

# 'Be-longing' in a 'doubly occupied place': The Parakalamos Gypsy musicians

ASPASIA THEODOSIOU

Triggered by continuous references to Parakalamos—a village on the Greek–Albanian border area in the north-west of Greece—as ‘musicians’ or Gypsies’ village’—this paper attempts to unfold a number of layers embedded within the process of identity formation by exploring the way place and its locatedness (both physical and symbolic) are implicated in processes of othering. The purpose is to invite reflections on the interrelations between the constitution of identity of places and the constitution of ‘terrains of be-longing’ with specific reference to the Gypsy case. In this respect it runs contrary to most of the assumptions shared by recent studies on Gypsies: against their focus on ‘nomadism’ and/or ‘imagined communities’—a focus that seems to disregard the significance of place in the constitution of Gypsy identifications—the paper raises the ways in which Gypsies’ locatedness and sense of ‘be-longing’ might be more apt in understanding how policing their identification with place can indeed be a crucial part of the Gypsy world.

*Keywords:* place, locatedness, ambiguity, be-longing, Gypsiness, music, Epirus, Greek–Albanian border, Parakalamos.

The village of Parakalamos in north-western Greece, which lies in the border zone with Albania and where I carried out my field research, was often described to me both by people associated with it and by people living in the neighbouring areas as a ‘musicians’ or Gypsies’ village’. This article explores the significance of this labelling by exploring the way place and its locatedness (physical and symbolic) are implicated in processes of ‘othering’. The purpose is to capture a number of layers embedded within the process of identity formation as they figure in the Greek–Albanian border area and with specific reference to the Gypsy case.

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Aspasia Theodosiou is a temporary lecturer in anthropology of music, Department of Music, Technological Institute of Epirus, Kostakii, 47100, Arta, Greece. She is also an honorary research fellow of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester. E-mail: [cissy\\_theo@hotmail.com](mailto:cissy_theo@hotmail.com), [aspasia.theodosiou@man.ac.uk](mailto:aspasia.theodosiou@man.ac.uk)

Ethnographically my analysis concerns the twists, the 'redefinition' of place imposed by the formal institution of the Greek nation-state in the area (after the end of the Ottoman rule in 1913) involved in the Parakalamos case. As I demonstrate below, not only was the place to be made 'Greek', but also it was to be invested with the significance of 'home' for the roaming 'Turkish' Gypsies of the area. As a result of these processes, and being only recently 'relocated' in the plain, Parakalamos's constitution as a place involves the stitching together of a series of pairs (peasants–musicians, 'Turkish'–Christian, non-Gypsies–Gypsies, dwelling–travelling) and is thus marked by ambiguity.

It is perhaps to be expected that Gypsies would constitute an ambiguous case, that their Gypsiness would be constructed around a 'distinct' culture rather than a place (e.g. Gay y Blasco 1999; Stewart 1997) with music playing a crucial role in their ascription of an insider/outsider role (e.g. Manuel 1989; Mitschell 1994; Rice 1994). Yet, the way the topography of the constructions of Gypsiness bears on the Parakalamos Gypsies' sense of 'be-longing' summons up even more complexity. With a sense of identification—a 'be-longing' (Probyn 1996)—associated with the place (the area around the Greek–Albanian border) and music-playing practices, Gypsies willingly changed their religion and names so they could remain, when the place was 'redefined' by Greek nationalism. With their settlement in Parakalamos marking a new departure in their local history, Gypsies are both part and reflection of the ambiguity that permeates representations of Parakalamos as 'a doubly occupied place' (Stewart 1996): they are constituted as new born 'Greek subjects', albeit in a 'dishevelled' (Todorova 1997) form: being locals but not indigenous, settled but with a long history of travelling, Christians but with a close connection to 'Turkish' places in the past, Gypsies are rendered ambiguously distinct and notable, a group on their own. In that sense, their apparent ambiguity is inextricably related with the 'where' of the place, not the 'who'.

Such a story, however, runs contrary to most of the assumptions shared by recent studies on Gypsies: against their focus on 'nomadism'<sup>1</sup> and 'imagined communities'—a focus that seems to disregard the significance of 'place' in the constitution of Gypsy identifications—I raise here the ways in which a sense of 'be-longing' might be more apt in understanding how Gypsies, in the case of Parakalamos at least, have constructed their identities and loca-

1. I take 'nomadism' here in a more metaphorical sense than the usage of the term in the literature that concerns Gypsies as travellers.

tions in the past and how they go about constituting ideas about themselves at present.

### The Parakalamos *Yifti* (Gypsies)

Parakalamos, with a permanently resident population of about 1000 inhabitants is located in the centre of the Doliana plain, some 30 Km from the Greek–Albanian border in the northwest of Ioannina, the capital of Epirus. The residents who founded the village used to live some way up the side of the mountain of Kasidiarés in a village now called Ano Parakalamos. The current site of Parakalamos used to be a collection of straw huts, which were used by the upper villagers, when they were cultivating the plain or grazing their animals.<sup>2</sup>

As in almost every other part of Epirus, in Parakalamos there are a range of differences marked between peoples: some are called *Greki* (ordinary Greeks)<sup>3</sup> and they constitute the majority of its population; these are mainly the upper villagers, who started settling in the plain just before the end of the Ottoman rule (1913),<sup>4</sup> when their village was burnt by the Turkish army (Gogos 1995: 29–30). Some are called *Vlachi* (Vlachs) and they used to be transhumant pastoralists before they finally settled in the village, and finally some others are called *Yifti* (Gypsies).<sup>5</sup> Interestingly enough for a place that has a reputation of being a ‘Gypsy village’ there are not more than twenty Gypsy families living there.

In Parakalamos Gypsies have been recorded in official papers of the local administration since the 1920s. Before they finally bought land and settled in the village—a process that was completed more or less after the Second World War (1941–1945)—Gypsies used to temporarily (during winter) reside in Parakalamos and other villages in the area, mainly the ‘Turkish’ ones (Chrisodouli, Pogoniani),<sup>6</sup> while ‘roaming aimlessly’ during the summer

2. Until 1927 the current site of Parakalamos was officially called ‘the straw huts of Pogthoriani’ (the old name of Ano Parakalamos). Most of the village names in the area—as in other areas—were changed in 1927 in the aftermath of their incorporation into the Greek state, to ‘Greek ones’ due to their Slavic connection (Kostulas 1995).

3. See Green (forthcoming) for a more detailed discussion.

4. Epirus has been under the Ottoman rule until 1913. See Peckham (2001), Galland (2001), Clogg (1980[1979])

5. In what follows I employ the term Gypsies (*Yifti*) only in reference to the Parakalamos Gypsies as a way to keep up with the distinctions made in Parakalamos.

6. The term ‘Turkish’ is being used very loosely here, as people in the area use it. It does not imply that the residents were ethnically Turkish—most often in fact, they were ethnically

across a vast area between Thesprotia in the South and Konitsa and Zagori in the North. Their association with the ‘Turkish’ villages is still echoed in their identification as *Turkoyifti* (‘Turkish’ Gypsies) as opposed to the *Romioyifti* or *Christianoyifti* (‘Rom’ Gypsies, meaning Christian Gypsies who had the same kind of background as the non-Gypsy Greek Folk, in Herzfeld’s terms 1982),<sup>7</sup> who reside in the neighbouring villages and do not speak Romani—the term is less frequently uttered in the context of Parakalamos, where they are called *Yifti* (Gypsies).

It is important to stress that the *Christianoyifti* of the area were ‘integrated’ into the local communities much earlier—this is seen as the main reason for not speaking Romany—mainly through their traditional activities as musicians and blacksmiths, have Christian-Greek names, and do not usually engage in close relations (e.g. marriage, formation of music-bands) with the *Turkoyifti* (Gogos 1995: 40). As briefly mentioned above, the term *Turkoyifti* conveys Gypsies’ relations to certain places and is strongly echoed in their ‘old Turkish names’ (e.g. Chalil, Kerimis, Meme, Beintasis)—Gypsies were baptised en masse after the end of the World War II in Parakalamos and were registered as Christians. The *Turkoyifti* of the area before the final closure of the Greek–Albanian border—after the end of the Greek civil war (1949)—by Hoxja’s new communist regime, interacted and had strong connections (family ties) with ‘Turkish’ Gypsies in Albania. Since recently, after the re-opening of the Greek–Albanian border in 1991, those relations are in a process of transformation.

