

“We are not Diasporic Greeks. We have Always been Here:” The Case of Griko (Apulia, Southern Italy) and the Symbolic Construction of Hellenism

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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 this 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, p. 429).

By painting a picture of Grecìa 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 'proof' of historically deep social relations which are rhetorically mobilized through both bottom-up and top-down approaches. Kinship appears therefore as the very language through which Hellenic cultural heritage is reclaimed as an idiom of global belonging, contributing to symbolic constructions of Hellenism as a post-territorialized entity. Yet, speakers of Griko draw on their language to advance a diversity of claims, claims which are at times rather divergent, thus revealing in the process the multilayered relationships they nourish with the language through its past, and the relationships they nourish with the past through language.

Introduction

Scholarship has long investigated the roles of language in creating and reinforcing a sense of community within nation-state building processes (see Anderson 1983, among others). Such is the case with the Greek language. Since the time of the establishment of Greece as a modern nation-state, the Greek language has enacted a pivotal role in defining 'Greekness.' Similar to other nation-building processes in Europe, the Greeks romantically regarded their language as the expression of 'the spirit of the people.' More specifically, the Greeks considered the Greek language as tangible in the history of Hellenism, as tangible evidence of a continuity in Greek identity, that is, from antiquity until the present (Herzfeld 1982; Calotycho 2008).

Yet, against this ideology, at the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, Slavic, Albanian, and a variety of local Greek 'dialects', were all concurrently spoken throughout the Greek peninsula, which at times were barely and even completely not mutually intelligible, e.g., varieties such as those spoken in Cappadocia, Epirus, Crete, and Pontus (Stewart 2006). Since then and until the present day, the Greek language has maintained a prominent position in the stylization of Greek national ideologies. The establishment of the *World Council of Hellenism Abroad* in 1989 C.E., and the mass appointment of teachers of Standard Modern Greek (SMG) in diasporic communities globally, both effectively evidence the efforts by the Greek state to invest in sustaining the legacy of Hellenism (see Venturas 2009). To add to these efforts, the ecumenical character of Hellenism has sought to pervade the boundaries of the late 19th century Greek global diaspora, having included varieties of Greek spoken around the world, each with its own historical developments and extant specificities.

Among these varieties are also those used in several villages in two Southern Italian regions. In 1821, ironically in the very same year of the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence, the philologist Karl Witte exposed the presence of Griko, or Salentine Greek, used in Grecìa Salentina in Salento, in the region of Apulia, and of Greko, or Calabrian Greek, used in Calabria at the 'toe' of Italy (see Figure 1).¹ Yet speakers of these varieties do not conform to the historical categories of *omogéneia* ('people of the same descent') and of *chaméni patrída* (lost homeland), both of which the Greek state developed soon after its inception. The connectivity to the Italian land of these two communities, together with Greece's close relationship with Italy, have guided the Greek State to avoid potential tensions between Greece's conceptions of fostering these communities and of not interfering with the cultural and political mechanisms of Griko-Greko and Italy. However, as I contend throughout this paper, the traits that Griko and Greko share with SMG and other Greek varieties are rhetorically mobilized by the Greeks at large, through both bottom up and top-down approaches. By doing this, Greek society generally and frequently tends to construct a sense of belonging, by forging junctures between Hellenism and its historical continuity; yet speakers of Griko and Greko draw on their language to advance a diversity of claims, which are at times rather divergent.

In this paper, as part of a larger study, I draw on the fieldwork I conducted in Greece and Apulia, in Southeastern Italy, to investigate the current revival of Griko. Here, I focus on an analysis of popular and institutional engagement with Griko in Greece, to assess its contribution to the reproduction and circulation, in Grecìa Salentina, of a language ideology that celebrates the Griko (and Greko) variety as 'ena zondanó mnimeío tou Ellinismou' (a living monument of Hellenism). My own ethnographic explorations reveal some ways in which the measures taken by Greece in support of these varieties are both complex and contested. As a methodological tool, my discussion purports to provide insights into one symbolic construction of Hellenism, a construction which is cultivated and predicated, I argue, on linguistic affinities and resemblances between, in this case, the Greek and Griko / Greko languages. My Greek informants often interpret such resemblances as evidence of a long and shared highly iconized past, thus providing pathways through which to incorporate these varieties and their speakers into overarching temporal and representational frames of belonging. I therefore present the extant relations and cultural ties between contemporary Greece and Southern Italy that Griko (as well as Greko) has nourished, a process that, through pointing to the power of shared language ideologies and cultural interpretations of the past, seeks to connect these communities across national borders and across water.

The structure of this paper is as follows: After presenting a review of the field, and a brief historiography of language activism, in Section 2, I provide a background of the policies developed and implemented by the Greek State with regards to its diasporic communities. The discussion then points to the rootedness of the historical categories of *omogéneia* and *chaméni patrída*, which, I argue, have guided the Greek State in applying language policy globally, including in Apulia and Calabria, in Italy, through SMG courses which began in 1994. In section 3, I draw on my

ethnographic data to discuss the collaborations between cultural associations and Greek aficionados of Griko on both shores. I contend that through their metalinguistic comments, these Greek citizens and associations, as Greek interlocutors, evidence their internalization of the cultural ideologies of historical continuity, which filter their gaze on Griko.

In my work, and particularly in this paper, I concur with that work in linguistic anthropology that has explored how language ideologies "both produce and are produced by multiple and heterogeneous histories and temporalities" (Irvine 2004, p. 1). In this way, this study highlights ways in which such languages and their ideologies are pivotal, not only by indicating how communities are structured through ideology, but also how these communities structurally differentiate themselves from others (Gal and Irvine 2019) through these ideologies. I argue that these two instances ultimately reveal how my Greek- and Griko-speaking informants entertain multiple, and at times, divergent relationships with the language through its past, and with the past through language.

Review of the Field

Despite the millenia-long historical relations between Greece and Southern Italy, contact between these two lands had long been severed by the time of the Greek war of Independence in 1821 C.E. Highly evident in the cross-Adriatic sea contact situation, however, Griko is used in several villages in the Apulian province of Lecce (in Grecia Salentina, in the peninsula of Salento), and Greko is used in Calabria, in the province of Reggio Calabria, also known as Bovesia (see Image 1 below). These language communities are either believed to date back to the Magna Graecia period, or otherwise to be remnants of Medieval Greek communities of Southern Italy.²



Image 1: The Griko and Greko speaking areas, in Apulia and Calabria

Political and ideological maps of the emerging Greek nation-state ignored these enclaves in Southern Italy; indeed, they did not belong to the 'Greek' merchant or elite diaspora, and similarly, they were not considered, nor considered themselves, part of the *chaméni patrída* (lost homeland). Significantly, Griko speakers did not see themselves as a people whose motherland had recently been emancipated from the Ottoman Empire. By that time, they had already become a small unit living in rural areas in Southeastern Apulia, as Catholics following the Roman rite, and whom the Bourbons ruled until the unification of Italy in 1861. At the time, only 2.5 percent of the total population could speak 'Italian,' while 97.5 percent of the population — peasants and aristocrats alike —spoke other local varieties or languages, and to whom Italian was a foreign language (De Mauro 1970).

