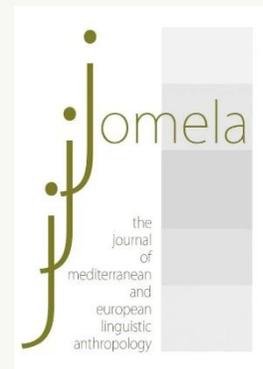


Symbolic Construction of Hellenism in Griko-Greek Two-Way Symbiotic Encounters

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Abstract

Based on fieldwork conducted in Greece and Grecia Salentina on the revival of Griko – the language of Greek origins used in the Southern Italian province of Lecce (Salento/Puglia) – in the proposed article I investigate the potential and the limits of 'the language of kinship' between Greeks and Italian Griko-speakers, who do not belong to the historical Greek categories of diaspora and “lost homeland”. I examine its dual articulation - linguistic kinship and kinship as language - in the context of Greek tourism in the Griko-speaking villages and of collaborations between Greek and local cultural associations and individuals, focusing in particular on the initiatives promoted by Greek aficionados of Griko in its support. I therefore undertake a semiotic analysis of kinship related terms embedded in the metalinguistic comments they offer to explore the ways in which kinship remains powerful, within and beyond the Western biologizing assumption of the term itself (Sutton 1997: 429).

By painting a picture of Grecia Salentina and Griko drawn by my Greek interlocutors I investigate the extent to which the inscribed 'cultural ideology of Hellenism' and of historical continuity has filtered their views and shaped their gaze on Griko, which they often define as a “living monument of Hellenism”, “ena zondanó mnimeío tou Ellinismoú”. My data show how despite the limited mutual intelligibility between Greek and Griko, their linguistic kinship is selectively highlighted and iconically projected onto Griko-speakers, becoming the ‘proof’ of

historically deep social relations. I argue that the ongoing contacts among Greek aficionados of Griko and Griko-speakers ultimately highlight the performative effects of metalanguage and the effectiveness of language ideologies linked to specific historicities to reinforce cultural ties between contemporary Italy and Greece, connecting communities across national borders. Kinship becomes indeed the very language through which the Hellenic cultural heritage is reclaimed as an idiom of global belonging, contributing to the symbolic construction of Hellenism as a post-territorialized entity.

Introduction

Hellenism and Romanticism

At the time of the War of Independence and afterwards, 'Greece' had to deal with its own dynamics. Its very emergence as a nation-state was notably supported by Western European philhellenism, which had developed in France, Germany, and England in the nineteenth century. Philhellenists were admirers of the Greek classical aesthetic and philosophy, and they evoked the notion of cultural Hellenism, giving Greece the ideological foundations of its *raison d'être* and its justification for realizing the national project in political terms (Caloychos 2003). Hellas was chosen as the name for the newborn country, revealing the extent of philhellenists' romantic fascination with classical culture and their implicit claim of cultural continuity. This Romantic ideal would link the Greeks of that time to a civilization that had disappeared almost two millennia earlier, a civilization that would have resisted any important cultural influence of other peoples (Most 2008; Stewart 1994). Whether on the eve of independence ordinary Greek speakers of today's Greece had any developed notion of their Greek/Hellenic ancestors remains questionable; yet they were romantically expected, as it were, to have preserved knowledge or memory of their classical past (Herzfeld 1982; Stewart 1994). From its very inception, the Greek State has therefore invested in crafting a national culture to match the expectations of the philhellenic dream, as it were. In order to prove the continuity of the Greek identity in all its manifestations and expressions, disciplines such as historiography, archaeology, philology, and folklore notably engaged in the construction of a continuous past linking modern to ancient Greece (see Herzfeld 1982). Greek history was to be Hellenized along a coherent temporal narrative in which Macedonian domination, the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the Byzantine era, and the Ottoman Empire had to be synthesized as phases of a continuous Hellenism (Liakos 2008, Livanios 2008, Plantzos 2008). Likewise Christian 'Greeks,' who had called themselves 'Romaioi' throughout the Byzantine and Ottoman periods, were conflated with the 'Éllines' of Ancient Greece to become 'Helleno-Christian.'

The Greek Ministry of Education and the Teaching of Modern Greek in Southern Italy

The teaching of MG in the South of Italy is part of a bilateral agreement between the Italian and Greek Ministries of Education. As part of my fieldwork in Greece, I decided to investigate this further, as I was interested in finding out the legal framework within which this agreement came into existence and whether it was part of the overall policy aimed at 'Greeks abroad.' I called the Greek Ministry countless times in order to identify the person in charge of the program. I sent a letter with five questions¹ to a number of different departments (International Educational Affairs, Education for Greeks Abroad, and Intercultural Education and Education for Greeks Abroad²), but received no reply. I visited the Ministry on three separate occasions before and after the elections in October 2009 that resulted in a change of political party. Like a package, I was sent from one person to another, shuttled from phone call to phone call. This proved to be one of the most difficult parts of the research in Greece, a task at which I failed miserably, since all my would-be interlocutors refused me any information. This could have been a reaction that Herzfeld (1983:143) identifies as *Efthinofovia* or "fear of responsibility," that is, "the stereotypical unwillingness to take any initiative in even the most marginally anomalous [bureaucratic] situations." Although regrettable, as my requests went unanswered I am left to make inferences about the involvement of Greece at the institutional level without benefitting from the 'official' perspective.

In this 'deterritorialized' and 'imaginary' nation, also the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy could find a place; the limitations of the historical category of *omogéneia* could be overcome once this was extended to incorporate "ever more categories of populations of 'Greek descent' living outside the country into the nation in practical and in symbolic terms" (Venturas 2009:136). Through such a categorical extension, the 'anomalies' of each group would lose their relevance, as it were; each became the addressee of a deterritorialized version of the Megáli idéa.³ However, as Venturas notes (2009:136), this relies on the same rhetoric and the ideological tropes that had proved successful in the previous version. In other words, as she stresses, it does not alter the paternalism of the State.

For the Greek State, as regards the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy, this is a win-win outcome. As opposed to Pontic or Albanian Greeks, these communities do not constitute a political issue, as they represent neither a pool of potential returnees nor an enemy state. Lack of political animosity and lack of interest on their side in obtaining Greek citizenship in fact partly explains the Greek State's policies and reactions to these communities. Let us not forget that the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy have never advanced separatist claims. Lack of Greek consciousness aside, Greece represents for them no political

advantage, as their motivations to become Greek citizens are few. As members of the European Union, they are already entitled to settle in Greece with full rights to work. Therefore, they are in a much different political position compared to the Pontic peoples from the former Soviet countries and the ethnic Greek Albanians, for whom Greece represents a stronger economy and the availability of a European passport. On the other hand, for Greece, at a practical level, Southern Italy too represents a natural extension zone for Europe. When I interviewed a former mayor of one of the Griko-speaking villages on the Italian shore and discussed with him particular European INTERREG projects between Greece and Italy that had been stepped up in recent years, he told me that, “Greece has always looked to us as a bridge to Europe.”⁴ Moreover, at a symbolic level, the ‘anomalies’ and ‘ambiguities’ (Douglas 1966) of the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities, whether paradoxically or not, render them an unexpected ‘gift’ of Hellenism. Whereas Pontic and Albanian Greeks are expected to prove their ‘Greekness,’ in the case at hand, a language kept in remote areas of Southern Italy for millennia—or a millennium, according to the theories—without any investment from the Greek State, is turned into proof of the true value and durability of Hellenism. This is the discourse that appeals to the part of the Greek population sensitive to this type of national pride, which then further promotes it. Griko—as Calabrian Greek—becomes *ena zondanó mnimeío tou Ellinismoú*, a ‘living monument of Hellenism.’

When ‘Greeks Meet Griko’: Greek Aficionados of Griko and Cultural Associations⁵

The Griko- and Greko-speaking enclaves of Southern Italy quickly became an object of interest to Greek philologists. But knowledge of these linguistic islands began to go beyond merely the scholarly field in the 1960s, mainly through publications by the philologist Angela Merianou,⁶ which presented an idealized image of the topic. The existence of the *Ellinófona choriá tis kato Italías* (Hellenophone Villages of Southern Italy) kept diffusing, and reached the Greek public at large through a series of documentaries called *I géfires tou Ioníou* (The Bridges of the Ionian Sea), aired in the early 1970s on State television, and through the 1983 release of a CD entitled *I Ellinikí musikí parádosi tis Kato Italías* (The Greek Musical Tradition of Southern Italy) by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation.⁷

When I set off for Greece to do fieldwork, my plan was to focus on cultural associations as a means of exploring what motivated their members to engage with Griko; in other words, to ‘explain to myself’ their fascination with this language, with the *mistikó* (secret) of Griko, as Vasilis from Ioannina put it. Through my fieldwork in Grecia Salentina, I had already identified the associations that regularly collaborate with associations in Grecia Salentina.⁸ They were established between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, and some are still active to different degrees. As they are located in various parts of Greece, I traveled to meet their leaders and

members, had lengthy conversations with them, and participated in and observed the activities they promoted. The history of their establishment follows a common pattern; in most cases, it followed an independent trip to Grecia Salentina by an individual or small group of people who took the case of Griko to heart and became eager to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the language, as well as of local traditions and customs. The range of activities promoted is typical of cultural associations. They include *ekdromés*, short trips to Grecia Salentina through which Greek participants familiarize themselves with the place and its traditions. There are also exchange programs for people from Grecia Salentina to spend time in Greece, and these are organized to the same effect. Finally, cultural and social events, ranging from music and theater performances to literary contests, are organized on both shores.