Gypsies reside in two different neighbourhoods without being visibly singled out. An important role in this plays the chaotic sprawl of the village, an outcome of the fact that houses on the plain were built more or less where the huts had previously been. Men earn their living from making music, while women—especially the older ones—earn some money by helping local people with agricultural activities. They primarily associate in their homes and with their kin, what is often referred to as ‘family’—parents, siblings, children, grandchildren, in-laws. Most often than not, they marry among themselves, with people of their *ratsa* (lit. ‘race’); you can find almost nobody who is not associated with kinship ties. Their sense of ‘community’ overlaps the bounds of Parakalamos and is extended to their relatives main-

Albanian or sometimes Bulgarian or other Slavic ethnicity. What is usually meant by saying a village used to be ‘Turkish’ is that the residents were mainly Muslim or had converted to Islam and they generally spoke a language other than Greek.

7. Friedman (1994: 120) discussed how identifications such as *Romii* and *Christiani* are equivalent.

ly in the Gypsy neighbourhood of Ioannina (Nea Zoi) but also in Athens and the US (New York).

I will not pursue this descriptive account about Parakalamos or the Parakalamos Gypsies much further except to note that the task of understanding and representing how the differences between Gypsies and non-Gypsies are discussed and experienced in Parakalamos is not a straightforward one. The dichotomy—Gypsies–non-Gypsies—is at most a starting point. As I discuss elsewhere (Theodosiou 2003: ch. 3), questions of what it means to be ‘Gypsy’ in Parakalamos feed complexly into mutual racial categorisations and, most importantly, are met with an active and conscious lack about what to think about them and their possible effects: there is no way of ‘fixing’ self and other, and therefore no way of clearly recognising an opposition between them. Many ‘fixed’ elements—classifications, categorisations, essentialisms of all sorts—are evoked, they are tested and tried out, but the outcome seems to be a situation of permanent indecision about them, rather than a coherent and conclusive account about what constitutes Gypsiness.<sup>8</sup>

In that sense the issue to be explored here is not whether Gypsies are different (in terms of language, family contacts, settlement profile, etc.) but the way they are constituted and understood and the relationship between them. Far from being a situation easily incorporated into well—ordered schema of neatly divided ‘communities’, Gypsiness in Parakalamos is constituted and understood mainly in relation to ‘where’ (both physical and symbolic) not the ‘who’. My account therefore is less an ethnography of the cultural construction of Gypsiness (e.g. Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 1999) than a consideration of the topography of its construction.<sup>9</sup> Sibony’s point is acute here: ‘it [difference] sets about the demand for a closer examination of the very ‘space’ through which people pass in order to become different and attempt to live their difference; in short, the very gesture of ‘seeking place’ (Sibony quoted in Steen Preis 1997: 89).

### Talking about Gypsiness from a non-Gypsy perspective

I begin with an oral account given by Panagiotis Gogos, a non-Gypsy man in his eighties from Parakalamos,<sup>10</sup> which attempts to capture something of

8. Many recent ethnographies are characterised by the same resistance to nail things down. See, for example, Tsing (1993), Stewart (1996), Ravetz (2001).

9. See Lemon (2000) for a similar point: the challenge for her lies in grounding Gypsy life in local places and pasts and less in addressing the sources of Gypsy distinctiveness.

10. Panagiotis is the brother of Andreas Gogos, a teacher and the author of the two-volume history of Parakalamos (Gogos 1995).

the way different people described and experienced the ‘where’ of this place and its Gypsiness. This account represents just a small portion of the accounts people shared with me.<sup>11</sup> Obviously what was said, left unsaid, shared or exchanged, and the way in which things were said within each type of encounter or relationship would be different; but there were also elements which remained the same. In particular this account draws out the past and present of the Gypsy presence in the area; it takes the shape of an insistent and multi-layered story that nonetheless involves three main elements: past patterns of movement, music playing, and current belonging to Parakalamos. There are however, missing pieces and strange twists in this story, and in what follows I go on to dwell on them and provide my own story about the effects of the discourse about movement on inter-ethnic relations and the way Parakalamos Gypsiness is strongly interrelated to location.

### ‘Routes and roots narrated’

‘Lowland villages like Parakalamos have kept their people’, said Panagiotis, while urging me to imagine life in a place that was only partly affected by the repeated mass migrations that hit the rest of the area. For Panagiotis, the current location of Parakalamos by the plain has been a double-edged sword: ‘the need to have a better life drove the people away from other villages in the area, right? Well, here things took a different route: people stayed because they could live on, survive. But that meant that they never bothered to get educated, travel. Even *Yifti* [Gypsies] came here because of that . . .’

Panagiotis said the Gypsies were nomadic—scattered and welded together out of a history of nomadism; he remembered them year in and year out renting his family’s straw huts during winter and he invited me to consider the scenes that still haunted him:

. . . picture a small room, filled with smoke, no windows nothing; the fire in the middle of the room, the Gypsy kids running around barefoot . . . a whole family of ten, eleven—perhaps more—packed together in a just one room for the winter. . . *talai-poria* [hardships] . . .

11. There were many more stories and aspects to people’s understanding of Gypsiness and its association to Parakalamos and Panagiotis’s is partial and incomplete, which is the nature of all stories and accounts. Obviously here I have not focused on the analysis of narrative accounts. However, I have been mindful of some of the issues involved, gleaned from an appreciation of the work of the following, amongst others: Steedly (1993), Pratt (1992), and Stewart (1996).

. . . the Gypsy women dressed in long *tumania* [Turkish skirts] appearing at our doorstep offering to tell fortunes and asking for some bread and milk . . . the Gypsy troupes dragging horses and donkeys around the villages to trade and more rarely the sound of the Gypsy band, for they were not musicians at that time, they just hit (*htipusan*), and beat (*varusan*) [songs] . . .

Panagiotis, as many others in the village, was brought up with the Gypsies; played as a child, went to school with them; he even spoke their language, *Yiftika*. To re-present his personal story though was to particularly emphasise his role in ‘making the Gypsies Christians’: ‘because they [Gypsies] were not Christians before. We wanted to make them Christians and this was not a state project about converting them to Christianity . . . instead the baptism grew out of our concern about the destiny of our *Yifti* [Gypsies] and *Yifti* themselves agreed.<sup>12</sup> Why should they be different?’ he asked.

But all these were elements of the past, because Gypsies had changed a lot since then, Panagiotis was quick to add: a different Gypsy presence captured in well-tended houses tightly packed with flowers, cleanliness and good food, ‘easy life’ and prominent musicianship: ‘there, [in the Gypsy neighbourhood] you won’t see huge stables and the messiness you encounter in our houses; there is no worry about investing in land, buying houses for the kids, saving money, education . . . you know all the worries we, the *balame* [‘non-Gypsy’ in Romani], have . . .’ he said, and he wondered whether we could actually call them *Yifti* (Gypsies) any more.

During my fieldwork in Parakalamos I was told over and over again, in a chant of certainty expressed by both the Gypsies and the non-Gypsies of the village, that the story of the Gypsies started somewhere outside Parakalamos, but within the area of the Greek–Albanian Border.<sup>13</sup> In all those accounts Parakalamos seemed to represent a nodal point from which one could stretch backwards and talk about the Gypsy presence in the area through movement, divert outwards in order to draw distinctions between local kinds of Gypsiness, and eventually return to, so that the link between a *new* kind of Gypsiness and Parakalamos can be stressed again.

According to this well repeated story, the Gypsies were poor, did not own any land or houses and moved around the area a lot; they did all sorts of dif-

12. See Gogos (1995: 35) for a similar point.

13. Historically tracing Gypsies’ relations with the area is rather difficult due to scarcity of written records. Based on folklore sources, local texts, and mainly oral accounts (e.g. life histories and genealogies) one can argue that Gypsies’ presence in the area has been prominent throughout the last 150 years.

ferent things for a living—sieve making, repairing umbrellas, trading horses and donkeys—amongst which was the playing of music. But you could not call them ‘musicians’, apparently, not yet. Parakalamos was a good place for Gypsies to settle because of the plain—‘they could secure the basics there’ was the phrase commonly uttered—and the people were ‘nice’ to them, unlike the ‘more cultured villages where locals would look down at *Yifti* [Gypsies] and despise them.’ Thus, they chose to come and settle in Parakalamos. And from that moment Gypsies changed a lot: they were baptised, stopped moving around, became professional musicians. In short, I was told that the Gypsies were *like* the rest of the people of the village, except they had a different language, as many others in the area anyway (e.g. Vlachs) and they all tended to be musicians; music was ‘in their blood’ after all.

