

EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL (PhD) THESIS

**Oral Histories, Hidden Identities, Silent  
Waters: an audiovisual journey to the Greek  
side of the Prespa lakes**

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## **Abstract**

The documentary film '*Silent Waters*' along with the doctoral thesis titled '*Oral Histories, Hidden Identities, Silent Waters: an audiovisual journey to the Greek side of the Prespa lakes*' form the main outcomes from a multifaceted inter-disciplinary practice-based research. The aim was twofold: to produce an ethnographically inspired documentary film depicting the history of the Greek part of the Prespa Lakes and the bilingual communities living in this area, and, to produce a thesis containing a reflective account of both the research process and the creative practice.

The reflexivity evident in both the thesis and the film aims to acknowledge the constructed and subjective nature of knowledge. The researcher is therefore situated within the wider context of academic film practice, and the selected case study of the Greek Slavs. The written text and the audiovisual representation deal with personal and collective histories surrounding the formation of Modern Greek identities from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century until now.

The thesis begins by positioning the researcher within the grand narrative of the Modern Greek nation building, and then provides an overview of the history of the area. It continues with a discussion of inspirational ethnographic films and film-making practices. Thereafter, it presents a diary-style account of the fieldwork. The thesis then describes the post-production process and the editing choices that shaped the narrative structure of the film. It concludes with a reflective epilogue summarising the researcher's journey within this project.

Throughout the audiovisual representation of this extraordinary place and its people, the film interweaves the turbulent history and life stories of the locals with the 'silent' waters of the lakes. The film's structure, non-linear and fragmentary, relies on visual and aural metaphors to create filmic sub-narratives. Apart from the testimonies and the landscape, the film also portrays a feast where local people dance, but do not sing their songs; a reference to salvage ethnography. This film therefore is as much a film about some of the most intriguing Balkan histories, as it is about the lives of its protagonists.

I realised the importance of this project when I was almost certain that I would fail it. I weighed the effects it brought me and I was stunned. The way I saw documentary had changed. The way I held a camera had changed. Even my views on basic human rights had changed. But then, I also realised that precisely because I changed, the project did not fail.

## **Chapter 1**

I was born in Athens, Greece just before the fall of the military dictatorship of the 1970s, the son of a middle class couple<sup>1</sup>. My parents enjoyed a university level education. They shared the ideals of modernity, such as rationalism, gender equality and trust in technological advances. Both studied different disciplines of engineering. Their modern convictions were also the result of the fact that, for some years in the 1960s, one of them studied and the other worked in Western Europe. In other words, my family was quite progressive and always supportive towards me, and my upbringing was characterised by the beliefs of my parents.

The end of the Colonels' rule in 1974 was a crucial turning point in Modern Greek history. For the restored Greek republic, this signalled the start of a volatile period of political movement and changes. The country became a member of the then European Economic Community in 1980, and voted the first social democratic government into power in the Autumn of 1981<sup>2</sup>. My first political memory, if I can call it as such, was when my mother took me to the centre of Athens to join in the celebrations of this victory. I state these facts here to provide information about the political landscape that I grew up in, to emphasise the constant change that was -and in some sense is- taking place in the Greek society the last 35 years, something that took place much earlier within the societies of Western Europe. The gradual move towards modernisation of the state structures and apparatus, the move towards a secular state in comparison to the oppressive conservative and almost theocratic state of the past are the two main ways in which Greek society went through this ongoing process of change. This was -and still is- a difficult process, especially considering the nationalistic ideology and racial rhetoric of the past.

As the anthropologist Jane Cowan writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Similar reflexivity is evident in the filmic work discussed later where I speak about myself as a researcher/film-maker and about the research process as being crucial in acknowledging the constructed and subjective nature of academic knowledge. Therefore, in this thesis and the film, I place myself in the wider context of the documentary film discourse in general, and the selected case study of the Greek Slavs of the Prespa lakes in particular.

<sup>2</sup> The Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) won an absolute majority at the parliamentary elections of October 1981.

*Greece, like many nation-building states in Europe, employed both carrot and stick in this process. It used state institutions – schools, universities, the army, local government – to reorganise daily life and reorient social loyalties. It developed new academic disciplines like folklore and history to elaborate a national mythology of glorious ancient origins, defiant continuity through ‘four centuries of slavery’ under ‘the Turks’, and heroic vindication of enduring nationhood through the Greek revolution. Conveying these Hellenic visions through schoolbooks and public rituals, it enjoined the Greek citizens to see their own past, as well as their present affiliations, in its terms. At the same time, it discouraged and in certain moments (for example, during the Metaxas era of 1936-41, and later during the military dictatorship of 1967-74) prohibited and punished cultural expressions which seemed to indicate ‘non-Greek’ affiliations (Carabott 1997; Cowan 1997a).*

(Cowan, 2000: 11-12)

To be able to understand this transformation, one needs to look at the processes through which the Modern Greek nation was formed. In this context, what I mean by the concept of nation is consistent with the modes in which Anthony D. Smith defines nations:

*A nation can [...] be defined as a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.*

(Smith, 1991:14)

I also take into consideration Benedict Anderson’s proposed anthropological definition of the nation as an imagined political community, as all its members share a common imaginary; for example they imagine who the member of this community is, without being in the position to know everyone of them (Anderson, 1991). The Modern Greek state thus was founded on a paradoxical basis: that the Greek nation stems directly from the ancient Greeks, with which it claims ethnic and genetic identification. Simultaneously, this Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox nation imagined itself also as the heir of the Byzantine Empire and tradition. Our ‘charter-

myth' further claims that, despite five centuries of Ottoman occupation, Greek nationals are ethnically homogenous. The scholar Anastasia Karakasidou writes that the Greek historian Konstantinos Paparigopoulos in 1843 laid the ground for the defence of this continuity of the Greek race and civilisation to the present day, and that this neo-Greek renaissance required a conceptual unity of the nation's history through time and space (Karakasidou, 1994). Indeed, the Greek intellectual and academic circles played an active role through this claim of continuity in developing and strengthening a Modern Greek national identity. According to Loring M. Danforth, in his *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* Michael Herzfeld has shown that the discipline of folklore in Greece has played an important role in the development in Greece of a sense of national identity (Danforth 1984). As Herzfeld himself points out in the introduction, he intends to show how Greek scholars constructed cultural continuity in defence of their national identity, clarifying though, that they did so not in defiance of the facts (Herzfeld, 1986:4). Another scholar, Adamantia Pollis, writes,

*Since Greekness is an integral, transcendent entity, non-Greeks are not – and cannot be- members of the éthnos [nation]; hence...they are not entitled to those rights that are available to members of the Greek éthnos. ... Beginning with the founding of Modern Greece, the conceptualization of the Greek éthnos as coterminous with the Greek state rejects, except for historic religious minorities, the existence of other ethnicities within its boundaries.*

(Pollis, 1992:189)

As a Balkan state, Greece gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1829 and continued expanding its borders until 1947 with the annexation of the Dodecanese from Italy. Nationalistic and racial ideologies and practices still thrive in Greece. Even after the 1974 restoration of parliamentary rule, a considerable part of society vehemently opposed this shift towards secular, meritocratic, and liberal democratic principles. This 'deep state' consisted of large sections of the army, the police, the church, the civil service and the educational system. These principal supporters of the dictatorship, aided by the pretext of the cold war ideology of communistic fear, united behind it. I began to realise, as I grew up, how conservative my society remained.



As a boy I enjoyed private education, attending a Montessori-system elementary school and the German School of Athens at high school level. This decision that my parents took was based on the consideration that firstly, the state educational system in Greece of the late 1970s was then dominated by the extreme right wing ideology of the recent dictatorship<sup>3</sup>, promoting the famous dogma of the era *Homeland, Religion, Family*<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, they thought that through the private educational system I would have a better chance to go abroad for studies after my graduation as they had done. Even in the private sector, the Greek Ministry of Education dictates the programme of studies, obligatory for all the institutions, public and private alike. I can recall my first textbooks in elementary school where the doctrine of *Homeland, Religion, Family* was still evident; the primer made use of religious and patriotic words to teach the pupils the basics of the Greek language. This educational policy, easing over the last three decades, continued throughout my years in school. It implemented a strategy of forcible assimilation and homogenisation of Greek pupils regardless of their origins and religious beliefs. For example, we spent many hours in class over the history of ancient Macedonia and the achievements of Alexander the Great. But until I graduated in 1990, I do not recall hearing in school that, apart from the northern Greek territory of Macedonia, there was also another Macedonia, one of the republics of the Socialist Federate Republic of Yugoslavia, as it was known then. However, after 1989, this policy took a gradual turn towards more liberal-democratic values; another example of the fluidity of values within the Greek society.

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<sup>3</sup> As Koulouri, C. & Venturas L. stress in the article *Research on Greek textbooks: a survey of current trends*: 'This particular focus can be explained by the special features of the educational system and the post-war historical experience of Greece. The civil war which followed the Second World War handed down a legacy of deep division and polarisation, in spite of the victory of conservatives. The monopolisation of state power, and thus of decisions on educational policy, by the Right led to a use of textbooks tailored to the inculcation of direct political messages and attitudes. This phenomenon reached its peak during the colonels' dictatorship (1967-1974). After 1974, despite political change, continuity of centralisation in education and political tradition resulted in changes of textbooks corresponding to alternations in government, reflecting partly divergent conceptions and values.'

<sup>4</sup> 'Πατρίς, Θρησκεία Οικογένεια' Homeland, Religion, Family was the core ideology of the Greek dictatorship, with the clear intention to steer away the left wing ideologies of internationalism, atheism and gender equality. This doctrine was evident in many aspects of public life: the official government, the educational system, the Church.

In 1990, after I finished high school, I moved to Munich for four years, where I enrolled in an engineering course at the University. I didn't like the programme and found that I was ill suited for it. Nevertheless, this period offered me the chance to distance myself from Greek society, Greek mentality and the official state narratives that I had absorbed during my school years in Athens. I became more politically aware because of all the changes that started taking place in Europe: the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the fall of the Berlin Wall. I was interested in politics and started following current events: the first Gulf War in 1991 and the start of the breakup of Yugoslavia during the same year. The Yugoslav crisis was the first time ever I heard of the Republic of Macedonia and the *Macedonian Question*, which refers to the dispute surrounding the name under which the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared independence after the Yugoslavian breakup. I had learned along with everyone else the official Greek version of events, that Greece had no substantive ethnic minorities. The sole exception admitted was the internationally recognised religious minority of the Muslim community in the north eastern region of Thrace, close to Turkey<sup>5</sup>. At that point, a hot debate arose regarding the name of this country in Greece. My opinion at that time was in line with the mainstream Greek position: Macedonia is Greek, and the Slavic populations of Yugoslav Macedonia wanted to appropriate something that did not belong to them. It took me almost a decade to become conscious that this opinion actually derived from a careful construct based on the Modern Greek narrative of our direct descent from the ancient Greeks (and Macedonians). My experience of being a cultural immigrant and living abroad on my own had only partly distanced me from nationalistic and racial ideologies.

I decided to suspend my studies in Germany. I returned to Greece in the summer of 1994 and stayed there for the next seven years. I made a radical change in my life and started a three-year photography course in Athens. During this time I was politically active through debates and demonstrations. The first occasion for these was the first NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in Bosnia & Herzegovina in 1995. Greek society followed this conflict with great concern. There were various perspectives for opposing this bombing. The nationalists propagated the traditional

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<sup>5</sup> Recognised through the Lausanne Treaty (24<sup>th</sup> of July 1923).

Greek-Serbian Orthodox ‘brotherhood’; the left wing activists addressed the anti-American sentiment of the population. There were also pacifists who opposed any use of force, and the ecologists who voiced their concern of the consequences of this bombing to the people and the environment. I along with some of my friends, who opposed the military intervention as well, were coming out of different levels of political consciousness. Even if we had the experience of living abroad, it did not free us from political predispositions. Apart from the *Macedonian Question*, a war was taking place in our immediate vicinity. In the wider scheme of things, the Yugoslavian war was something ‘unbelievable’ for everyone apart from the Yugoslavs themselves. Nobody expected a war on ethnic grounds to take place in Europe again; on the same time this war made people aware on issues like the Slav minorities in Greece and Europe. This was a central and recurring topic in the news and public and media attention was immense.

I completed my photography studies in the summer of 1997. I started working as freelance photographer, then as assistant photographer in a big Athenian studio, and then got a job in the local film industry. During this period I met my partner. Her different national identity (or lack of one) shook the foundations of mine. She was a woman *from a country that does not exist* as she liked to say jokingly about herself. Her Yugoslavian<sup>6</sup> origin (Serbian/Croatian) did not translate into a distinct national identity, after the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the subsequent disintegration of that country along with the Yugoslav national identity. She was the first person I met who did not identify herself through her national identity, a fact that led us to innumerable discussions and debates. These also helped me see the world with less reference to my national identity, and this view was revealing. Our relationship was the starting point for me to become more interested in the Yugoslavian crisis, its history and ramifications. Anything I could find regarding this was intriguing for me. With my partner, I began to depart from the established Greek attitude that Greeks and Serbs enjoy a special relationship dating back to the liberation wars against the Ottomans, the Balkan Wars and the fight against Nazi Germany in World War II. Greeks were taught customarily to side with Serbian interests regardless of the facts in the case, as the Greeks and the Serbs were regarded as Orthodox brothers. The

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<sup>6</sup> Yugoslav in literal terms means South Slav.

second bombing of Yugoslavia, due to the Kosovo conflict, was even more revealing. I followed the media campaign supporting the demonstrations against NATO intervention, and I took part in some of these demonstrations. Simultaneously, I tried to observe the matter less through the goggles of my national identity, and more as an independent observer. Total objectivity is a Utopian quest. Still, I began to understand the post-Ottoman situation in the Balkans with less prejudice than before. I became interested in the history of the South Slavs residing in the Balkan Peninsula; I was trying to correlate my views about them with those of my ex-Yugoslav partner.

Along with my partner, I then moved to Scotland in late 2001 to study Film in Edinburgh. In my final year (2004), I decided to write my BA dissertation<sup>7</sup> on the second Gulf War; how mass media in the United Kingdom was used to steer public opinion towards support of the war, whereas in the beginning it was overwhelmingly against it. Thus I researched generally various aspects of identity and human rights issues. I came across the website of the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM), itself one of many NGOs founded in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall<sup>8</sup>. There I came across some information that threw further doubt on my received ideas regarding the homogeneity of the Greek nation state. Through GHM I found out that there is a group of people, who reside in the northern Greek region of Macedonia, are of Slav origin and consider themselves to be an ethnic minority, distinct from the majority of this country (GHM, 2003). This contradicted the state narrative that I had absorbed up until then, and made me curious to find out more about them. After the initial shock, I started researching

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<sup>7</sup> The title of this dissertation was *THE IRAQ WAR & ELECTRONIC MEDIA*.

<sup>8</sup> Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) was founded in 1992 by members of Minority Rights Group - Greece, affiliated to Minority Rights Group - International since 1992. In 1993, GHM became the Greek member of the International Helsinki Federation. In 1998, GHM became a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX); in 2000 of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) and the Southeast Europe Media Organization (SEEMO); in 2001 of the OneWorld.Net; and in 2002 of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT). GHM monitors, publishes and lobbies on human rights issues in Greece and, occasionally, in the Balkans. It has participated in and often coordinated the monitoring of Greek and Balkan media for stereotypes and hate speech. It has prepared (usually jointly with other NGOs) detailed annual reports; parallel reports to UN Treaty Bodies; and specialized reports on ill-treatment and on ethnonational, ethnolinguistic, religious and immigrant communities, in Greece, as well as on the Greek minorities in Albania and Turkey.

them informally, to discover aspects of their identity: Who are these people? Where do they come from? How come we do not know about them? I asked my parents if they knew about them: they didn't. To be fair, I knew a slogan sung by Athenian football fans towards fans of the teams of Greek Macedonia, but I never realised where this came from. The Athenian fans accused the ones from Salonika of being 'Bulgarians'. I had presumed this was because of their proximity to the Greek-Bulgarian border. Now I found out that this insult meant that they were accused of *being* Slavs, not just of living close to them. So there were some Greeks who did not fit in the prescribed attributes of the state narrative, who claimed to be of a distinct *Slav Macedonian*<sup>9</sup> identity; a Slav Macedonian minority in Greek Macedonia.

What I actually read about them in GHM (GHM, 2003) was that they had formed a political party called 'Rainbow'<sup>10</sup>, based in the town of Florina in Western Greek Macedonia. In early December 2003, they planned to hold their conference in the neighbouring city of Edessa. This conference never took place there, since the organisers, along with the owner of the space where they intended to meet, were verbally and physically harassed by Greek nationalist extremists. They asked the mayor of Edessa for an alternative location, and he proposed a public hall that they could use. The management of that hall also refused to make it available, and the conference was cancelled (Ios Press, 2003; Eleftherotypia, 2003). So, in the year 2003, somewhere in the European Union, there were people subjected to systematic violation of their democratic rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression<sup>11</sup>. This event set off my desire to enquire into this particular issue.

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<sup>9</sup>I use the term Macedonia, Macedonian, etc as regional geographic designator present in the territories of Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. To describe the ethnic identity of the Greek Slavs I use the term Slav Macedonian.

<sup>10</sup> *European Free Alliance – Rainbow: Political Party of the Macedonian Minority in Greece*. Member of the European Free Alliance - European Political Party (EFA-EPP). Member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN)

<sup>11</sup> As the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human rights (10/12/1948) states in article 2: *Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status*. thus outlining the universality of this declaration. Article 19 guarantees the freedom of opinion and the freedom of expressing it: *Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers*. Finally, article 20 ensures the peaceful assembly & association of every individual.