Once in the field, however, I had inevitably broadened the scope of my investigation, since the initiatives taken in support of Griko at the popular level led me to meet a variety of social actors who engage with the cause of Griko through a panoply of activities, activities that are not necessarily linked to an association. In what follows, I introduce you to some of them in order to highlight the variety of individuals and/or groups of people who show a genuine affection towards Grecia Salentina and to its people, to whom they feel connected (*deméni*). These individuals and groups are an integral part of my ethnography. Among them, Kostas, a painter who grew to like Salentine music so much that he established a musical band called Encardía, made up of Greek musicians who sing and play (and write) songs in Griko. And there is Christos, a teacher who has compiled a small textbook in Griko and teaches it to schoolchildren in the Corinth area. I met both of them in Greece and subsequently in Italy. While living in Athens, I regularly spent time with Yannis, a psychiatrist who has so far completed two art-therapy programs involving special needs schoolchildren from Grecia Salentina. Thanks to him, the municipality of Ilion (Athens) and that of Corigliano d'Otranto are now twinned. In Athens and Grecia Salentina, I also met Alessandro, an Italian national of Greek descent, a screenwriter who has directed documentaries in Calabria and is planning one in Salento. Likewise, I traveled to Thessaloniki to interview Dimitris, a lawyer specializing in human rights who was involved in a project with the University of Macedonia,⁹ which resulted in the 1997 publication of a book entitled *Greek-speaking Contemporary Poetry in Southern Italy* that is written in both MG and Italian. In Athens I also met Michalis, who helped finance the publication of a book in Griko (Lambropoulou 1997; Tondi 2008).

Methodology

In presenting this picture of Griko drawn by my Greek interlocutors and aficionados of Griko, I build on the ethnography I carried out in Greece as part of my doctoral studies, and during my subsequent stays in Athens and on the island of Ikaria. However, observations deriving from my

encounters with Greeks visiting Grecìa Salentina, and from Greek–Griko encounters on both shores are equally part of the data from which I draw my analysis. For instance, I also met Niko in Grecìa Salentina on various occasions; only one year earlier he had organized an *ekdromì*—a trip to Grecìa Salentina—and had contacted the cultural association Chora-Ma of Sternatia. The collaborations between Greek and Griko cultural associations, which had begun to intensify in the 1990s, continued to strengthen. We saw in the previous chapters how the teaching of MG provided by the Greek Ministry of Education since 1994 had played a role in the local languagescape.

I was therefore drawn to carry out fieldwork in Greece, as I wanted to follow the network of cultural collaborations with and ties to Greece, and to better understand the effects of both the institutional and popular measures being undertaken in support of Griko. I was particularly attentive to local discourses/metadiscourses about Griko and Grecìa Salentina, as I planned to assess how they contribute to the reproduction and circulation in Grecìa Salentina of a language ideology that highlights the Hellenic cultural heritage and celebrates Griko as a ‘living monument of Hellenism’ (MG: *ena zondanó mnimeío tou Ellinismoú*). In Greece, I soon realized that the very fact that I come ‘from over there’ granted me a very warm welcome; it was not a total surprise and I cannot deny that it was wonderful to be so warmly embraced, although at times this caused me some embarrassment. More than anything, I felt puzzled by it. What is their gaze on Grecìa Salentina, Griko, and its speakers? The more I listened to my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko talking about this topic, the more I heard them talking about themselves: Griko emerged from their narratives as a “spiritual extension of Greece” (Triandaphyllídis 1952, cited in Stewart 2006:74), as it were.

In order to contextualize my ethnography and findings, as usual I need to begin in the past—in this case the past of Greece—to trace the dominant Greek State’s attitude towards Greekness/Hellenism within and outside its own borders. What strikes me about the case of Griko and of its speakers is that it represents a case of “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966:39) with respect to the historical categories of *chaméni patrída* (lost homeland) and of *omogéneia* (roughly translated as ‘people of the same descent’) that the Greek State developed soon after its inception. Although inapplicable to the case of Griko (and Greko), the rootedness of these categories has guided the Greek State in the policy it has implemented in Grecìa Salentina (and also Calabria), namely, the teaching of MG.¹⁰ Likewise my ethnographic exploration of Greek popular perceptions of Griko offers an interesting avenue to assess how the inscribed ‘cultural ideology of Hellenism’ and its historical continuity has been internalized by my Greek interlocutors, and how their views of Griko are filtered through it.

Linguistic Kinship

Language, as the tenet of nationalism and of many nation-state building processes in Europe, was soon elevated to be the purest trait of the national identity; yet ‘Greek’ was not the language of all Orthodox Christians, and for that reason it was also the most vulnerable tenet of the Greek national project. In Athens alone, half of the people spoke Albanian at the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 (Herzfeld 1997). In the newborn Greece, Slavic, Albanian, and a variety of local Greek dialects were spoken, while varieties such as those spoken in Cappadocia, Epirus, Crete, and Pontus, were barely mutually intelligible (Stewart 2006). Particularly telling is the case of Solomos from Zakynthos, whose language of education was Italian, and who wrote a ‘Hymn to Liberty’ (1823), which subsequently became the Greek national anthem.¹¹ In Italy the languagescape was equally internally heterogeneous, with only two percent of Italians speaking the national language at the time of the Unification of Italy in 1861. Indeed, although modern nation-states are usually depicted as the natural repository of national languages—the expression of the spirit of the people, as it were—in many nation-state building processes in Europe language has been the very means through which a sense of community was created and reinforced (see Anderson 1991, among others). Greece likewise required a national Greek standard, and in response to philhellenic ideals, *katharévousa* was crafted, a language that adopted the morphology of ancient Greek; once this was ‘purified’ of all foreign loanwords (including from Turkish, Italian, Slavic, and Albanian), it could then be considered “the quintessential index of Greek continuity” (Calotychos 2008:237)—and thus the very means by which to ‘re-Hellenize’ the Orthodox peasant populations under Ottoman rule, including the Turkish-speaking Greeks (Horrocks 1997; Clogg 2002). The vernacular *dimotikí*,¹² which had meanwhile become associated with low-status domains in a classic example of diglossia, became the national language only after the restoration of democracy in 1974.

[[INSERT FIGURE 28]]

When I met Niko in Ioannina in 2009, he proudly showed me the brochure of a recent trip his cultural association had organized, called ‘We are Crazy about Grecia Salentina’ (see Figure 28). The trip allowed for a few stops in the best-known towns and villages of the area, such as Sternatia and Calimera, but it also included Otranto, Gallipoli, and Taranto. I had met Niko in Sternatia in June of that year, when he organized a cultural exchange and invited the theatrical company of Ioannina to perform in MG in the village square. After the performance, we all went to eat at the local taverna, Mocambo, a focal point of Griko/Greek encounters; run by the late Vito, it was a gathering place for Greek tourists and visitors with whom Niko met regularly. Over dinner, Niko told me again about his fascination with Griko: “I like discovering words and

expressions in Griko, I like searching for their origins.” His friend and a fellow association member, who was sitting next to him, promptly remarked about the similarities in pronunciation between certain sounds in both Griko and Cretan—the sound /k/ is pronounced /tʃ/ in both—and how it reminded him of his own mother. Here, the very sounds of the language became the focus of attention; they connected this Greek aficionado of Griko with his own memories and a sense of nostalgia about his past, as he went on recalling his mother throughout the conversation. The sounds of Griko provoke different comments, at times more vague; for instance, I have repeatedly heard my Greek friends commenting that Griko is ‘such a sweet language; it is music to my ears.’ At times, simply hearing words that are no longer used in MG elicits emotional reactions among Greek aficionados of Griko. One such example is the Griko verb *polemò* (to work), which retains this meaning in some local variants of Greek¹³—although nowadays it is largely used in MG to indicate ‘to fight’ or ‘to battle.’ The very hybridity of Griko—meaning the presence of borrowings or adaptations from Salentine or Italian—may acquire an attractive aura; the alternation of words with Greek origins and words with Latin origins represents “the known among the unknown—this is Griko,” as Vangelis, member of the band Encardia, put it to express his fascination with the language.

During my encounters with members of the association Amici della Grecia Salentina, from Ioannina, what struck me repeatedly was the absolute command they showed in dealing with philological matters. Most would reference linguistic details and the presence of archaisms in Griko—elements from the Doric Greek of classical times; for instance, the retention in Griko of the infinitive after verbs of volition, seeing, and hearing, whereas the infinitive is no longer present in MG:¹⁴

The following archaisms are the ones most often cited:

English	Griko	Modern Greek
now	<i>Arte(na)</i>	<i>tora</i>
yes	<i>umme</i> (<συν μέν)	<i>Nai</i>
no	<i>denghe</i> (<ουδέγγε)	<i>Oxi</i>

The members of the Ioannina association are particularly fascinated by the language’s archaic flavor, and this can lead at times to misunderstandings when Griko speakers who attend MG classes insert Modern Greek words ‘to facilitate communication’ and are chastised for doing so,

being told something to the effect that MG corrupts the very nature of Griko. Griko very often sparks etymological discussions among Greek aficionados of Griko, who venture etymological explanations, acting as verbal archeologists.¹⁵ For instance, they often refer to *spiri* (little)—used in the variants of Zollino and Martignano and deriving from *spòros* (seed)—and *armàzo* (MG: *pandrèvomai*, which means ‘to get married’ and derives from *armègo*, ‘to milk’). Their constant attempts to trace etymology shows how the centrality of philology is in fact by no means restricted to the academic world, as Greece is a country where people often engage in passionate disputes over etymology (Herzfeld 1997:352; see also Calotychos 2008).