### Routes and roots revised

#### *‘The years of travelling around’*

Let me return for a moment to the issue of movement and the way Panagiotis, like most of the people to whom I spoke, enthusiastically embraced the figure of the Gypsy as a symbol of mobility and flux. In all those accounts movement through space appeared to be the common denominator in discussing Gypsies’ local status, and although empowering in some ways, it actually hindered accounts of Gypsy presence at other levels.

What counts as movement though? And how does one site of the construction of difference (movement) become the condition—the ‘unmarked background’ (Butler 1999)—for the articulation of the other (racialised accounts of Gypsies)? As I demonstrate below, Gypsy movement and the more general mobility option are as linked and continuous as they are distinct and discontinuous. Understanding movement as produced, at least partly, by the Ottoman past, can demonstrate that the gradual restriction of movement—so closely connected to the age of consolidating Greek nationalism (with the creation of strongly guarded state boundaries and with the development of equally strongly guarded national identities)—is not effaced or superseded in the assumed Gypsy articulations so much, as it is transmuted or reconfigured. Interpreting versions of movement as Gypsy then, does not simply designate styles, but links identities to political, economic and *spatial* material practices with significant implications for the issue of difference.

Let me explore a bit the local mode of perceiving space, for it is within this notion that Gypsy movement is embedded. Green (2000, forthcoming:

chs. 2 and 3) wonderfully outlines how different kinds of movement are key to local people's constructions of place, landscape, environment and social relations, as well as their interactions with political and economic worlds beyond the Epirot region. She suggests that for people in Epirus movement had been, in the past, the way things were and the way things happened, and the measure by which people and places were valued and judged: 'the language of movement and place [was] pervasively used in the Epirot region to talk about and constitute distinctions' (forthcoming: 91). 'There was no strong expression of 'roots' amongst many people in Epirus . . . in the terms described by Malkki (1992). Even though most did strongly associate themselves with the area, that notion carried no attendant idea of being rooted in the place, fixed there or based in the soil somehow' (2000: 11).<sup>14</sup> Space here then is not something vacuous (e.g. Ingold 1995, 2000; Casey 1997), but the very essence of movement and shifting; it is constructed out of movement.

Within this more general context, the identification of Gypsies with movement is different from that of the *Greki* (ordinary Greeks) people living around the Greek–Albanian border whom Green also discusses: 'this continual mentioning of movement . . . was not really the focus of the conversation . . . what was important about each story was not movement as such . . . movement was not considered a 'tradition' . . . it was simply one of those elements of living life, and people did not see it as either contributing anything to them as a people and nor, necessarily, to any new direction, as it were, that they may be taking' (2000: 4). Yet, it is also different from the way the two transhumant pastoralist groups of the area—Vlachs and Sarakatsani—are perceived: for them movement is their key distinctive tradition (e.g. Campbell 1964; Nitsiakos 1985); nomadism as a repetitive tradition-bound mobility 'cordons off a space of cultural purity and simplicity more settled than the space of the sedentary' (Tsing 1993: 150).

In all the accounts presented to me Gypsy movement appears rather different: Gypsies did not have to move because they were not seen as locals, were forced into displacement,<sup>15</sup> as a result of some sort of 'traditional activity',<sup>16</sup> or because they privileged solitude and a space of their own<sup>17</sup>; nor was

14. The implication of such a mode of perceiving space for the way 'identity'—constructed via the notions of 'tradition', 'authenticity' and 'nation'—is understood will unfold in what follows.

15. See Stewart (1997) and Gay y Blasco (1999) for an example of Gypsies being forced to live in ghetto like settlements.

16. See Lovell (1998: 4) for an example of a portrayal of Gypsies' sense of belonging as highly predicated on movement. See also Okely (1983), Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar (1998).

17. See for example Stewart (1997: 28).

Gypsy movement in Epirus seen as threatening or abnormal in any sense. As one of my non-Gypsy informants put it: 'It happened that Gypsies in the area moved around due to poverty and lack of property, and finally chose to settle in Parakalamos, where they were given a proper name, stopped wandering around and became proper musicians'.

Even though the 'before' and the 'now' act as counterpoints and derive much of their symbolic power from their contrast, it is clear that the hold that 'the years of moving around' has, resides in the way it resonates with a more familiarly local mode of perceiving space—as constructed out of movement. What is more, while movement appears to render Gypsy identity right away in a more familiarly local mode, turning the continuity of Gypsy presence into a spatial grid, it does not actually imply a lack of homeland; Gypsies do have a homeland—'they come from the area,' I was repeatedly told.

Gypsies' local status then is moulded and defined as much by their locat- edness around the borderland as by their movement across the area. Yet, and this is noteworthy, while the 'earlier and elsewhere' element of the Gypsy settlement practices is acknowledged, what this narrative fails to focus upon, interestingly enough, is other moments of Gypsy settlement. To put it differently: while the settled presence of Gypsies was significant in other localities in the area—they were all classified as 'Turkish villages'—before their final (that is, most recent) settlement in Parakalamos, these other 'settlements' are somehow presented in these accounts as 'the years of moving around, the era of roaming'.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar vein, the act of settling in Parakalamos almost entirely eclipses both an adequate explanation of the reasons that led Gypsies to stop moving around, and the fact that movement is still important to Parakalamos Gypsies. Movement in the context of Gypsy musicianship or the more recent moving around of some Gypsy families after their final settlement in Parakalamos<sup>19</sup> slips effortlessly out of our grasp, unless we are aware of 'what is continually traversing the story laterally' (Berger quoted in Soja 1989). It is thus the practice of moving around that is focused upon as constituting Gypsies' local history, yet distinct presence in the *past*. And this is then juxtaposed with the stasis of the present. In expanding the inscriptions of Gypsy

18. Likewise, the term *Turkoyifti* conveys Gypsies' relation to certain places without openly classifying them as Muslims—note for example how in Panagiotis's account Gypsies were presented as only recently baptised, but not as previously being Muslims.

19. Quite a few Gypsy families from Parakalamos continued to move around the area during the summer until very recently (1975).

‘coming and going’ or alternatively compressing the inscriptions of Gypsy settlements the desire to produce a racial narrative shows clearly. Gypsies’ perceived dwelling-in-movement, to paraphrase Clifford (1997), is seen to be a place in relation to the area’s history, used not to objectify Gypsiness through nostalgia or authenticity, but as a means to unpack their different being-in-the-world.

*Parakalamos: settlement*

If Gypsiness was mainly related to mobility in the past, it was, nonetheless, their settlement in Parakalamos that gave way to their life now; it served to create, mould and reflect different ideas about Gypsiness.<sup>20</sup>

Let me explore the way in which in Panagiotis’s account presented above the settlement in Parakalamos appears to conflate and combine three distinct elements—the end of the years of ‘wandering’, conversion to Christianity and musicianship. In many respects, one can argue, what marks the significance of this articulation is not settlement as such, but rather the terms upon which settlement was being negotiated. Hesse (1993), in his account of the Black post-war settlements in Britain, presents us with a similar situation, what he calls ‘a narrow temporalized notion of settlement, as if it were a discrete moment’ (*ibid.*: 168). Following him I suggest that by thinking laterally against the grain of this well repeated narrative—since movement and settlement had a number of different articulations which resist a neat codification of Gypsies as progressing in a linear sequence from movement to stasis—the Parakalamos settlement can be viewed as ‘a politics of reinscribing times and spaces’ (*ibid.*: 165).

In that sense, there are some key layers to the association of Gypsies with Parakalamos which have to be uncovered here. First and foremost is the physical and symbolic locatedness of Parakalamos: away from the troubling border<sup>21</sup> and the ambiguous ‘Turkish’ past, but close enough to maintain

20. From yet another perspective, one can argue that ‘not moving around anymore’ in this context is equated with the kinds of dwellings in which the Gypsies now live: as Panagiotis said, they have houses that they are ‘neat and tidy, gardens filled with flowers’ etc.; hence, they are ‘domestic’ in a way that seems similar to the non-Gypsies; they no longer take their belongings with them, when they move around, and it is men alone, and not the entire family, who move around. One could say that using Epirot standards, that counts as not moving (Green 1998, 2000, forthcoming)

21. The Greek- Albanian border was finally cemented in 1921 after the end of the World War I (1919). Its location, however, despite the battles over the years has only shifted a small amount from its designated location when it was initially drawn up as a state border in 1913 following the end of the Ottoman rule.

their local connections, the Gypsies' settlement in Parakalamos consolidated and elaborated regional networks (hence reaffirming the presence of existing Gypsy settlements), but also marked a significant, nonetheless ambiguous, spatio-temporal break.