More specifically, in a few villages in the province of Lecce, locals were mostly bilingual in Griko and in Salentine, the local variety which derives from Latin. Crucially, Greek and Latin, and Griko and Salentine have influenced each other; the Greek 'flavor' of Southern Italian local varieties is in fact due to the influence of Greek, just as the Italian 'flavor' of Griko is due to the influence of Salentine and Italian. The century-long linguistic and cultural exchange between Greek and Latin first, and subsequently Griko and Salentine, has indeed been defined as "historical bilingualism" (Fanciullo 2001). Yet, the transmission of Griko ceased in the aftermath of WW2. At this time, Griko-speakers, through a troubled process, began to abandon Griko in favor of Salentine and Italian, as the "language of the future," which would supposedly provide them with better opportunities, in symbolic opposition to Griko as "the language of the past", of backwardness and shame (see also Pellegrino 2019b). This remains indeed a multilingual landscape in which competence in Griko is linked to age – those born post WW2 show varying degrees of competence – and in which locals are mostly bilingual Italian / Salentine, while Griko is used mainly by the elderly and by language advocates.³ Today, the administrative body of *Unione dei comuni della Grecia Salentina* (Union of the Municipalities of Grecia Salentina), constitutionalized in 2001, oversees the following villages: Calimera, Carpignano Salentino, Castrignano dei Greci, Corigliano d'Otranto, Cutrofiano, Martano, Martignano, Melpignano, Soleto, Sternatia, and Zollino. In the villages of Carpignano and Cutrofiano, Griko was spoken until the beginning of the 19th century and the end of the 18th century, respectively. The borders of the Griko-speaking area have progressively contracted; this is what remains of a larger area which counted twenty-four villages in the 16th century (see Image 2 below).⁴

Yet, at the turn of the 19th century, the Griko-speaking area counted thirteen villages – the locals would refer to it with the expression *ta dekatría choría*. At this time, a group of locals, whom I label as 'the philhellenic circle' of Calimera, began to restore prestige to Griko. Their engagement with Griko developed also in response to the social changes in post-Unification Italy, which broke a perceived sense of continuity (the Lecce Group 1979); moreover, I argue that it constituted an early interaction between Greek and Italian cum local language ideologies. Local folklorists, inspired by Vito Domenico Palumbo from the village of Calimera, successfully re-established contact with

Greece, and were encouraged to retain their linguistic heritage by Greek folklorists, notably Nikolas Politis, the patriarch of Greek folklore studies. Yet, Griko-speakers' preoccupations were distant from the rhetoric of a Hellenic past and the noble origins of Griko portrayed by this philhellenic circle. Crucially, the long period of coexistence and the integration of cultures and languages had washed away whatever account of their distant past they might have had; only highly educated locals were knowledgeable about the wealth of Greek history and Greek as the language of culture, while the majority of Griko speakers typically lacked such historical consciousness⁵. Indeed, this first revival of Griko did not inspire a language shift, which as hinted on above, did occur post WW2.



Image 2: Map of the extant administrative area of Grecìa Salentina

The end of the war facilitated the reestablishment of contact between the two shores, somewhat owing to the efforts of a new generation of local advocates of the language, and who looked to Greece as an 'agent of recognition' of the value of Griko. Yet, by the 1970's, the pool of Griko speakers had dramatically decreased, at which time, politically engaged activists and *operatori culturali* (cultural activists) promoted initiatives to re-appropriate local indexicalities of the past – language and folk music – which locals had previously abandoned in their quest for modernity. These activists, however, lacked a legal framework that would legitimize their claims about Griko, despite their long-term lobbying for the language. Crucially, the Griko- and Greko-speaking enclaves of Southern Italy quickly became an object of interest to Greek philologists; in the 1960s, knowledge of them began to pervade scholarly boundaries, mainly through publications, by the philologist Angela Merianou⁶, that idealized the image of the topic. The existence of these linguistic enclaves increasingly diffused and reached the Greek public at large through the documentary series *I géfires tou Ioníou* (The Bridges of the Ionian Sea), aired in the early 1970s on Greek State

television; the 1983 release of a CD entitled *I Ellinikí musikí parádosi tis Kato Italiás* (The Greek Musical Tradition of Southern Italy) by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation further contributed to this awareness-raising process.

On the Italian shore, more recent attempts to revive Griko and its cultural heritage, began in the 1990's in the midst of right discourse and a climate of support for minority languages at a European level. This support arose as both financial and symbolic. In conformity with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in 1999, Italian law 482 recognised Griko and Greko together as one of the twelve historical-linguistic minorities (*minoranze storico-linguistiche*) in Italy. This law, demonstrating the interplay between local, national, and supranational language policies and ideologies, sought to represent a significant realization, albeit a late one, considering the fact that 50 years had passed since the ratifying of the Italian national constitution. Moreover, from the 1990s, the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities incrementally intensified their contact with mainland Greece, a contact which SMG language courses and interactions with Greek visitors and friends fostered. Through such contacts, a segment of speakers of these varieties and local language activists have become progressively acquainted with the Greek dominant language ideology of historical continuity. Yet, the local linguistic and metalinguistic landscape (what I call 'languagescape' Pellegrino 2013, 2021) reflects the history of Italy's linguistic diversity, which is considered unique in Europe and has been influenced by the language ideology promoted by Italian governing forces, which promoted Italian as national language⁷. Therefore, the junctures between a dominant Greek language ideology with the local heteroglossic languagescape may give rise to misunderstandings on both sides. The media and social networks circulate these breakdowns in communication, often ideologically mis-representing Griko- and Greko-speakers as "diasporic Greeks".

World Council of Hellenism Abroad (Simvoúlios Apódimos Ellinismós)

Inclusive to my fieldwork was an investigation of a legal framework supporting bilateral agreements between Greece and speakers of Greek varieties outside of Greece, such as the Griko speakers. I sought to understand the extent to which any agreement contributed to a policy for Greeks or Greek affiliates abroad, as vital to trace the dominant Greek State's attitude towards Greekness / Hellenism within and outside of its own borders, not least of which was its neighboring Southern Italy.