Greek aficionados’ overall metalinguistic comments about Griko appear simultaneously as metacomments about the Greek ‘language question.’ They ultimately show the legacy of the role that language played in the process of nation-building—alongside religion and Greek consciousness—and the role attributed to Greek in the *expression* of a national identity. The average age of Greek tourists who participate in *ekdromes* to Grecia Salentina is between fifty and seventy; most were therefore taught *katharévousa*; their emotional attachment to Griko and the very way in which they experience it therefore shows the legacy of Greek “political philology” (Herzfeld 1997:74–88). Greek aficionados of Griko embody this legacy, and it informs the ways in which they engage with the language. Indeed, language was considered to be something tangible in the history of Hellenism; since it could be traced back to the form it had acquired in antiquity, the origin of the nation could, it was reasoned, likewise be found in the remote past. *I glossa ine patrída*—“the language is the nation”—as Fotinì put it. Their reference to Griko as a ‘living monument of Hellenism’ further indicates the internalization and embodiment of this language ideology.

Griko is obviously not ancient Greek; this is clear to the ears of my Greek interlocutors, and to aficionados of Griko. Moreover, Griko and MG are not mutually intelligible—at least not easily. Many among the Greek aficionados of Griko state that they understand Griko fairly or very well, but cannot speak it (some of them are learning it). However, Greek speakers can pick up its archaic features, and if they make an effort to overcome pronunciation differences, may retrieve the meaning of simple sentences.¹⁶ Those with even a rudimentary knowledge of Italian clearly have an easier time of it. However, they tend to choose the archaizing forms of Griko selectively as evidence of the link to the past, of that longed for continuity of Hellenism from antiquity to the present day. In these instances we see at play the legacy not only of the discipline of philology but also of archaeology and their complicity, since the latter provides background knowledge for the philological study of antiquity (Calotychos 2008; Herzfeld 1986). Not incidentally, my Greek friends and aficionados consider Griko as an ‘archaeological’ artifact, like the Akropolis of Southern Italy, as some argue. Indeed, as Eleana Yalouri (2008) has noted, monumentality is a quality that transcends material, physical, or visible structured space. Interestingly, the Greek

word for monument, *mnimío*, derives etymologically from the word for memory, *mními*. The ‘monumentality’ of Griko is, however, something alive; this is why the reference to Griko as a ‘living monument of Hellenism’ acquires further significance as a living memory of historical continuity, as a living reminder of antiquity, as it were.

As the following vignette shows, it is particularly when discussing the topic of the history of Grecia Salentina that my Greek aficionados of Griko evidenced the pervasiveness of the notion of historical continuity, as well as the ability to incorporate apparently contradictory data into a coherent timeline.

Intimate Historicities

Southern Italy was outside of that particular chapter of Greek history. Its people were not living in a ‘lost homeland’ (*chaméni patrída*) belonging to the Ottoman Empire, nor did they belong to the Greek merchant or elite diaspora (or to a distant non-Eastern Mediterranean diaspora). In other words, these linguistic enclaves in Southern Italy were not on the political or ideological map of the emergent Greek nation-state. By the same token, on the other shore, Griko speakers did not see themselves as a people whose motherland had just been liberated. The story of Griko I am recounting in this book in fact began in the late nineteenth century, when relations between Greece and Grecia Salentina resumed thanks to the activity of intellectuals/folklorists from both shores. It started with the ‘first language ideological revival’ of Griko, promoted by the philhellenic circle of Calimera, although—as we saw in Chapter 1—its intellectualist efforts to link Griko to Hellenism failed to reach Griko speakers at large: they could not identify with that discourse because their lived reality of the language linked them to a different past and to local dynamics.

I knew how to get to Fotinì’s place; by coincidence, she lives in the same *politikìà* as my friends Vaso and Panayotis—actually on the same floor. When I entered, the layout of the flat seemed different, possibly because Fotinì’s place was almost literally overrun with books. She is a tiny lady with sparkling eyes, delicate and self-confident, a retired teacher of Ancient Greek and a writer. It was the middle of a windy October afternoon; it was the right time and I was in the right mood for the hot cup of tea that Fotinì immediately offered me. We started talking about her first book about Salento, *I Elláda tou Saléntou* (Salentine Greece¹⁷), which had just been published; it was an impressive historical, philological, and artistic exploration of the topic, the result of over a decade’s research. We had met in Grecia Salentina, in the village of Zollino that was my home until my early twenties, while she was there looking for a local editor to translate it into Italian. Fotinì stressed how her book was the first to deal with topics other than the origins of Griko—a subject that had long attracted scholarly interest in Greece. She has meanwhile published two additional books, the third being a diary of her trips to Grecia Salentina over the years, during

which she diligently made notes of her impressions and conversations with the various *cultori del griko*, local intellectuals such as Prof. Sicuro from Martano, whom you met in Chapter 3.

Fotinì started the conversation by referring to the Messapians—the autochthonous population of Salento—and wished for more studies to be conducted on the Messapian language in order to prove that they were ‘Greeks.’ “Once this is established, the origins of Griko speakers will be resolved once and for all,” she argued, since if the Messapians were Cretans, Griko speakers would come from a Greek population that had settled before the eighth century BCE, when the colonization of Magna Graecia began; they would be the heirs of the Minoan civilization, which flourished from 2700 to 1450 BCE. Fotinì was not the only one among my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko to exhibit such knowledge of and confidence about the topic. They repeatedly referred to Herodotus, who attested that the Messapians descended from Cretans who had been driven ashore there on their voyage homewards from Sicily, to which they had traveled to avenge the death of Minos. They were equally well informed about the Magna Graecia theory and quoted linguists as evidence for the argument of a continuous link between Griko and Ancient Greek; and they often offered comments about the perceived closeness to Homer’s language. Indeed, I was often told, ‘You have kept this language for four thousand years! You need to be proud of that!’ What struck me time and time again was their practice of linking Griko to the most distant past possible; this shows the powerful role that the very length of the history plays for Modern Greeks at large (Stewart 2008, 2012)—and how historical awareness and reference play an exceptionally developed role in the expression of Greek personal style and national identity. Through its social significance, history becomes a treasure to be safeguarded at all costs (see also Yalouri 2001).

Fotinì soon got into the details of the debate about the Magna Graecia versus the Byzantine hypothesis of the origins of Griko; she pointed out that she had reported all such references in her own book, including those of Greek linguists such as Katsidaki, Karatzà, Kapsomeno, and Karanastasis, who argued for the Magna Graecia thesis and opposed the Byzantine thesis about the origins of Griko and Calabrian Greek supported by Italian linguists. She continued, “Rohlf’s and Greek scholars believe you come from the Ancient Greeks, and this is what I think too. You have things which we lost in MG and that you are maintaining instead”—“*O Rohlf’s kai oi Éllines oli pistevoun oti iste apò tous archèous Éllines kai egò nomìzo auto, èchete pràgmata pou sta Ellinikà chàthikan kai èchoun meìnei se sas.*” Among the archaic features that Griko managed to keep or maintain and that MG ‘lost,’ she gave me a few examples of the use of the infinitive, such as “*pi, fai.*” As for the origins of Griko, she confidently stated, “I disagree with Italian linguists who have not understood it yet; it is clear that the basis of Griko is ancient Greek.” Fotinì then provided me with examples of the practice of adding the Greek ending to verbs from Salentine

or Italian, such as *pensare* (to think), which in Griko becomes *pens-èo*: “This is why I believe you come from the Ancient Greeks,” she concluded.

Once again we see the centrality of philology as a discursive practice inherited from the past that makes sense of the present. When I mentioned the Byzantine hypothesis of the origins of Griko, her reply was equally reassuring: “The basis of Griko is ancient Greek; of course, during and after the Byzantine period, more people arrived; it is simply a layered language”—she clarified. Fotinì is genuinely sure about the impossibility that there could be another explanation for the current linguistic reality, and confidently bases her arguments on ‘linguistic proof’; for example, she repeatedly cited Rohlfs and Karanastasis to this end. Yet her very choice of verbs such as ‘believe,’ ‘think,’ ‘agree’ (*pistéo, nomizo, sinfonò*) seem to indicate again how the linguistic data are ‘interpreted’ according to the underlying language ideology. In the name of proof, what Fotinì expressed is the state of her feelings and opinions about language origin and use. The debate about the origins of Griko in this way becomes a metalinguistic practice through which Fotinì expresses her own language ideologies, those culturally mediated lenses that are also generated and generate a cultural relationship with the past, with a specific historicity: in this case, that long past to which Hellenism is linked.