Being relatively recently relocated on the plain, Parakalamos is seen both by its people and by its neighbours as a place that 'lacks education and thus culture'.<sup>22</sup> As a '*psomotopos*' ('bread basket') it is ascribed a 'peasant' character, which situates it in sharp contrast to most of the villages in the area. It was exactly this—Parakalamos's location by the plain and its relative *agricultural* affluence<sup>23</sup>—that accommodated Gypsies both in terms of securing their living and providing a backdrop against which they felt 'not despised and looked down upon as in the more cultured villages'. As is the case almost everywhere, different locations in this area were not of equivalent cultural value and are used as a form of 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu, 1986).<sup>24</sup>

If Parakalamos seems to mark the past of the area, a 'peasant past' that was to be changed by emigrations (and subsequent heavy depopulation) in most of the other villages of the area, in another way it signifies its present. In Parakalamos, Gypsies are relocated as *new-born subjects* of the Greek nation-state that was recently consolidated in the area. They are given new names, a new religion and a new place of origin and perhaps more importantly, they are identified with a new occupation, that of a musician. A mere look at the residents' register of Parakalamos tells it all: the Gypsies' 'old names' ('Turkish' names) are crossed out and replaced by 'new ones' (Christian-Greek). Settling, then, was about settling what is negotiable and what is acceptable. Thus, apart from a spatio-temporal articulation, settlement (settling down) signifies also an 'ethno-national' one.

Let me explore this aspect a bit further, for it situates Parakalamos within the wider nationalist discourses. In the context of the expansionist ideology of the Great Idea—the irredentist policy of the Greek government of the day (1920s) of trying to incorporate within a unified Greek state all the Greek populated areas (particularly in Asia Minor that could be claimed to be 'nat-

22. See Green (1999) for an example of how people from the nearby village of Doliana describe the Parakalamos people as lacking in education and culture.

23. The Upper Parakalamos peoples are described by Gogos (1995) as pastoralists in the middle of a fertile and cultivable plain. This echoes a point made by various scholars (e.g. Nitsiakos 1985): the Ottoman system encouraged pastoralism and discouraged cash crop cultivation.

24. See Green for a similar point (forthcoming: 90).

urally' Greek)—Greece as a place was to be physically specified. The Great Idea was concerned more with the identity of the place and not the people: people would be moved, removed, etc., so that the place could be 'pure' Greek.<sup>25</sup> The forced dislocation of all the Muslim population of Epirus—in the context of the mass exchange of population<sup>26</sup> in the wake of the failure of the Great Idea—is yet another manifestation of this process of 'fixing' the right people to the 'right' place. Thus, whilst the Great Idea had flopped disastrously and at the cost of thousands of lives, in its wake 'ethno-nationalist' (Verdery 1993, 1996) territorialism began to take 'root' in places like Epirus, where, as briefly mentioned above, there had not been much evidence of it before. Green's point is pertinent here: 'the language of roots was usually reserved for the expression of nationalist sentiments, the 'Hellenic' discourse, which was different in two important respects from the discussions that involved the local people which incidentally mentioned movement: firstly, the nationalist rhetoric specified Greece, as a place and as a whole; and secondly, the nationalist rhetoric carried a strong air of resistance to movement, of fixing in place, that was entirely absent in the way local people talked about their own experiences.' (2000: 11).

Place here then seems to be related to two things. Firstly, it is related to the past seen as the outcome of previous movements, the traces left by movement and displacement and of political history's construction, and secondly to the nation-state. Place being strongly related to these two elements—Ottoman past and the nation-state—becomes then intrinsically ambiguous.

*Parakalamos: 'a doubly occupied place'*

There is, however, an added complication to that: Parakalamos, like the Appalachian coal-mining region of south western Virginia of which Stewart writes (1996), is 'a place apart' (*ibid.*: 41). The sentiment of ambivalence towards Parakalamos has been utterly commonplace during my fieldwork; continually reiterating the conviction was that this was a place 'othered'<sup>27</sup> and de-centred by stories of 'proper places', where people conform

25. The literature on the issue is vast. Among the studies I have found useful are Peckham (2001) and Galland (2001).

26. I am referring here to the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in the aftermath of the Smyrna disaster in 1922. See Clogg (1980[1979]), Galland (2001).

27. According to Stewart (1996) marginality within the USA generates 'spaces or gaps', what she calls 'othered' or 'doubly occupied' places, in which it is imagined that a lost authenticity might still exist. In that sense they are not constructed as being outside or marginal to some mainstream cultural landscape, but are rendered as 'occupied' spaces.

and where 'education and culture' are the values that hold sway. The place to which most of these accounts finally led was the conviction that it has been the locatedness of Parakalamos that encouraged people to become peasants—with the latter bound to be followed by a contrasting, yet strongly interrelated, connection with Gypsiness. The common occupancy of such a place by Gypsies and peasants confers them with a shared identity; put differently, although Gypsies came to Parakalamos relatively recently, they still 'belong' to Parakalamos because they are important in constituting Parakalamos as the 'place' that it is.

Arriving at Parakalamos, as a fieldworker, I found myself constantly thrown between these two poles—Gypsiness and peasanthood—believing I must delineate discrete systems with their own distinct characteristics.<sup>28</sup> This attempt, however, was constantly disrupted and the means of this disruption showed me something about Parakalamos as 'a doubly occupied place' (Stewart 1996): the combination of Gypsiness and peasanthood bears on Parakalamos's 'otherness' in a way that is not alluded to by Stewart's account. If, for Stewart, 'doubly occupied' places appear as a systematic negation of the ideal order of things, then in Parakalamos one is presented with something more: otherness, there, is not only something that enters Parakalamos from 'outside', it grows within it too.

The initial questions have to be reformulated somehow: how can the locatedness of Gypsies in Parakalamos be explained when it coexists with the continual interweaving of Gypsy movement? And how is this used to buttress social and racial distinctions? I argue that the oscillation between movement and settlement is about emphasising the relation in which there is no dichotomy, but a mutual constitution (and coercion—locality is elicited from movement). Gypsy locality is said to be done within the pair. Talking then of Parakalamos as 'a Gypsy village' involves acknowledging that a limited notion of settled/travellers (as bound up with Romani studies for example) is at most a starting point; it is perhaps a way of grasping 'the gist of things' (Stewart 1996), but only by 'closing the gap of particularity' (*ibid.*) and accepting that questions about Gypsiness can be answered coherently and conclusively. In contrast, in my perspective, place is located knowledge: in refusing the either/or dualism of dwelling and traveling, the act of constructing place encompasses this and other pairs (i.e. peasants/musicians, ambiguous identities/ clear cut ones, etc.).

28. For Stewart (1997: 237) 'the Gypsy and peasant ethic are constituted by a series of structural oppositions, at once economic, social and moral'

Place then is not simply there, taken for granted as a pre-given materiality defining and dictating meanings or made out of an investment in the realm of nature; nor is the place this foggy construct made out of people's need to describe/signify, an effect of a particular kind of imaginative practice.<sup>29</sup> Rather its symbolic and physical positioning woven together locate it in a very specific way. The complexity of the processes involved in the changes presented above has to do with certain contradictions and ambiguities riddled in the place and its locatedness. And theorising in this manner is crucial: for it attests to the ways in which issues of identification and space construction cannot be divided (and hence how the spatial cannot be posited as ontologically prior to issues of identification). What is generated by these pairs, what is engendered by this condition of being in-between, of being neither one thing nor the other, is a condition of ambiguity. And the implications of what this means for the Gypsies are indeed very pertinent.

If on one level attempts to 'identify' them ran concurrently with the 'coming of the Greek [state]'—to use the phrase commonly uttered—and Gypsies are made enough *like* the rest of the locals (became Christians and settled), they are nonetheless constituted as ambiguously distinct and different: being local but not indigenous (because of their aimless wandering in the past), being Christian but with a long term association with 'Turkish' places, being musicians but with a peasant quality, *Yifti* are cast as 'dishevelled' Gypsies and figure as 'incomplete selves' (Todorova 1997) in relation to both local populations and other groups of Gypsies (i.e. *Tsingani*)—an aspect that will unfold in the final part of this paper.