Consider the sensitivity shared among Greeks regarding the freedom of assembly. During the seven-year Greek junta (1967-1974), gatherings of more than three people were banned; three decades after its fall similar practices were in force by a parliamentary democracy. I wanted to know more about this topic, and eventually to expose it to public view as much as I could. There was also another reason, a personal one: as I mentioned, my partner was an ex-Yugoslav herself, and I wanted to get to know her identity through the study of the identity of the Greek Slavs. So, after my graduation in July 2004, I started reading about these people. I decided to focus on this ethnic group as my case study in my PhD.

The first book I found regarding the minority was an extensive study, based on private and public archives and scholarly resources in Greece, the Balkans and Europe. It focuses on the Slav minority in Greece, and was written by a well-known investigative journalist of Eleftherotypia, one of the biggest Athenian dailies, called Tasos Kostopoulos (Kostopoulos, 2002). He documented the existence of the minority and described how official state policy enforced assimilation in the Macedonian territories that Greece gained after the decline and disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The title of the volume is *The Forbidden Language: State Suppression of the Slavic Dialects in Greek Macedonia*. He starts from the end of the Ottoman rule and ends at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His main topic is the issue of language: on this he argues that a distinct cultural and, in extension, a distinct ethnic identity exists amongst these people. Kostopoulos gives an account of the demographics in the parts of Greece where Slav speakers reside, policies to assimilate these populations throughout the history of the Modern Greek state, and the historical and political contexts of these actions. Importantly, Kostopoulos (2002) reveals that the Greek state briefly recognised the Slav speakers as a cultural minority as early as 1919. It produced and published a Slav Macedonian primer for the schools of this area, though this book never reached these schools and was never used (Kostopoulos, 2002). Greek policy regarding this issue changed along with Greek politics. So, during the two periods of dictatorships of Greece (1936-41 and 1967-74) the behaviour of the state towards its non-Greek subjects was by far worse than during parliamentary rule. Throughout this time, the central point was always the issue of language.

Among the numerous scholars who wrote about nations and nationalism (Smith, Hobsbawm, Anderson, Mazower, Pollis), those that made the most profound impact on my understanding of this topic, and subsequently also the discussions in this thesis, were Anthony D. Smith and Benedict Anderson. In particular, the book that had a pivotal effect on the way I began to perceive the notion of ethnicity and nation was Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Anderson argues that

*...nationality, or ... nation-ness, as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.*

(Anderson, 1991:4)

Apart from the historical and political landscape which shapes how nation-ness is created or developed, Benedict Anderson argues that the attribute of nation became 'modular', capable of being transplanted to a variety of social terrains. In other words, national identity is not something singular and static that persons have, it is something that can be multiple and ever changing. This last point is also the reason for the policies of nation-building and assimilation that took place in this particular region. As noted above, though, the Greek concept of nation was much less flexible for the new members of this society.

There are specific aspects of Balkan history of the late- and post-Ottoman era that an independent reader unfamiliar with this period needs to be familiarised with in order to understand the events that took place in Macedonia. This applied to me as well, even if I went through the Greek educational system, since many parts of this history were omitted. One of these is the history of the rulers of the area. The geographic area of Macedonia was part of the Ottoman Empire for roughly five hundred years (Karakasidou, 1997a; Danforth, 1995; Cowan, 2000; Poulton, 1995, Kacovska-Maligkoudi, 2004). As the Empire's rule in Macedonia weakened towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the main contenders for control of Macedonia emerged. Greece and Serbia, already established as independent or autonomous at the beginning of that Century (1829), were joined by Bulgaria. Bulgaria gained its autonomy with the Treaty of San Stefano, marking the defeat of the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish War

in 1878. The success of the Bulgarian side was principally aided by the creation in 1870 of an autonomous Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the Bulgarian Exarchate, independent from the Greek-dominated Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul (Karakasidou, 1997a:78-80). The Christian populations of Macedonia were then wooed by each side (Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian) in what would be later known as *the Macedonian Struggle*. The creation of ethnic schools and churches and the deployment of covert military forces were some of the methods used to make the people of Macedonia make a choice. The antagonism between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria was put aside during the First Balkan War<sup>12</sup>, where Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians fought together for the liberation of Macedonia against the Ottoman Empire. This temporary alliance is something that was never properly explained at school, since immediately after that war, it ceased to exist. Then, during the Second Balkan War, Greece and Serbia fought successfully together against Bulgaria<sup>13</sup>. Their victory was formalised in the Treaty of Bucharest (August 1913) with a highly unfavourable territorial settlement for Bulgaria. So Greece, on the eve of the First World War, saw its land area increase by almost 70% and its population by almost 50% (Clogg, 2002a). But the ethnic composition of the population of the new areas was not at all homogenously Greek. Kostopoulos (2002) claims that the new territories annexed by Greece had a considerable – in moderate estimation – population of Slavs compared to the Greeks, the Turkish/Muslims, the Vlachs<sup>14</sup>, the Albanians, the Jews and the Roma.

I use the terms Slavs - not just Bulgarians, Serbians or Slav Macedonians - because each new state which claimed populations and territorial jurisdiction in the *new lands* exaggerated the numbers of persons pledging allegiance, and divided them according to its own interests. This was aided by the state structure of the Ottoman Empire, which classified its subjects on religious beliefs rather than ethnicity (Poulton, 1995; Karakasidou 1997a; Clogg, 2002a). These categories were called *Millets* (literally: nations). The anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou writes:

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<sup>12</sup> The First Balkan War lasted from the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1912 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1913.

<sup>13</sup> The Second Balkan War lasted from the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1913 to the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 1913.

<sup>14</sup> Another Balkan ethnic group of Romanian descent.



*...the millet system...classified inhabitants on the basis of religion. Millets were administrative rather than territorial jurisdictions, and the Christian and Muslim “nations” of the Ottoman Empire, divided under this system, were administered according to different regulations, offices and procedures...all Orthodox Christians belonged to the Orthodox Rum millet...were subject to the direct and indirect control, supervision and administration of the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, which enjoyed a privileged and powerful position in the Ottoman Empire.*

(Karakasidou 1997a: 78-79).

So the numbers of Greeks, Bulgarians and Serbs within the Orthodox Rum<sup>15</sup> millet were contested between the respective nation states of the time. The nationalist movements of Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria were established before the nationalist “awakening” of the Slav Macedonians. All three countries tried to assimilate the Slav Macedonians before they established their own distinct nationalism, taking advantage of the Ottoman system of the millets. These *passages to nationhood* comprise another important aspect that an outside observer must consider in order to understand the situation in Macedonia at the end of Ottoman rule.

In the case of the new territories of Greece, there were big populations of Turkish, Jewish, Bulgarian, Albanian and Slav origin, which had to be either assimilated or driven out (Kostopoulos, 2000; Karakasidou, 1997a; Roudometof, 1996; Carabott, 1997; Cowan, 2001). The digital archive of Eleftherios Venizelos contains clear indications of this policy (The National Research Foundation ‘Eleftherios K. Venizelos’, 2010). Venizelos was the Greek Prime Minister from October 1910 intermittently until 1933. Confidential reports of that time addressed to Venizelos illustrate this effort, proposing either forcible hellenisation through the educational system, the army and the civil service, or alternatively, policies of economical and political asphyxiation to force the non-assimilative members of the ethnic or linguistic minority to emigrate from the country (Dimitriadis, 1928; Modis, Undated

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<sup>15</sup> The word *Rum* derives from the word *Roman*, as the Byzantine Empire was the successor of the Eastern Roman Empire. Roudometof and Robertson write that, *middle-class and urban Greek Orthodox Christians were generally self-identified as ‘Christians’ or ‘Romans’* (Roudometof and Robertson, 2001:68).

Report). I discovered though that Greece was no exception in the way it treated its minorities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This was a common practice elsewhere, for example in Bulgaria, Germany and France, for this period was the apogee of nationalism in Europe. The ideology of multiculturalism and tolerance was a thing of the later periods.

In the book *Who Are the Macedonians?* Hugh Poulton (1995), an expert on minorities in the Balkans and Turkey, gives a thorough account of the population of this area since antiquity. I found this book really interesting, because it incorporated historical and anthropological facts. So, I learned, some of the Slavs had already left during the two Balkan Wars, while the Greeks left living behind the newly established borders between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia were moved inside Greece proper. The next step was the 1919 Greek-Bulgarian convention, where population exchanges were officially implemented. This new situation on the ground was formalised in the Treaty of Neuilly (November 1919), right after the end of World War I. So, Eastern Greek Macedonia became practically Slav-free (Poulton, 1989).

Bulgaria, allied with Germany during World War I, was on the defeated side, in contrast to Greece on the winning one. This solidified Greek rule over part of Macedonia. There was a brief spell of harsh Bulgarian occupation during World War II, where the Bulgarians were again on the German side. In Western Greek Macedonia though, the Slavic populations, especially ones living in the area along the Greek-Yugoslav border, remained largely in place (Poulton, 1995). They constituted one of the main ethnic groups of the population of Western Greek Macedonia in the interwar period. But, I then discovered, this composition was about to be changed again, with the removal of the Muslim populations of the area. At the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922, the Greeks were defeated by the Turkish Army in Asia Minor. The leaders of Turkey and Greece, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Eleftherios Venizelos, signed the Treaty of Lausanne on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1923. Richard Clogg, one of the few Balkan-wide accepted historians, describes how the war and its treaty formalised population exchange between the two countries: some 1.100.000 Greeks were moved to Greece and some 380.000 Muslims were moved to Turkey (Clogg, 2002a). Of more than one million Greek refugees, approximately 540.000, along with some 100.000 more who came before 1920 (Poulton, 1995;

Cowan, 2000), were settled in Greek Macedonia, while most of the Turkish and Muslim populations emigrated.

The change of the pre-war demographics of the area was accomplished and the Greeks were now the majority in Greek Macedonia. It now coincided with the nationalist and indeed contemporary Greek popular belief in a homogenous Greek country. Now the Greek state aimed to assimilate all its remaining non-Greek subjects by policies of hellenisation – implemented by force if need be - which lasted for decades. Kostopoulos (2002) describes these efforts in extensive detail. The assimilation policies included compulsory change of names of people and places from Slavonic form to Greek, internment and forced labour in the South of Greece, boarding schools in the South for children and compulsory adult classes in Greek for non-Greeks, enforcement of the language ban through the police and the army, no job-access for non-Greeks at the civil service, etc (Kostopoulos, 2002; Karakasidou 1997a; Karakasidou 2002; Poulton, 1995; Carabott, 1997; Cowan, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1994). For people who did not assimilate, there was the option of emigration abroad, especially to the US, Canada and Australia. The harshness of these policies varied in their implementation, depending on the political and/or historical situation. So for example, the fascist regime of Metaxas (1936-1941) was one of the hardest periods for the non-Greek populations.

After the end of World War II, a Civil War broke out in Greece, with the Slav Macedonians fighting along the Partisans of the Democratic Army<sup>16</sup>. These Greek Communist forces took on the Greek Nationalists; 40 per cent of the former comprising Slav Macedonians (Poulton, 1995). The appealing insinuation of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) of an independent Macedonian entity, free from Bulgarian influence, in a Socialist Balkan Federation, was the main factor for this alliance, a promise that was never kept, however (Clogg, 2002a). The defeat of the Partisans though, and the fear of Nationalist repercussions against the defeated Communists, saw a massive stream of refugees taking place at the latest stages of the Civil War. These people sought refuge in countries of the then Eastern Bloc, like

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<sup>16</sup> Although even during the German occupation in Greece there were antagonisms inside the Greek resistance, an outright Civil War broke out between the Communists and the Nationalists, which in its peak, lasted from August 1946 to October 1949.

Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union. The Slav Macedonians were only a part of this exodus, but areas in Western Greek Macedonia inhabited by them were especially affected by it. I was not aware of this particular history of Greece after World War II, so I set out to find more about it.

There are conflicting estimates on the numbers of the Slav Macedonian refugees, so according to the Human Rights Watch report *The Macedonians of Greece*, Greek historiography puts them at around 35.000 people, whereas the Slav Macedonian one puts them at more than 210.000 people. Thousands of these refugees were children between the ages of two and fourteen at that time (Human Rights Watch, 1994). Only some refugees were allowed to return to their homelands during the following decades. Greek state policy did not change significantly towards the Slav Macedonians until 1967, when a coup d'état overthrew the parliament and installed military rule in Greece. During this time, Slav Macedonians along with other citizens of Greece like communists, intellectuals and dissident people in general, were suppressed through internments, exile, discrimination and persecution. After the fall of the colonels' dictatorship, a coalition government of National Unity was formed in 1974, which signalled the gradual liberalisation of the Slav Macedonian situation in Greece (Kostopoulos, 2000; Van Boeschoten, 2006). However, in 1991 the situation for these people took a turn towards worse. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia declared its independence as the Republic of Macedonia with Skopje as its capital city. Most Greek political parties saw this as an irredentist action that sparked a new round of problems with the Slav Macedonians, especially the ones who identified themselves with this new Balkan state, since they were seen by many Greeks as traitors and *agents of Skopje*. Another interesting factor to this Greek-Slav Macedonian equation is also the fight between the respective Diasporas in Australia, as Danforth describes,

*National identity...is a matter of choice, a matter of self-identification or self-ascription. ... As an anthropologist...I suggest that it is possible for a woman to give birth to one Greek and one Macedonian. It is possible precisely because Greeks and Macedonians are not born, they are made. National Identities, in other words, are not biologically given, they are socially constructed.*

(Danforth, 2000:99-100)

So finally, I decided to study these forgotten people, the Slav Macedonians of Greece. I wanted to investigate and bring to light the experience of a minority group, the bilingual population living in western Greek Macedonia. I proposed to produce an ethnographically inspired documentary film which would focus on the life histories of these forgotten people. Up until then, my experience of visual ethnography was limited. I was aware of films made by Robert Flaherty and Jean Rouch, such as *Nanook of the North* and *Chronicle of a Summer*. My initial plan was to conduct a lengthy fieldwork in Macedonia. I was aware of this painful history, and expected the locals would be reluctant to take part in a filmic account on the record. I intended to research Greek, Slav and international literature on issues like national identity, nation building and history, with a particular focus on Greece. I became aware of Geertz's (1973) *thick description* of ethnography, and I was fascinated by the idea of ethnography as an interpretation of cultures. However, I also knew that I would not be able to stay for a longer period there, nor would I be able to conduct my research in the language of my potential participants, but in Greek, thus I could not follow the variety of normative standards for this form of research, as James Clifford (1983) notes. Nevertheless, I would attempt to follow Geertz's ideas about doing ethnographic work, as to be able not only to write –and record–,

*...about them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively with them.*

(Geertz, 1973:23)

I decided that the best place to situate such a project would be the Western part of Greek Macedonia, around the two main towns of the area, Florina and Kastoria, since the majority of the bilingual populations of Greece reside there. I planned to collect testimonies of oral memory, personal artefacts e.g. photographs, archival material and personal histories by first and second hand accounts on the site. I was also interested in their traditions and customs within the Modern Greek State and in comparison to the 'Greek' majority. Materials from the two sides of this 'conflict' would be then juxtaposed to reveal the extent of the polarisation of the local society in the past and the present. I would begin with filmed interviews, describing how efforts to establish minority rights clash with official assumptions about "ethnic purity". It would then focus on the construction of oral versus written history, examining how oral narratives structure and express the problematic identity of

minority ethnicities in the Balkans. I planned to realise the primary research by conducting field visits each to the urban towns of Florina and Kastoria, and the rural lake district of Prespa, to spend time with and interview local people, local authorities, communal and religious leaders, men and women, across generations. The number of the visits needed would depend on the nature of the area, the topographic and climate characteristics (rural area with continental climate). Since I had a very limited budget to realise this fieldwork, I acquired a camper van as a means of transport, and to reduce the costs of sustenance and stay. So I started my preparations and set off to Macedonia.

## **Chapter 2**

I proposed to produce an ethnographically inspired documentary film, an audiovisual portrait of the lives and the oral histories of the Slav people in the Greek side of the Prespa lakes. Anthropologists used film as a research tool almost immediately after this technology became widely available, recording various aspects of the lives of their research subjects. As with still photography, early visual anthropologists claimed that film could ‘capture reality’ in an absolute truthful manner. Many of the later anthropologists had a different approach. As Marcus Banks states,

*...[a] positivist approach...is modelled on that of the natural sciences: data exist ‘out there’, independently of observation, and it is the researcher’s job to gather them and study them. ... Interpretive approaches...challenged the idea that human social action was subject to natural science-like laws that were sustained independently of that action. Instead, it was argued that participants and social researchers alike interpreted social action according to a broader set of contexts and meanings.*

(Banks, 2007:22)

The visual anthropologist and ethnographic film-maker Paul Henley argues that, until the 1970s the positivist paradigm dominated theories of authorship (or even auteurship): the camera was considered a scientific tool and creative or authorial intervention ‘contaminated’ the data it gathered (Henley, 2009b). I, as I will show later, was much more interested in the creative and authorial intervention of some interpretive ethnographic film-makers, precisely because of their successful combination of science and art.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, photography and film complemented and sometimes replaced other types of visuals in ethnographic studies, such as drawings. The first visual anthropology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century consisted of museum exhibits and shows. Sometime actual indigenous people were exhibited in lectures and popular events such as circuses. As the historian Curtis M. Hinsley writes,

*Ishi, the last of the Yahi, spent his final years at the University of California's Museum of Anthropology as Kroebers's informant and a kind of living exhibit. ... Franz Boas helped organise the Anthropological Hall at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, where fourteen Kwakiutl were displayed.*

(Hinsley, 1991:348-50)

This desire for visual exhibits as anthropological 'evidence' of the exotic was partially catered to photography and film. Though adopted by the anthropologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the scientific value of these technologies was deemed inferior to that of written ethnographies.

