic Greeks in Greece and abroad. The First International Pontic Congress was held in Thessaloniki in 1985 and Soviet Pontics were officially invited. Although they did not manage to acquire permission from the Soviet authorities, they were able to send

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[61] Although the Soviet economy was already in decline from the mid 1970s, the living conditions continued ameliorating throughout the decade.

representation to the Second Congress held in 1988 (Hassiotis, 1997; Voutira, 2006). The encounter between Soviet and native Pontics began with euphoria about the mutual rediscovery of their 'long lost brothers'. For the Soviet Pontics it was also the first time they had been confronted with their Pontic identity (Voutira, 2006). Soviet Pontics had been brought up to think of themselves as Greeks within the Soviet nationalities model. They never though of themselves as a separate subgroup of the wider Greek nation, as the native Pontics had had to after they met other Greeks and were categorized as such after their settlement in Greece.

Before the unforeseen developments that brought about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the local Greek associations that mushroomed in the late 1980s took a series of initiatives and organized joint meetings aimed at solving the 'national problem of Greeks' in the Soviet Union. The claims of their representatives in the International Pontic Congress were for support of the cultural activities of the diaspora in the Soviet Union as well as recognition of academic degrees for those who were contemplating return (Voutira, 2006).

Their requests mirrored the lack of consensus among the Greek leadership on the strategy that should be followed. Two tendencies had prevailed: one considering that any action should take place in the existing homelands, and another supporting that Greeks should only stay in the Soviet Union conditional on the creation of an autonomous Greek region. According to Voutira, (2006) the two different positions reflected regional priorities in the changing social contexts within Soviet space and evolved around the ambiguities surrounding the concept of 'autonomy'.

The position of *territorial autonomy* was adopted by the Central Asian and Transcaucasian Greeks who opted for mass 'repatriation' to Greece and/or for resettlement within Russian territory. [62] Their reasoning was based on the realization that life for the Greeks was becoming increasingly difficult given the rise in titular-nationality nationalisms. A solution was sought in the establishment of a concrete 'territorial base' for the Soviet Greek diaspora and the consolidation of their dispersed presence. The Krimskayia *rayon*, where a Greek region had had a short-lived existence in the 1930s, together with the region of Anapa, were the proposed candidates for the creation of the Greek region (Voutira, 2006).

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[62] The position of territorial autonomy was also supported by the Greek erstwhile mayor of Moscow and the President of the All-Union Greek Association (1990–1993) Gavriil Popov (Hasiotis 1997).

The second position, that of *cultural autonomy,* was supported by Ukrainian and Russian associations. Ukrainian Greeks reported having good relations with people of the titular nationality and claimed that they had no substantial reasons to leave their homeland. Their favourable economic situation was also mentioned; in the words of the president of the Greek association of Crimea 'there are no poor Greeks in our region [Symferopol], we have no reason to go to Greece' (as cited in Voutira, 2006, p.395). At the same time, the Russian Greeks, especially those living in the Krasnodar area highlighted the risk of evoking violent reactions from the local populations by claiming a Greek region in south Russia (Hasiotis, 1997). In the first All-Union Greek Congress, held in April 1991, the final vote of the representatives was 71–65 in favour of promoting the 'cultural autonomy' position rather than pursuing the political path of establishing a politically recognized 'territorial autonomy' (Voutira, 2006).

The emigration flow

Emigration had already begun to acquire substantial dimensions before the All-Union Congress. When the representatives of the Central Asian Greeks spoke in favour of a mass exodus to Greece, they were describing a reality which was already taking place in their area. The urge to 'repatriate' was most pronounced and widespread among the Greek communities in Central Asia who shared the collective trauma of deportation in a far away land. The unfamiliarity of the landscape as well as religious and phenotypical differences with the natives sustained feelings of cultural isolation among Greek populations (Voutira 1991). At the same time, the Greek communities in Central Asia had remained rather segregated from the titular nationalities of their republics and were generally lacking the skills and resources (linguistic and cultural aptitudes) needed to re-adapt in the new situation that the natives were claiming for their republic. The deportees would have to renegotiate their positions and build their lives anew even if they stayed in their country of residence.

In a period of rising nationalism, Greeks felt they did not fit in, and fear of a Muslim ethnic revival was crucial in shaping their decision to uproot themselves once more. In emigrating to the historic homeland they hoped that at least they would be safer living among their own people. The pattern of migration was sudden and massive. Rather than being an individual calculated decision, migration was gradually becoming a collective reaction, since departures reinforced feelings of alienation and insecurity within the remaining population and in turn influenced their decision to leave. Large-scale family migration soon resulted in the complete relocation of kinship- or locality-based networks.

Migrants quit their jobs and liquidated most of their assets, cutting all bridges with their previous environment (Voutira, 1991).

Although their emigration was less abrupt, the Greek communities in Georgia found themselves in a similar state of unrest about whether to stay or not. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the out-flows gathered pace. Life was becoming increasingly difficult for Greeks due to the dramatic economic decline of the Georgian economy, and the nationalist and often xenophobic policies that swept the country in the early 1990s (Trier & Turashvili, 2007); emigration was increasingly seen as an option to escape social marginalization and poverty. Moreover, in the aftermath of independence, Georgia was tormented by ethno-political conflicts. The Greeks in Abkhazia as well as in Ossetia were caught between bloody civil wars. In 1992 the Greek foreign minister ordered a rescue mission to evacuate the Greek population of the city of Sukhum (Abkhazia) which was under siege. By the end of the war of 1992-1993, nearly all of the 14,700 Greeks who had lived in Abkhazia in 1989 had left their country for Greece (or Russia). Ethnic conflicts in Adjara also influenced the decision of local Greeks to emigrate.