### On Gypsy 'be-longing'

Reading against the grain of non-Gypsy accounts is to ask how Parakalamos and Gypsiness figure in the Gypsy accounts. In what follows, it is the interrelations and separations between those accounts that concern me most and it is in that sense that I do not take these narratives as either self-contained or self-evident. I shall therefore show how Gypsy accounts, while disrupting

29. For Gupta and Ferguson (1992) the social construction of place is uncontested and needs to be politicised. While they agree that space preceded place and becomes inscribed with meaning in multiple ways, they also argue that space continues to be relevant. Yet, I agree with Ravetz that the emphasis Gupta and Ferguson place on imagination as a means to create place is predicated on an implicit disjunction between the realms of embodied non-linguistic practice and imaginative worlds' (2001: 40). My argument here echoes Feld's suggestion (1996: 8).

the *pair* of the non-Gypsy accounts— for example, by foregrounding a clear break between their present situation of being settled and their roaming in the past—are nonetheless told alongside the dominant accounts with no disruption. By giving a different impression and focusing on different aspects of the past, these stories successfully signify something precisely because they are deployed within a shared universe of meaning (i.e. the Ottoman past). Yet, in so doing, they are also capable of provoking a sliding of signifiers and thereby triggering new forms of representation and memory. Following de Certeau's (1984) concerns, the workings of transformation, the openings and foreclosures of social space, the subtle changes of meaning in dominant discourses is what I find important here.<sup>30</sup>

A few brief points about my theoretical approach are needed here: in talking about Gypsies' sense of 'belonging' to Parakalamos, I employ the term 'be-longing' in Probyn's sense (1996), who has highlighted that belonging allows for an affective dimension—not just 'being' but 'longing'. Against the reification of 'imagined communities' as the paradigmatic figure of Gypsies' experience of identity (e.g. Stewart 1997; Gay y Blasco 1999) on the one hand, and the assumed 'isomorphism of space, place and culture' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) on the other, I explore here the ways in which 'be-longing', similar to the Deleuzian rhizome (1987), conveys connections, interrelations between people and places and relates to processes of identification<sup>31</sup> (Hall 1996), rather than 'possessions and *appartenance*' (Fortier 1999: 42)—that is a clearly articulated sense of identity as a separate and self-contained set of properties and possessions which identify a people vis-a-vis other peoples (a conceptualisation that is paraded in identity politics struggles). As will become clearer in the following pages, 'be-longing' relates to processes of identification that are strongly related to location and as such could only be partially connected to the wider discourses of identity formation in the context of the Greek nation-state.

In that sense, the case not only bears directly on what local people—both Gypsies and non-Gypsies—wish to make visible about themselves and their immediate 'others', but also what kind of relations these people both desire and they are able to generate. By exploring what goes into making people

30. The need to go beyond the general depiction of heterogeneous practices as resistance informs my approach here. See Ortner (1995); Abu-Lughod (1990).

31. For Hall the term identification is preferable to identity itself (1996: 2) for it allows a better grasp of the processual ways in which people come to identify themselves within multiple discourses. See also Skeggs (1997) for a similar perspective.

and places ambiguous, both in terms of how it occurs and what the consequences of such ambiguity might be, I argue for the *interdependence* of the performance of identity and the performativity of politics (in this case the politics of ambiguity)—strongly inflected as the latter is with the way place is constituted and understood.<sup>32</sup>

*An origin(al) story?*

In the company of Chalilis and Selimis<sup>33</sup>—two Gypsy men in their seventies—at the far end of the one Gypsy neighbourhood in Parakalamos and surrounded by the usual custody of children, I was presented with the following story line when I asked Chalilis where he had been:

CHALILIS: I was at Chademis's place . . . Do you know Chademi? She was Chairos's wife. Chairos was an enterpreneur, tradesman and of course a very good musician. He owned plots of land in Ioannina . . . he was extremely rich . . . money counted with a shovel. He was one of us . . . Eh, Selimis, you must have heard about them . . .

Selimis emitted an ambiguous 'hmm' before he said: 'You are the story teller, I do not know'. For Chalilis, Chairos, among others, was 'an old Gypsy; a well-known musician and closely linked to Ali Pasha<sup>34</sup>—Turks knew all about music after all. He was something like the ancient Greek heroes, the ones kids learn about at school; except he was a musician and not a fighter'.

With the benefit of hindsight—as I grew steadily less and less confused when presented with such unusual stories—in the length of the whole afternoon I grilled Chalilis and Selimis for an 'accurate' outline of these old Gypsies' kinship lines. Chalilis tried to reel off names and connections that did not tally and in the end, while abandoning this enterprise, he insisted, 'we

32. I distance myself from a dualistic perspective that characterises identity as either essential or performative. Yet, it is well beyond the scope of this paper to theoretically discuss how the concepts of identity, identification have been dealt with in the literature and to situate the concepts of locatedness and 'be-longing' squarely within this literature. For a discussion see Theodosiou (forthcoming).

33. In Parakalamos only Gypsies and myself would use Gypsies' 'old names.' The rest of the locals would utter their Christian names.

34. The most famous recent historical period for Epirus was the era of its rule by Ali Pasha (1788–1822), an Albanian Muslim, who only ever learnt a few words of Turkish, and who was despised by the Ottoman authorities in Constantinople for being dangerously autonomous. We read in the memoirs of Athanasios Lidorikis: 'the musicians of the Turkish army were all *Athiggani* [*Tsingani*] and Ali Pasha loved music. In Ioannina there were a lot of Gypsies, expert musicians playing the violin, *ndefi* [small drum] etc.. but sometimes musicians were invited from Rumeli. . . young Gypsy women were called upon as well to sing and dance' (as presented in Dousas (2001: 57)).

are all related to each other in some way . . . from the same place you know . . . the same *ratsa* [lit. 'race']<sup>35</sup>

Stories like this one were mundane among Parakalamos Gypsies. They, especially the old people like Chalilis, favoured 'origin(al)' stories, accounts where you can still find the remains and the edges of other, untold stories, other possible kinds of arrangement, other possible claims.<sup>35</sup> Yet, such *formal* discontinuity with the dominant discourses barely disguises their continuity. Gypsy accounts go beyond, not beside, the more dominant accounts. Far from being irrelevant, these 'invisible'—in non-Gypsy accounts—elements (i.e. stories of Gypsy musicians being prominent in the area during Ottoman times) are crucial to the way Gypsies were concerned with establishing their loyalty to the area, with important effects on their intended relocation as local beings. In this sense, while signalling a new arena of relationships, they retained and, for their meaning, depended on dominant discourses. Thus, being *Yiftos* does not require the kind of 'origin stories' found in much of the literature about Gypsies—they usually deal with Gypsy poverty and explain the origin of the Gypsies' deceitful attitude towards the non-Gypsies (e.g. Stewart 1997: 18). Unlike stories about their 'Indian origins' (they can be found in local history books (e.g. Gogos 1995) or in a more general accounts about Gypsies in Greece (e.g. Dousas 1997) and obviously Gypsies are exposed to them), which can be about Gypsies (e.g. in terms of linguistic evidence (Matras 2002)), but not directly concerning these Gypsies,<sup>36</sup> such 'origin(al)' stories were both *for* them and *about* them.

By highlighting their long-standing connections to the area and their 'tradition', as it were, which was not about roaming or being poor and peripheral, but instead revolved around musicianship, respectability and strong links to the area, Gypsy accounts highlight the complex mechanisms by which their alleged association with movement cannot actually connote a different Gypsy being-in-the-world. Chairios, a well off and well established musician, might have settled in Ioannina, but these elements were yet another instance of his loyalty to the area. Even for Gypsies who did move and did not have land, it does not necessarily mean that they did not have a loyalty to the area; movement does not negate 'attachment' in emotional terms.

Chalilis resorts to genealogy as a metaphor of continuity, but without implying that the nature of the present day community is biologically deter-

35. For a similar point see Navaro-Yashin (2003: 117).

36. For a similar observation regarding *Tsingani* in Greece see Kozaitis (1997), Vaxevanoglou (2001).

mined by its lineage. Generations are called upon as images of duration and continuity, the origins of which are located in the area. Yet, although they are place based, they are not univocally place bound. Their *ratsa* (race) to use the term Chalilis uttered, cannot be talked about, cannot be represented and experienced without resorting to two elements that actually index it: place and music.