In the context of contemporary ethnography however, the anthropologist Jay Ruby defines ethnographies as...

*...articulated statements about cultures which are based upon notions of: 1) the concept of culture; 2) the nature of evidence which would support the statements; and 3) the ability of anthropologists to translate the cultural reality of one group of people into a form understandable to the anthropologist's culture. As such, ethnographies have the potential of being expressed in a variety of communicative forms.*

(Ruby, 2006)

This approach is evident in the work of scholars such as Félix-Louis Regnault in France, Alfred Cort Haddon in Britain and Franz Boas in the United States. They were among the first to use the movie camera as a research tool in fieldwork just before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (de Brigard, 2003:15). They used film, in a scientific manner, as an archival tool to collect raw footage for lectures and analysis. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson were the first to use footage shot in the 1930s and to release edited ethnographic films, albeit some fifteen years later.

But which films can be considered to be ethnographic? This question does not have a straightforward answer. Some commentators, such as Karl Heider (1976), define a film as ethnographic if it possesses specific attributes that correspond to its *ethnographicness*. In a revised edition of his work published in 2006, he writes: *the simple opposition of scientific ethnography versus artistic cinematography is*



*misleading*. Heider gives merit to both. He then argues that, *although we are thinking about ethnographic film...this does not imply any moral superiority for one sort of film over the other* (Heider, 2006:x). His position is important to diffuse and bridge differences, if we consider the existing debate over *what is* ethnographic film and *who* is entitled or qualified to produce it.

Heider distinguishes between raw footage and finished films. Many anthropologists produced raw footage, others produced edited films presenting some sort of ethnographic narrative for public screening. He weighs both viewpoints: the anthropological and the cinematic. In case of conflict between these two, he concludes, *ethnography must take precedence over cinematography* (Heider, 2006:3). He moves on to define ethnography as a detailed description and analysis of human behaviour based on long-term study on the field. A work of ethnography relates specific observed behaviour to cultural norms and, to some degree, places things and events in their social and cultural context. Heider, thus, positions himself within the positivist tradition; he argues for example that another feature of ethnography is truth. Others, such as Trinh (1993) argue that the pursuit of 'truth' is a hopelessly naive goal. Heider concludes with a list of conditions, whose satisfaction gives a film the attribute of ethnographic. These sixteen attributes, as Heider calls them, are wide ranging. He accepts that almost no film can fulfil all these conditions; this is why he talks about the *degree of ethnographicness* of documentaries.

Though Heider positions himself within the positivist tradition, some at least of the attributes he defines are closer to the interpretivist tradition; for example the attribute of reflexivity and the acceptance of interpretation with regards to the post production of a film (image & sound editing). He does not attempt to confine the art of ethnographic film-making to anthropologists only, since the satisfaction of enough attributes by a non-anthropologist would result in a documentary which would be also an ethnographic film.

Others, like Ruby, insist on distinguishing between plain documentary and ethnographic documentary films according to the attributes of the film-maker. He thinks that only an anthropologist is in the position to produce an ethnographic film (even a bad one), whereas a film-maker without anthropological training is not, no

matter how good his/her film might be as a film. In one article he goes as far as to claim that *film is too important to anthropology to allow film-makers to control it* (Ruby, 2008). This distinction illustrates what Henley defines as *documentation versus the documentary* (Henley 1998:38); documentation is what Heider calls raw footage and documentary is an edited film. Ruby himself, reviewing and commenting on Heider's *Ethnographic Film*, stresses that,

*...the difficulties most anthropologists have had when trying to make ethnographic movies revolve around our cultural ideas that film is either an aesthetic conveyer of emotions or a neutral observer which has the capacity to record reality. Neither of these "folk models" is particularly useful for the visual anthropologist. As anthropology contains a particular way of looking at the world it seems logical that ethnographic films should help audiences to perceive anthropologically and that ethnographic film-makers should seek to find ways of infusing their films with that implication.*

(Ruby, 2006)

Ruby goes on to demote films made by professional film-makers as merely films 'about culture' and not films that pictorially convey ethnographic knowledge. He even rejects films made *by anthropologists who thoughtlessly follow the dictates of documentary realism* (Ruby, 2006), such as John Marshall. Apart from the anthropological training of the film-maker, Ruby's manifesto of ethnographic cinema explicitly rejects what he describes as documentary realism. He argues for documentary's anti-positivist character and the implementation of multivocality by raising the agency of those involved in it. The film-maker should accept his/her authorship of the film, keep the production costs low and strive to make a non-commercial film. Finally, the ethnographic film-maker should develop different distribution mechanisms than these used by conventional documentaries, such as TV channels or film festivals. Ruby's tone is militant and absolute. I think he makes some well-founded points. For example, he supports the notion of multivocality and reflexivity, and denounces philosophical positivism and documentary realism. According to Ruby, the ethnographic film-maker's acceptance of authorship brakes with the positivist defence of observational ethnographic documentary.

My film-making approach, as I discuss in the following chapter, was rather different. I researched the work of some important visual ethnographers from the beginning of audiovisual anthropology and works of contemporary ethnographic film-makers, both anthropologists and documentarists. I wanted to understand debates between anthropologists and film-makers, as well as debates amongst anthropologists themselves. Studies on realism and neo-realism helped me assess and evaluate ethnographic film as filmic artefacts. I researched form and approach in terms of changing theories of representation. I saw that ethnographic film-making did indeed follow theoretical trends, such as positivism and interpretivism. Realism as a theory of social representation was central to my analysis: its meaning shifts as different theories dominate each era. Realism, however, is not positivism. As the scholar John Roberts writes,

*... 'realism' as a historical category and a philosophical method is not a monism; realism is not an unstratified theory of fixed things and fixed relation. On the contrary, realism's understanding and recovery of the world is based on the socially produced and self-qualifying nature of signification, in which things and their relations and representations are in dynamic movement and tension. ... Consequently, claims to the realist content of representations are not governed by the reflection of their objects, even if such objects play a determinate causal role in these claims.*

(Roberts, 1998:5)

So, notions of reality and truth expressed in realist representations do not necessarily imply naturalism or empiricism. Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Social Realism –representing class struggle, as the voice of the unrepresented- did, but critical realism of the later part of this century did not. As Roberts (2008) argues, three distinct historical periods shaped film-making along dominant theories of visual representation. The first is early modernity, from c. 1900 to roughly World War II, including late Romantics, Social realists and surrealists. The second starts after the war and lasts until the late 1970s, including neo-realists, American modernists, and *auteur* theories. The third is late modernity, from the 1970s onwards, including post-modernists, feminists and critical realists. There is a certain time-delay from the moment these cultural theories were invented until they were applied in ethnographic film-making. So, for example,

the elements of neo-realism in ethnographic film-making can be traced in a period when neo-realism was already a thing of the past for cultural theory. I will now be referring to ethnographic films and film-makers that have had a particular effect on the modes of how I perceive ethnographic film-making. This reference is done chronologically, but it is by no means intended to be perceived as a short history of ethnographic film. It is meant to indicate films I researched and inspired my own filmic practice.

From the period of early modernity the ethnographic films I was particularly interested in were Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, and the formation of Dziga Vertov's Kino-Pravda (Film-Truth) movement in 1922. Flaherty spent years living with the Inuit to make his film. A romantic explorer himself, he favoured a romantic and mythical approach to life, but, in his film he used empirical realism, which later invigorated neo-realists and observationalists in the 1950s. *Nanook of the North* proved to be too ethnographic for mainstream audiences of the time. At the same time, Flaherty's ethnography was too naive and self-invented to give him access to academia (Heider, 2006:21). His representation of Inuit society took up elements of late romanticism, such as the expressionistic close-up shots of Nanook's dogs showing their teeth aggressively as they smell the blood of the killed walrus.

At much the same time, the Soviet film-maker Dziga Vertov worked for the new Soviet revolutionary state. His films were released under the banner of Kino-Pravda (Film Truth). Vertov argued that the film camera is an artificial eye –Kino-Eye-. He believed it could 'capture' reality, life caught unaware. In 1929, he made *Man with the Movie Camera*, a documentary fiction. It portrayed life in a Soviet city from sunrise to sunset. This city was a filmic construction of Vertov. The film was shot in various locations in the Soviet Union. Vertov, a constructivist himself, declared this an experimental film without any actors, scenario or scenery. *Man with the Movie Camera* was a triumph of early modernist ideals of Soviet times; as an ethnographic film it also fulfilled many of both Heider's and Ruby's criteria.

*Man with the Movie Camera* became a legend amongst Western film-makers, such as Jean Rouch and Jean Luc Godard. Vertov used extensive post-production techniques, soundtrack and innovative editing effects, to construct his version of 'reality'. For

example the portrayal of a movie camera lens with a human eye in it underlines Vertov's argument of Kino-Eye. Another example is the depiction of the camera operator operating from the top of a movie camera of gigantic proportions. Jean Rouch called Vertov a futurist poet, who *was doing sociology without knowing it* (Rouch, 2003b:82 [1973]). Inspired by Vertov's writings and films, Rouch called his own documentary films *Cinéma Vérité* (Film-Truth). In a famous essay *The Camera and the Man* (1973), he quoted Vertov:

*I am the 'cine-eye', I am the mechanical eye; I am the machine that will show you the world as only the machine can see it. Henceforth, I shall be liberated from human immobility. I am in perpetual motion. I can approach things, back away from them, slide under them, enter inside them...*

(Vertov, 1984 [1923])

Rouch commented, *within these impassionate statements resides all the cinema of today, all of the problems of ethnographic film, of research film done for television* (Rouch, 2003b:83 [1973]). *Man with the Movie Camera* shaped my film-making and awareness on various levels. Apart from its stunning cinematography, optical effects, experimental character and innovative editing techniques, I was impressed by Vertov's construct of filmed reality as a true international language. The film creates a cinematic rhythm through pioneering use of editing and carefully outlined music soundtrack.

A decade after the films of Flaherty and Vertov, the anthropologists Margaret Mead (1901-1978) and Gregory Bateson set out to bring anthropology and film together. They tried to create anthropological knowledge with the assistance of the film camera during their fieldwork in Bali and New Guinea (1936-1939). Distilled from the footage they gathered, they released six ethnographic films, the most famous of which are *Trance and Dance in Bali* and *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea* in 1952. Through these early ethnographic films they intended to develop an archival method to record human behaviour and preserve it on film for centuries; interpretation of this material could be provided later. David MacDougall describes the intent behind this as *annotations of anthropologists' research footage* (MacDougall, 1995:233). Mead and Bateson disagreed about this; the former argued

for film as evidence that can be evaluated at a later stage, the latter wanted to conduct research through film (MacDougall, 1997:292). MacDougall quotes a discussion between them in 1977,

*M.M.: [The] effort was to hold the camera steady enough long enough to get a sequence of behaviour.*

*G.B.: To find out what's happening, yes.*

*M.M.: When you are jumping around taking pictures...*

*G.B.: Nobody's talking about that, Margaret, for God's sake.*

*M.M.: Well.*

*G.B.: I'm talking about having control of a camera. Your're talking about putting a dead camera on top of a bloody tripod. It sees nothing.*

*M.M.: Well, I think it sees a great deal.*

(Bateson and Mead, 1977:79)

Even if one can detect an element of sexism in Bateson's answer, his point on the more active use of the camera deserves consideration. Mead and Bateson are talking forty years after their fieldwork. Their discussion demonstrates the kind of disagreement between visual ethnographic practitioners, which is still active. Bateson wants the active use of ethnographic film to create anthropological knowledge; not a passive research tool, such as a telescope or a magnifying glass. Mead takes a stricter view, that visual materials are samples taken with the aid of the tool called camera, and are subordinate to written ethnographies. She wants the camera to be a static and silent observer that successfully records 'reality' in front of it. MacDougall points out that Mead and Bateson's publication of their fieldwork in Bali and New Guinea *falls between two divergent conceptions of photography – one an extension of the mind, the other an extension of the eye* (MacDougall, 1997:292). Bateson's position is that the camera is an extension of the mind, whereas Mead sees the camera as an extension of the eye. As we have seen, this debate dominated ethnographic film practice up to the 1970s: observational versus participatory cinema. Henley describes one point of view:

*...the observational method seeks to effect ... engagement between subject and audience through a cinematography based on an unprivileged' single camera that offers the viewpoint, in a very literal sense, of a normal human participant in the events portrayed.*

(Henley, 2004:105)

In the 1920s, as Roberts explains, *technological change was linked in a positivistic fashion to new realism or New Objectivity* (Roberts, 1998:40-41). This approach became standard in ethnographic film in the following decades. We can take the neo-realist movement in post-war cinema as marking a new period. Films by Roberto Rossellini and Vittorio De Sica were widely imitated by later ethnographic film-makers, such as John Marshall and Timothy Asch. They tried to represent reality through recording *action* and *signs*, and not through *description* and *text*. Characteristic examples are Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1946) and De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), which both, through the use of non-professional actors, depicted scenes of the underclass. My particular attraction to the neo-realist view was that the camera recorded images that were intended to truthfully portray social reality: to record whole people in their environment, whole actions that took place in front of the camera, using long takes and naturally recorded synchronous sound. It strongly reminded me of the documentary film stereotype that I grew up watching: whatever was presented on screen was also supposed to accurately depict reality.

Roberts describes American Modernism and the ideology of liberal humanism as a by-product of the Cold War, leading to the pursuit of what he decries as a *so-called individual free expression* and *the reinvention of the photographer as auteur* (Roberts, 1998:118-119). As I show later, among the responses to the new post-War cultural situation were *Observational Cinema*, *Direct Cinema* and *Cinéma Vérité*.

Observational cinema was primarily practiced by the founders of the Harvard Movement film-makers John Marshall and Timothy Asch, who revived ethnographic film-making in the US right after World War II. Marshall released his most famous ethnographic film, *The Hunters*, in 1958, before forming, in collaboration with

Timothy Asch, a large ethnographic film studio under the name Documentary Educational Resources in 1968<sup>17</sup>. Here, Marshall and Asch produced numerous ethnographic films during the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Heider, 2006). A primary characteristic of this kind of cinema was that the film-maker positioned the camera as if the camera along with its operator were invisible. Such films usually featured a voice-over narration. This device produced what Trinh (1984) was later to call *the voice of God* effect: masculine, leading and instructive. These films claimed to be truthful, as the voice of God is infallible. Such claims equally inspired the soon to follow *Direct Cinema*'s claim of authenticity.

*Direct Cinema* and *Cinéma Vérité* film styles took advantage of new smaller, lighter cameras and portable synchronous sound recording, enabling their respective creators to systematically apply their manifestos, or, dogmas. In the US, Richard Leacock started making *Direct Cinema*, what would become known in the early sixties as the cinema of 'reality', 'objectivity', and 'authenticity' (Heider, 2006). The camera was present and silent. New technologies enabled film-makers to extend the maximum length of each shot to more than ten minutes. They recorded what happened in front of the camera with minimum intervention. Thus, *Direct Cinema* film-makers such as Richard Leacock, Donn A. Pennebaker and Albert Maysles claimed their cameras recorded 'evidence'. From the *Direct Cinema* movement, the film that inspired me was *Don't Look Back* (1967) by Pennebaker, even if its degree of *ethnographicness* was not high, because it successfully positioned its viewer directly into the action, as if the viewer was an invisible bystander overlooking the events unfolding.

In Europe things took a quite different direction. Jean Rouch coined the term *Cinéma Vérité* as a tribute to Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* (film truth) documentary series: it was a direct translation from Russian into French. Rouch took a great deal from the films of Vertov and Flaherty; he considered them both as parents of ethnographic film. He based his idea of *Cinéma Vérité* on event-centred narrative, rather than on explanation, implying one could learn about other cultures through a combination of observation, empathy and induction (MacDougall, 1995:233). The film historian Eric Barnouw compares the two styles:

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<sup>17</sup> For details visit [www.der.org](http://www.der.org)



*The direct cinema documentarists took his camera to a situation of tension and waited hopefully for a crisis; the Rouch version of cinéma vérité tried to precipitate one. The direct cinema artist aspired to invisibility; the Rouch cinéma vérité artist was often an avowed participant. The direct cinema artist played the role of uninvolved bystander; the cinéma vérité artist espoused that of provocateur.*

(Barnouw, 1993:224-225)

Jean Rouch started making ethnographic films in West Africa in 1946. Rouch's early films, such as *In the Land of the Black Magi* (1946) and *Initiation into Possession Dance* (1948), were conventional observational ones according to the fashion of the time. He released dozens of them. Throughout his career one sees the gradual shift towards a participatory approach. Rouch brought the camera into the action; one anecdote has him changing film style because he lost his tripod in the river Niger in West Africa. He took his camera off the tripod and held it in his hand. His camera was therefore no more invisible; it entered into and often provoked the action. Life was not to be caught unaware; it was provoked in order to be recorded. The film-maker himself was evident in the film. The observer is observed by the viewer. The era of participatory cinema had begun. In his film *Jaguar* (shot in 1954-1957, released in 1970), Rouch introduced his characters' commentary as a separate soundtrack. The subjectivity of the film-maker gradually took its place inside Rouch's films. As David MacDougall writes, Rouch developed *a form of ethnographic psychodrama* (MacDougall 1995:237).