Greek aficionados of Griko more broadly tend in fact to be ‘enthusiastic consumers’—to borrow the words of historian Dimitris Plantzos (2008:11)—of a culturally inscribed language ideology and ideology of historical continuity, and also influential mediators and reproducers thereof. They reproduce and project onto Griko this specific historicity, this cultural relationship with the past; they do so through what Silverstein and Urban define ‘metadiscursive entextualization’—where a ‘text’ is intended as a metadiscursive construct through which participants in a culture create an image of a durable and shared culture (1996: 2–11). In the case at hand, through the insertion of ‘texts’ of cultural Hellenism into a chosen self-reflexive discursive practice, Greek aficionados of Griko indicate the preferred modality of reading them, ‘reproducing’ a seemingly shareable and transmittable culture.

We have seen, however, that when and whence the first Greek settlers arrived in the area has never been established with certainty. Grecia Salentina lacks that coherent, homogeneous, and linear timeline constructed for Greek history; the lack of any conclusive historical or linguistic data, in this case, seems to offer my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko the opportunity to render Grecia Salentina a space for the collective imagination of the Greek spirit. By dating the origins of Griko speakers as far back as possible, my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko act as “historical constructivists” (Faubion 1993:xix) of the history of Griko and its speakers; by reproducing the practice of historical constructivism, which rendered Greek history a cultural behavior, they simultaneously reinforce their own legacy onto the past.

These intimate historicities, this shared cultural perception of the past and relationship with it, engenders among my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko a set of comparisons through which the Hellenism of Southern Italy is actively pursued and common cultural traits are highlighted.

In Search of Commonalities

The first time I met Fotinì, two of her friends—two teachers—had joined her on her trip to Grecia Salentina. We all met at the headquarters of the Italo-Hellenic [Cultural] Association in Zollino to talk to Pompeo, who was the president of the association at the time. As we were waiting for him by the entrance to the Maniglio library on the ground floor of Palazzo Raho—the early-twentieth century building that hosts the association—Fotinì and her friends started commenting on the beauty of La Chiesa di San Pietro e Paolo, the church opposite the library that is dominated by its bell tower; they then went on to recount their experience of the place and the people in very complimentary ways. Fotinì emphatically said, “It’s like being in Greece. For the English it is something different, for us it is something common; it feels it very common to me, I love it, as if I were somewhere else in Greece. And the people are hospitable, warm, beautiful. They feel like brothers.” One of Fotinì’s friends echoed her remarks.

The search for commonalities, as well as the expectation to find similar traits in Grecia Salentina, were indeed the driving force for many of the cultural visits. From my Greek friends’ accounts, there kept emerging strong references to ‘resemblance’ and at times ‘sameness,’ and those accounts also incorporated affinities between the landscapes: for Yiorgos, the place “resembles the area of Mani a lot: it is a piece of Greece in a wild place”—“*ena kómáti Ellinikó se ena ágrio topo*”; for Yannis, “the land, the olive trees, the types of agriculture are identical in the Peloponnese and in Crete. You feel you are in a common place.” The affinities between traditional music, dances, and architecture on the two shores are likewise emphasized and at times inflated. “Your songs in Griko resemble Greek poetry,” the mayor of the municipality of Ilion (Athens) told me, while Michalis noticed with excitement that, “Your traditional songs for the New Year (*strine*) are just like our *kalanda*!” By the same token, people link the origin of pizzica and tarantella to Dionysian celebrations with a peculiar certainty, and they compare the polyphonic singing of the Salentine music to Greek singing.

At times this mode of identification goes so far as to resemble what Herzfeld labeled ‘cultural intimacy’, “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 1997:3). “There is a blood bond between us. I say it because your mentality is clearly Greek. The characteristic of our race [*sic*] is that we are always against each other, ever since the war between Sparta and Athens,” says Ilias. Vasilía echoes him, “I noticed that here

everyone talked about himself. That's how we are. We have the same qualities and the same shortcomings." Michalis adds,

Greeks are not descendants of ancient Greeks; our ancestors were Bulgarian, Slav, Turkish, etc.; certainly these populations were here, but the point is: Did they change us, or did we change them? Or did we become blended (*anakateftíkame*)? In Italy you had the Normans, the Gauls, and others, you did not have the Turks; so we had completely different influences, but we speak *one language* and even today we can understand each other. (emphasis in original)

The process of highlighting similarities leads my Greek interlocutors not only to justify the inconsistencies of the case of Griko but also to offer them the possibility for self-negotiation: "We may have accepted some influences, but our basic philosophy and behavior as a people, our language, our culture, and tradition have remained the same," as Yannis from Athens put it in one of our conversations. To share these 'intimate' comments in front of Griko speakers or people from Grecia Salentina therefore shows how the latter are considered insiders and incorporated into this common sociality. What we ultimately see at play is a semiotic process called iconization—a concept introduced by Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine to describe the essentializing process through which a linguistic system is viewed as an image of the essence of a social group (Gal and Irvine 1995, 2000). They argue that iconization

involves a transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features, or varieties and the social images with which they are linked. Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them ... This process entails the attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection (between linguistic features and social groups) that may be only historical, contingent or conventional.¹⁸

Irvine and Gal 1995:973

Through the semiotic process of iconization, the 'deep' linguistic kinship between Griko and Greek is projected iconically onto their speakers, their people; Griko becomes an 'icon,' and its characteristics—through the convenient erasure of any inconsistencies—are seen as a reflection of the essential characteristics of its users. In this way, Grecia Salentina is viewed as 'a sacred land,' 'a cradle of culture' (*choma ieró; kitída politismouí*), and its people are largely described as 'beautiful, good, expressive, friendly, cheerful, hospitable, and warm' (*oréi, kaloí, ekfrastikoí, katadektikoí, gelastoí, filóksenoi kai zestoí*).¹⁹

This becomes yet more evident when the Hellenism of Southern Italy is elevated even over the Hellenism of Modern Greece, and when the metadiscursive adulation resembles idealization. "There people still sit at the doorsteps of their houses and talk; they still live that way. In Greece,

we have stopped doing that,” Panaiotis said. “This is Hellenism. If only we Greeks had kept this Hellenism”—“*Autó einai o Ellinismós. Makari na kratàgame auto ton Ellinismó emeis oi Éllines*”—Kostas concluded. These comments were part of broader reflexive critiques of the modern lifestyle, which ‘corrupts’ and ‘pollutes’ the ideal image of Hellenism. Ilias explained it as follows: “Greece was a peasant society. Then the conditions changed and people changed with them. Over there [Grecia Salentina] people still hang on to their traditions; we are losing them here.” To use the words of Kostas from the Encardia musical group, “Greeks are nostalgic for Salentine Hellenism.” The image of people sitting in front of their houses therefore becomes a ‘sign,’ or an ‘icon,’ that Hellenism has been preserved regardless of the imprint of modern times.

Drawing from Johannes Fabian (1983), it would seem that in these instances Greek aficionados of Griko treat today’s Griko speakers as temporally distanced groups. Fabian developed the notion of the ‘denial of coevalness’ to refer to the “persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (Fabian 1983:31). Greek aficionados of Griko equally tend to eclipse the contemporaneity of their Griko interlocutors and friends, in so doing creating an allochronic discourse about them.²⁰ They define Griko as a language ‘frozen in time’ or ‘as if it was put in a freezer,’ as Nikolas expresses it. This perceived or real characteristic of the language is iconically projected onto its speakers; the recurrent sentence, “You have been Greek since ancient times” (*Íste Éllines apó tin archeótita*) captures this. Griko and Griko speakers, however, do not become ‘other’ but exactly what they are romantically expected to be: the living proof of the continuity with the past, the “living monument of Hellenism.”

Griko is this way turned into a form of ‘survival,’ in accordance with what Herzfeld (1986:102–105) has defined as the Greek version of survivalism; this was theorized by the father of Greek folklore studies, Nikolaos Politis, who selectively drew on Tylor’s theory of survivals, reading it not “as a theory of societal progressions which encompassed the fossils of a primitive stage but as a static doctrine of cultural continuity” (Herzfeld 1986:103). Politis could not consider survivals as relics of a primitive past, as this would go against the Hellenist argument of the superiority of Ancient Greeks; survivals were not considered atavistic traits that needed removal, but were ‘upgraded’ to represent a “partial but unbroken continuation of an earlier life” (Politis 1909:6, cited in Herzfeld 1986:104).

Exploring Greek popular views on Griko brought to light specific ways in which the cultural ideology of Hellenism has been internalized: Greece’s gaze on Griko, as it were, is shaped by and filtered through a historically produced lens. This lens refracts the relation that Greeks by and large have with their own past and national identity. What I am arguing is that the romanticized character of the metadiscourse of Greek aficionados of Griko emerges out of dynamics inherent in their own romantic imagination. As in a mirror game of reflections, this could be defined as a

two-step iconization process where the picture drawn by Greek aficionados of Griko appears as a self-portrait, an image of the historically produced and iconized 'Greek self'; this is then projected onto Griko and Griko speakers, rendering Griko an icon within an icon. What I am arguing is that the view from *apénandi* ultimately reveals Modern Greeks' own language ideology and ideology of history/historical continuity. Through it, Grecia Salentina and Griko speakers become a "spatial projection of their cultural imaginary" (Calotychos 2008:158): an imagined community (Anderson 1983).