Greeks outside of Greece have played an important role in sustaining Hellenism since the pre-independence period. Since the end of the 19th century, Greek migration to the United States, Australia, and Europe, occurred in phases, rendering the Greek diaspora one of a larger set of several paradigmatic historical diasporas (Tziovas 2009). As Stewart (2006, p. 69) notes, since the late 19th century,

the term *omogéneia* increasingly corresponded to 'diaspora' — a population dispersed from an original homeland and maintaining some relation to this Homeland.⁸

The sense of anxiety scattered across the diasporic world coupled with a gratitude towards the 'nation' which spawned the diaspora, constitutes part of the 'translational' character of Greek history. Policies applied by the Greek state to its diasporic people reflect this translational process. In 1982, a General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad was also established in order to resolve emigrants' and returnees' problems (see Venturas 2009). The World Council of Hellenism Abroad (*Simvoúlios Apódimos Ellinismós*), established in 1989, only began to legitimately act in 1995, a delay largely constituted by emergent policies following the restoration of democracy in 1974. These policies purported to facilitate the repatriation of diaspora people in order to reflexively revitalize the Greek homeland.

The generosity of Greek policy towards expatriates in the 19th century was driven by its expansionist strategies (Vogli 2009). The policy and rhetoric of the *omogéneia* in the 20th century seemed to serve a similar aim, that is, to incorporate groups of Greeks and people of Greek extraction or consciousness into the imaginary 'national body' (Venturas 2009). Towards the end of the 20th century, diasporic Hellenism emerged as a new cultural 'Great idea,' creating the illusion of Greece, despite its small size, as having a virtual empire through its worldwide diaspora. Such a supraterritoriality would improve Greece's image both at home and internationally by reversing notions of Greece's backwardness, both economically and culturally (Venturas 2009). A fear that Greek migrants would over-assimilate into other ethnicities in host countries, yet the hope that they would at least partly return to the homeland to revitalize Greece, motivated the establishment of Greek schools abroad from the early 1970s, and particularly subsequent to the restoration of democracy (Venturas 2009).

A crucial ideological shift in these policies then occurred, in 1996, at which time a new bill was passed, which stipulated that Greek education abroad should no longer be reserved for the descendants of migrants in Western European and Western countries, but should also be directed to the populations of ethnic Greeks in the countries of the former Soviet Union and Albania. Such a shift aimed to extend the diasporic scope with which Greece reinforced the ideology of *omogeneís*, while concurrently and more strongly serving "the national center from afar" (Venturas 2009, p. 133). This 'deterritorialized' and 'imaginary' ideological and virtual nation could also include, so to speak, the Griko and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy. Here, any limitations of the historical category of *omogéneia* could be overcome once the ideology 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, p. 136). Through such an extension, the anomalies of each group would become less poignant and would hence increasingly dissipate, a seamlessness as it were, as each group became the addressee of a deterritorialized version of the *megáli idea* – within a larger matrix of anomalies to the *megáli idea*.⁹ The teaching of SMG in

Southern Italy – which predated the 1996 bill by two years – further provided the Greek State with a way through which to deal with the anomalies and ambiguities (Douglas 1966) of the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy – also considering the fact that the latter are Catholics. However, as Venturas notes, this deterritorialization relies on the same rhetoric and the ideological tropes that had proven successful in the previous version, and yet, does not alter the paternalism of the State.

For the Greek State, the relation with these Southern Italian communities emerged as a win-win situation. Unlike the Pontic or Albanian Greeks, the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy did and do not signify a political issue for Greece, as they represent neither a pool of potential returnees nor an enemy state. A lack of political animosity and interest in obtaining Greek citizenship partly explains the Greek State's policies, more so as the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy have never advanced separatist claims. For these populations, Greece provides no political advantage, as their motivations to become Greek citizens are few; since they are Italians and members of the European Union, Griko and Greko-speakers are entitled to settle in Greece, having every legal right to work. Their political disposition therefore differs to that of the Pontic peoples from the former Soviet countries, and to the ethnic Greek Albanians, for whom Greece represents a stronger economy and a provider of a European passport.

However, for Greece, at a practical level, Southern Italy represents a natural extension zone for Europe. In one of my discussions regarding the European INTERREG projects between Greece and Italy that had escalated in the late 20th century and into the early 21st century, a former mayor of a Griko-speaking village in Italy informed me of the fact that, "Greece has always looked to us as a bridge to Europe."¹⁰ Moreover, at a symbolic level, the anomalies and ambiguities of the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities, whether paradoxical or not, have rendered these communities 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 one or more millennia without investment from the Greek State is considered proof of the value and durability of Hellenism. This discourse appeals to that segment of the Greek populations sensitive to a national pride which reflexively intensifies the discourse: Griko — with Calabrian Greek — thus signifies *ena zondanó mnimeío tou Ellinismoú* (a 'living monument of Hellenism').

Methodical Framework

My anthropological research in the Griko-speaking villages, as well as in Greece, began in 2006 and has continued until the present time; I was raised in the Griko-speaking village of Zollino as a speaker of both standard Italian and Salentine. Yet, Griko was 'around' me, as a material presence, as I would hear my grandmother speaking it with my parents, aunties, uncles, neighbors; but it was the language the elderly would speak and, as a child, I envisaged that I had to become 'old / older'

for it to also become 'mine.' Indeed, I took a conscious decision to learn Griko only in my late 20s, upon embarking on a PhD in anthropology to trace its past and place its present. Over time, and quite naturally, I learnt to shift and mix these language codes when necessary.

My expertise with such communities and their anthropological junctures was core to my interest in understanding the linguistic, cultural, and political aspects of the revival of Griko. In Greece, the fact that I was enculturated into the Griko community 'from over there' granted me a warm welcome, and was to be highly beneficial in my ethnography. Owing to the sporadic placement throughout Greece of the cultural associations and people who show interest in Griko, the data collection required that I travel throughout the country (Salonika, Ioannina, Patra, Corinth, and Corfu), to interact with Greek aficionados of Griko through discussion and observation of their activities. My ethnographic work on Greeks visiting Grecia Salentina in Italy, and on Greek-Griko encounters on both shores, equally contributes to my data. In particular, I sought to investigate Greek efforts at the institutional and popular level, and their effects among Griko-speakers and locals at large. More centrally, I focused on cultural associations as a means of exploring their members' engagement with Griko, and hence to 'explain to myself' their fascination with this language, with its *mistikó* (secret), as one informant Vasilis from Ioannina put it. Inevitably, in the field, I would broaden the investigation, since a variety of social actors have engaged and sustained Griko through a panoply of activities, yet many of these activities are not necessarily linked to any association.

In particular, I focused on my Greek interlocutors' ideas and perceptions toward the structure and use of Griko, that is, their language ideologies. Kroskrity defines language ideologies as "beliefs, feelings and conceptions about language structure and use" (2010, p. 192), which are often as much about perceptions of speakers as they are about the speech itself (Irvine and Gal 2000), thus bringing my attention to dominant metadiscourses, as "discursive practices which reflexively focus on language use itself" (Silverstein 1998, p. 136). Analytically, I located metaphors about language, language acquisition, socialization, and particularly attentive to language ideologies forming in relation to these communities. Moreover, my analysis is further enriched by fieldwork on Greko carried out in Calabria in 2018 / 2019 as part of an interdisciplinary research project promoted by the Smithsonian Institution.¹¹ Yet, as a multi-sited ethnography, this corpus required a complementary extraction of online materials and data, such as Facebook pages, in which both Greek nationals and diasporic Greeks dispersed globally interact and present their ideas. In this respect, the investigation of the roles of CMC (computer-mediated-communication) in the reconstruction of shared histories acquires further importance.