*Cinéma Vérité* reached maturity with a collaborative project between Jean Rouch and the sociologist Edgar Morin in 1961. They shot an experimental film not in exotic Africa, but in Paris, to record, as Henley writes, *their own 'tribe', the Parisians* (Henley, 2009a:136). In *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un Été*) they portrayed a group of Parisians who actively took part in the film and expressed their views on questions such as 'How do you live?' and 'Are you happy?'. The two film-makers were present in the frame and commented on the answers received from their participants. So this film was an experiment in which Rouch and Morin *reflected upon the nature of truth that can be achieved through a documentary film* (Henley,

2009a:136). However, the final result of their extensive footage contravened some of the principles of *Cinéma Vérité* and the sequence-shot (*plan-séquence*)<sup>18</sup>, which Rouch had developed and implemented in his earlier films. He and Morin disagreed about breaking the *Cinéma Vérité* rules: they had to resort to extensive editing, because their producer wanted to release a film with a ‘beginning’, ‘middle’ and ‘end’. So, this broke up the long shots that were supposed to portray ‘life as it is’. Morin still argued that the subjects of *Chronicle of a Summer*...

*...raise[d] profound and general problems, such as job alienation, the difficulty of living, loneliness, the search for faith. The question is to know whether the film poses fundamental questions, subjective and objective, that concern life in our society.*

(Morin, 2003:260 [1962])

For me *Chronicle of a Summer* was crucial: I saw it at the start of this project and became aware of the subjective voice in ethnographic film and reflexive modes of documentary representation. The film-makers are visible and comment audibly on the previous shots, thus realising Vertov’s concept: the observer observed. But Rouch and Morin pushed this further. They introduced the commentary of their participants. Henley quotes a 1962 comment by Jean Luc Godard: *The first time I heard a worker speak in a film was in Chronicle of a Summer* (Henley, 2009a:169). As Rouch himself wrote

*For me, as an ethnographer and film-maker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already the transition from the real world to the imaginary world, and ethnography, the science of the thought systems of others, is a permanent crossing point from one conceptual universe to another; acrobatic gymnastics, where losing one’s footing is the least of the risks.*

(Rouch, 2003a:185-186 [1973])

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<sup>18</sup> The sequence-shot was an idea by Rouch that a long enough shot can include the wholeness of a sequence, making use of camera movement and montage without cuts.

This reflexivity was the reason why this film has enjoyed high status in visual anthropology since its release: as a classic of participatory ethnographic cinema. *Chronicle of a Summer* demonstrated a radically different approach to the positivistic one that to a certain extent still dominates ethnographic film-making. Young stresses, *nothing can ever be the same after it. In it the invisible wall between the film-maker and his subject collapsed* (Young, 2003:112). Between 1954 and 1970 Rouch released four of his most important ethnographic films: *The Mad Masters* (1954), *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), *The Lion Hunters* (1964) and *Jaguar* (1970). All explored questions of ethnographic representation, subjectivity and authorship in a creative and inspiring fashion.

Another crucial moment in my understanding of post-war ethnographic film-making was the release of Timothy Asch's film *The Ax Fight*, made in collaboration with Napoleon Chagnon in 1975. Asch started making ethnographic films as an assistant to John Marshall in the 1950s. From the 1950s onwards they produced many ethnographic films on Western African tribes, intended for classroom use; Asch taught anthropology at Brandeis and Harvard (Heider, 2006). In 1968 Asch started his collaboration with Chagnon, then conducting research on the Yamomamö tribes in southern Venezuela. They made more than forty films including important ethnographic works, such as *The Feast* (1970), *A Man Called 'Bee': Studying the Yamomamö* (1974) and finally *The Ax Fight* (1975).

*The Ax Fight* consists of twelve shots taken in a hurry by Asch, when a fight broke out in the Yamomamö village they were researching. It took them by surprise; this was not planned or expected. Asch let his camera roll and treated his shot like a journalist would, attempting to catch the action. Henley (1998) calls this the Marshall-Asch 'event-sequence' or 'reportage' technique. Based on extended fieldwork and immersed in their subject when they were to record an event, such as a ritual, the researchers would know in advance the way to film in order to depict the whole action (Henley, 1998:41). However, the *Ax Fight* shots were imperfect and unclear. Asch edited then the film to make three different accounts of this fight. The first contains the complete raw footage with an audio commentary by Chagnon made on the spot. The second gives an analytical version of events, edited in chronological order, and enriched with diagrams describing kinship structure. The third version portrays the events as seamlessly as possible, through the use of montage.

*The Ax Fight* is a film that broke ranks with positivistic conventions, since it offered various representation of the same event, thus presenting multiple versions of ‘truth’. Henley interprets this as *an attempt to circumvent the dichotomy between positivist and hermeneutical approaches in the social sciences* (Henley, 1998:42). Bill Nichols wrote, reassessing the *Ax Fight* that, *it enjoys some of its very special status precisely because it calls into question the adequacy of accurate observation and faithful representation* (Nichols, 2004:233-234).

Young draws a parallel between the subjectivity in the selection process of text from the notes in an anthropologist’s diary to be published and the selection of raw footage to an edited film.

*The filming process can be as much like observation as possible; the finished film can represent the event observed. What has to be studied by people using the cinema, however, is the way that film acts as ‘representative’. It is after all an artefact, a system of images.*

(Young, 2003:101)

In the publication of *The Ax Fight*, the audiovisual notes of Asch and Chagnon are presented in three different versions. Each version represents the same event from a different perspective and this is exactly what makes this film important. Nichols adds that, *it is an interpretation more than an explanation, a representation of meaning in an immediate, affective form rather than as abstracted content* (Nichols, 2004:235). The varying degrees of ‘realism’ gave way to the relative hermeneutic readings of each different point of view; the film-maker, the anthropology lecturer, the western researcher in an unfamiliar and possibly hostile situation are just some of these points of view presented in this film. The film theorist Brian Winston writes that,

*The problem with Ax Fight...is the fact that he [Chagnon] is relying on the scientific heritage of the camera to make a strong claim that he is presenting evidence of the real world. ... If we stop making strong claims for photos as evidence, in effect we transfer the onus of the claim on the real from the image to the viewer. That is to say, we stop pretending authenticity –truth, even- can be found within the frame.*

(Winston, 1998:58-59)

Henley notes that Asch later became much more sceptical about the objectivity of film and in his subsequent work he sought to include the participants' exegesis and collaboration (Henley, 1998).

*The Ax Fight* helped me see ethnographic film from a different perspective. The film-maker's relationship to his/her film became something like that of the author to the published text in the sense of Roland Barthes's *Death of the Author* essay (Barthes, 1977). The film is liberated from the film-maker the moment it is released; the director's intentions are over and the viewer interprets the film with his/her own set of cultural principles. The culture dictates the point of view and not the film-maker.

Robert Gardner drove ethnographic film in a different path. He started out, like Asch with John Marshall and the Harvard Movement with the *Direct Cinema*'s principles of observation, but he developed his own style of filming, cinematic principles and aesthetics. Peter Loizos suggests that, in some of his films,

*Gardner is best understood as a painter with a film camera.*

(Loizos, 1995:314).

Gardner himself always claimed authorship (or auteur-ship) of his films, and, as Henley points out,

*the observational method [does not] involve any denial of authorship: indeed, observational film-makers often claim authorship in a card that comes up immediately after the main title.*

(Henley, 2004:105-106).

Robert Gardner's film that impressed me greatly was *Forest of Bliss*, released in 1986. It is a poetic portrait of the funeral industry in the holy city of Benares in India on the river Ganges, lasting from one sunrise to the other. The film's immaculate photography and sound drives the narrative and its meanings. It has no commentary, and its few pieces of dialogues are not translated or subtitled. This film is a radical challenge to see what we can learn from looking and listening (Loizos, 1992). Gardner created a rhythm for his film highly appropriate to the depiction of this processing corpses industry and its relation to the river. The whole action takes place on one bank of this river, with many shots looking to the 'other side', as if Gardner

wanted to make a metaphor of ‘us’ and ‘them’ on the other side, drawing parallels to the river Styx from Ancient Greek mythology. Viewing and thinking about this film, helped me ascertain my ideas regarding how narrative can be constructed through landscape shots to establish otherwise invisible boundaries, such as issues of ideology or identity. *Forest of Bliss* was the strongest ethnographic film I have seen in terms of visual pleasure. Gardner broke the realist-observational conventions of academic film-making to create and structure his narrative through poetry and aesthetics.

Loizos (1995) mentions the anthropologists Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall who criticised another of Gardner’s films, *Rivers of Sand* (1973), as an ethnographic farce. Loizos argues that Gardner should not be judged on the ethnographicness of his films, but on his filming intentions. David MacDougall writing about *Forest of Bliss* notes that he has no problem in regarding it as an ethnographic film,

*... because it seems to me to mark out new conceptual possibilities for visual anthropology.*

(MacDougall, 2007:156)

Gardner clearly signalled early on that he was not working to make films of record, but he wants his audiences to be transported at least as much as informed, Loizos concludes (Loizos, 1995). So, in a way, Gardner was making experimental and non-literal ethnographic films with a purely visual and aural plot. He wanted to structure his films through visual and aural narratives, probably having Antonioni and Tarkovsky in his mind. This was also why Strecker and Lydall criticised him, because of the lack of any descriptive realism in Gardner’s approach.

At approximately the end of the 1970s ethnographic film entered a new phase. Obviously, chronological and stylistic boundaries and movements were by no means fixed. Film-makers kept releasing films that were affected by past approaches and sometimes the same film-makers would adopt newer ones. Some of them adopted a non-diegetic approach, where their films were non-dramatic but observational, whereas others adopted a diegetic approach, making films that were based on drama. One prime example of this gradual shift is the visual anthropologist and film-maker

David MacDougall. He started making ethnographic films in the early 1970s together with his wife Judith. He was also prolific in his writings about the development of a cinematic approach towards ethnographic realities (Grimshaw, 2001). His first film *To Live With Herds* (1971) -one of the few that he directed alone- was well received and won various awards in film festivals of that time. Other early MacDougall films, such as *Boran Women* (1974) and *Boran Herdsmen* (1974), were characterised by an observational positivistic approach. The MacDougalls' documentary practice went through various stages during their long career. Their observational approach stemmed from Italian neo-realism and featured visual and aural detail along with close observation of the characters in their everyday routine. Grimshaw argues that

*...the developmental impetus of the MacDougalls' work suggests an underlying conception that ethnographic realities may be rendered ultimately knowable through the improvement of the techniques of inquiry.*

(Grimshaw, 2001:123)

It is obvious that the pursuit of 'truth' remained central in their work. It is also obvious that the MacDougalls' film-making practice went through a gradual change from the observational model towards the participatory and more reflexive one. They managed to bring together elements of anthropological positivism with cultural relativism, such as the use of conversation between film-maker and subject. This is also the reason why I consider some of the MacDougalls' films inspirational to my own documentary practice.

Consider two later films of the MacDougalls, *Tempus de Baristas* (1993) and *Doon School Chronicles* (2000). The former was shot solely by David MacDougall; the latter was a joint project between them. *Tempus de Baristas* is an ethnographic film about the vanishing lifestyle of rural residents of Sardinia. These people traditionally lived as goatherds, but now their way of life becomes endangered by growing social mobility, the drive for education and opportunities for employment through tourism. This film depicts this social transformation of Sardinian pastoral communities through the use of conversation and interview: the characters themselves lead the spectator into their lives. Other narratives are structured through the beautifully photographed landscape shots. Even if the presence of the film-maker is not denied,

in an approach that implies subjectivity, the camera viewpoint remains invisible: we see medium to short distance shots of people talking. They never face the lens. This way of filming becomes quite uncomfortable for the viewer, since the character talks 'to' the viewer, but their gaze never meets the camera (the viewer). This reinforces a feeling of setup or re-enactment. What I found really interesting in this film, and which later inspired my own film-making practice, was the creation of a landscape narrative structure through the use of static landscape shots. Also, another interesting aspect, that underlined the turn of the MacDougalls towards a more reflexive film-making practice, was their choice of giving space to the subjective voice in their films; it demonstrated another element of the synthesis between observational and participatory ethnography. It is, in a sense, an example of contemporary *salvage ethnography* as it seeks to record a vanishing lifestyle.

A more recent example of the MacDougalls' ethnographic films is *Doon School Chronicles* (2000), which documents Doon School, a prestigious Indian boarding school. The film was shot over the period of two years and lacks any voice-over commentary. It is structured in chapters, each prefaced by an intertitle quoted from the school archives. This composition seems to be incompatible with conventional ethnographic film practice of chronological order. However, the film adopts an observational realist approach. The MacDougalls pay particular attention to portray close-up details and the everyday of the characters. They extensively employ conversation and interview as narrative devices. Shots inside and outside the school are edited to form a purely visual narrative of its own. This remained the focal point of interest for me in this film. The choice, though, of a particularly slow rhythm seems unsuitable: the whole film seems stagnated, as if nothing dramatic ever happens. The MacDougalls deliberately reject the construct of this film becoming a drama, keeping it on the scientific and not-diegetic side of documentary.

The American experimental film-maker, composer and feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha started making documentaries in the early 1980s. She is the principal representative of postmodern feminist ethnography. Her experimental style broke ranks with all the conventions of observational realist ethnographic film-making. Crawford (1992) argues that the impact of, and interest in, the work of Trinh challenges the doctrines of ethnographic film-making. He identifies ridicule and irony as significant elements of her films and writings, which,



*...reject the search for authenticity, truth and objectivity embedded in ethnographic representation.*

(Crawford, 1992:78)

I found Trinh's writings on documentary and the pursuit of 'truth' particularly revealing. Trinh criticises the quest of 'fact' and 'truth' by underlying documentary's artificiality. She argues for a balance between 'fact' and 'fiction', and, ultimately, for the aesthetic and the artistic nature of documentary:

*A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction. It does not work to conceal or exclude what is normalized as 'nonfactual', for it understands the mutual dependence of realism and 'artificiality' in the process of filmmaking. It recognizes the necessity of composing (on) life in living it or making it. Documentary reduced to a mere vehicle of facts may be used to advocate a cause, but it does not constitute one in itself; hence, the perpetuation of the bipartite system of division in the content-versus-form rationale.*

(Trinh, 1993:99)

Apart from her writings, Trinh applied her theories to her own film-making practice. Her films seek to explore the mode by which feelings are created through combinations of experiments in sound and image. Sound on a black screen; image disassociated from its synchronous sound; montage effects, such as visual loops, image replication, jump-cuts, text over the image or even text accompanying aural testimonies are just a few of Trinh's creative innovations in her film-making practice to state her reflexivity and defend the subjectivity of her characters. Trinh's hallmark, though, is her own voice commentary in her films: a poetic de-construction of her topics with a touch of irony and melancholy. This commentary seems to be based on her fieldwork diary notes; she uses it in a poetic way to make her critical intentions explicit.

Trinh's *Reassemblage* (1982) is a film about women in rural Senegal in the early 1980s. Her subjects, in contrast to the MacDougalls', face directly into the camera lens. The camera is directed not by facts, but feelings. Her editing creates rhythm using all the aforementioned devices. Her commentary addresses the points of her

research and points about herself. For example, an excerpt of her voice-over commentary says, *reality is delicate. My irreality and imagination are otherwise dull. The habit of imposing a meaning to every single sign.* Sarcasm and irony are important elements in Trinh's work. What I consider the most important of all is her experiment of aural and visual representation of *her* social reality. She continues this style in other films, such as *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989) and *Shoot for the Contents* (1991). Trinh's films were very significant for me. She helped me see ethnographic film from a different perspective, a much more liberal and experimental one. Her contribution to ethnographic film-making was the introduction of experimental representational forms in an area dominated by observational positivistic approaches, and, as such, her contribution is invaluable.

Recent contemporary examples of ethnographic film-making outside academia that were of particular interest to me include films by the Serbian documentary filmmaker Boris Mitić. His first film, *Pretty Dyana* (2003), portrayed a group of Roma refugees from Kosovo, living in the outskirts of Belgrade. They make their living out of collecting and recycling paper, glass and aluminium. Mitić enters their lives with his camera, prompting them to show him their way of life. Mitić's approach to this film was very much a contemporary, one-man-crew, low budget example of *Cinéma Vérité*. This approach had both observational and participatory elements. Mitić's presence remained obvious throughout the film, like Rouch and Morin's in *Chronicle of a Summer*. He did not include any reflections by the film-maker, but his participatory approach was evident.

In his last film though, *Goodbye, How Are You?* (2009), Mitić collected bizarre visual material, such as an electricity post planted in the middle of a street, or a tiny river island with a house twice its size on it, during a three year long trip in Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo. He assembled these along with 24 narrated aphorisms from the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle to produce a film structured in 24 chapters. Mitić himself calls this documentary style 'satirical Vérité'. The narrator calls for an imaginary duel that never materialised. The whole feeling that I received from this film, was of a snapshot of contemporary Serbian society. Its sarcastic narration reminded me of Trinh's poetic irony. The innovative narrative structure distances the film from traditional ethnographic practices. I found this film particularly interesting, because it

managed to tackle a difficult subject, such as the situation of a country some ten years after a war, with dignity and intelligence. Films like *Goodbye, How Are You?* are examples of ethnographic films intended for a wider audience, not just the academic anthropological circles. I call this *ethnography for the masses*; this became my goal in my own film-making endeavour.