Cultural Synthesis and Erasure

The case of Griko seems also to offer my Greek aficionados of Griko the possibility for 'synthesis' to work at its very best, allowing for continuity not only to be preserved, but reinforced. Even the tension over the Byzantine period, which proved most difficult to incorporate into the narrative of historical continuity, is released when dealing with 'Griko history.' Herzfeld (1987) developed the notion of 'disemia' to refer both to the polarity between the two models of Greek identity, the 'Hellenic' and 'Romaic,' deriving from the Classical and Byzantine-Ottoman models, respectively, and to the battle between the official cultural form and more intimate social knowledge. For the history of Griko, the Byzantine period therefore does not represent the anxiety over self-definition between these two available repertoires of identity.

You have here all these beautiful Byzantine crypts. Byzantium played a huge role in Greek history and in the history of Europe. And what was Byzantium? Italian. Yes. Byzantine dictators were 'Romii,' they were Italians. During the Byzantine period Greeks called themselves Romii, did you know that?

Michalis gives 'Romii' a 'modern' sense of ethnicity, which fluctuates between Greek and Italian or conflates them. "You know that it was through Byzantine scholars that Italian humanism developed? They transcribed everything coming from Greece. This is important," he concluded. His words effectively situate Byzantium as a medieval phase of Hellenic history by retracing the pathway of historiography. For my Greek aficionados of Griko, the praxis of synthesis—historical, linguistic, and cultural more broadly—was indeed also a way to overcome the apparent 'contradictions' and 'anomalies' of Griko. If religion represented the biggest stumbling block, as it were—as Griko-speakers are Catholic—Kostas, the president of the Corinth Apollonian Academy finds a reassuring narrative: "The Greek-Orthodox church existed there until recently if you think about it, until not many centuries ago. I heard that the last Orthodox priest was killed in 1750." As we have seen, Orthodoxy together with common descent is a pivotal defining character of Hellenism; the lack of this trait in the case of Griko is an 'anomaly,' which cannot be ignored but which can be 'explained away,' as Kostas does.

In reality the schism between the Orthodox Eastern and Latin Western Churches occurred in 1054, although Griko speakers kept worshipping in Greek and following the Byzantine rite until the end of the seventeenth century; yet since the schism, they were Catholics, responding to Rome. Certainly locals retain no memory of Byzantine rites and feel no anxiety about their religiosity. In Calabria, Stavroula Pipyrou (2016) argues, proselytizing on the part of the Patriarch of Constantinople has a long history and a few locals have converted to Orthodoxy (see also Petropoulou 1997:243). In the Calabrian case, equally interesting is Catholics' adherence to the Byzantine rite rather than to Orthodoxy—which they define as the expression of a spiritual need rather than a religious statement, as it were (Squillaci, M. Olimpia, personal communication). Yet Kostas mentioned that he had put forward a proposal to build an Orthodox church in Salento “not to reintroduce the Orthodox liturgy,” he clarified, “but so that people can find there not only your Byzantine crypts and churches, but also an Orthodox *naò* (church). It did not happen though,” he concluded with disappointment. When I pointed out to Kostas that Griko speakers do not feel any sense of belonging to Orthodoxy, he noted that, “It might be that they cannot say it freely.” The fact that he dismissed my point reflects his own anxiety over the religious conundrum, and his attempt to square the inconsistencies of the Griko case. It ultimately suggests a sort of ‘misrecognition’ (Bourdieu 1977) of the Griko-speaking community, a sort of denial of its lack of ‘Greek consciousness.’ This is a semiotic process technically defined as erasure, which entails ignoring details that are inconsistent with a given ideology, or downgrading differences to make them either irrelevant or ideologically justified (Gal and Irvine 1995). Selective erasure—downgrading differences—and highlighting similarities to reach identification ultimately leads my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko to a ‘romantic iconization’ of Grecia Salentina and its people.

Aficionados of Griko as Ideology Brokers

The sense of commitment towards Griko that Greek aficionados of the language have shown over the years has led them to act on behalf of Griko speakers through two main modalities: by pursuing the involvement of the mass media to give visibility to the cause of Griko, and by involving Greek politicians and the State generally. They have contributed to this awareness-raising process by producing CDs of Salentine music, by hosting music events, by publishing accounts of their trips to Grecia Salentina in the associations' journals, and/or by airing interviews with Griko speakers. For instance, Kostas proudly remarked on the contribution of his cultural association, which had produced a CD of Salentine music in the 1990s, with pictures and information in Greek about the area of Grecia Salentina. He stressed that one of their biggest achievements was to involve the mass media in order to sensitize the Greek public to the topic of Griko: “We played our role and journalists played theirs, you know? They described the area with very nice words. We used the media, newspapers, TV, in order to give resonance to this

place.” Equally proudly, Kostas then referred to then-President of the Hellenic Republic Stefanopoulos’s 2002 visit to Grecia Salentina, which occurred also thanks to the involvement of the Corinth Apollonian Academy:

I had gone to talk to him, I brought him books and a dictionary and I told him that we needed a favor. And he asked me, ‘What do you do over there? Do you live there?’ I replied, ‘No, but we love the place so much that we would move if there was need.’ So he asked me what help they needed. And I thought to myself ‘That’s it. We got the State (*piásame to kratos*)!’ When the president went to the Greek-speaking villages, he just went crazy (*treláthike*) and then asked me, ‘What was that? How beautiful! I did not know that there was so much Greece there.’ He became emotional (*sigginíthike*).

Likewise, Kostantinos, an active member of the Organization for the Internationalization of the Greek Language (ODEG), proudly mentioned the journal *Greek, International Language* that they publish and distribute in seventy-four countries, pointing out that various issues displayed articles dedicated to Grecia Salentina and Calabria. He also told me that ODEG was preparing a presentation for the office of *Apódimos Ellinismós* in order for the Greek-speaking communities of Southern Italy to get its support.²¹ “We are trying to give prominence to this topic (*anadíksume aftó to thema*) because if the members of the parliament decide that this is interesting, they can give directives to the Ministry of Education.”

Following Blommaert (1999:9), aficionados of Griko could therefore be defined as “ideology brokers”, that is “the category of actors, who for reasons we set up to investigate, can claim authority in the field of debate (politicians and policy-makers, interest groups, academicians, policy implementers, the organized polity and individual citizens).” By organizing trips to Grecia Salentina, as well as cultural activities, they ‘introduce’ Greek people to the topic of Griko, sharing their own knowledge, as it were. These *ekdromés* effectively helped to spread the knowledge about the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy among ‘Greeks’ at large. Cultural associations therefore are an interesting ‘ideological site’ (Silverstein 1998), which shows the rootedness of the state ideology in civil society and the very role that civil society plays “as a tool of the social imagination, as a cultural construct and ideological trope” (Comaroff 1999:8).

Importantly, knowledge about the case of Griko renders Greek aficionados of Griko authoritative, and this strengthens their role as ‘mediators/brokers’ between Grecia Salentina and Greece. Kostantinos stressed that, “the Ministry would not want to show an official interest in this case; this is where the associations come in.” Kostas made a similar remark, saying, “For political reasons Greece did not want to say that there is a Greek minority there. This may be the

role we [associations] played, as we do not have the stamp of the State (*sfragída tou kratous*).” One successful example of their role as ‘ideology brokers’ is provided by the teaching of MG in Grecia Salentina; indeed, it could be argued that, by acting on behalf of Griko activists, Greek aficionados of Griko mediated the intervention of the Greek State, effectively ‘bridging the gap’.

This is not to say that cultural associations on the Italian shore do not play their own role. For the Calabrian case, Pipyrrou (2011, 2012) argues that self-awareness, victimization, and more recently, consumption, are categories of representation and articulation of difference utilized by the Calabrian Greek community over the past fifty years. At the same time, these are rhetorical tropes handled by the associations and adjusted according to the audience, be it Greek tourists or members of the Greek government. These observations can also largely be applied to the case of Griko; self-awareness became the means for the articulation of local claims (Chapter 3); consumption has indeed become dominant in the dynamics of the current revival (Chapter 4); the victimization trope is instead not rhetorically deployed, as cultural associations in Grecia Salentina do not portray Griko speakers as ‘victims.’ According to Pipyrrou, writing about the Calabrian Greek case: “(a) the conditions of living in Grecanici villages, and (b) the social status of and the discrimination against Grecanici migrants to Reggio Calabria” (Pipyrrou 2011:80) determine the politics of victimization. This highlights how the processes of language shift in the two scenarios were immersed in similar yet different dynamics. In the Calabrian case, natural disasters indeed exacerbated “the image of poverty, ruin and abandonment” (Pipyrrou 2011:80), and had led Greko speakers to migrate to Reggio Calabria, where they were excluded because of their language—and the poverty it was associated with—and were confronted with a hostile social environment. Although it would be a mistake to treat Griko- and Greko-speaking communities as discrete and bounded entities culturally differentiated from the surrounding area that has not retained the language, we have seen how Griko speakers equally suffered stigmatization for being bilingual (‘people with two tongues;’ this is, however, not rhetorically deployed by Griko activists. Moreover, Griko-speaking villages had historically and geographically been integrated into the Salentine surroundings, and they had undergone a significant socioeconomic restructuring that began in the aftermath of World War II, which continued throughout the 1960s and ’70s; this renders the victimization trope not applicable, so to speak.