Data and Discussion

Initial Policy Categorizations

While in Athens, in early July 2009, I spoke with the 'World Council of Hellenism Abroad,' as a subsection of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to request an appointment. One employee suggested that the Griko-speaking communities of Grecia Salentina are not 'Greeks abroad,' that is, *apódimi*, commenting that,

they are not Greek, they are Italians, only nationalists would say something different. It is a matter of sentiments / feelings (*sinesthímata*), not political.

Another employee reiterated the fact that these communities are not regarded as Greeks abroad:

Of course they have a very important history, no one denies it, but they do not fall under the definition of the World Council of Hellenism Abroad, therefore there are no programs related to them, or anything else.

Following these interactions, my requests to meet in person were met with a refusal. However, I located the below document while conducting archival research at the Centre Chòrama Cultural Association, in the Griko-speaking village of Sternatia, which was sent to the association by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The document requests information and stipulates that:

In line with the government policy as far as the Greek diaspora is concerned, and in view of the compilation of the data concerning all the communities of Hellenism abroad, you are kindly requested to send to the general secretariat of the Greek Diaspora, the following information (and so forth).

The letter was forwarded to an organization of which I was a member, thus contradicting the informant's earlier comments of having no contact with these communities, as they do not regard them as 'Greeks abroad.' When I spoke to the woman again and explained this found document, the woman then labeled the group in Italy as one of a set of "omogeniakés kinótites" (co-ethnic communities). However, the Griko and Greko speaking communities of Southern Italy do not represent a *chaméni patrída*, nor can they consider themselves to be diasporic communities, and thus, are an anomaly, as they do not fit into historical categories recognized by the Greek State. In line with work by Douglas (1966), this exposing of an anomaly appears to have elicited an avoidance strategy in this employee and others with whom I interacted.



Image 3: Letter sent by the Greek Government office of the World Council of Hellenism Abroad to Chòrama

The measures adopted by the Greek state in support of Griko are few. Yet, it is enlightening to explore the ideological foundations of such an involvement, and to highlight the contradictions arising from it. The Griko and Greko-speaking communities are a recent discovery and an unexpected chapter in the history of Greece, thus requiring a policy inconsistent with previous policies. As the Greek State has not yet produced a category suitable for these communities, it has pigeonholed these communities into other existing categories, thus ignoring the possible irrelevance of these categories to these communities. As Pipyrrou (2010, p. 92) puts it with regards to the Grecanico community of Calabria,

the existence of the modern Greek nation-state as a point of reference and the relations that this state fosters with the communities affects conditions similar to those of a diaspora.

The teaching of Modern Greek clearly exemplifies this discrepancy, as this policy is commonly and largely restricted to diaspora communities. In what follows, I move to present the initiatives taken at the popular level in support of Griko; these are linked to cultural associations and / or to individual aficionados of Griko: the metalinguistic comments they offer during our encounters are a springboard with which to analyse dominant Greek ideologies of Griko, and to foreground the internalization and further reproduction of the cultural ideology and historical continuity of Hellenism.

Linguistic Kinship and Iconisation

As hinted above, contacts between local and Greek cultural associations dealing with Griko greatly intensified in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. In most cases, the establishments of such associations began with a visit to Grecia Salentina by an individual or small group of people who took the case of Griko to heart, and who eagerly desired to contribute to the preservation and promotion of the language and its local traditions and customs. The range of promoted activities is typical of cultural associations, and includes the following; *ekdromés* (excursions) as short trips to Grecia Salentina (as well as to Calabria) through which Greek participants familiarize themselves with the place and its traditions; exchange programs where people from the Griko and Greko-speaking areas sojourn in Greece; cultural and social events ranging from music and theater performances to literary contests, organized by groups on both shores.

As a representative example of a Greek aficionado of Griko, Kostas was at the time of our encounters the president of the Corinth Apollonian Academy, a cultural association that was established in 1990 purporting to manage contacts with 'Greeks around the world.' An anecdote that involved our common friend, Antonio Anchora (1950-2016) from the Griko-speaking village of Corigliano is revealing. Antonio was a longstanding and active supporter of Griko, and was nominated 'ambassador of Hellenism throughout the world' in 2001, by the Athens prefecture. Laughing and pointing to his computer, Kostas recalled: "Once I found a picture of Antonio Anchora, and I put it on my computer as a screen saver and wrote on it "PER SEMPRE FFRATELLI" — Forever Brothers — in capital letters, but I made a mistake and wrote ffratelli with a repeated 'f.' I left it that way," he said, continuing to laugh while he showed me other pictures of Grecia Salentina and the people he had met, and with whom he was in contact. "Ton theoró oti einai aderfós mou" (I consider him as a brother or mine) Kostas concluded. Such a statement becomes a monument to the connectivity of speakers of varieties of Greek across the seas and between shores.

Crucially, on both shores, I heard narratives that were often permeated with references to such kinship. "You are our relatives, our people. That's why we understand each other. The language is the family. That's why we are brothers too in a way," Kostas had stressed. This also appears in the people's own writings, e.g., the accounts of the trips to Grecia Salentina published in the association's journals. Moreover, kinship presents itself as the very discourse that circulates among the Greek public at large through the media. Below I present some crucial examples, which emerge from my discourse analysis of a corpus of 30 newspaper articles on Griko and Greko.

Example 1

Οι Griki είναι συγγενείς μας. Γείτονές μας (The Griki are our relatives. Our neighbors. Our people).

Example 2

'Μερικοί από τους κατοίκους είναι κατευθείαν απόγονοι αρχαίων Ελλήνων.' ('Many of its inhabitants are direct descendants of ancient Greeks.')

Example 3

'Απόγονοι τον Ελλήνων που φτάσανε εκεί στην αρχαιότητα και κυρίως στα βυζαντινά χρόνια' ('the descendants of the Greeks who arrived there in ancient times and mainly in the Byzantine years').

Example 4

In one article, whose main topic was a trip to Greece by children from Grecia Salentina, the author notes that the children were invited to travel to Greece 'να έρθουν σε επαφή με τον πολιτισμό των προγόνων τους' ('to come into contact with the culture of their ancestors').

Throughout the corpus, the topos of kinship is recurrent and indexed through a series of lexical choices, such as 'siggenia' (kinship, relationship, connection), its derivative 'siggenis' (relative), 'apògonoi' (descendants), 'prògonoi' (ancestors), and 'katagogi' (lineage). I also encountered a reference to Greece, the 'kakì mitrià' ('mother' albeit 'stepmother'), where the author assigns agency to Greece for turning a deaf ear to the Greek dialects spoken in Southern Italy. This is also evident in the following example:

Example 5

The Greek dialect of Southern Italy has been betrayed for many years by the complete indifference and the inertia of Greece.