Having all these past and present ethnographic films, scientific approaches and aesthetical decisions in mind, I started planning my own documentary film. My options were constrained: my funds were extremely limited and my project, due to its politically sensitive nature, was not an easy one to realise in Greece. I had to follow a strategy that would keep my budget low. At the same time I needed to be mobile in order to operate in the field, and have access to accommodation. The solution to these organisational matters was to choose the guerrilla film-making option: minimal crew in a campervan for discretion and cost efficiency. Apart from the production details, my approach depended on various factors, such as access to informants or research participants. I had no established contacts in the area. It was difficult to decide in advance of the style and form of my film. Inspired by Rouch and Morin, I wanted to engage in a reflexive mode of film-making, recording myself along with my participants, observing and interacting with them. I hoped that a long stay in the field would solve potential participation issues. I also initially opted for a film without personal narration, not even intertitles, to avoid suggesting a single interpretation of the material. I wanted to create a film that would be a collection of anthropological and historical elements, pieces of private and public archives interwoven with personal memories, oral testimonies and location shots. All these I intended to assemble in a fragmentary way. I wanted to make a film which portrayed my personal account of the social reality as I encountered it in the field.

### **Chapter 3**

During my short preliminary field visit in January 2006, I visited the town of Kastoria in Western Greek Macedonia. There, soon after the New Year celebrations, a traditional festival takes place that lasts for three days (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> January). In the evenings, people dress up in costumes and go out in the streets to celebrate. Musicians from the region and from the rest of Macedonia (Greek and Slav) are invited to play. So the whole city is given over to multiple street concerts, which meet and overlap over the course of the night. I thought that this occasion was a good starting point for my research. The footage I recorded there was satisfactory in documenting the festival; less suitable for my project. The festival was commercialised, and, according to some participants, not what it used to be in the past in terms of local traditions, costumes, music and happenings. But I attended a semi-private concert inside a small local café that was more relevant to my research. A large brass band and singers, dressed in traditional costumes, played traditional Slav Macedonian songs for a relatively small audience. This unusual public use of the Slav language in the form of the songs I was hearing impressed me. This was my first encounter of the kind. I did not consciously understand at that moment that we were in a place that we should not be, but still while there, I never felt confident enough to take out my camera to record the event. Looking back, I realise that it was a wise decision; emotions do run high when conflicting nationalisms clash, and I believe that this was the case there. Even if I was aware of these interethnic tensions, the fact that I experienced it for the first time made me realise that the project I was about to embark on required much more effort than I envisaged when proposing it.

The next day I left Kastoria along with my partner and another friend. We decided to make a brief visit to the Prespa lakes, which were a few hours' drive away. We arrived there in the afternoon. The scenery was breath-taking: two big lakes situated on a plateau surrounded by white mountain peaks. The lakes were frozen, and the whole picture was the complete opposite of Greek stereotype of sun, sea and sand.

We booked a room in the village of Psarades, the most touristic village in Prespa, and went to a tavern to have a taste of the local speciality: the famous Prespa beans<sup>19</sup>. The tavern was very busy, and the first question that the waiter asked us –something which would become a recurring theme for the whole duration of this fieldwork- was ‘Where are you from?’. The two of us replied that we were from Athens; when my partner said that she was from the former Yugoslavia, the waiter immediately smiled, and spoke to her briefly in Slav and said that he understood Serbian. He told us that he normally lives in the town of Florina, and that during the festive period he comes to Prespa to help his parents with their tavern. They were also there, in their sixties, working in the open plan kitchen of the restaurant. I also heard him speak to his parents in Slavic. This encounter gave us the impression that the Slav-speaking situation in Prespa was not as bad as we thought it is. The following day and before our departure, we decided to have lunch at the same tavern. This time we were not served by the son, but by the daughter of the owners. When she realised that one of us was of Slavic origin, she was quite hostile towards us, as if we were not welcome there. We also noticed that she spoke to her parents only in Greek and was uncomfortable when they spoke Slavic between them. This strange demonstration of distinct choices about performing ethnic identity between a brother and a sister was the most significant finding of this first field visit to Greek Macedonia. This was very similar to what the research undertaken in the Greek and Slav Macedonian Australian Diasporas by Loring Danforth has shown, where the national identity is a matter of choice of each individual rather than the family, thus a social construct (Danforth, 2000; see also chapter 1).

The main fieldwork started a year later, at the beginning of 2007. I established a base in Athens, which I equipped with a video editing suite and started making visits to Prespa with the aid of a camper van, accompanied and greatly assisted by my partner. This help was invaluable. We could discuss, debate and assess situations that a Greek-speaking person working on his/her own would find more difficult. For

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<sup>19</sup> The beans produced in Prespa are famous all over Greece for their unique taste and their thin and soft skin and have been awarded the label of Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) by the European Union.

example, at the start I was not completely sure if the Prespa lakes were the ideal location for my research. So we started the first trip by visiting the villages east from Florina. According to various publications (Karakasidou, 1993a; Karakasidou, 1997a; Kostopoulos, 2002; Poulton, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1994) these were also inhabited primarily by Slav speakers. We entered a tavern in the village of Meliti and the experience was quite appalling. Some locals were sitting inside eating and drinking and, from the moment we entered, a strange silence dominated the situation. The waiter served us and he was not talkative at all. The other people there continued to silently stare at us. Being an international couple of Greek and Serbo-Croatian origin put us in a situation where the locals, Greek or Slavs, could not trust us: we were neither a completely Greek, nor a Slav couple. That was another manifestation of the difficulties when working in an area of interethnic tension, and, in particular, when the researchers were part of these nationalities and not independent observers, who could be seen as neutral to these issues. These thoughts made us feel unwelcome there and after our meal we left and discussed why. I was aware of the sensitivity and the emotions surrounding this topic, and I remembered what Mazower and others wrote about the problems and threats that Karakasidou faced while conducting her ethnography in this area, that even led Cambridge University Press, after getting security advice from the British Embassy in Athens, to withdraw from publishing her monograph (Mazower, 1996; Friedl, 1999). Comparing Meliti to the scene of our first visit in the Prespa lakes, my preference was overwhelmingly in favour of the latter. I then decided that the feasibility of the project would only be assured if I would locate it in Prespa. I do not imply that such a project could not be realised in the towns of Florina and Kastoria or the villages east of Florina; it would have to be a project of a different nature and magnitude. I would have had to have resided there for a substantially extended amount of time, to mingle with the locals in order to establish personal relations with them, and then try to find the ones willing to participate. I could not do any of the above, so we left Meliti for Prespa.

Since I had no established contacts there, the first day we drove around the few villages of the area. The whole population is about 1,500 inhabitants. The main settlement is the conjoined villages of Lemos and Agios Germanos. The area around the lakes is very fertile, and the abundance of water from the lakes makes it an ideal farmland. The main bulk of the population depends on agriculture, herding and

fishing; the locally produced Prespa beans enjoy high demand all over Greece. At the village of Psarades, we had lunch at the same tavern as during the first visit. The owner there told me of his refugee past in Eastern Europe and the situation nowadays in Albania and the FYR of Macedonia. He said he and his wife are Slav speakers, and that he travels every year to the other side of the border. But when asked to be interviewed on camera, he politely declined to be recorded. He sent us to another person who might have been interested in participating in my project. We went and found this person, who, to my disappointment, also declined.

At the main square of Agios Germanos we discovered the office of the NGO Cultural Triangle of Prespa (CTP), which seemed as a reasonable starting point for establishing contacts<sup>20</sup>. Inside, a French employee talked to us on camera about CTP's activities and projects. She let us film the office. She told us that CTP manages "Steki", a youth information centre/café which serves as an open space for various activities. This place acts as a meeting point for its volunteers and the local youth. I thought that this would be an interesting point of research for us. When I asked her more specifically about Prespa, its history, peoples and traditions she forwarded us to another person, a local Vlach farmer. She phoned him to come and meet us.

Christos, a relatively young farmer in his thirties, is also involved in the activities of the CTP. The first thing he asked was, which TV channel were we working for. After realising that it was not a commercial project, he agreed to help. He talked to us freely, mentioned all the ethnic groups of the area, but when he found out the Yugoslavian origin of my partner, he became much more reserved with his stories. As mentioned earlier, our nationalities at times proved to be an obstacle, than an advantage for the purpose of my research. This recurring problem made realise that it would become extremely difficult to find willing participants who would talk to us freely on the record. All these happened off camera, since he was reluctant to talk in

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<sup>20</sup> CTP is, according to its website ([www.ctp.gr](http://www.ctp.gr)), a non-profit organisation which aims to reduce the effects of rural isolation on the local communities at a cultural, economical and educational level, to bring together civil society activists and local stakeholders to support them in strengthening their capacity building and networking, as well as to offer opportunities to children and young people from all over Europe to meet and to realise their possibilities, to develop skills in the fields of arts and new technologies and in taking initiatives.

the presence of it. Nevertheless, he took us for a ride in his small pick-up truck around the area. His selected points of interest were mainly religious sites, most of them from the Byzantine era, as if he was trying to reinforce the classic nationalistic argument of the continuity of the Greek character of the area. The most interesting moment was when we visited the now blocked border crossing between Greece and the FYR of Macedonia in the area of Prespa. It was shut down by the Greek Dictatorship in 1967 and never reopened. Through Christos we found out about the NGO 'Society for the Protection of Prespa' (SPP) and the large ecological movement that developed around the lakes during the last four decades; in 1974 the Greek government designated the area as a National Park, and shortly after the small Prespa as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention<sup>21</sup>. We agreed to a potential future interview with him.

The same evening I visited the youth centre. There we met two more CTP volunteers, of Dutch and Scottish origin. There was also a French former CTP volunteer leading a project funded by the European Union about traditional water mills and the use of traditional ovens in the area of Prespa. Gwenaël Les Bras seemed to know the most about this area; he had lived there for two years. He talked about the ethnic compositions of the villages of Prespa: the Slav speakers, the Pontiacs and the Vlachs. He was the first one in Prespa to show genuine interest in my project. I felt that this person might become a character in the film. He told us that he would be baking traditional bread the next day at the old watermill (now a hotel) and that we were welcome to come and taste the bread. He also proposed to us to visit a nearby grocery store. The owner was a local Slav speaker, eager to speak this language and tell stories of the area. We then visited this store.

The owner, an elderly man, asked us the usual question regarding our origin. As soon as my partner told him that she is from the former Yugoslavia he brightened up and said in Slav with an obvious sense of pride: 'You can speak our language freely here! Do not be afraid to use it, I will not tell anyone!' Van Boeschoten, amongst other

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<sup>21</sup> For more information see the website of the NGO 'Society for the Protection of Prespa' (<http://www.spp.gr>). The mission of it is to maintain and strengthen the relationship between people and nature in the region and to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of Prespa for the benefit of its inhabitants and of all those interested and concerned, today and in the future.



scholars, wrote about the reluctance of the Slav speakers to speak this language in front of outsiders (Van Boeschoten, 2006). Discussing on this, she notes that the linguistic repression of the past drove the bilingual communities in Western Greek Macedonia to develop cultural practices as,

*...a response to the cultural hegemony of a dominant language: code-switching and the use of embodied memories to express a 'muted voice.'*

(Van Boeschoten, 2006:352)

The grocery store owner told us then stories of his childhood. At five years old he became a refugee child in Poland. There he stayed for the next ten years until he was repatriated in 1958. He was then drafted into the Greek army, where former refugees were treated very badly and called 'red snakes'. Although he was very talkative, when I asked him to take part in my project he also declined. After we left, my partner told me that he called this Slav language *dopia* (local). To her it sounded somewhere between old Serbian and Bulgarian, missing declination and clauses.

The next evening we visited the disused watermill, which the owner had converted into an alternative tourism unit. A few local people and some young volunteers were there. After Gwenaël baked his bread, we all went inside and sat at the restaurant. The owner, an intelligent man in his forties, treated us all with homemade food and the local grape distillate called *tsipouro*. When he found out that my father came from Crete he told me with a slight complaint in his tone: *You Cretan people are smarter than us, since you can call your distillate 'raki'. Here we have to call it 'tsipouro'!* (*Raki* is very close to the Slav equivalent of *rakija*). This statement impressed me and I noted in my fieldwork diary that I would have to speak to him about my project during a future visit, since we were to leave for Athens early next morning.

This winter time visit gave me an insight to the specific characteristics of the area, the issues regarding the Slav language and the composition of the population of Prespa. I was struck by the frequency of uniformed persons in this area, policemen, soldiers or border guards. Apart from the armed forces, the population of Prespa falls into distinct groups: local Slav speakers, refugees from Asia Minor and Pontus, and Vlachs. These were long established divisions since the 1950s. There were also two newer groups: the ecologists and the European volunteers of the local NGOs. These

findings raised questions about the direction of my project and the suitability of my original methodology. The lack of access to participants and the numerous refusals that I kept receiving, along with the distrust and wariness of the local people to participate, forced me to scale down the project. My new plan was to be completely flexible, adapting to the situation in the field. I concentrated first on filming establishing landscape shots: the narrative of the landscape. Knowing in advance the heavy history of the area, I thought the most appropriate film rhythm would be a slow one. The white peaks of the mountains along the lakes were very beautiful and suitable shots for this purpose. I also recorded shots of visual interest: the fisherman departing with his boat from the small harbour to go fishing, snow shots in the villages with kids playing on the street, the local municipality worker setting up Greek flags for the coming national day of celebration. The lack of progress with finding participants willing to be filmed was not satisfactory at all and I started having doubts about the feasibility of the project as a whole.

The most fruitful visit of the whole project was the one at the beginning of July. We started with a walk in Florina, the main town of the area; in a supermarket I overheard young people talking in Slav to each other. We also passed by a small street in the centre, where we saw the bilingual sign of the offices of 'Rainbow' (see chapter 1). The display of this sign caused unrest in Florina on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2005. After a string of protests by right-wing and extreme right-wing press, the church and the local council, the public prosecutor at the Florina Criminal Court ordered the removal of the sign on the ground that the inclusion of the party's name in Slav Macedonian was liable to sow discord (Article 192 of the penal Code) among the local population. The following night extreme right-wing people stormed the offices of 'Rainbow' and destroyed everything on the pretext of this bilingual 'provocation'. The police was called, but pressed no charges. Because of this, Greece was convicted by the European Human Rights Court in October 2005<sup>22</sup>. Knowing

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<sup>22</sup> The Court held unanimously that there had been: a **violation of Article 6 § 1** of the European Convention on Human Rights (right to a fair hearing) on account of the length of proceedings; a **violation of Article 11** of the Convention (freedom of assembly and association). European Court of Human Rights CASE OF OURANIO TOXO AND OTHERS v. GREECE (*Application no. 74989/01*)

this history, I understood why the sign was now put high on the second floor of the building and not over the entrance. Later, on the main square of the town, I saw a huge banner for the 2007 election campaign of LA.O.S. (People's Orthodox Rally), a right-wing populist and Christian nationalist political party. I was struck by the location and size of the banner. Here was an explicit manifestation of extreme right-wing political views in Greece, some 30 years after the fall of the dictatorship. Having all of the above in mind, I thought once more about the difficulties regarding my project. I felt as if I was placed in the middle of the clash of competing nationalisms in the area and decided to continue my work in Prespa, where at least I felt much more comfortable than in the town of Florina.

We returned to Prespa and visited the main island in Small Prespa Lake, Agios Achillios, famous for the ruins of a basilica of the same name. This church was built by the Bulgarian Emperor Samuel; the island served also as the capital of his empire for some years. There I spoke with an old inhabitant, who told me that the island is largely depopulated, only five families and two children are left. They live out of fishing and tourism and there is nobody to work on the fields, which are covered by weeds to the extent that one cannot distinguish individual properties. I asked him if he wanted to appear in my film; he declined. I went around in the village and asked a few people the same question; nobody agreed to this.

Back at the main village of Agios Germanos we went to the offices of the NGO SPP and tried to find a way to break this deadlock of the access to participants. There I realised that, apart from information regarding the invaluable environmental work of the SPP, I would not get anything useful for my project. I then arranged an interview with Christos, the Vlach farmer, even if he was uneasy with this. We met in his farm where he planted organic beans. Discussion centred on the situation in Prespa today, and the problems that the inhabitants are facing. He talked only about conventional issues. He never mentioned anything about the ethnic groups of the area, even though in previous discussions he had talked openly about them. He kept recommending other people to be interviewed, thus avoiding my direct questions. Clearly he did not want to participate in my film.

The same evening a concert took place in the village of Lemos. It was organised by the CTP and the performers were children from all parts of Prespa (Greece, FYR of Macedonia and Albania) along with some Serbian children and volunteers of this

NGO. I was asked to record the event for them, which I gladly did. During preparations for the event, many village kids were standing by and watching. I overheard them several times talking between themselves; they were speaking Slav. There I also met the director of CTP who agreed to talk to me on camera at a later date. The square of the village was full. I noted in my diary that, during the song from the FYR of Macedonia, the public sang along, and some local people stood up and danced to it. I got the impression that this public expression of ethnic identity was unusual. But due to the low illumination in this part of the square, I could not record this incident.

The next day I had arranged to talk to the French researcher Gwenaël, the only person who had showed genuine interest in my project. We met at his house where I recorded one of the most useful interviews of the whole project. Since my first visit to Prespa, I had kept in contact with him, letting him know of my progress. He lived in the area for two years, and travelled around the whole of the lake for his research. He spoke Greek well and he was also learning *Slavomacedonian*, as he called it. He was aware of the historical and political circumstances of the area. He told me which of the villages were now predominantly Slav, Vlach or Pontiac. The most interesting thing though, is that he is from Brittany, an area of France with striking similarities to Prespa. For example, his grandfather was not a French speaker; he spoke only Breton, the local Celtic language. Gwenaël's name was also Celtic. He was therefore perhaps more interested in understanding the local identity issues than the rest of the volunteers that I met, more so than many Greeks residing in Prespa. During this interview, he told me that, through his research, he unintentionally became a collector of *histories of tears and pain*. He spoke on camera about language and identity issues among the local population since the Ottoman era. He described the fear of talking the Slav language by some, especially old people. He told me about the villages in Prespa, how they had their names changed and how some of them were completely destroyed after the Civil War. It was as if Gwenaël was reading out loud parts of the studies I was researching, especially Kostopoulos's (2002) and Karakasidou's (1997a) accounts on the Slav Macedonians in Greece. This interview was a breakthrough for my project; it broke the silence. I was at first very sceptical about the fact that the only good interview I had was not from a local, but a foreigner. I then thought that, exactly because Gwenaël was neither Greek nor Slav,

he had managed to become accepted by all the groups living in Prespa. So, even if his account was not first-hand, his testimony was invaluable.