Yet Griko activists and *cultori del Griko* are also responsible for creating high expectations, beyond the ‘politics of victimization.’ What prevails in the case at hand is the mobilization of the Greek people’s attachment to their own cultural ideology of Hellenism. We have seen in Chapter 3 how the Italian state’s long neglect of the communities speaking a language of Greek origins had admittedly led local Griko scholars and activists to turn their gaze to Greece for recognition. They have in the meantime successfully mastered the very ‘language of Hellenism’ and of

common cultural heritage—a ‘professional’ lexicon, as Pipyrrou (2016) put it for Calabria—and also capitalize on it, aware of the warm reception given it by Greek visitors. The intimate historicity of Hellenism indeed appeals to a section of Griko scholars and Griko activists who likewise act as ideology brokers locally. Following and building on the legacy of local philhellenists, they entertain regular contact with the other shore and with Greek aficionados of Griko, sharing with them the ‘intimate historicity’ that connects Griko to the Hellenic past and constitutes a reason for discursive pride. This cultural but also affective relationship with *that* past (see also Knight 2015) turns Greece into a ‘cultural motherland’ (as Luigi from Calimera remarked), while not implying or advancing any claim of ethnic belonging. Meanwhile, Greek aficionados of Griko who have taken on the task of helping their ‘forgotten brothers’ and interceding on their behalf filter their gaze through the historical category of *omogéneia*; this complex intermingling of partially shared and yet differently articulated claims leads at times to confusion on both ends. Kostas from Corinth offers an example of this:

I offered Antonio Anchora to intercede for the inclusion of the Griko-speaking community at the World Council of Hellenism and he told me, ‘We do not want to.’ So I asked, ‘Why not?’, and he replied, ‘Because we are not diasporic Greeks.’ And I said, ‘What are you then?’ and he replied: ‘We are Greeks who have always been here. We are Griki.’

Interactions such as this, that are based on different interpretations, articulations, and enactment of self-understanding and belonging, may lead to a temporary breakdown in communication, to a ‘lost in translation’ type of interaction, as it were; this is when the incommensurability of the two languagescapes emerges: indeed here Antonio’s reply shows how the sense of belonging is rooted in the place itself, forcing Kostas to be confronted again with the anomalies of Griko that had been semiotically erased.

Lost in Translation I

The expectation of finding brothers in Grecia Salentina may indeed disappoint some Greek visitors. In spring 2011, I went to join some friends at a tavern in Soletto; unexpectedly, I found the tavern packed with people because a live concert of pizzica and songs in Griko was taking place. The waiter told me that my friends were waiting for me in another pizzeria, as a group of Greek tourists had just arrived and no table was available for us at the tavern. Suddenly he asked me, “You speak Greek right?” and dragged me to meet Stavroula, a lady in her fifties, who was struggling to communicate with another waiter in a mixture of Greek and English. “Would you please see if you can help her?” When Stavroula heard me greeting her and asking her what she needed, she erupted, “Finally, finally I hear some Griko! You speak beautifully!” Flattered as I was, I had to correct her and tell her that I was speaking MG. She was happy that this allowed me

to direct her where to buy cigarettes, but she could not hide her disappointment. “Tell me, *koukla*, where are the Griko speakers?” Before I could try to answer the question, Stavroula was called away by her friend as their main course had arrived. They left, but not before asking me for a cigarette.

This sort of disappointment is also reported by Petropoulou (1995:152) and Pipyrrou (2011:78, 2012) in Calabria; there, too, Greek visitors who are not necessarily thoroughly informed, and who are also filled with expectations fueled by local activists, are left wondering why locals do not speak ‘Greek,’ as they would expect their ‘forgotten brothers’ to do. Eleni Papagaroufali (2013) likewise notes that Greek teenagers visiting Calabria as part of a European school twinning program comment that, “The Italians’ Greek was ‘poor’ ... it sounded like Chinese.” Such evaluative comments are not isolated; my friend Vaso from Athens—my adoptive mother while there and mother of my friends Aspa and Niko—also commented, “Your mum does not speak Greek well, does she?” after talking to her over the phone. Vaso’s expectation was that she would hear Greek while my mom was speaking Griko. Indeed, while Greek aficionados of Griko ‘fall in love’ with Griko antiquity insofar as they wish for its ‘authenticity’ not be ‘polluted’ by MG, Greek visitors may not share such views, or they may have different expectations.

The expectation of commensurability can likewise fail for Griko speakers who do not speak the language of Hellenism, creating a similar sense of confusion. Their encounter with the Greek of Greece produces yet another ‘lost in translation’ situation. In such instances we see the interplay of—as well as the clash between—language seen as a means of communication between people and language as a framework for representation (see also Pipyrrou 2012). This at times reveals and at times masks commensurability or incommensurability among all social actors involved.

Lost in Translation II

It was about 9 p.m., but since it was a sunny day in late June, it was still light out. After the greetings and reciprocal expressions of gratitude between the assessor for cultural affairs of the municipality of Sternatia and the representatives of the regional theatrical company of Ioannina, the performance began. The audience was composed mainly of people over the age of sixty, along with a few children. Just behind me sat two ladies in their eighties, all ears, trying to follow the story’s plot. Unable to do so because of what still is a language barrier, they had instead started to identify common words and repeat them aloud.

“*Ivò ikusa krasì*”—“I heard ‘*krasì*,” said one lady to the other; not incidentally the word for wine is the same in Griko and MG. After about a minute, the other replied, saying, “*Arte ipe glossa, ikuse?*”—“Now, she said ‘language,’ did you hear?” Not incidentally again, ‘*glossa*’ is the same in both languages. The pingpong continued; they also picked up on *astèri* (star), *na se filiso* (to kiss

you), and *mirizo* (to smell). The scene was momentarily interrupted by the noise of a small motorbike ridden by an elderly man who stopped by us and joined the conversation to summarize and say, “It is a kind of Greek that you don’t understand much. You need to listen very carefully.” “Sure, we understood many words,” one lady replied, and was censured for speaking during the performance by her daughter sitting two rows in front of us. “Maybe if they did not speak this fast,” commented the other lady, without lowering her voice. The elderly man, rather puzzled, concluded, “But if we do not understand, why did they come to perform it? I’d better go.” The ladies had reached a different conclusion: “Let’s stay and listen. At least the heat is bearable out here.”

Reviewing these reactions between the elderly Griko speakers from Sternatia—who are external to the politics of the current revival—what emerges is their search for commensurability. Whereas a section of Griko scholars and activists often resorts to ‘linguistic kinship’ as a rhetorical tool, using ‘Griko as a language of representation,’ what prevailed with the two ladies was the value of Griko as a communicative tool—indeed, the search for shared words between Griko and MG intrigued and even amused them. As we also saw in Chapter 3, Griko speakers came to realize the communicative potential of Griko through the lived encounters with Greek people. Significantly, however, the elderly Griko speakers commenting on the theatrical performance do not speak the language of Hellenism; their phenomenological references to Griko link them to a recent and local past, as we have repeatedly seen. The limits of intelligibility between Griko and MG, and their respective worlds, may however emerge at any moment, and their expectation of commensurability can also fail; indeed, we heard the elderly Griko speaker watching the performance comment that MG is “a different kind of Greek”—and if we cannot understand it, then what is the point of listening, as he crudely put it.

We see, therefore, a variety of claims put forward by different social actors and based on different references; it comes as no surprise that the result is a polyphony of expectations that may produce ‘lost in translation’ scenarios. These are, however, mitigated by the festive character of the typical Griko-Greek encounters on both shores; during them the actual interactions between Griko speakers and Greek visitors are limited, while the limits of commensurability we have just seen are balanced and overcome by the ‘recreational’ climate in which these encounters take place, where food, wine, music, and dance create an important bonding setting, and where common cultural traits are celebrated.

Equally dominant in these encounters is the atmosphere of staged monumentality of Griko in front of a Greek audience. Interestingly, in fact, Griko is not a monument that one goes to see, but to hear; indeed, it is a living monument because its speakers embody its very monumentality. We saw above how Stavroula was longing to hear Griko; likewise Vasilis told me, “When we go to Grecia Salentina we always want to hear Griko; we know that Greek visitors like to hear it, so we

ask someone to speak it to us. Many of us go there to hear the language—it is an instinct.” The following two vignettes address the theatricality with which Greek-Griko encounters tend to take place, and the dominant role played by music.

Greek-Griko encounters: The Living Monument of Hellenism ‘On Stage,’ Athens, February 2008

[[INSERT FIGURE 29]]

I took a short field trip to Athens to attend a music event focusing on ‘the music tradition of Southern Italy’; this was organized by the Greek music band Encardía, who, as hinted above, interpret the musical repertoire of Salento, but also compose new songs in Griko. Kostas is one of the founders of the band, which was established in 2003 as the result of a series of trips to Salento over the years, motivated by their interest in the local music. Once in Salento, the encounter with the Avantaggiato family from Corigliano facilitated their project. The organization of the concert derived from Encardía’s desire to host the Avantaggiato family again in Greece following the success of the previous concert. The very title of the event *I Éllines sinandoún tous Éllines* (The Greeks Meet the Greeks) is indicative, since we can see how through the semiotic process of iconization Griko speakers here become ‘Greeks’ *tout court*; as Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall (2004:380) argue, iconization represents practice through ideology.