Many of my Greek aficionados of Griko share this author's accusation toward the Greek State in neglecting these linguistic islands; here, the aficionados perceive / render Griko-speakers as the image of 'forgotten brothers' by resting on this cultural frame. "The language is the family. That's why we are brothers too in a way," Kostas had stressed. I observe here the facility of the transition from linguistic kinship — "our languages are like sisters" — to kinship as the language of communication — "You are our relatives / brothers." The linguistic kinship between Greek and Griko (but also Greko) is often selectively highlighted and projected onto the speakers, to evidence historically deep social relations. This process suggests how kinship remains a familiar language through which relations are conceptualized and experienced by Greek aficionados of Griko. Yet, kinship as a cultural domain and the concept of heritage are indeed strictly linked (Graburn 2001), rendering kinship the very language through which the Hellenic cultural heritage and Hellenism as cultural ideology are reclaimed as an idiomatic object of global belonging, thus transcending national and international boundaries.

Here, we are observing the semiotic process of iconization. Gal and Irvine introduced the notion to describe the attempt to essentialise a group and their language activities, at which time, and within which process, a linguistic system appears as an image of the essence of a social group (Gal and Irvine 1995; Irvine and Gal 2000). Irvine and Gal 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.¹²

(p. 973)

Through the semiotic process of iconization, observers reflexively project a 'deep' linguistic kinship between Griko and Greek iconically onto its speakers, and hence its people, thus creating icons of artifacts; here, Griko becomes an icon, and its characteristics — through a convenient erasure (ibid.) of any inconsistencies — are seen as a reflection of the essential characteristics of its users. I 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 2007; Andronis 2003). The case at hand instead leads to a romantic idealization of the language and the community.¹³ Significantly, Greek aficionados' overall metalinguistic comments on Griko expose the legacy of Greek "political philology" (Herzfeld 1997, pp. 74–88), and the role attributed to the Greek language in the imaginary and institutional definition of belonging. Greek aficionados of Griko accept and even embody this legacy, which informs their engagement with Griko. The 'survival' up to the present of Griko (and Greko) in remote areas of Southern Italy without any

institutionalized support from the Greek state has struck a chord with the Greek population at large, despite and beyond the inapplicability of the category of 'lost homeland' and 'diaspora' to the Griko- and Greko-speaking communities of Southern Italy.

Metalinguistic Factors, Continuity with the Past

The comments provided on social media, and in particular, posts on Facebook, substantiated my claim that linguistic affinity is rhetorically deployed to incorporate Griko and Greko into overarching temporal and representational frames of belonging. Contributing to this notion is also the relevant notion that 'the length' of history usually acquires substance in the stylization of the Greek self (Stewart 2008, 2012), and, through its social significance, history becomes a treasure to be safeguarded at all costs (see also Yalouri 2001). Indeed, as I present above (Example 5), references to Griko-speakers (and Greko) as "descendants of ancient Greeks" (απόγονοι αρχαίων Ελλήνων) are not uncommon. To highlight this point, below I draw on a set of comments from Billy, an Australian writer of Greek descent, whose family originally hails from the island of Lesbos. Billy is a film producer of documentaries and short film projects. During our first encounter, he explained that most of his work focus on "the dozens of Greek communities, including Magna Graecia." Billy contacted me in 2018 while shooting his documentary "Magna Graecia: the Griko of Apulia," having recently shot a documentary about Calabrian-Greek, called "Magna Graecia: the Greko of Calabria" In his posts on Facebook, in order to showcase the World TV premiere of the documentary, he writes:

Example 6

On 24 May, Basil Genimahaliotis and I, will screen our documentaries from Magna Graecia We shot across the Greko and Griko towns and villages of Calabria and Apulia respectively, returning with some of their stories, stunning scenery, history and connection to our ancient and Byzantine Greek past.

What: Magna Graecia film is set in the Griko towns of Apulia. We shot here for a few days and learned as much as we could about the ancient and Byzantine Greek descendants (my emphasis)

Magna Graecia, meaning Greater Greece, was the name given by the Romans to Southern Italy as this area was extensively populated by Greek colonies in antiquity.

This is our new film about the Griko (a form of ancient and Byzantine Greek, minority language) speakers of Apulia, Italia.

This is one the most significant film projects that our Greek community will ever watch as it provides stories of the local Greko / Griko and highlights *the language of Magna Graecia. 2800 years of history and culture (my emphasis)*

I hinted above on the intricacies surrounding the origins of Griko and Greko. The unavailability of conclusive historical data prevents an establishment of when and whence the first Greek settlers arrived in the region. The Griko and Greko language question remains immersed in a mysterious aura, as it were; it is indeed uncertain as to whether Griko and Greko are a continuation of the Hellenism of Magna Graecia – as argued by Greek scholars who follow the argument advanced by German philologist Gerhard Rohlfs (1980) – or whether they originated in Byzantine times, which was first argued by the Italian linguist Morosi (1870) owing to its similarity to MG. More recently, Karanastasis (1992) suggested that some Greek-language communities could have survived the end of the Magna Graecia period, and later formed hellenophonic regions and communities in the Medieval era. Local history ultimately lacks that coherent, homogeneous, and linear timeline with which Modern Greeks are familiar. Without an authoritative account of the past – or maybe also owing to this – Griko (and Greko)-speaking enclaves become a place for collective imagination of the Greek / Griko spirit.

The titles of his documentaries “Magna Graecia: the Griko of Apulia” and “Magna Graecia: The Greko of Calabria” suggest a direct link between “Magna Graecia” as an historical category and the language used today in Apulia / Calabria, in the Griko- and Greko-speaking villages. More generally, what repeatedly struck me was the confidence with which many Greek aficionados of Griko referred to the Magna Graecia theory and quoted linguists as evidence to argue for a continuous link between Griko and Ancient Greek. These aficionados often commented on the perceived closeness to Homer’s language – You speak like ‘Homer’ – which points back to the fascination for the length of history and to which I refer above. Most would reference language details and the presence of archaisms. The fact that Griko is characterised by elements from the Doric Greek of Classical times resonates with the Greek population at large as it offers both reason and substance for ‘national pride;’ 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.

Example 7			
English	I	cannot	eat
Griko	‘E’	sozzo	fai
Modern Greek	Den	boró	na fao

Yet, Griko is unlike ancient Greek, as was evident to the ears of the Greek interlocutors in my ethnographic work, and also to aficionados of Griko. Similarly, Griko and SMG are not mutually intelligible — at least not easily. Many among the Greek aficionados of Griko informed me of the fact that they understand Griko fairly or very well, but cannot speak it (some are in the process of

learning it). However, Greek speakers can detect its archaic features, and by attempting to overcome pronunciation differences, may decipher the meaning of simple sentences.¹⁴ A rudimentary knowledge of Italian facilitates the understanding of Griko. Crucially, they tend to choose the archaizing forms of Griko selectively as evidence of its link to the past, and of that longed-for continuity of Hellenism from antiquity to the present day.