The day after Gwenaël's interview, I reassessed my achievement so far. On the one hand, I was happy that I had one good interview, but on the other hand, the progress of the research was disappointing. I still had not managed to get any testimony by a local person, and most of the filming so far was of secondary, mainly aesthetic value. I came to the conclusion that I should try to ask people instead to tell me 'What is my Prespa?', in order to break this communication problem with the locals. The same day, Christos the farmer took us for a ride on the top of the mountain above the village of Agios Germanos, where I recorded a stunning sunset over the lakes. There, trying to extend the previous interview with him, I asked *about his own Prespa*; still he continued to avoid answering questions. I now felt a slight reservation or even hostility towards my project from his side. So my new plan was not so successful either. Nevertheless, Christos brought us in contact with a new volunteer of CTP, a young woman from the FYR of Macedonia; *one of you* he ironically told my partner. We met her the next day in the office of CTP, and she agreed to give me an interview. She was a very kind person, and respectful of the area, the NGO and the village. She compared the lake area of the Greek side with the one in the FYR of Macedonia, and she said that the Greek side is far more organised and lively. She then told us that she was very surprised to find many residents here speaking a Slav language that to her sounded as very close to the dialect of Bitola<sup>23</sup>. I wrote this down in my diary: the first open testimony to the language connections over the borders. Another observation regarding the language that I noted took place in the village of Psarades. There, overhearing some street workers talking to each other, I noticed the mix between Slav and Greek words in their speech. For example, they said *aspro moje, mavro tvoje* meaning *white mine, black yours*. Interestingly, in the same sentence to express the colours Greek words were used, whereas to express possession Slav words were used. Van Boeschoten (2006) observes a similar pattern of the use of language in her observation of a local Slav Macedonian peasant, who used words from the purist version of Greek to express bureaucratic notions mixed with the Slav Macedonian vernacular.

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<sup>23</sup> Bitola is a town in the west of FYR of Macedonia, in the vicinity of the Prespa lakes.

We were about to depart for Athens, when, in the centre of Lemos, we met the owner of the mill along with his elderly parents. I talked to them about my project and the old couple seemed to be willing to participate in it when we returned next. I thought that this could be the breakthrough; both of them were members of the Slav speaking community and their potential testimony would be of immense value. I began to think the project might still be successful, even if its scale was to be much smaller than originally planned before fieldwork. I planned the next visit for the middle of August to coincide with the big religious festival of the Virgin Mary day on the 15<sup>th</sup>. It was this visit, apart from the interview with Gwenaël that was to provide me with new connections and prospects for access to first hand testimonies.

As planned, we arrived in Psarades late in the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of August. To our surprise the village was surrounded by numerous parked cars, loud live music and unusually many people. In fact, it turned out that the festivities for the religious holiday last two days, from 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> August. Entering the main square in front of the long closed elementary school, we saw a big traditional brass band playing and people dancing in the centre. We sat on the side and started filming the feast. I noted that there were three kinds of songs: Greek traditional songs from all over the country, Vlach songs where the clarinet dominated the tune, and Slav songs which sounded very close to south Serbian ones. Worth noting was also the fact that the dancers mostly adhered to their ethnic group: Slavs danced the Slav songs, Vlachs their own, and the descendants of the Greek Asia Minor refugees danced to the Greek ones. This was not a strict rule, since some danced to all the songs, but it was nevertheless notable. The thing that really impressed me was that the words of the songs were only sung if they were in Greek. During the Slav songs, nobody sang, they silently danced. Despite the fact that I already knew about this practice through Van Boeschoten's (2000) account of the silent village feasts in Slav speaking villages, I was shocked: a silent (or should I say silenced?) feast was for me something I had never experienced before, especially if I compared it to many other feasts I've attended in Greece. My partner's experience reinforced this finding; she recognised a popular tune of the former Yugoslavia and told me that she was completely sure that this song had words. For me, the experience of the silent feast was a very powerful one. I tried to record it from a certain distance to avoid any

disturbance to local tradition. As noted above, Van Boeschoten's (2006) description of the way that cultural minorities respond to practices of cultural hegemony through code switching to express a 'muted voice' was more than evident here: the mute dance was a clear manifestation of it. The second night was similar, with less people though. I also noted that the participation of the people was higher and more enthusiastic during the (unsung) Slav songs. The film recordings of both days were of good quality and finally did visually display various ethnographic elements.

A few days later, I decided to pursue the promised interview with the old mill man. I visited the mill to locate him. There I found him with his son, the owner of the mill. I asked the son if he thought his father would still be willing to participate in my project. He replied that I should ask him directly, which I did. To my surprise, he now declined to help me. I asked him why and he replied that these are old stories and said: *What should I tell you? Agios Germanos had 14.500 people and no one was left.* I returned that these were stories worth preserving and that this was my intention. He looked at me and I could not help but feel a strange fear coming into his expression when he told me: *This is all gone now and we are going to get in trouble. Leave these stories alone. We are going to be turned in. Let me in peace.* I accepted his refusal. This was the clearest manifestation of the difficulties I was facing regarding access to first hand participants. The fear of being exposed in front of the camera, even if the situation had improved in the meantime, still dominated these people. I could understand it, even if I felt frustrated. As the old man was leaving, I thought I would ask his son instead. He offered me coffee and we sat in the beautiful yard of the restored mill. At the same time, my partner was by the camper van parked some distance away from the mill; the old man met her and had a conversation with her. She recorded the conversation in my fieldwork diary and this is what she wrote:

*'As I was walking towards the mill, I met the grandfather who stopped and asked me where I was from. I said I was from Yugoslavia. He said 'Are you from across the border?' I then said 'No, I am from the south of Serbia and the coast of Croatia, a mix.' Then he asked me how I came here (to Greece). I told him that I met Yorgos (my partner), fell in love and stayed here. 'You did well, you did well' he said, and then, with a lot of pain in his eyes which were full of tears, he said: 'You know, all my*

*relatives live there, in Serbia (for him there was only Serbia, no Macedonia). A cousin of mine came the other day from the other side to tell me that my mother recently died there (more tears in his eyes). My cousin came and I knew her only by name. This woman I did not know or could not recognise, came to my house and hugged me strongly. I did not understand why. She then explained who she was and said she is sadly bringing the news that my mother just died. You know, my mother died there. All my relatives are there.’ ‘I am sorry to hear your mother just died. My condolences’ I said. He repeated once again that his mother had just died and I again I expressed my condolences. He then told me, in a way of wrapping up a long and painful history: ‘This place here suffered a lot’, almost suggesting that my story (a Serb-Croat married to and living with a Greek in Greece) was a happy one compared to the tragedies lived by the Slav people here.’*

While my partner was talking with the old man, I was talking to his son about my project. He listened carefully, and with interest to what I was saying. In the meantime my partner also arrived there and sat with us. *I never recalled us singing our songs in the feasts. We only dance to the music* he said, and added *I can completely understand the old man not wanting to talk about it. While he thinks of these stories, all the suppressed feelings of that era are also awakened, therefore he feels fear, suppression, the fear of repercussion etc.* I then asked him if he would be willing to talk about this on the record, but he declined, saying that there was no point in him doing so. He did not live through this period; it would be a second-hand account of the events. And he added that he would probably ‘lose’ if we recorded him. He stressed that his interest lies with the Greek side and he would not risk it. This would be a task for an older person, a first-hand witness. He said he is fighting for contemporary stories and problems, and added that these were older histories he would tell his children in private. He closed this discussion by saying that anyway he was an internationalist; he did not believe in nations or ethnic identities: neither this one, nor the one on the other side of the border. This is why he does not care which one he carries. I realised that this was another manifestation of the social construct of national identity as Anderson (1991) and Danforth (1995; 2002) noted. Whenever he spoke Slav, he told me, he got into trouble; he had had enough of trying to explain how and why. Sometimes, though, he got annoyed and told people complaining



about the Slav language, *we are this kind of people, no matter if you like it or not*. Seeing my obvious disappointment about his rejection, he added that he would try to assist me in finding first-hand witnesses for my project. I could not help but agree with most of his arguments. This discussion was important, even if it was not on camera, because, for the first time, I really communicated with a member of the Slav community, who was both aware and willing to discuss it with me. Also the refusal by both him and his father to participate in my film, even for different reasons, was the most vivid manifestation of the difficulties I faced while working in this area. Regardless if I or my partner were cultural insiders in this region, the obstacles these people have to overcome to speak overtly about their issues are immense, and are even more difficult to record these on tape. If I were a different person, a classic anthropologist for example, I would maybe be able to utilise alternative research methods than my camera. Participant observation and a written ethnography would be able to document the case of the Slavic minority in Greece as others, reviewed earlier in this thesis, have already done.

This was the end of that visit; we left the next day for Athens. Having missed this chance for a first-hand account of both the old man and his son, I felt that the project was slipping away from me. The time I had at my disposal for fieldwork was coming to an end and I had not managed thus far to gather sufficient audiovisual material to complete my research.

I started to orientate myself towards the probability of failure and tried to direct my project towards the justification for this, stating the problems I encountered on the field. But no more than ten days passed after I left Prespa for Athens, when I received a phone call from the owner of the mill in Prespa. He told me that a local journalist was willing to help me get in touch with some old people. I then contacted her and I was told that there were two cousins, both of them former refugees in Eastern Europe after the Civil War, who would gladly talk to me on camera about their lives and about Prespa. I quickly organised another visit, my final field trip, and set out to Prespa. The morning after our arrival there, we met the journalist and she took us to the village of Mikrolimni to meet Georgios Iliopoulos and his wife. They were a cheerful couple around 65 years old. After the introductions, the journalist left us to conduct the interview. Georgios's wife did not want to take part; we

interviewed only him. He started this interview, which lasted for more than two hours, with his memories of Prespa before he had to leave as a refugee. He told us stories of the Greek Civil War, of his left-wing family tradition and his native village, Kranies that does not exist anymore. He went on to describe the conditions of his displacement to Yugoslavia along with the other children of local communities, and then to Hungary, where he spent the following thirty years. It was like listening to the history of Europe after World War II. He described the 1956 uprising in Hungary, the fallout with Stalin's USSR and the subsequent Soviet invasion and suppression of the uprising. He spoke of the Greek refugees' village of Beloyanni in Hungary, where more than a thousand Greek communists took refuge, and their constant attempts to be repatriated to Greece. He then spoke with tears in his eyes of his successful return to Greece on the first of May 1982, thirty four years after he left, and the problems he faced trying to rebuild his life in the city of Thessaloniki. He told me of his emotional return to Prespa, about his lost property and the lack of any state support for returning former refugees. He said that he was a *dopios*, a local, and that he spoke the Slav language. He promised to take us with his boat to the location of his destroyed village and we agreed to meet him again over the next few days. He also told me that his older cousin, Evangelos, would come for a visit from Thessaloniki, and he would be glad to help us as well. I thanked him for this invaluable interview, and also for the invitation to the boat ride.

The following morning we went to meet Evangelos Iliopoulos as agreed. He was a thin, athletic man in his late sixties and seemed to me stricter than his cousin. He had a loud and clear voice and I got the impression of a person who was used to talk in front of others, something of a theatrical character. He talked about his childhood and early displacement. When he was fourteen, he lived in Budapest, where later he graduated from high school; an achievement for the average refugee child in Eastern Europe. His father, himself a political prisoner in the South of Greece, managed to secure his repatriation to Greece much earlier than his cousin, so he returned in 1960, twelve years after he fled. As soon as he arrived back, the state had his passport removed. He was sent to a compulsory agricultural school in the South of Greece *in order to learn Greek*. Kostopoulos (2002), Karakasidou (1997a) and Van Boeschoten (2000) wrote about these forced assimilation practices that were often used to penalise members of the Slav Macedonian community in post-Civil War Greece. He faced all the discriminations that the Greek state exercised on returning communist

refugees; interrogation upon arrival and humiliation especially during his army service. Upon entering the army he had to sign a declaration against Communism. His captain ordered him to give a speech to the rest of the soldiers condemning Hungary. He refused, telling his captain that he was grateful to Hungary, for the education it offered him. When he was discharged, he managed to get a new passport and left as an economical immigrant to Germany. He told me stories of Prespa before and right after his return and summarised his account in a short anecdote which finished with this sentence:

*Prespa is very beautiful, but for 24 hours only. If you stay longer than that, you will realise all the pain and sorrow that this place carries and you will see what I mean.*

He was very pessimistic about the future of Prespa, due to the depopulation of the area. This interview was important; it was completely different than the one of his cousin Georgios. It gave me another insight into life in Prespa right after the Civil War, since Evangelos returned twenty years before Georgios. His evidence reinforced the testimony of state repression of local Slav speakers, many of whom left again to emigrate to Germany, Canada, Australia and the US.

Later the same day, Georgios would take us for the promised boat ride to his old destroyed village of Kranies. The time to enter the lake had come. All this time, me and the camera had been approaching it, but had never reached it properly. Georgios had one of the old traditional small boats, long and thin with the modern addition of a motor. I sat in front carrying the camera, my partner in the middle holding the microphone to pick up Georgios's commentary, and he sat at the rear. We started from in front of his house in Mikrolimni and continued along the coast towards the Greek-Albanian border. Kranies was located very close to this border; this was the official excuse for demolishing it. On the way, Georgios showed us marks on the rocks caused by British air raids against Greek Partisans positions at the end of the Civil War. As we approached Kranies, I felt awe: the only remains were the ruins of the church and the school. Georgios told us that, in the graveyard next to the church, was the grave of his grandmother. Unfortunately, there was no way to disembark there, due to the wild vegetation at the coastline; so we stared at it from the boat. There was little to be seen.

Georgios told us that Kranies was one of the locations of the People's Court of the Partisans; he showed us the place where executions took place. On the other side of the lake was *Zachariades's Cave*, the headquarters of the Partisans in Prespa. He told us of the spring that they used for drinking water and used *izvori*, the Slav term for it. Then he turned the boat and we set out towards the small uninhabited island of the Small Prespa lake, a bird sanctuary. I got some spectacular shots of wild birds flying away from the island, and other shots of the actual island itself. With this island in the background I asked him about *his own Prespa*. He replied that this place is everything for him, and that *people should seek for such places to spend their lives*. This was in marked contrast to his cousin's view of Prespa, and I noted it in my diary. He then brought us back ashore, and we filmed him rowing his boat away to its mooring; this would become the closing shot of the film.

With this boat ride my fieldwork came to an end, and, as I drove back to Athens, I thought, for the first time, that I had enough material for the film. I had recorded more than 20 hours of footage. This included eight interviews on the record and almost ten off the record. It was much less than I had originally expected, but considering the circumstances on location, I was more than happy with my achievement. The next challenge was to assemble it into a coherent documentary film that would fully respect the people who had agreed to participate.

## **Chapter 4**

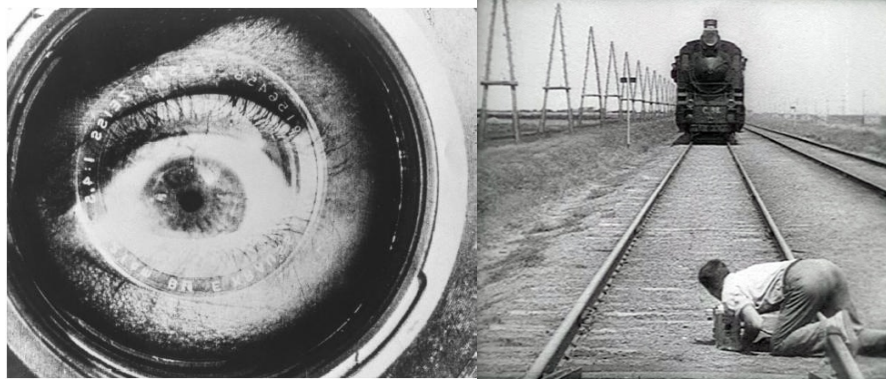
I returned to Edinburgh for the post-production of the film and the writing of the thesis. I had gathered more than twenty hours of footage, and needed to assess it and see how I could assemble it into a film that would be documenting the oral memories I managed to record, of a certain aesthetic and filmic quality, and, at the same time, respectful of my participants. This subject in Greece was politically sensitive and I wanted to be able to return to my participants and show them the completed film without causing any inconvenience. I imported the full audiovisual material into the editing suite and started evaluating and categorising it. There were two different approaches in the way I filmed on location. Most of the landscape shots, including the recordings of the feast, were clearly observational, whereas the interviews and the shots from the boat were clearly participatory. I was aware even during the filming stage that this twofold strategy would result into a hybrid film of both observational and participatory nature; adhering to the inspirations from the ethnographic films that I studied. I wanted to make a film that would be a representation of what I encountered in the field, enriched with the oral testimonies gathered and the beautiful landscape shots of the lakes.

I started thinking what I wanted my finished film to be like. I had to make a choice of a filmic form, or to be precise, a combination of filmic forms. I considered all ethnographic films I had studied and selected various elements, approaches, concepts and techniques that seemed appropriate and useful to help me create this audiovisual representation. What follows is an account of the most important elements that inspired me within the approaches and films I have surveyed.