The hall hosting the event is crowded with mostly middle-aged people. Kostas introduces the stars of the event: Giovanni and Maria, in their mid-eighties, and the couple’s son Rocco, in his early fifties, who is handed the microphone and says in Griko:

<i>Sekùndu ipe o Kosta imì erkumèsta a’ttò Salentu,</i>	As Kosta said, we come from Salento, from the
<i>a’ ttin addhi Grècia,</i>	other Greece,
<i>ìmesta i Griki ka stene so’ addho mero ti’ ttàlassa</i>	we are the Griki who live
<i>ce milùme Grika. ‘Na pramma poddhì importànte</i>	across the sea and we speak Griko. Something
<i>leme imì, ‘en itsèro pos ènna po, ene na min</i>	very important, we say,
<i>allimonìsume ti’ ttradiziùna,</i>	I don’t know how to say it,
<i>jatì o kosmo ka ichànni ti’ memoria, ichànni</i>	is never to forget our tradition, because who
<i>tikanè.</i>	loses memory,
	loses everything.

The loud clapping of hands interrupts Rocco twice. He continues:

<p><i>Àrtena ikànume 'na travùdi ka fonàzzete i ghetonìa. Milà ats' enan àntrepo ka diavènni ats' enan dromo [Modern Greek], dromo lete isì nde? ce itorì nan ghinèka sti' ffenèstra.</i></p>	<p>Now we will sing a song which is called neighborhood. It talks about a man who passes by a street— you say 'dromo', don't you?— and sees a woman by the window.</p>
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Griko from Corigliano d'Otranto

A few people sitting in the first-row pipe up, "*Paráthiro, paráthiro* (window) is the word you are looking for," suggesting to Rocco the Greek word for window as he had borrowed *fenèstra* from the Romance dialect. Again, a much moved and clearly enthusiastic audience starts clapping its hands. Kostas intervenes to translate "the two or three words which you [the audience] probably did not understand," and he then tells the audience about his frequent trips to Grecia Salentina, and refers to the previous summer spent there as the most beautiful of his entire life. He leaves the stage to Rocco, who starts singing a song in Griko, followed by a few pizzica songs in Salentine, which Greeks tend to refer to more generically as 'tarantella.' He is accompanied by his father Giovanni playing the accordion, and by the musicians of Encardía; his mother also sings and dances, although she is visibly uncomfortable, while the old man sitting next to me ecstatically keeps repeating, "*Bravo, brava*," alternating Greek and Italian.

Sternatia (Grecia Salentina), October 2008

It was Monday evening and I had just attended the MG course held at the association Chora-Ma in Sternatia; you have already met some of the locals attending the course, like Gaetano, Uccio, and Cosimino. At the end of the class, we are told by the Greek teacher, Elèni, that there is a surprise for us. Suddenly the main door opens and about eighty people enter. They are Greek people from Athens, from the municipality of Ilion. The 'elderly center' they belong to had organized a trip to Grecia Salentina.

[[INSERT FIGURE 30]]

Giorgio—a Griko teacher from Sternatia and member of Chora-Ma you have already met—had been informed of their arrival and had organized the reception. He greets the audience—who in the meantime had sat down—and in perfect MG summarizes the history of Sternatia (*i chora*) and the area of Grecia generally. He stresses that regardless of the open debate about the origin of Griko, Greek people have constantly been present in the area over the centuries. It is now Eléni's turn. She introduces herself, explaining that she is one of the five Greek philologists sent by the Greek Ministry of Education to to teach MG in local primary schools and cultural associations. Talking about her class in Sternatia, she points out that some of the attendants could

speak MG fairly well (she was clearly generous in saying this, I add). She stressed that everyone showed enormous interest not only in the language, but in Greek culture in general. At that point, every single person in the audience started clapping joyously.

After this introduction, the ‘show’ begins. Firstly Mimmo greets the audience in Griko. This is followed by a poem in Griko recited by Gaetano; then Uccio tells them some anecdotes in Griko, stressing before starting that he was going to speak “In our Greek, right?”—“*Is Grika-ma, nde?*” The attempt by the audience to follow the flow of the story is evident; some Greek tourists even intervene and ask directly for the meaning of some words. The ‘show’ becomes suddenly more interactive when Giorgio starts playing some songs in Griko. The escalation of enthusiasm goes on and reaches its climax when Giorgio starts playing, *Àndramu pai (My Husband Goes)*, a song written by Salvatore Corlianò from Calimera, which became famous in Greece thanks to its performance by Maria Farandùri. Everyone in the room is now singing the refrain of the song in unison!

What emerges from both vignettes is a ‘staged performance’ of Griko and its monumentality: Griko speakers were literally on stage on both occasions, performing the language through poems, songs, and anecdotes, whereas real interactions between Greek visitors and Griko speakers were very limited.²² As we have seen, Rocco’s attempts to create commensurability between the two languages—inserting MG words and contextualizing Griko—an effort in which the audience participated, were promptly followed by his musical performance. Likewise, after Uccio’s anecdote and Gaetano’s poem in Griko, Giorgio took the stage to perform a Griko song that was very well-known in Greece. Greeks at large in fact tend to know about Griko and the place through songs—the historical music band from Calimera, Ghetonìa, is for instance more popular in Greece than in Italy—and music groups or individual singers or musicians from Grecia Salentina are indeed often invited to play in Greece. Importantly, both vignettes demonstrate how songs in Griko, but also Salentine music more generally, are a dominant feature of these encounters. The potential breakdown in Griko-Greek communication is avoided through these performances, as music becomes the very language of communication. In these instances ‘the music speaks Griko,’ as it were, reaching and entertaining the Greek audience. Indeed, as we heard Rocco say in Chapter 4, “the music has wheels and travels,” carrying Griko alongside. While discussing encounters among Greeks and Grecanici, Pipyrou similarly notes how “through simple and clever lyrics Greeks and Grecanici found a performative space where they could communicate” (Pipyrou 2011:84). Likewise, as we have seen, pizzica songs further animate these encounters: Greek visitors are particularly attracted by this music and its dance, as it represents the ‘exotic,’ ‘the unknown among the known’—to paraphrase Vangelis, cited earlier. There is, however, also space for Greek music and dances: a typical Griko-Greek encounter does not end

without an alternation of traditional Greek and Griko music and dances, which cultivate further bonding.

These recreational moments through music and language performances dissipate the potential frustration on both sides: in both scenarios described above the Greek visitors left by-and-large enthusiastic. The Greeks had 'heard' Griko, had gotten a flavor of its speakers, and largely found their expectations met. The locals were equally satisfied: they had 'performed' to their expectations by using some MG words, showing this way their interest and reassuring the Greeks of their strong attachment to Greece. However, these Greek/Griko encounters actually hide more than they reveal. As I hope to have demonstrated, Greek visitors have largely a ready-made romantic and idealized image of Griko and its speakers; they have high expectations when visiting Grecia to find the 'living monument of Hellenism.' Local Griko scholars and activists are very aware of the enthusiasm and involvement that Greek aficionados of Griko and visitors show when they witness the use of Griko, and they utilize it too. Likewise, those Griko speakers who have come in contact with Greek visitors and aficionados of Griko are certainly flattered by the attention received after they have been long ignored and also stigmatized; they now feel appreciated as they have seldom felt before. Moreover, as opposed to the elderly Griko ladies we heard commenting on the theatrical performance, and who are foreign to the politics of the revival, Griko speakers such as Gaetano, Mimmo, and Uccio, who 'performed' for the Greek visitors, have been sensitized to Greece generally—by also attending the MG course and by meeting Greek tourists. They therefore take particular pride in meeting them, as they feel like the center of attention; this is particularly important since, for them, Griko has effectively shifted from being considered a language of backwardness to a 'language of pride'—as a meta-effect of Greek interest. To use Pipyrrou's (2011:83) words again with reference to the Calabrian Greek case, what happens in these Griko-Greek encounters is that they project their Griko essence mainly to Greek tourists. In other words they 'perform' this essence and tend to emphasize their sentimental link to Greece in front of Greek visitors, as they know this will strike the right chord. Am I suggesting that Greek/Griko encounters are a 'farce'? No, I am not. What I want to emphasize is that these encounters are not simple 'encounters with tourists' but loci of self-representation (Goffman 1956), where Griko social actors conflate the front and back stages, and blur the boundary between them, ultimately rendering redundant the dichotomy. Indeed, control over the audience's perception takes place in the back as much as in the front space; in both spaces, equally crucial is self-perception alongside managing the impression of the other; in both spaces actors may drop their pretenses, their 'masks,' as it were. 'Performing Griko' ultimately becomes an embodied cultural communication—a cultural performance as much as a performance of culture.

The past and its multiple accounts have been ever present in this book. Throughout it we have continually encountered examples of the cultural temporality of language, of the multiple relations that locals entertain with Griko through its past, and with the past through it. By engaging in this temporal dialogue through these performances, they evoke, redeem, and reenact the past, expressing in the process their moral alignments and projections. Yet, Griko meant, continues to mean, and is meant to mean different things to people of different ages, backgrounds, and ideological orientations. To elderly Griko speakers, and to the majority of those who remember Griko as a language of communication, the relevant historical touchstone remains a recent experiential past embedded in the subalternity of the Italian South. Here is at play the semiotic process of indexicality, which creates meaning through relation; Griko therefore points to that historicity, and to locality becoming indexical of them. Meanwhile, Greek aficionados of Griko, as well as some cultori del Griko and activists, advance claims to the Hellenic and/or Byzantine past, and who are influenced by the modern cultural ideology of Hellenism. The Greek aficionados of Griko, as well as some cultori del Griko and activists, evoke the similarity between Griko and MG—that is, the iconic relationship between them—and interpret it as inevitable. Indeed, in semiotic terms, iconization describes the process of creating meaning through resemblance.