Yet, such a focus on music and place, while overpowering, is also brittle and fragile. Both dominant and Gypsy stories focus on music—it is where both sets of stories seem to agree on the matter of Parakalamos Gypsies. But there is a crucial difference in terms of relations to place between the Gypsy version and the one asserted by the non-Gypsy people: for the Gypsies, music playing is inextricably linked to their ‘be-longing’ to the place—playing music in Ottoman times around Epirus; for the non-Gypsies, talk of Gypsy musicianship, while not failing to ignite into the process of making place—as they accept that Gypsies are *local musicians*—is mainly about an essential Gypsy identity—‘it is in their blood’.

### *Movement and settlement*

But these were the ‘old Gypsies, the Gypsies of the past, living in an old place that was Turkish centuries ago’ insisted Chalilis and Selimis. For their generation, however, things had been different: stories of hard times of travelling around—some would even say roaming—. . . when poverty and the lack of property had necessitated a whole new way of life for them similar to the Vlachs and the other groups of the area . . . when they constantly moved around villages working as hired labourers, trading animals—horses and donkeys—and playing music—because they had always been local musicians.

These years (throughout most of the twentieth century, up to the 1970s)<sup>37</sup> became a space filled with paths of actions and imagination, encounters with non-Gypsies who were more or less like them: poor, unassuming, ready to open their doors to them; they could see themselves in what the Gypsies were suffering after all. And in some sense, these years were ‘better’; for they were ‘all the same then: no competition of who had the best house, car, gar-

37. It is difficult to account authoritatively for the time span of ‘the years of roaming’ due to the scarcity of written records—the overall consensus in them being that Gypsies are registered as residents in the ‘Turkish’ villages of the area, whilst being always on the move. My suggestion above is based mainly on information gathered through life histories and genealogies.

den or who was the best musician', Chalilis and Selimis were ready to accept.

Here, then, the exemplary image of the Gypsies' drifting nomadism on which the non-Gypsy accounts were predicated is seen from a different angle: Gypsies remaining in familiar and ancestral places do not find their relation to place ineluctably changed; movement appears to do a similar job to the one the *Greki* people of the area Green talks about (2000, forthcoming) pronounced as their own self-representation: it neither contributes anything to the way Gypsies are nowadays, nor can it sustain any differentiation between them and the non-Gypsies. It is the *place*, not the people that is constructed out of movement. And being connected to place as a Gypsy meant that you just did what the other people had to do: move.

And it is within this more general mobility context that the high tension between stasis now and movement in the past has to be viewed. The latter, tense with contradiction haunts the Gypsies, because they can recognise that it has been used by the non-Gypsies as a means to detect what was lacking for them: a place, a chance to be respected. And yet, it is something full of potential, desire and excitement, for it is their relations to place that were sustained in and through movement, and not some sort of distinct tradition. It might be that their Gypsiness became attached to movement and 'home' was a matter that went beyond individual dwellings, but it was an intensified attachment to place—what I call their 'be-longing'—that continued to constitute their being-in-the-world. To think *about* movement then is to think *in* movement; 'be-longing' is understood in relation to place.

Employing such a spatially informed notion of 'be-longing', within which people and places produce each other in very specific ways, cannot be divorced from the way place historically also came to be related to the nation-state. Gypsies settled in Parakalamos and became Christians, but not as an attempt to show their desire to be *different* from their past; instead, such 'a choice' went with the continuity of their presence in the area, them becoming the 'same' local subjects. When the area 'became Greek' then, all the Gypsies had to do was to comply with what the area wanted them to be: Gypsies' conversion and settlement was not a project implemented on a marginal minority that had to become Greek, a state sponsored project that aimed at the elimination of their 'difference'. Instead it was a necessity that grew in tandem with their yearning for 'be-longing'. Ultimately then, what explains this lack of resistance against such changes to their religion and names—when others either fought to the death or actually left the country in order to avoid making such changes (i.e. the Muslims of Epirus)—is that it was nei-

ther religion nor their names in the first place that was part of their 'identification'. Gypsies 'be-longed' to and helped to constitute the 'place'; it was not so much their religious affiliation, nor even (and perhaps more suprisingly) their names, which gave them a sense of 'be-longing'; instead, it was the right to stay. It might seem, then, that the triangulated relationship among Gypsiness, movement and place was consolidated with their settlement in Parakalamos, but it is important that all the distinct elements of such a conjuncture pre-existed and are very much embedded in the way place is localy conceptualised.

And such a conjuncture was indeed empowering: conceptualising movement and settlement here in terms of a dichotomy—rather than as a pair—a time scale that provides Gypsies with their 'modern history' and thus 'their' 'tradition' is constructed. Gypsies are part of 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995 ): they can consciously talk about movement as 'tradition' then, police their Parakalamos 'roots', exemplify music as their distinct contribution. Parakalamos is both an end point and a starting point: a point of arrival and a point of departure. For it gave birth to a new kind of 'Gypsiness' that is constructed as localised and musicalised in a different way and in a completely different form from what had come before. And yet this 'dichotomisation'—the radical break between before Parakalamos and after Parakalamos—is couched in terms that imply that Gypsies were always already musicians.

It follows then that the paradox of continuing to insist on having been 'always already musicians' (or at least, have played a musical role in much of Epirus's history)—which sounds rather essentialist—is where two discourses collide: the first that argues these people 'be-long' here, without any reference to their 'Gypsiness'; and the second, that they 'belong' *because* of their musical 'tradition', a 'tradition' that, according to non-Gypsy accounts, is specific to a Gypsy *identity* and is 'in their blood'. In order for the first statement to be true, the second must also be true, and yet they focus on two different things: place making through music-playing practices and 'Gypsiness'.

### *Local musicians*

This presumption of differences, however, holds within it another more important mark: regardless of their 'differences' from the other locals (i.e. different language or different 'history' etc.), I was repeatedly told that they do not provide sufficient 'difference' for me to study them as anything other than as local musicians. And perhaps such an image of settled 'local' Gypsy

musicians who do not have any 'resources' to be different was not probably what I was looking for.

Consider, for example, what happened when I began to explain to some of the Gypsies in Parakalamos what it was that I wanted to do in my research. They suggested that the video I was proposing to make would be more successful, if I filmed not them but 'real, authentic' Gypsies, like the *Tsingani*.<sup>38</sup> It was they, 'who with their full, pleated skirts, scarves and braids were the most visible and exotic'. And for the film I certainly needed to gather impressions of 'beautiful customs; or even different clothes and colours'. But all these elements could not be provided by them.

Yet, this was not an issue of dividing the 'same people' into two kinds. Unlike Lemon's (2000) discussion of differences among Romani communities and of the ways Roma spoke about them (*ibid.*: 92), Gypsies construct their differences to *Tsingani* and relate them to locality. They define *Tsingani* culture by features and practices that isolate them from what is regarded as mainstream society; they might capitalise on differences in language, but usually they dwell on the image of the *Tsingani*'s drifting nomadism—even though most of the *Tsingani* are settled.<sup>39</sup> Rejection of being a *Tsiganos* then is ultimately a rejection of being an itinerant traveller—which means that Gypsies themselves might be seen as *Tsingani* in the past, or at least some could see them as such, but they are not anymore. But there is an additional element: *Tsingani* people are not 'Greek'. Entering Greece as refugees during the exchange of populations in 1922, *Tsingani* are defined by Greek 'ethno-nationalism' as people of 'foreign origin'.<sup>40</sup>

In Lemon's account, interactions with dominant European majorities and state policies are considered crucial to the constructions of the terms of difference among Roma.<sup>41</sup> Such an emphasis—running against the long re-

38. Whereas the terms *Yifti* and *Tsingani* are used all over Greece—in most cases interchangeably—to denote itinerant groups, in Epirus *Yifti* are perceived as different to *Tsingani*: *Yifti* are settled and of local origin as opposed to the *Tsingani* people, who are still nomadic—or at least they are seen as such (e.g. Lydaki 1998; Vaxevanoglou 2001). Similar kind of distinctions are also made in the context of other areas in Northern Greece. See Cowan (1990: 102), Gianakopoulos (1981).

39. Images of uprootedness are propped up by the way in which *Tsingani* stories are told in public media. For an account of those see Rougneri (1999).

40. On this ground *Tsingani* people were granted the right to vote only recently (1979). A more nuanced analysis of such issues would of course require much more substantial data and therefore it is outside the scope of this paper.