The earliest is Dziga Vertov's modernist construction of social reality and how he created, in *Man with the Movie Camera*, a cinematic rhythm through the combination of strictly prescribed music soundtrack and innovative montage techniques. This film helped me realise the potential of documentary film to depict a subjective point of view. The camera operator, the editor, even the audience inside the cinema theatre

were depicted in the film (fig.1). Vertov, through the portrayal of the crew and the viewers, acknowledged his constructivist approach.

**Figure 1. Man with the Movie Camera**



*Man with the Movie Camera* particularly showed me the significance of cinematic rhythm. Through its steady and mechanical pace, Vertov showed his admiration for the camera as a technological achievement. By rhythm, I do not mean the speed of the succession of shots in a film. Rhythm is the internal pulse of a film dependent on the narrative; cinematic rhythm is similar to the flow of a music piece. Rhythm is not static. There is a connection between the subject matter of a film and its rhythm. It speeds up and slows down according to the film's narrative. I thought of my film's rhythm: the nature of its topic was painful and emotional. An uninformed viewer would need some time to process and think about the historical and personal information contained in the film. I opted for a slow rhythm in the construction of the film's narrative.

*Chronicle of a Summer* introduced me to a completely different approach, the participatory one. Rouch and Morin go a step beyond Vertov; they do not depict their crew, but they appear themselves in the film (fig.2); they interact with their participants and discuss amongst themselves what they thought were the strengths and the weaknesses of this attempt.

**Figure 2. Chronicle of a Summer**



This remarkable approach interested me and I tried to find ways to implement it in my film as well. I had decided to be filmed along with some of my participants; I left microphones visible in the frame and also recorded my partner in the boat with Georgios during the boat ride in the lake (fig.3).

**Figure 3. Silent Waters: Boat Ride**



This enabled me to stress the subjectivity of my filmic representation and dealt with the pitfalls of naive realism. My partner actively interacted with Georgios through conversation; she prompted the action. She held the microphone visibly in the frame, an approach that underlined the representational character of documentary film-making. The use of these participatory elements I owe to Jean Rouch's invention of *Cinéma Vérité*. They constitute a vital element of my film.

Robert Gardner practiced a different and unusual form of ethnographic film-making. His later films, characterised by abstraction, poetry, aural and visual narratives and

excellent photography, departed from the usual scientific style of ethnographic film (fig.4). *Forest of Bliss* is the prime example of the above, and I tried to follow Gardner's example in creating meanings through a combination of aural and visual metaphors. I had recorded many landscape shots, which I thought were beautiful, poetic and abstract enough. I used them as ingredients of a visually driven narrative, establishing the location and the mood of the project. Another interesting inspiration from Gardner was the constant play with the river in *Forest of Bliss*, where the other side of the river is always depicted from afar.

**Figure 4. Forest of Bliss**



I tried to create the same effect of 'ourselves' and 'the other' through a narrative constructed from landscape shots. The camera observes from afar the other side of the lake, the side that does not belong to the same country as the one the camera records from. Gardner's poetic and emotional cinematic rhythm, in contrast to Vertov's industrial and emotionless one, was a crucial factor; a choice that became a central element in my editing process.

During his long career David MacDougall practiced observational ethnography, but gradually fused it with participatory components, such as interactivity in the form of conversation with his participants (fig.5). His film *Tempus de Baristas* contained such elements, which I tried to incorporate in my film-making approach. In this film, he showed discussions he had with his participants to underline the representational nature of documentary.



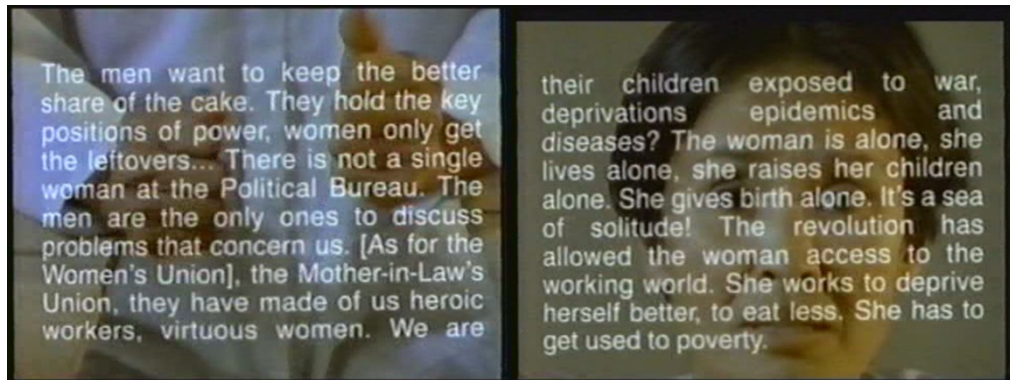
**Figure 5. Tempus de Baristas**



These components I used in my filming too. I conducted most of the interviews as conversations; my partner and I, going a step further, were clearly visible in the frame. The observational shots in MacDougall's film portrayed the Sardinian environment of his participants, edited in such a way, to create a self-contained visual narrative. I followed his example, and that of Gardner, to construct my own landscape tale of the Prespa lakes. This fusion of observation and participation managed to create a bridge between what MacDougall himself described –and I quoted earlier- as *the two divergent conceptions of photography – one an extension of the mind, the other an extension of the eye* (MacDougall, 1997). With the aid of montage, my own film-making thus attempts to bridge the mind and the eye, participation and observation, something I discuss later in this chapter.

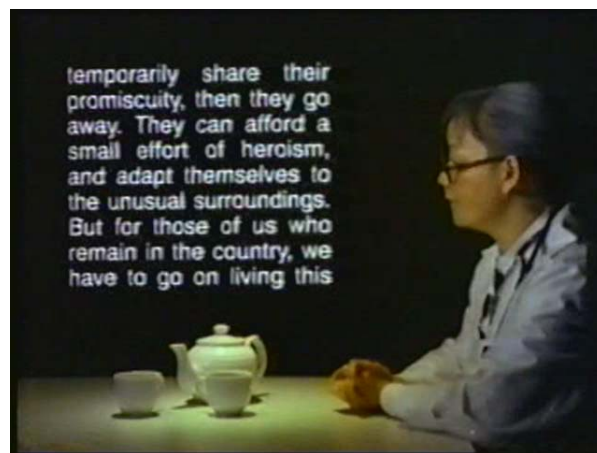
The final film-maker that helped me shape my documentary film-making practice is Trinh T. Minh-ha. Her films are experimental, challenging the limits between documentary and fiction, or even science and art. She consciously distanced her film-making practice from the usual approach to ethnographic film and has written extensively about her approach. She used irony and sarcasm in her narrations, fragmentary narrative structure, and unconventional framing and camera movements. She often focused her representation to images that carry emotions, such as hand gestures, extreme close ups of faces, personal gazes. She uses editing techniques, such as split screens or text over image (fig.6).

**Figure 6. Surname Viet, Given Name Nam 1**



Trinh reminded me that ethnographic film-making can be artistic, driven by emotions, and, on the same time, proliferate anthropological knowledge. I was particularly impressed by her treatment of her participants and her active engagement with them in the image (fig.7).

**Figure 7. Surname Viet, Given Name Nam 2**



My approach was not experimental to that extent, but the effect that Trinh's practice had on my film-making is evident in the way I decided to tackle the editing of the feast sequence. The central argument of that scene is that the Slav participants of the feast dance to the music of their songs, but they do not sing the words. So, inspired by Trinh, I decided to use the effect of split screen to juxtapose the situation of the 'muted' song with its actual lyrics. I consider this sequence a central point in my narrative and I will return to it later in this chapter.

The post production was a complex and time-consuming procedure. I reviewed and assessed my material in subcategories, according to type: landscape and environment shots, interviews and activities. I indexed the material of each subcategory into separate folders –or ‘bins’- according to the tape number. This activity bears resemblance to what Crang and Cook (2007) describe as coding in non-visual ethnographic research. I used markers in the editing suite to mark points of interest, that I would turn back later on during the assembly of the material. This indexing enabled me to evaluate, interpret and control the twenty hours or more of footage I had gathered.

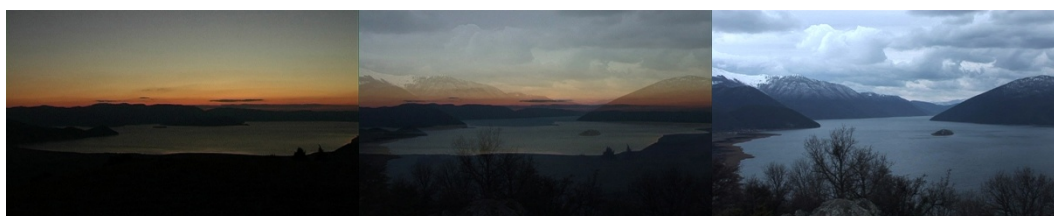
Apart from the inspiring films and approaches that I described above, another issue was the treatment of my participants, including the question of anonymity and exposure. The difficulty I faced in locating and convincing these people to talk on camera about a sensitive topic made me realise that I had to be very careful in the way I would select and portray them in my film. From the beginning it was evident that the interviews of the French researcher Gwenaël, and the two former refugee cousins, Georgios and Evangelos, would be central in this film. I wanted to be fair towards them and, at the same time, consistent in my representation of the subject matter of the film. It took me a long time to achieve what I hope is the correct balance between exposing my informants and the coherence of the narrative of the film. I worked extensively on each individual interview, isolating arguments, memories and testimonies, and assembled each interview into a small self-contained sequence. I decided earlier that I would not use any kind of voice over or intertitles. Rather, I would create a narrative through the choice of shots, the actual witness accounts and the rhythm of the film. As I will show later, I had to revise these choices as part of the post-production procedure.

After evaluating the footage, I realised that the material collected would not support any attempt to structure the film in a conventional sequence, following for example a chronological order of events. Instead, I opted for a fragmentary structure, a mosaic of important the elements. I assembled smaller parallel running narratives (sub-narratives), as constituent fragments of this mosaic, thus enabling the viewer to ‘read’ the film on various levels. These sub-narratives were cerebral, visual, aural, or

a combination. I divided them into four parts: rhythm, landscape, interviews and history, and finally the feast.

The first sub-narrative is created by the choice of the rhythm of the piece, a slow one, which corresponds to the history of the area, ‘full of tears and pain’ as Gwenaël said. It also allows the viewer enough time to reflect on and absorb the visual information presented in the film. I created this rhythm by the selection of shots, their duration, and the composition of static shots with more active ones, such as the boat ride in the lake. I made prominent use of the ‘dissolve’ transition, to bring together shots. This enabled me to control and modify the pace according to the needs of the bigger narrative of the film (fig.8). The film critic Noel Burch (2003) argues that the ‘dissolve’ edit was usually regarded as a sign of time lapse, but he notes that some directors, such as Robert Bresson, used it as a syntactic or constructive element in their films. I used it precisely for syntactical purposes in this case, to help the creation of a filmic form. The rhythm picks up pace as the film progresses, to reach its culmination with the feast sequence. Then, after a pause, it slows down again at the end of the film.

**Figure 8. Silent Waters: Dissolve edit**

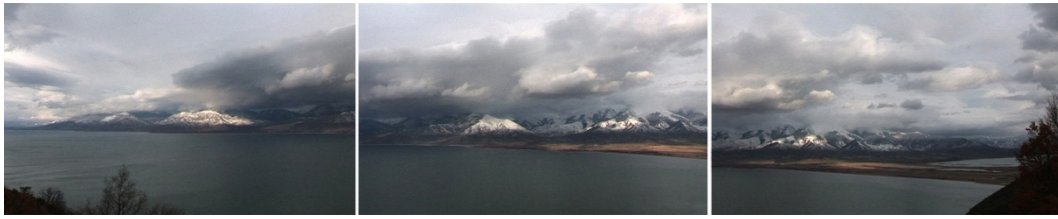


The second sub-narrative is closely related to rhythm, though not identical: it is a visually driven narrative. It consists of landscape shots that are static, or extremely slow pan-shots<sup>24</sup> (fig.9), establishing the environment of the lakes and slowly moving towards the water. Only later the camera ‘enters’ the lake during the first boat ride, to retreat again until the trip to the destroyed village of Georgios. This sub-narrative strand, apart from its pictorial qualities, underscores the rhythm of the film to establish an appropriate melancholic and mournful tone.

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<sup>24</sup> Pan-shots (from the verb: panning) are shots, where the camera is turned on its horizontal axis only, from one side towards the other.

**Figure 9. Silent Waters: Rhytm**



Then, I assembled selected fragments of the testimonies, along with selected archival and other images, to create the third sub-narrative, which is the most informative of all. The first two were mainly designed to address the senses, whereas this one addressed the intellect. Watching the accounts of the two old cousins, I felt as if I had recorded a concise version of the European history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a history narrated through two life stories (fig.10).

**Figure 10. Silent Waters: Talking with Georgios**

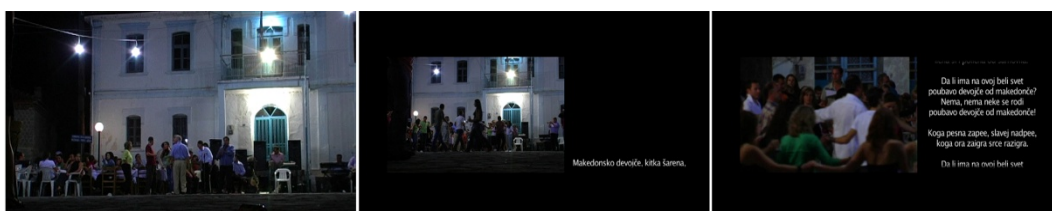


For obvious reasons my interviewees could not supply any archival material to support this sub-narrative; they were children, poor and fleeing at the time. Instead, I used archival material from photographers active in Greece and Hungary at that time to cover this narrative. The still images by MAGNUM photographers David Seymour and Erich Lessing provided a pictorial illustration of the situation these people were when they became refugees in Hungary, their host country.



Finally, the last sub-narrative was the sequence of the feast. When I assessed the footage I was looking for a way to represent my experience of this ‘muted’ feast. I came up with the idea to introduce a split screen: the image and sound from the feast on the one side and the lyrics of the song on the other (fig. 11). I was aware of Trinh’s work of split screens and superimposed text. Based on that experience I thought that, instead of static text, I would have the text rolling to match the movement of the dance. The first attempt was encouraging. I decided that it was not necessary to translate the lyrics; these were not important, it was just a traditional love song. The text on the right side of the screen complemented the missing words of the ‘muted’ song on the left.

**Figure 11. Silent Waters: Feast sequence**



I consider this sequence to be the core of the whole film. It shows in less than two minutes the whole situation of the Slav speakers in Prespa. The beautiful square is full of people, the music is there, but the words are not. It is a peculiar silence, a silence of language, though not of music.

In order to make this multiple narrative structure work, I had to find ways to generate and communicate meanings. Without a voice over narration, I had to achieve that through audiovisual representations. I had very few shots of my informants outside the interview context: Georgios during the boat ride and Gwenaël cleaning the fish. I wanted to find a way to express emotions through representation. I thought that through selective juxtaposition of imagery I could create visual metaphors to support the storyline.

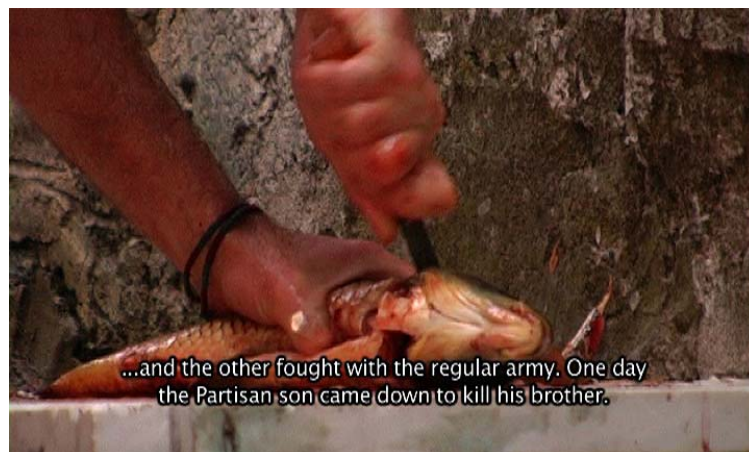
The first visual metaphor is the image of the bamboos at the edge of the lake (fig.12). The emptiness of the lake acts like a stage on which the mind projects the sorrow of the people who stayed behind and did not leave Prespa. Like plants, they cannot move. Their location forces them to observe the other side of the lake. This metaphor evokes feelings of solitude and stagnation, similar to Gardner’s *Forest of Bliss*.

**Figure 12. Silent Waters: Bamboos 1**



Next I introduced Gwenaël's account of the Civil War story of the mother with the two sons. I recorded the story separately, of course, from the footage of Gwenaël gutting and beheading his fish. I thought that the narration of such a horrible story, the son killing his brother and therefore executed by his enemies, would be reinforced and made more powerful if I combined it with the shots of Gwenaël gutting and beheading the fish (fig.13). I think it worked quite successfully.

**Figure 13. Silent Waters: Gutting the fish**



Similarly, I combined the oral testimony of Georgios about the day they left as refugees with a shot of the lake. The lake is frozen, with a visible path from a boat that has broken the ice (fig.14). The path starts from the position of the camera (from the viewer) and leads to the other side of the lake (towards the forbidden other). It creates a feeling of melancholy and separation. This visual metaphor draws on the Gardner school of poetic narrative.

**Figure 14. Silent Waters: Frozen lake**



Here are three frames from the long take shot on the boat, facing the island of the small lake. As the boat approached, thousands of birds flew away. I used this sequence to portray visually the mass exodus of the refugees at the end of the Civil War (fig.15). I consider this sequence visually among the best in the whole film. It illustrates a feeling of emergency: the birds fly instantly and collectively away. Some stay behind on tall dry trees. The birds work as a metaphor for the refugees.