Not incidentally, my Greek networks view Griko and Greko as an 'archaeological' form, and at times, akin to the Akropolis of Southern Italy – its speakers are often defined as "living, breathing ancient Greek statues." Here, we again see the shift from the definition of Griko (and Greko) as a monument of Hellenism to defining their speakers as living breathing ancient Greek statues, as another example of iconization. In order to sustain this continuity of Hellenism, Greek aficionados of Griko more broadly tend to be 'enthusiastic consumers' — to borrow the words of historian Dimitris Plantzos (2008, p. 11) — of this culturally inscribed language ideology, and ideology of historical continuity, and also influential mediators and reproducers thereof.

Example 8

The Southern Italian Greek dialect – Griko, is considered to be the last living trace of *the ancient Greek diaspora* (my emphasis) that once formed Magna Graecia. Griko is a dialect of modern Greek spoken in the Italian regions of Salento and Calabria.

References to *Magna Graecia* – and interestingly not to *Megali Ellada* – continue to gain currency over the longstanding expression *ta ellinofona choriá tis kato Italiás*, literally 'Greek-speaking villages of lower Italy,' both for Apulia and Calabria.¹⁵ This representational dynamic is further extended not only through the use of historical categories such as Magna Graecia, as we have seen with the documentary titles above. This latter quote evidences the smooth transition from references to Magna Graecia, to Hellenism, and to diaspora. By resting on these categories – which were embedded in the construction of the Greek state – Greek aficionados of Griko tend to retroactively apply to Griko and its speakers the cultural ideology of Hellenism, notwithstanding the inapplicability of the category of 'diaspora' to the case at hand.

The praxis of synthesis – historical, linguistic and cultural at large – enables my Greek interlocutors to overcome the 'contradictions' and 'anomalies' of the Griko case. Here, the sociolinguistic complexity of Griko is indeed reduced; its hybridity due to the presence of Salentine and Italian borrowings or adaptations is not and cannot be denied; its relevance and significance is, however, negotiated and largely ideologically justified, as it appears as a threat to their culturally embodied language ideology. As we have seen, selective erasure — downgrading differences — and highlighting similarities so as to attain identification, ultimately leads my Greek friends and aficionados of Griko to a 'romantic iconization' of Grecia Salentina and its people.¹⁶ Greek aficionados of Griko feel an emotional, almost visceral, attachment to this language, to its speakers

and to the very place where, according to Dimitri, "the heart of Greece beats." In this way, Grecia Salentina is viewed as a sacred land, a cradle of culture. The romantic view they hold of GS becomes evident when the Hellenism of Southern Italy is even elevated over the Hellenism of Modern Greece and the metadiscursive adulation reaches idealisation. "*Autó einai o Ellinismós. Makari na kratàgame auto ton Ellinismó emeis oi Éllines*" (This is Hellenism. If only we Greeks kept this Hellenism) – Kostas commented.

Exploring Greek popular views on Griko brought to light ways in which the cultural ideology of Hellenism has been internalized: Greece's gaze on Griko is shaped by and filtered through a historically produced lens. This lens appears to refract the relation that Greeks by and large have with their own past and national identity. The romanticized character of the metadiscourse of Greek aficionados of Griko emerges from dynamics inherent in such a romantic imagination. As in a mirror game of reflections, I describe this 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,' projected onto Griko and Griko speakers, rendering Griko an icon within an icon. This argument also applies to the case of Greko and its speakers. What I am arguing is that the view from *apénandi* ultimately reveals Modern Greeks' own language ideology and ideology of history/historical continuity. Through this process, these linguistic islands and their speakers become a "spatial projection of their cultural imaginary" (Calotycho 2008, p. 158), and an imagined community (Anderson 1983).

Sense of Commitment and In-Commensurability

Example 9

A friend gave me an article abt the Greko of Calabria a couple of years later and I decided to visit. Ever since made the decision to find one Greek community a year and spotlight them in the Greek media and stay in touch with them.

...Encourage U to put your thinking caps on and find ways to help the Greko and Griko maintain their dialect and culture...

What I want the audience to learn about MG, what the Griko mean and how important they are to Hellenism. Hellenism isn't just about getting a Sparta tattoo (yes I have similar tattts), there is a bigger history and living history out there and they need your support.

Most of what we do is to protect Hellenism.

The sense of commitment towards these varieties that Greek aficionados of the language have shown over the years has led the Greeks to act on behalf of Griko- (and Greko) speakers through two main modalities; by pursuing the involvement of the mass media to give visibility to the cause of these varieties, and by involving Greek politicians and the State generally. Throughout time, Greek aficionados of Griko have contributed to this awareness-raising process by producing CDs,

by hosting music events, by publishing accounts of their trips to Grecia Salentina in the associations' journals, and by airing interviews with Griko speakers. For instance, my informant 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 describing the region of Grecia Salentina.

Numerous documentaries in SMG about Griko, Greko, and local music, have been circulating, such as the award winning 'I petra pou xorevei' (Dancing stone 2013), filmed in Grecia Salentina, and most recently the documentaries on both varieties (Magna Graecia: the Griko of Apulia, and Magna Graecia: the Greko of Calabria 2020). In particular, the circulation of documentaries in English has further 'sensitized' the general public about the existence of these enclaves. This also points to a new attention of diasporic communities who have expressed their commitment to the plight to sustain Greek heritage through a continuity of pockets such as Griko and Greko. These communities have become active online, and tend to reproduce a discourse of moral panic (Cohen 1979; Cameron 1995) with regards to the disappearance of these Greek varieties; by crucially portraying their loss as a threat to Hellenism itself, they encourage others to engage with their 'survival' and to contribute the extended efforts of other aficionados. To this, I argue that Greek aficionados of Griko, in a suggestion of metadiscursive entextualization, appropriate a text as a metadiscursive construct to create an image of a durable and shared culture (Silverstein and Urban 1996). In the case at hand, they reproduce such an image through an insertion of 'texts' of cultural Hellenism, be they spoken and pragmatic or simply ideological, into a chosen self-reflexive discursive practice.