41. Stewart's (1997) and Gay y Blasco's (1999) work explore how state policies produced differences between Roma and non-Roma.

peated tendency in Gypsy studies to account for such distinctions through ‘dialectical differences, segmentary clan principles and tribal laws’ (Lemon 2000: 111)—rightly foregrounds as more important the ‘specific memories and performed loyalties, occupational opportunities and relations to state, and stereotypic discourse circulating about Gypsies on stage and media’ (*ibid.*). Yet, this does not quite suffice in the case of the Parakalamos Gypsies. One key difference can be found in the way Gypsies desire to identify themselves with place and music. And related to this is their tendency to trace links between themselves and the other locals, to see themselves as ‘ones’ of a local kind.

‘Their’ people—what they articulate as the Parakalamos Gypsies—have gone a long way away from what they used to be in the past—at least the past that they remember or the one that some non-Gypsies might be anxious to foster. ‘Nice, proper houses, musicianship, life similar to the one *balame* [non-Gypsies in Gypsy language] live, in one word’, explained Maria, a Gypsy middle-aged woman, and continued: ‘there are cars parked on the street, Gypsy kids go to school and some times do not even speak the language [Gypsy]’. It is only the music then that makes them different and the interest of a non-Gypsy researcher in it was seen as less controversial than nosing around about their (other) differences. As long, then, as my research was about Gypsy musicianship, I had come to the right place: Parakalamos was the place of origin of (Gypsy) music after all. As for ‘their differences’ from other locals—the ones I was repeatedly asked to delineate so that they could be questioned and endlessly debated<sup>42</sup>—they were just ‘topical’ differences, I was repeatedly assured: ‘we are like the Vlachs who have another language, or the Cretans.’<sup>43</sup> Without distinct customs and costumes, with a language that is all ‘made up and mixed with Greek and Albanian’, and most importantly with a long-lasting relationship to the area, they do not have ‘enough difference’ to exhibit and make my work ‘successful’. And they come to these thoughts not with bitterness, not with any sense of failing somehow to comply with what can be seen as ‘their culture and their people’.

Gypsies, then, seem to conform with the nationalist construction that the differences between Greeks are interesting, but constitute no difference in terms of ‘Greekness’ (Herzfeld 1982); at the same time, however, they are also aware that there *is* a difference, for they are not regarded (by the non-Gypsies) as being Greek in the same way as others are Greek—the more gener-

42. See Theodosiou (2003: ch.3) for more.

43. For a similar representation on behalf of the *Tsingani* see Lydaki (1998), Kozaitis (1997).

al assumption tends to be that Gypsies have more in common with other Gypsies around the world than they have with Greeks (e.g. Lydaki 1997, 1998; Dousas 1997). Moreover, Gypsy 'origins' are not generally regarded as having been Greek, whereas that *is* claimed for most of the rest of the Greek population (e.g. the Asia Minor refugees are Greeks as Asia Minor ought to have been a part of Greece, and if the Great Idea had succeeded, it would have been). If Gypsies are Greek now, it was not always so and that makes a difference.

In this light, one can say that what the Parakalamos Gypsies are doing is claiming a much smaller origin: not a national one, but a regional one: they come from here (the Parakalamos area and its environs), just as everyone else does; they are different, but lots of people around here are different; they belong in the same way as everyone else does—they are here, they have always been here and nowhere else, and their music is from here; moreover, they are identified, more than anything else, with their music-playing practices. How could anyone say they do not belong here? If not here, then where?

Thus, being *Yiftos* does not adhere to an idealised version of culture like the one Stewart (1997) or Gay y Blasco (1999) discuss in their ethnographies about the Hungarian Gypsies and the Gitanos of Madrid respectively. Unlike a 'Rom culture' in which 'there were cultural themes of the outside world, but shifted in key and tone' (Stewart 1997: 235) Parakalamos Gypsiness has been and continues to be dependent on place and music; it is constituted by a set of connections (to the other locals) that generate identifications that have to be emotionally forged: 'be-longings'. It is the place and the relations generated in it and with it which are the sites of the investment for the Gypsies. In this respect, what frames their desired self-representation is not an identity as *Yifti* as such but the ways such an understanding of themselves intersects a place of origin and a connection to music.

Yet, and this is noteworthy, this complex triangulated relationship between Gypsiness, place and music seems to be easily collapsed and dismissed.<sup>44</sup> Parakalamos Gypsies are aware that a *Tsingani* identity clings to them, or even produces them more and more in a way that does not tally

44. In the very process of producing ethnographic knowledge social researchers seem to dissipate and destroy such connections which cannot cohere into an identity as such. Cowan (1997) in her discussion about idioms of belonging in Greek Macedonia makes a similar point. See also Malkki's (1997: 92) similar observation in relation to what she calls 'accidental communities of memory'.

with their own sense of 'be-longing, with their own understanding of themselves as nothing else than local musicians. Perhaps then I should go along to the recently launched re-education scheme for *Tsingani* people<sup>45</sup> in which some of them take part. There, I could see how they forcefully and repeatedly assert that they are not *Tsingani* and nobody believes them: 'historically, you are the same' they are told. And they accept it for the sake of money—they are paid for participating in this scheme. But I must have something to say, since I have already been in Parakalamos and I know their 'roots': 'Would *you* ever say that *Yifti* and *Tsingani* are the same kind of people?' I was repeatedly asked.

Some of the vantage points that will contribute to an understanding of this situation—Gypsies' alleged links to *Tsingani* people<sup>46</sup>—include the recent proliferation of publications on Gypsies in Greece during the last ten years or so.

## Studying Gypsies

### *Gypsies in Greece*

Whilst it is hard to account authoritatively for the current focus on Gypsies in Greece,<sup>47</sup> it is clear that the poles of influence operating on its development come from both outside Greece—EU policies on social inclusion and exclusion—and within. Gypsies have been retrieved from their marginal position in Greek academia—at the same time undergoing a rapid process of deconstruction and reinvention. This two-fold re-evaluation process has largely been undertaken by social scientists (mainly folklorists and educationalists) who have sought, through their production of 'ethnographies' about Gypsies in Greece, to reveal the racist assumptions that govern Greek society and its political structures (e.g. Dousas 1997, 2001), to raise public awareness about Gypsy culture (e.g. Lydaki 1997, 1998), to deconstruct the signifier 'Gypsy' (e.g. Vaxevanoglou 2001) and/or critically engage with the more recent emphasis in the context of the EU on multiculturalism (e.g. Vaxevanoglou 2001; Dousas 1997). It is noteworthy that while the majority of

45. A university of Ioannina team is in charge of the nation-wide vocational and re-educational project on the *Tsingani* peoples.

46. To give another example: the recent debate about a proposed EU development project that aimed to create a Gypsy settlement in Parakalamos. See Theodosiou (2003: ch.2) for more.

47. Previous works include Gianakopoulos (1981), Biris (1954), Faltaitis (1939).

these studies emerged in the context of a nation-wide EU project on ‘Gypsies and Education’, they nonetheless focus on the *Tsingani*<sup>48</sup> community of Agia Varvara, in Athens, a group that entered Greece with the exchange of population in the 1922 (e.g. Kozaitis 1997; Lydaki 1997, 1998; Vaxevanoglou 2001).

Vaxevanoglou’s (2001) aim, to explore one of those studies a bit further, is to turn the spotlight on the construction of Gypsyess; the latter is glossed as being implicitly political and as constituting a contested and disputed site of power. The arrangement of her material implies that by showing how conceptualisations of Gypsyess have their sources in Greek society—and not in a distant Indian origin—a more grounded understanding of Gypsyess can be achieved. She argues for a middle ground between the reductionism—found in much of the literature on Gypsies—and relativism—pursued by studies that see Gypsyess as merely a cultural construct—which accepts that the world is real and held together by a complex and changing set of relations. Multiculturalism projects—such as the ones facilitated by the EU directives on social inclusion and exclusion—she argues, often deflect attention away from the exploitative nature of constructions on which Gypsyess depends. In a manner reminiscent of the way Stewart (1997) talks about the Hungarian Rom, Vaxevanoglou argues that the only realm left for Greek *Tsingani* to claim authorship of their identity is that of family and work (trading).