**Figure 15. Silent Waters: Birds 1**



In the next figure, the birds left on the trees of the island suggest the few Slav speakers who did not leave. A few of them fly away (fig.16). In this I attempted to visually depict the situation in Prespa after the Civil War, where immigration has depopulated the villages even more.

**Figure 16. Silent Waters: Birds 2**





My second use of the image of the bamboos is placed in between Georgios's account of the situation in exile. It shows only the bamboos and the sky (fig.17). It suggests how the refugees try to start a new life in their host country; they keep together, but are a vulnerable exposed group. This visual metaphor is not very obvious, but I believe it triggers the desired emotions.

**Figure 17. Silent Waters: Bamboos 2**



I decided to link Gwenaël's oral account of the ethnic composition of the villages in Prespa, and the use of the Slav language there, with a sequence of shots of old abandoned houses (fig.18). The condition of these houses brings across feelings of emptiness, desertion and refuge. The closed door subtly connotes silence and fear, similar to the public use of the Slav language.

**Figure 18. Silent Waters: Abandoned house**



In this shot, a council worker puts up Greek state symbols in preparation of a national celebration (fig.19). He does not succeed with his first attempt and tries

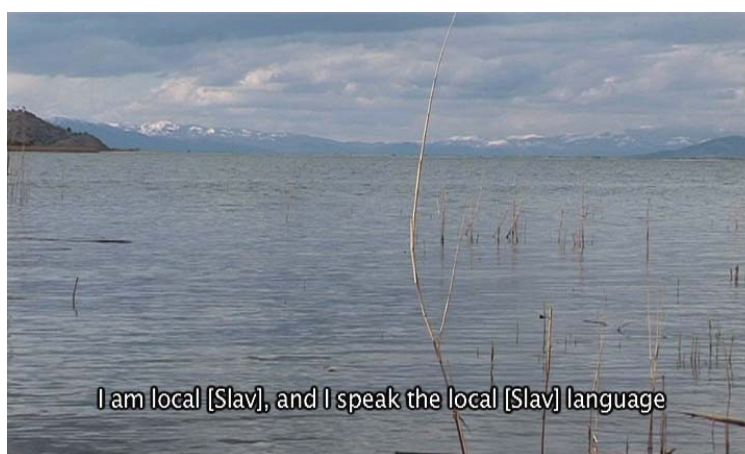
again. The image of the Greek state symbols being hammered on a post signifies the past attempts by the Greek state to impose a Greek identity to the Slav speaking populations in Prespa, thus forcibly assimilate them. This visual metaphor is deliberately sarcastic and direct.

**Figure 19. Silent Waters: Greek state symbols**



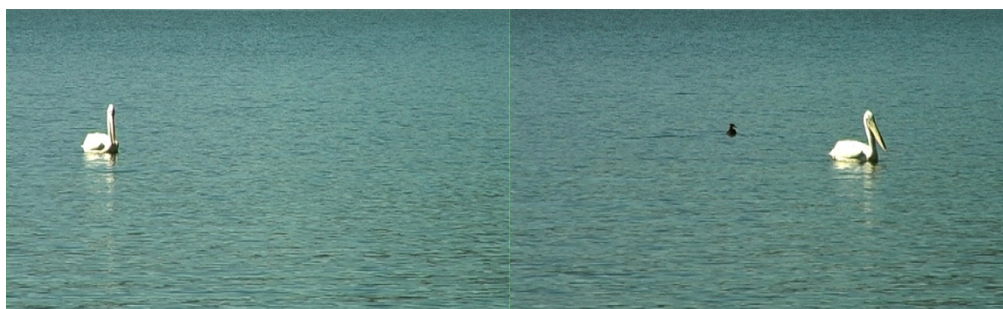
After the sequence of the feast, we hear one of my participants saying that he speaks Slav and that he is a 'local'. This is the only time that I recorded a Slav speaker stating that. I was aware of the sensitivity of the issue, and during the editing process, I decided that I will not show him while he states that, to protect his identity. Instead I opted to let the lake 'talk' on his behalf, as if the silent waters broke their silence and started telling their stories (fig.20). This poetic metaphor is one of the most difficult to 'read' in the whole film, but nevertheless, I consider it important. It is from this metaphor about the silence of the waters, that the title of the film has its origin.

**Figure 20. Silent Waters: The waters speak**



The final sequence after the feast, which started with Georgios covertly stating his ethnic identity, is an assemblage of the three participants describing in their own way what they think of Prespa. These accounts are stitched together along with a shot of the lake itself. In there, a Pelican swims in the lake. The bird is big, beautiful and white, and dominates the frame. Suddenly, after a while, a smaller bird comes to the surface after its dive. It swims behind the big pelican, and it is small, ugly and black (fig.21). I wanted to use this sublime visual construction as a metaphor, where the pelican is suggested to be the dominant Greek majority, and the blackbird the weak Slav minority.

**Figure 21. Silent Waters: The pelican and the blackbird**



All the visual metaphors I described above are attempts to create meanings and feelings, some subliminal, some more direct, through filmic representations. Still or moving photographs are polysemic. Even if I invested a lot of thought and reflected upon these filmic constructions, there will be people who interpret these constructions differently. I am fully aware of this and believe that this is something all film-makers should be open to.

After a first rough cut of the film, I invited some people from different backgrounds, gender and nationality to show them my film and receive their feedback. There were six people in total, three female (from Spain, New Zealand and Greece) and three male (one from India and two from Greece). The film's structure was non-linear and it tackled a topic that was barely known inside Greece, let alone outside. I was anxious to see if my viewers would be able to identify the location and follow the

narrative. Most of them did. However, the non-Greeks did not understand why all this oppression has happened and that it is still going on. Another point of interest was if my viewers would identify the voice of the film-maker. After discussing it with them, I understood that some perceived the voice of Gwenaël as the one to provide the framing narrative of the film, rather than my own. After further consultations with my advisors, I then decided to adjust my chosen strategy regarding intertitles and personal narration. I inserted intertitles just before the feast sequence to provide an update of the contemporary situation in Western Greek Macedonia (fig.22). These three intertitles were:

**Figure 22. Silent Waters: Intertitles**



- 1) *The fall of the dictatorship in Greece in 1974 signalled the gradual liberalisation of the Slav-speaking regime.*
- 2) *The 1981 elected socialist government abolished any remaining civil war legislation.*
- 3) *Despite all of these, public use of the Slav language in Greek Macedonia still remains taboo.*

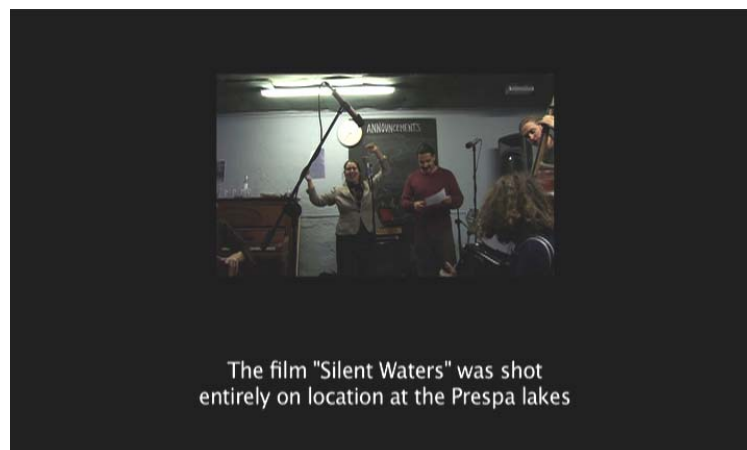
I then recorded a reflexive narration in first person Greek and overlaid it mainly on the static silent shots between the small sub-narratives. I believe that the use of this narration assists the viewer to identify my personal point of view, reinforce the reflexive nature of the project and assist the ‘reading’ the metaphors.

At that preview screening I decided on the title of the film. After viewing the rough cut, we discussed as a group the film; the Indian friend suggested that *Silent Waters* would be a suitable title. It included both the elements of silence and water, as in the forbidden language and the Lake Prespa, our main topics of discussion.



Interestingly, most of the viewers followed the narrative structure of the feast. Even if they did not understand the literal meaning of the words projected on the screen, they realised that these were the ‘muted’ lyrics of the song. They even made the connection between the song played at the feast and the song sung at the end of the film. This was my attempt to construct an aural narrative. The song *Makedonsko Devojče* (Macedonian Girl, a traditional Slav love song) was the only musical element of the film. I consciously avoided the use of any other music soundtrack to assist this linkage between the two versions of the song. This connection between the two songs reinforced the sub-narrative of the feast sequence. The projected text on the image of the muted feast becomes a song at the end of the film, after the ‘silent waters’ broke their silence. I recorded the sung version in a studio in Edinburgh with the help of a group of musicians and I also took part in the process.

**Figure 23. Silent Waters: Studio recording**



I attached a short clip of the recording session after the end titles (fig.23). This demonstrated my active engagement as a film-maker with the subject, and further underlined the reflexive approach I followed throughout the various stages of the making of this film.

The post-production of the film was complete. I prepared DVD-Video copies and submitted the film to various documentary film festivals. As of the time of writing, the film *Silent Waters* was accepted and screened at the 18<sup>th</sup> International Festival of

Ethnological Film in Belgrade, Serbia in October 2009. While it did not win any awards, it was received with positive feedback from the audience and the organisers.

I intend to show the film to my participants in a future trip to Greece and discuss it with them. Their thoughts and reflections are very important for me. I hope to do this in the near future.

## **Reflective Epilogue**

This work documented the personal journey I made for the purposes of the research titled '*Oral Histories, Hidden Identities, Silent Waters: an audiovisual journey to the Greek side of the Prespa lakes*' and of the documentary film '*Silent Waters*'. I started with presenting myself: I recognise that the reflexive approach, evident in my work as researcher and film-maker, is crucial in acknowledging the constructed and subjective nature of knowledge. I therefore placed myself in the wider context of academic film-making discourse in general, and the selected case study of the Greek Slavs of the Prespa lakes in particular. I selected this particular topic, to acquire, on the one hand, a deeper understanding of the shaping of the Modern Greek state at the time of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, and, on the other, to study the identity of my partner, a person of ex-Yugoslavian origin, who does not see herself through her national identity. My partner helped me realise what Benedict Anderson (1991) wrote about national identity as not being singular, but multiple and ever-changing.

Recent history has shown that we require a better understanding of the historical roots and institutional structures, overt and covert, which influence the relations of ethnic minorities in modern Balkan states, and which shape the phenomena of "ethnic cleansing". I started by analysing the complex histories that played a central role in the formation of the identities of the people in Greece in general, and the Slav speaking people living along the trinational border of the Prespa lakes in particular. This bilingual population finds itself torn between Greek citizenship and Slav origin. They were never recognised as a minority by the Greek State and therefore deprived of their rights of cultural self-determination. This violation of their fundamental human right motivated me to research the history of the area from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century up to now. Through my research findings I became much more aware of the Modern Greek nation building project to assimilate all the populations of 'new lands' gained after the Balkan Wars, especially because these populations were not ethnically Greek. I decided to place my project in the area of Western Greek Macedonia, as the area with the largest remaining Slav speaking community in Greece.

I wanted to produce an ethnographically inspired documentary film about these people with the intention to bring to light the history and the situation of the Greek Slavs. My previous experience with ethnography was limited, so my approach was to study important ethnographic films and use elements of these works in my film. After late 19<sup>th</sup> Century visual anthropology in the form of museum exhibits and shows, visual anthropologists embraced the inventions of photography and film, and claimed, in a scientific manner, that photography and film could truthfully record 'reality'. I was familiar with the works of Flaherty and Vertov, who were never regarded as making ethnographic films, but who inspired many ethnographic film-makers later. I saw films by Mead and Bateson, the first to use footage shot in the 1930s, and to produce edited ethnographic films later. I became aware of the debate between visual anthropologists and film-makers on who is entitled to produce ethnographic films. With the aid of theories on realism as a form of representation, I studied examples of ethnographic films from the three periods of realist representation, according to Roberts (2008) that inspired my own film-making. The early one, lasting up until World War II included works of Flaherty, Vertov and Mead & Bateson. From the second period, after the war up until the 1970s, I reviewed works by the Direct Cinema and Cinéma Vérité film-makers such as Rouch, Asch and Pennebaker. And finally, from the third period of ethnographic film I was inspired by films of the MacDougalls, Trinh and more recent examples of Mitić. I adopted elements from the films of most of these film-makers and applied them to my own documentary practice.

So, with the aid of my partner, I set out to Western Greek Macedonia to make this documentary film. My preliminary fieldwork in early 2006 gave me an idea about the subject and the choice of location. I even heard the local version of the Slav language being spoken in public. But this visit also showed me the difficulties I would face there: the subject was politically sensitive and as I was working in an area of interethnic tensions there were very few people who would be willing to help me. When I returned for the actual fieldwork a year later, I faced this difficulty of establishing connections with the locals. Luckily, I met a French researcher there, who openly talked to me about the area. It was the first time that the theories I was reading during my research would materialise as his testimony in practice. He would become one of the central characters in my film. The fieldwork went through many stages, and up until the last moment, I was not sure if it would be successful. This



was mainly due to lack of participants. The August 2007 visit was important, because I recorded the feast in the coastal village, where the local people danced to their songs, but the songs were not sung, because they have Slavic lyrics. I immediately understood the audiovisual significance the recording of this event carried. Apart from that though, I was close to despair. People I was talking with were telling me all I wanted to know under one condition: that I would not record them with the camera. I thought I had failed, until the final field visit when two cousins, former refugee children of the Civil War, agreed to participate in the film. They gave me two lengthy interviews, sharing their life histories with me. It was as if they were reading out from a 20<sup>th</sup> Century European history book. One of the two cousins took me and my partner for a ride with his boat in the lake. We visited his destroyed village and I shot magnificent images there. After that visit, I felt that I had enough material to make this film.

Back in Edinburgh I assessed and indexed more than twenty hours of footage I had gathered in Prespa. I decided on a non-linear fragmentary structure of the film and reflected upon the elements I adopted from important ethnographic films. For example, Vertov introduced me to filmic rhythm, Rouch to participation and reflexivity, Gardner to poetic narratives and visual metaphors, MacDougall to a fusion of observation and participation, and Trinh to experiments of montage. I used these as an inspiration and decided on a structure built on smaller, parallel running sub-narratives. Each sub-narrative was driven by the use of visual and aural metaphors to create and bring notions and feelings to the viewer. At the end, I had a film of 38 minutes which I believe serves its purpose. It is informative and, at the same time, poetic. It portrays the oral histories and the memories of my participants, and also contains some ethnographic elements about these people's lives. At the same time it retains its filmic qualities. I believe that an uninformed person watching this film gets a good understanding of these people's lives, the area and its history. I also believe that it treats its protagonists fairly, without making concessions on its content.

If I were now to embark on this project, and had more funds to my disposal, I would probably adopt a different fieldwork approach. I would seek to remain for longer periods uninterruptedly in the field, and even try to settle there. This would enable me to develop a relation with the locals, thus possibly finding participants willing to

appear in the film easier than I managed now. Having had this experience, I would also have other aims for the project. For example, instead of researching the narrative of an oppressed minority as I did, I would aim for the wider narrative of European history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I perceive the identities of these people differently now. When I arrived in Prespa, I expected to encounter something similar to the Catalan or the Basque situation, characterised by nationalism. Instead, the people I talked to did not seem to be so concerned about such matters; they were not nationalistic. Their account was still rooted in the past. They were marked by the old ideological struggle between Fascism versus Communism, and not by the much more contemporary liberal human rights issue, which for me was one of the reasons to embark on this research. So, in this sense, the findings here changed my views and hope my personal testimony opened up the story of Prespa and the wider Balkan area to the grand narratives of World War II, the Iron Curtain and the fall of the Communist bloc.

As a final thought, I want to express the importance of this project for me. I engaged with theories and practices that helped me broaden my perspectives in the way I see film and ethnographic film in particular. I exposed myself to strangers in tough territories and unknown circumstances. I understood the way my identity is –or, to be correct, my identities are- shaped and ever changing. For all these and many more reasons, I am happy that I embarked on this journey.

**Figure 24. Silent Waters: Yorgos<sup>25</sup> filming**



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<sup>25</sup> Yorgos is the phonetic spelling of the Greek name Georgios.

Concluding this thesis, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my kind participants: Georgios Iliopoulos, Evangelos Iliopoulos and Gwenaël Les Bras; without their help this film would not have taken place. I would also like to thank all the people in Prespa that helped me one way or the other.

My deepest thanks go to my Director of Studies, Dr. Louise S. Milne, for her invaluable and continued support and guidance throughout the whole of this endeavour. I also wish to thank my second supervisor, Mr Roger Buck, for introducing me to Jean Rouch and bearing with me during the long hours of editing. From Edinburgh Napier University I further wish to thank my former lecturer Mr Colin MacLeod, Prof Chris Atton, Prof Matthew Turner and the Screen Academy Scotland post-production team Alex McLaren and Rob Walker.

Furthermore, I wish to deeply thank my parents, Ioanna and Manolis Karagiannakis, for all these years of patience and support, my sister Sophia Karagiannaki, my mother-in-law Oriana Orlić and my brother-in-law Nikola Rakić.

But first and foremost, I dedicate this work to my beloved partner in life and film, my dear Tijana Rakić, who entrusted me with her love and commitment. This journey I took is as much about you as it is about me.

**DVD ‘*Silent Waters*’ a 38 min documentary**

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