This is not to say that cultural associations on the Italian shore do not play their own role. Griko activists and *cultori del Griko* are also responsible for creating high expectations, by mobilizing the Greek people's attachment to their own cultural ideology of Hellenism. 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. A segment of local Griko scholars and activists 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 that this elicits a warm reception by Greek visitors. The intimate historicity of Hellenism that connects Griko to the Hellenic past constitutes a reason for discursive pride and indeed appeals to a section of Griko scholars and Griko activists who likewise act as ideology brokers (Blommaert 1999) locally. This cultural but also affective relationship with *that* past (see also Knight 2015) converts Greece into a 'cultural motherland' (as my informant Luigi from Calimera remarked), while not implying nor advancing any claim of ethnic belonging. Greek aficionados of Griko, who have taken on the task of helping their 'forgotten brothers' and interceding on their behalf, rather filter their gaze through the historical category of *omogéneia*.

This complex intermingling of partially shared and yet differently articulated claims about self-understanding and belonging, at times leads to confusion on both ends. Kostantinos, an active

member of the Organization for the Internationalization of the Greek Language (ODEG), exemplifies this. He proudly mentions that the ODEG was preparing a presentation for the office of Apódimos Ellinismós, in order for the Greek-speaking communities of Southern Italy to obtain its support, scheduled for May 2009, but cancelled owing to the occurrence of the European elections. Similarly, Kostas, an informant from Corinth, informed me as follows:

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.'

At this time, the incommensurability of the two languagescapes appears. Here, Antonio's response suggests that the sense of belonging is rooted in the place itself, opportuning Kostas to become again confronted with the anomalies of Griko that had been semiotically erased. Here, Antonio does not refer to Greece as an "original" or "lost homeland," despite his commitment to Griko and to his title as ambassador of Hellenism in the world. 'We are Greeks who have always been here. We are Griki,' he concludes. In this respect, it is enlightening to know that speakers of Griko translate *Griko* into Salentine as *Greco*, and into Italian as *Greco*, literally 'Greek.' Crucially, however, by the term *Greco*, speakers of Griko do not imply 'Greek of Greece,' as this use was and is deprived of its modern day connotation and reference to Greece as the homeland. To use Giorgio's words,

The elderly thought they were the 'Greeks.' They were called and called themselves Greci ['Greeks' in both Salentine and Italian], but many did not even know that Greece existed. When they met the Greeks elsewhere, or when the Greeks from Greece started traveling here, [the elderly] were surprised they spoke a language similar to theirs.¹⁷

Most of Greek visitors to Grecìa Salentina seem to have a predetermined romantic and idealized image of Griko and its speakers, having high expectations of finding the 'living monument of Hellenism.' Yet, they may equally be, and often are, disappointed, as also reported by Petropoulou (1995) and Pipyrrou (2012, 2012) in Calabria; there, too, Greek visitors who are not necessarily thoroughly informed tend to expect their 'forgotten brothers' to speak SMG. The expectation of commensurability can likewise fail for Griko speakers who do not speak the language of Hellenism, creating a similar sense of confusion. The majority of today's elderly Griko speakers characteristically ignore the wealth of the Greek past, and of Hellenism; their phenomenological references to Griko link them to a recent and local past. Identifying common or similar words in Griko and SMG favors communication, as an activity which tends to even amuse elderly Griko-

speakers who came to realize the communicative potential of Griko through their lived encounters with Greek people (through war and migration, and more recently, through tourism). Yet, as an elderly Griko-speaker characteristically put it, commenting on a theatrical performance in SMG in Sternatia "it is a different kind of Greek...But if we do not understand, why did they come to perform it?" In such instances, we see the interplay of, and a clash between, language seen as a means of communication between people, and language as a framework for representation (see also Pipyrou 2012). This binary process at times reveals and at times masks commensurability or incommensurability among all social actors involved.

Local Griko scholars and activists are certainly aware of the enthusiasm and involvement that Greek aficionados of Griko, as do visitors, display when witnessing the use of Griko. Through contacts and friendships with Greek aficionados of Griko and visitors, the locals in Grecia Salentina (but also in the Greko-speaking villages) have increasingly been acquainted with dominant modern Greek language ideologies. In particular, the availability of SMG courses provided by the Greek Ministry of Education and taught in local cultural associations has partially affected the local languagescape, thus influencing speakers' language choices and 'tastes.'¹⁸ Likewise, those Griko- and Greko-speakers who have contact with Greek visitors and aficionados of Griko are largely flattered by attention received after having been long ignored and stigmatized; they now feel appreciated. They take particular pride in meeting Greeks, and hence in becoming a center of attention. Such a construal becomes particularly significant for them, as Griko (as well as Greko) has effectively shifted from being considered a language of shame and backwardness to a 'language of pride' — also as a meta-effect of Greek interest. To cite Pipyrou (2012, p. 83) 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. Here, they 'perform' this essence and tend to emphasize their sentimental link to Greece in front of their Greek visitors, believing that this emphasis will strike the right chord. 'Performing Griko' ultimately becomes an embodied cultural communication — a cultural performance as much as a performance of culture.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented my analysis of the Greek gaze on Grecia Salentina, Griko, and its speakers, by reviewing the institutional measures and popular engagement with Griko and embedded language ideologies. I began by reviewing the Greek State attitude towards 'Greekness/Hellenism' within and outside its own borders, in order to contextualise my ethnographic exploration. More specifically, by analysing metalinguistic comments recorded in the field and online, I argued that the perceived or real linguistic affinities and resemblances between Griko and SMG and / or other Greek varieties and their linguistic kinship are increasingly evoked and turned into proof of historically deep social relations. I described this 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. The same applies to the case of Greko and its speakers.

My ethnography therefore considered the argument that Greek aficionados of Griko appear to embody ideologies of history and of language, upon which, the Greek State was constructed; these are recursively applied to Griko and Greko speakers, who are incorporated into overarching temporal and representational frames of belonging within which they do not find an easy fit. This dynamic ultimately reveals the limits and risks of retroactively applying to today Griko- and Greko-speakers' modern notions of identity, belonging, or even 'ethnicity,' and of unearthing historical categories such as "Magna Graecia." The quote offered by Antonio, "We are not diasporic Greeks. We are Greeks who have always been here: we are Griki", ultimately epitomizes the clash of those claims linked to language ideologies. Crucially, language ideologies of Griko are inscribed in non-homogenous 'historicity' in the sense given to this term by Hirsch and Stewart (2005) as they are generated by cultural models and accounts of past-present-future. I argue that an incommensurability between the local / Italian and Greek languagescape arises, linked to a different relation to the language, nourished through a shared cultural perception of the past; this reveals what I call the cultural temporality of language, which aims to capture the multiple relationships locals entertain with the language through its past, and with the past through language. By emphasizing "We are Griki," Antonio above negotiates notions of sameness and otherness in both temporal and spatial terms, to thus contribute to the continuous shifting of the chronotopes of the re-presentation of Griko. 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).

In the context of Griko, the past is indeed multifaceted; foremost, as it is the case of Greek, it is a critical ideological terrain of self-representation; the questions of which chapter of Griko's past best represents the language, and is best represented by it, become discursive struggles for community self-understanding and representation. Indeed, 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 at play is 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, more directly involved in the extant revival, and also influenced by the modern Greek ideology of historical continuity, have developed ways through which to lay claim to Hellenism by sharing that intimate historicity.