Running through her study is a still-to-be-examined belief that the complexities and enormous differences between Gypsies’ lives in Greece are reduced to the questionable idea of a shared experience, a shared being-in-the-world. Take, for example, the prologue of her study: she discusses an Epirot academic who resorts to his personal memories from attending local music festivals in Epirus as a child in order to prove how out of place the whole discourse about the Gypsies’ Indian origin is. While he accepts that those Gypsy musicians have a ‘*patrida*’ (homeland), he is quick to proceed to an exploration of the very ideologies that construct and perpetuate their ‘difference’—these are to be found within Greek society and its needs to construct an ‘abjected’ other (Butler 1993)—failing to question how and under what conditions such a *patrida* was formed and whether it can actually be that which constitutes and re-forms subjects.

48. I use the term *Tsingani*—and not Gypsy or Rom which are the terms used in the actual studies— as a way to keep up with the distinctions made by the Parakalamos Gypsies.

While the arguments filtering through the recent studies on Greek Gypsies provide an important window into the complexities, ambiguities, and instabilities that permeate the politics of identity in Greece—an issue that is beyond the scope of this paper<sup>49</sup>—in what follows I wish to focus on some issues that situate these studies squarely within the more general literature on Gypsies.

*Gypsy studies: Place and social memory*

The politics of place/space does not appear to have a theoretically defined status in Gypsy literature. This virtual theoretical silence is compounded by the fact that between the various iterations of the signifier ‘Gypsy’ as nomad and the contingent contexts of its deconstruction, there is a sense in which to speak of Gypsy association to place at all requires that we reconstruct a language that makes it possible.

In the ‘new Gypsy ethnography’<sup>50</sup> such a challenge is taken up mainly through a rejection of the search for ‘origins’ and ‘authenticity’. For Gay y Blasco (1999) and Stewart (1997) the associated phenomena of invocation of memory, ethnic identity and attachment to land are singled out as indicating a non-Gypsy mode of being. Indeed, the Gypsy worlds described in these studies are perhaps especially captivating because they work against these assumptions. Gay y Blasco begins: ‘my starting point is the fact that Gitanos appear to reproduce their singularity without recourse to the usual anthropological prompts of attachment to land or territory, appeals to a shared past or communal memory, or internal cohesiveness in the present’ (1999: 3). In a similar vein, the evocation of feasting Hungarian Gypsy men, a strong and confident group of brothers bound forever in their imagination in a world outside history and nation-states, forms the hub of Stewart’s work (1997). Stewart takes pains to underline that ‘the Rom do not have an ethnic identity. For them, identity is constructed and constantly remade in the present in relations with significant others, not something inherited from the past’ (*ibid.*: 28).

It is then the ‘persistence of cultural difference’ between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in contexts where Gypsies have been settled for a long period of

49. See Theodosiou (forthcoming) for more.

50. Okely’s work (1983) is still notable as it considers the historical relationship between *Gorgio* (non-Gypsy) and Gypsy and the way it bears on constructions of Gypsiness; in doing so it prefigures later studies of identity, nationalism and deterritorialisation. The term ‘new Gypsy ethnography’ is coined here to account for the more recent studies on Gypsies strongly influenced by Okely’s work.

time—rather than the ‘mere existence of foreign origins’—that need to be explained (*ibid.*: 4). Following that prompt, both authors emphasise the centrality of interactions with the surrounding non-Gypsy society and the local origins of the Gypsy populations they have been working with. But while space in these accounts functions as a central organising principle, it is analytically invisible. Gypsies and non-Gypsies are depicted as if they occupied physically discontinuous spaces. For the Gypsies, we are told, place is a matter of convention after all: it does not contribute anything to their understanding of themselves. Gypsies construct ‘imagined communities’<sup>51</sup> in the here and now regardless/despite of where they are (e.g. Gay y Blasco 1999: 16).

Likewise, the repeated claim that Gypsies are people ‘oriented towards the present’ (Stewart, Day, and Papataxiarchis 1998; Gay y Blasco 2001) is viewed as grating against ‘the western notion that images of the past are prerequisite for the construction of imagined communities’ (Gay y Blasco 2001: 632). In this light, Gay y Blasco takes up the challenge to theorise why it is that Gypsiness is not dependent on the invocation of memory; the answer for her lies in the emphasis Gitanos put on the person as the creator of the difference: Gitanos highlight ‘what they call their ‘way of being in the now as the foundation of their singularity’ (*ibid.*: 633); ‘containing the past and looking to the present are a way of imagining and constructing the community that is particularly appropriate for a dispersed, illiterate, and marginalised group with fluctuating membership which lacks claims to a territory and which suffers strong pressures to dissolve into the majority’ (*ibid.*: 642).

I suggest that there is a link between the idea of ‘imagined communities’ on which Stewart’s and Gay y Blasco’s works are predicated and ‘nomadism’. One of the key issues here is the idea of ‘drifting’: if you travel and move with a purpose (you know where you are going, you know where you came from and you can have a plan for how you are going to travel around), then the association with place immediately seems relevant and important (you will have place in mind as you move). If however, you are drifting, wandering aimlessly and with no particular destination in mind, then somehow place appears less relevant.

Lemon (2000) confronts these assumptions head on. She is practically

51. The word ‘community’ is carefully nuanced in the context of Gay y Blasco’s work—it refers not to a cohesive or harmonious whole, but to the Gitanos’ awareness of each other as moral beings’ (1999: 41). Yet, she clearly states that she deals with ‘the ways in which they construct ‘the Gitano people’ as an imagined community and come to see themselves as part of it’ (*ibid.*: 5).

alone in stating that ‘the challenge may be less to construct a nomadology for Gypsies than to see that Roma too belong to places’ (*ibid.* : 4). Following her lead, I argue that it is possible to approach the question of how Gypsies relate to place in ways that do not take for granted the idea of a drifting nomadism and /or of ‘imagined communities’. If Gypsies are the very products of the society they live in, their difference is constituted because of their proximity to the non-Gypsy world, then it seems to me that processes that go into the production of space (social memory is one of them), place and locality have also to be examined in relation to Gypsies or even seen as constitutive of Gypsiness, and not simply be singled out as indicating a non-Gypsy way of being. Taking memory and place to be far more heterogenous phenomena, and understanding movement as an important element in the construction of space, I suggest that ‘the relationship between the construction of the identity of places and the construction of terrains of belonging’ (Fortier 1999: 41–2) can be explored. And in some ways, overturning this idea of how Gypsies do identity—through ‘imagined communities’—has important theoretical implications beyond mere disenchantment; for it discourages letting any particular people stand as a trope for something else (i.e. ‘nomads’).<sup>52</sup> With Gypsies’ locatedness and belonging as an emblematic case we might be forced to think of how policing their identification with place can indeed be a crucial part of the Gypsy world.

### In conclusion

My experience of Parakalamos contrasts with this erasure of ‘place’—and what goes into its production—in Gypsy studies. For both the local people and the Gypsies, Parakalamos conjured up two ‘worlds’, home and movement, peasanthood and musicianship. And it was this articulation that provided Gypsies with an unquestionable local (and thus Greek identity) albeit in a ‘dishevelled’ form (Todorova 1997). The ambiguities embedded in the way the Parakalamos Gypsiness is perceived resonate with and are reinforced by with the same ambiguities that permeate the construction of place as ambiguous.

At a time when a large part of world culture is openly contemplating itself in multiculturalist and trans-national terms, while an equal part of it is embracing what seems to be mutations of ‘cultural fundamentalism’ (Stolcke

52. See Kaplan (1996) for a similar point.

1995), at times when concerns with ‘culture’ and ‘cultural difference’ constitute part of practices of ‘governmentality’ (Moore 1996), we are told that any posing of identity entails a claim to political space, that identity is inextricably linked with politics. Yet, to locate identity solely in the terrain of politics is to take certain forms of identity for granted rather than to examine the mechanisms through which it is historically constituted and comes to be recognised as such.<sup>53</sup> This article argues along with others (e.g. Green forthcoming) that an inquiry into identity should be topological; what has to be determined lies not in the operation of ‘otherness’ per se but in the location—the where of identities—of its construction.

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53. Take for example the recognition/ mis-recognition, visibility/invisibility discussions—mainly within the terrain of performativity theory) which assume that there is an identity that exists (has been constituted) or could politically exist, in the form we understand it; the idea is to either move towards removing existing prejudice or to generate some visibility for what ‘abjected’ people feel is their identity—thus reverse their mis-recognition. This kind of discussion takes for granted that everyone has—is in possession of—an identity which could be made to appear, to be recognised, to be visible; in short that everyone could constitute an identity that could be recognised. See, for example, Fraser (1997).

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