Yet, as Herzfeld points out, the very notion of resemblance needs to be problematized for being potentially misleading, and this is reflected in the modern popular misuse and abuse of the term ‘icon’ itself. An iconic relationship, however persuasive, is never totally organic; it is rather created to cultivate a shared sense of thingness potentially carrying political implications (Herzfeld 2005: 93, 94). Or to use the words of Umberto Eco, cultural resemblance becomes conventional, “step by step, the more its addressee becomes acquainted with it” (1976:204–205). I have in fact shown how local dynamics have been increasingly interacting with the modern-Greek cultural ideology of Hellenism and historical continuity; this has been embedded into the construction of the Greek nation-state, and is now being recursively and retroactively applied to Griko and its speakers. Indeed, the perceived resemblance between Griko and MG and/or other ‘Greek dialects’—what I have referred to as romantic iconization—is increasingly evoked / multiplied within the space of each one encounter with symbolic landscapes, and is used to invest Griko with a more than local symbolic significance. Griko thereby transcends locality and is projected as a symbol of global Hellenism.

Griko ultimately exists in a non-homogeneous, non-synchronous present, since its very subjects do not commonly share the same phenomenological points of reference to it throughout Griko communities. “Not all people live in the same Now,” as Ernst Bloch (1977:22) points out. Griko has entered what we might call a symbolization process, though which multiple temporalities collapse and new meanings emerge and compete. An arbitrary sign functions as a symbol by creating meaning through convention, yet a symbol becomes a social force that broadens the space of what it actually ‘stands for’. It is exactly the vagueness and openness of any symbol that makes it possible to indicate what is always beyond one’s reach (Eco 1984:130). Such a surplus of meaning emerges as people start

to impute to Griko plural meanings and a variety of claims. Griko remains therefore open to evaluation and interpretation: According to which historicity is evoked and by whom, Griko functions as a symbol of a redeemed and revalued local past, or as a symbol of the distant and glorious Hellenic past (each one of these is a (cluster of) chronotopes). The complex dynamics, through which all of these semiotic terms of description simultaneously operate, contribute to the continuous shifting of the chronotopes of the re-presentation of Griko. Multiple Chronotopes xxxx what are they? The cultural temporality of language presupposes in fact a semiotic relationality of time and space, since they are not separable from one another in our living perception (Bakhtin 1981:243). According to Bakhtin, “it is common moreover for one of these chronotopes to envelope or dominate the others ... Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another” (1981:252). The multiple chronotopes associated with Griko indeed co-exist in dynamic and dialogical tension, while locals keep negotiating the meanings and values they attach to the language by reacting to and interacting with the changing historical / historiographical, socio-cultural, and economic environment—but also by proactively shaping the environment themselves.

What I witnessed and have captured in this book is this transition, and the resultant destabilization: a temporal collapse though which multiple chronotopes of re-presentation converge and transform themselves, thereby re-storying the past-present-future of Griko and this land between the seas. “Kangas o kosmo, kiaterèddhamu.”

Endnotes

- ¹ This is the list of questions: 1) When did the Ministry of Education first send teachers of Modern Greek to the Griko-speaking villages of Apulia? 2) What are the reasons that brought the Greek State to activate this program? What is its overall goal? 3) Is this policy part of the program sponsored by the Greek Ministry of Education for Greek citizens abroad (*Apódimos Ellinismós*)? If not, what legal framework defines the program? 4) What exactly does this program entail? 5) What is the general stance of the Greek Ministry of Education towards the Greek linguistic minorities of Italy (Apulia, Calabria)?
- ² Diéfhinsi Diethnón Ekpedeftikón Schéseon, Diéfhinsi Pedías Omogenón kai diapolitismikís ekpédefsis and Diapolitismikís Ekpedefsís respectively.
- ³ Some among the populations of Greek descent, such as Pontic Greeks and Greek Albanians, also presented some challenges with respect to the criteria of ‘Greekness.’ While they are Orthodox, language did not always prove to be a valid criterion. While, as Voutira (1991:313) notes, Pontians from the ex-Soviet countries “mostly speak the Pontian language, a form of Greek with many Homeric elements which can be understood with difficulty by the citizens of Greece,” ‘Greek Albanians’ may speak very poor Greek (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002:199).
- ⁴ As we saw in Chapter 4, the availability of European-funded programs (such as INTERREG) aimed at stimulating interregional cooperation are beneficial for both Grecia Salentina/Puglia and Greece. For instance, the INTERREG II program for Italy-Greece (Training in the Language of Grecia Salentina;

“*katàrtisi stin glossa tis Gretsia Salentina*”) took place in 2000 and involved the Università del Salento and three Greek universities—the University of Patras, the University of Ioannina, and the Ionian University—in “research about the cultural and linguistic identity of the Greek-speaking area of Salento.” The research provides an in-depth analysis of the linguistic, historical, and archaeological aspects of Griko-speaking villages.

- ⁵ Here I purposely draw from the title of an event in Greece at which people from Grecia Salentina were hosted, called “The Greeks meet the Greeks”—*I Éllines sinandoún tous Éllines*—to which I will return.
- ⁶ Merianou 1980, 1989. Also Prelorenzos 1978; Vranopoulos 1999.
- ⁷ In Greek, the place is generally referred to as *Ta ellinofona choriá*, literally ‘Greek-speaking villages’ (both for Apulia and Calabria). Grecia Salentina is also referred to as Salentini Ellada and Ellada tu Salentu, literally ‘Salentine Greece’ and ‘Greece of Salento’.
- ⁸ Friends of Grecia Salentina (Ioannina); the Apollonian Academy (Corinth) and ODEG, and the Organization for the Internationalization of Greek language (Athens). Their original names in Greek are: Fili tis Gretsia Salentina, Apollónia Akadimía and Organismós gia tin Diádosi tis Ellinikís Glóssas, respectively. A fundamental role was also played by associations that no longer exist, among which is the Association of Friends of Greek-speakers Based Abroad (SFEE, Sindesmos Filon Ellinofonon, Athens), founded in 1973.
- ⁹ The INTERREG II program Italy-Greece (training in the language of Grecia Salentina) 2000 involved instead the participation of three Greek universities: the University of Patras, the University of Ioannina, and the Ionian University, in addition to the University of Salento.
- ¹⁰ I remind the reader that the term *Greko* refers to the variety spoken in Calabria; I use the terms *Greko* and *Calabrian Greek* interchangeably.
- ¹¹ See Van Dyck (2009) for the role played by diasporic Greeks in the Greek ‘language question.’
- ¹² ‘Roméika’ was what ‘Greeks’ called their language until independence (see Herzfeld 1986; Liakos 2008).
- ¹³ For instance on Naxos, as Charles Stewart informed me in one of our conversations.
- ¹⁴ It persists in the Pontic dialect (Manolessou 2005:117).
- ¹⁵ For the notion of ‘verbal archeology’ see Herzfeld 1986. This points to the archaeological nature of folklore studies, he argues (1986:100).
- ¹⁶ This is not a bidirectional process, as Griko speakers do not understand Modern Greek, although they are clearly able to ‘pick up’ on those words that are identical. I will return to this point.
- ¹⁷ Fotinì translates *Grecia* into *Ellada*, seeming to ignore the accent put on *Grecia*, which serves to distinguish it from Greece as a nation-state.
- ¹⁸ In their 1995 article, they refer to this process as ‘iconicity.’ They adopt the term ‘iconization’ from 1998 onwards. Irvine subsequently specified that, “technically it should probably be called rhematization, a process through which the interpretant takes a sign to be iconic” (2004:108n6). It is interesting to note that in studies attesting to iconization, this process tends to lead to the stigmatization of the language and consequently of its speakers (see Messing 2009; Andronis 2004). The case at hand instead offers a distinctive case of iconization that leads to a romantic idealization.
- ¹⁹ I personally became the target of ‘iconization’ on various occasions; for instance, I was always complemented on my Greek, only to be told that speaking it well is normal as “the language is in me.” On another occasion, I was welcomed at Odeg by a secretary, who knew that I originally come from Grecia Salentina, and who told me, “You do not look Italian! You look Greek, actually even a bit better.” Or when I was living on Ikaria, I was approached by a man at a summer celebration (*panigíri*) who told me, “You have the face of an ancient Greek woman.” In talking, it came out where I come from and he ecstatically said, “You see? That explains it.”
- ²⁰ Papagaroufali (2013) equally reports comments offered by Greek high school teachers and students

who visited a Greek-speaking town and school in Calabria. They compared the place and the way locals behaved to what Greece and Greeks 'used to be like' thirty years earlier; they likewise commented positively on locals' warmth and hospitality. This seems to indicate how the 'view from *apènandi*' transcends age differences.

²¹ This was scheduled to happen in May 2009; it was canceled because of the European elections, Kostantinos told me.

²² See MacCannell (1976) on his notion of 'staged authenticity' in tourism and his application of the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman (1956). See Victor Turner (1987) on the anthropology of performance.