What I have witnessed in my work is that the perceived or real linguistic affinities and resemblances between Griko and SMG and / or other Greek varieties are increasingly evoked and multiplied within the space of each encounter with symbolic landscapes. Eco had it right a long time ago, when he argued that it is the very vagueness and openness of any symbol that makes it possible to indicate what is always beyond one's reach (1984, p. 130). This 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 it may be invested with a more than local symbolic significance and may be projected as a symbol of the distant and glorious Hellenic past and of global Hellenism.

My ethnography ultimately presents the multifaceted politics of the symbolic construction of Hellenism, and points to the global dynamics in which Griko and Greko are immersed as minority languages within the Italian national space. Such a representation therefore prompts us to continue to investigate and foreground the ways in which, through linguistic and metalinguistic practices, people chronotopically negotiate and reconcile understandings of and claims to sameness and otherness.

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Endnotes

- 1 In Greek literature Griko and Greko are referred to as varieties or dialects of Greek, and in common use, they generally fall together under the label *katoitaliká*, literally 'Southern Italian.' I alternatively refer to them as languages, as locals do, and as varieties. In common parlance, Griko and Greko are often considered to be one and the same; similarly the two communities are often confused and/or mistakenly referred to and treated as one, notwithstanding they have independently developed overtime.
- 2 The debate about the origins of Griko and Greko effectively is an early "language ideological debate" (Blommaert, 1999) which divided Greek and Italian scholars: the first have tended to support the Magna Graecia argument which considered Griko and Calabrian Greek to be a continuation of the Hellenism of Magna Graecia (among them Caratzas 1958, Kapsomenos 1977, and Tsopanakis 1968). Italian scholars, instead, have tended to support the Byzantine argument (see Parlangei 1952, see Battisti 1959, Spano 1965). See Pellegrino 2015 for a more detailed analysis of the ideological debate on their origins.
- 3 Since Griko is no longer used as a medium of daily communication, its deliberate use, albeit limited, acquires a further significance. See, Pellegrino 2016 and 2021, Chapter 5, for an analysis of the use of Griko for performative ends, and as a cultural resource through which locals perform their linguistic identities.
- 4 Melpignano and Soleto counted Griko-speakers mainly until the beginning of the twentieth century. These same two villages were annexed to the Union of the Municipalities of Grecia Salentina in 2005 and 2007, respectively. Interestingly, the Italian term 'Grecia' is an artifact that has acquired a widespread currency since the latest revival; crucially, the accent put on Grecia serves to distinguish it from Greece as a nation-state (Grecia, without accent). In Calabria, Greko is spoken in a small number of villages located in the slopes of the Aspromonte Massif (southern Calabria), namely Bova, Bova Marina, Condofuri, Galliciano, and Rochudi Nuovo and in a few other towns by the coast. The Calabrian area is also known as Bovesia and Area Greca.
- 5 According to Rohlf (1980) Griko-speakers were not 'foreign bodies' which shared nothing with the nearby – Salentine speaking – villages; this was in contrast to other communities in Apulia, such as the Albanian community of the Taranto province or the Franco-Provençal of the Foggia province, who had a strong separate ethnic and cultural identity.
- 6 Merianou 1980, 1989. Also Prelorenzos 1978; Vranopoulos 1999. Crucially, the generic reference to the "Southern Italy" as a whole fosters the impression of a much larger area than the limited villages in the province of Lecce in Puglia and of Reggio Calabria, in Calabria.
- 7 Italy is characterized by a multilingualism that far exceeds the twelve minority languages recognized by Law 482. Indeed, the so-called 'Italian dialects' are not varieties of Italian, but distinct Italo-Romance varieties which developed from Latin at the same time as Florentine, which was selected as the national language – they are therefore unofficial languages (Tosi 2004, p. 248). Crucially, together with minority languages, they have been the targets of what De Mauro (1979) defined as 'dialect-phobia,' the State intolerance toward them, which was grounded in a deep-rooted aesthetic and moral prejudice that equates them with backwardness.
- 8 Let me clarify that I am only hinting here at the topic on Greek diaspora and migration – which is immense and is not one I can focus on here in more detail – in order to contextualize later in the chapter my Greek informants' references to it with regards to the case of Griko and Greko.
- 9 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).
- 10 Crucially 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. Specifically, Grecia Salentina has so far benefited from five such INTERREG Italy–Greece programs. These are aimed (among other things) at the “Promotion, Restoration, and Development of the Historical and Cultural Environment of Common Interest.”

- 11 The project compared responses to language maintenance and revitalization initiatives among the Greko- and Griko-speaking communities of Southern Italy; the linguist Dr. Maria Olimpia Squillaci and I acted as Co-Principle Investigators for Greko (Calabria) and Griko (Apulia) respectively. See Pellegrino 2019 and Squillaci 2019. The broader Sustaining Minoritized Languages in Europe (SMiLE) project was developed by the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (Smithsonian Institution) and produced ethnographic studies of seven communities in Europe (Irish, Galician, North Frisian, Occitan, Upper and Lower Sorbian).
- 12 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).
- 13 I personally became the target of ‘iconization’ on various occasions; for instance, I was always complimented 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!”
- 14 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.
- 15 This orientation has recently been taken to its extremes in various Facebook pages – both Italian and Greek – which post historical maps of Magna Graecia, and welcome its political reconstruction in the current era. This becomes particularly interesting in the context of the longstanding tradition of the subalternity of the South and the so called ‘Southern Question’ which, to put it crudely, concerns the economic, political, and cultural / social relationships between the North and the South of Italy. The investigation of the broader claims and of the implications of such a discursive act of unearthing historical categories represents a venue for future research.
- 16 Let us not forget that linguistic purism was at the basis of katharévousa, a language purposely “cleansed” of the pollution of the Turkish influence (see Herzfeld 1987, 1997). Griko is “polluted” – as it were, but the absence of Turkish influence, the absence of the ghost of the Ottoman past- makes Griko to the gaze of my interlocutors “less polluted.”
- 17 Through time and as a side effect of the more recent revival, locals have increasingly been using the terms Griko and Griki when speaking Salentine and Italian. Significantly, but not surprisingly, the terms Ellinikà, Ellines, and derivatives, do not belong to the Griko vocabulary.
- 18 The perceived or real influence of SMG on Griko is one of the most recurrent language ideological debates among locals. For a discussion on the role of SMG as ‘an agent of renewal’ of Griko, and source of neologisms, or as an ‘agent of contamination’ of its authenticity, see Pellegrino 2021. The encounter with the dominant Greek language ideology may also influence Griko-speakers practice, at times leading to verbal hygiene practices, with the aim of purifying Griko from Salentine interference in order to meet the expectations of speaking a ‘pure and authentic’ Griko (see also Pellegrino, 2016).