Apart from those Greeks who were forced to flee due to war, and in contrast to the mass flight from Central Asia, Georgian Greeks emigrated through an intermittent pattern of settlement, and several retained property, investment, and family ties in the former Soviet Union (Voutira, 1991). However, persisting economic stagnation and political instability resulted in continuous emigration. According to the 2002 Georgian Census the Greek presence in Georgia had shrunk to approximately one seventh of its former size. The situation in Armenia was similar. Most Greeks left Armenia in two major waves, after the 1988 earthquake and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, while the remaining population evacuated their homelands in the coming years. Currently, the Greek presence in Transcaucasia, as in Central Asia, is nearly extinct despite the fact that emigration was not so widespread during the early years. Continuous migration also had a self-reinforcing impact, inducing further outflows. The flight of the Greeks from Tsalka district in Central Georgia, who comprised 61% of the local population in 1989, is illustrative of the influence of cumulative causation of migration (see appendix I.3, pp. 245).

The Greek communities in Ukraine represent the other end of the spectrum. Emigration has been relatively small in number and started at a later phase; it is only after 1994 that it took on some significance. Emigration was much more widespread among the Greeks in Russian territories yet not comparable to the massive flight from Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Several communities retained a large part of their population while a number of Greek urban

communities experienced a demographic *increase* as a result of migration from rural areas but also from Caucasus and Central Asia.[63] As already mentioned, emigration to Russia was seen as preferable alternative to mass flight to Greece by the proponents of territorial autonomy. The majority of Greeks spoke Russian as their first language and were acquainted with the socio-cultural environment of that country; thus they felt more confident about moving there. South Russia contained the most affluent part of the Greek population, and from the late 1990s onwards the Russian economy provided some opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility, provided one possessed the needed human and social capital.

The 1989 Soviet Census recorded 358 thousand Greeks of whom those living in Ukraine, in Georgia and in Russia made the 80%. Of the remaining population approximately 15% was living in in Kazakhstan, 2% in Armenia (see table 3.2).[64] A census carried out by the General Secretariat of Repatriating Greeks in 2000 registered 155 thousand immigrants half of whom were from Georgia, followed by those of Kazakhstan and Russia, and small number of people from Armenia, and Ukraine (see table 3.3).[65]

Soviet Republics	Persons	Percentage
Russia	80,500	22.5%
Ukraine	104,000	29.1%
Kazakhstan	49,900	13.9%
Georgia	100,000	27.9%
Armenia	7,400	2.1%
Other	16,200	4.5%
USSR	358,000	100%

Table 3.2 – Greeks living in the USSR in 1989, source Hassiotis 1997

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[63] Not all migrants from the former Soviet Union headed to Greece; several emigrated to Cyprus and others to the Russian Federation. Emigration to Russia was in cases the first migration step before heading to Greece.

[64] The representatives of the Greek associations in the former Soviet Union claimed that the Soviet census substantially underestimated the real numbers of the Greek diaspora. Taking into account the demographic dynamics of the Greek populations and mixed marriages, Maos estimates its size at 1989 at approximately 478 thousand (Maos, 1992).

[65] Data were gathered in three waves from 1997 to 2000, thus lacking the accuracy of 'real' census data. Immigrants who re-migrated were not subtracted from the total population in 2000, while it is expected that some immigrants missed registration. It also unclear how the country of origin/migration (χώρα προέλευσης) was registered. There is no information whether the data stands for country of birth of the respondent or the country from where she/he migrated. Concerning the Armenian immigrant population, which appears slightly higher from their community's size in 1989, this is possibly due to the considerable emigration from Armenia in 1988, due to the Spitak earthquake in that year.

The majority of immigrants had settled in the geographical department of Macedonia (60%) and half of those stayed in the city of Thessaloniki (33%). A substantial number of people also settled in central Greece (22%) and the Department of Thrace (15%). According to the census data the migration peak was in the year 1993. Migration stabilized around a mean of 14,000 people in the next four years, and dropped to an annual rate of close to 5,000 people thereafter (see chart 3.4). Taking into account that emigration continued yet at a considerably slower pace throughout the previous decade, the FSU Greek population in the mid 2000s stood at around 200,000 people (Kaurinkoski, 2008; Voutira, 2006).

Soviet Republics	Persons	Percentage
Russia	24,042	15.5%
Ukraine	4,660	3%
Kazakhstan	31,271	20.1%
Armenia	8,810	5.7%
Georgia	80,644	51.9%
Other	16,200	3.8%
USSR	358,000	100%

Table 3.3 FSU Greek immigrants by registered place of origin – 2000, source GGO 2000

The immigrant population has a rather balanced demographic structure due to the fact that migration has largely been taken up by whole families. In terms of the origins of the immigrant population, the clear majority are descendants of the mid nineteenth-century immigration from Pontos, and a substantial segment – approximately one fourth – comprises Turkish-speaking Greeks that had earlier fled to Georgia from Erzurum Vilayet. The descendants of the indigenous Crimean Greeks and the Greek settlers of the northern Black Sea region comprise a marginal segment of the immigrant population, since emigration from Ukraine was relatively low.

Year	Persons	Percentage
1987	169	0.1%
1988	669	0.4%
1989	5,195	3.3%
1990	16,716	10.8%
1991	17,331	11.1%
1992	19,846	12.8%
1993	25,720	16.6%
1994	14,737	9.5%
1995	14,586	9.4%
1996	14,298	9.2%
1997	12,381	7.9%
1998	5,761	3.7%
1999	4,676	3%
2000	1,307	0.8%
Total	153,392	

Table 3.4 Arrivals of Greeks from the former Soviet Union in Greece by year, source GGO 2000