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Eleni Sideri

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The Diaspora of the Term Diaspora: A Working-Paper of a Definition

ELENI SIDERI

The quest for a definition of diaspora seems an impossible task because of the plurality of historical experiences, trajectories and agendas. One of the first approaches into this matter (Safran's typology 1991) tried to build a definition based on the idea of trauma, exile and nostalgia. However, it became evident that producing a definition based on the memories of one diasporic community (the Jewish experience) and thus, turning it into a paradigm, could be less fruitful than one could imagine. New approaches then, explored through a more ethnographic approach different roots/routes (Clifford, 1997) pointing not only to the variety of the histories, but also to the wider politico-economic conditions that instigate transnational movements and also, the epistemological framework that tries to comprehend the latter with the re-launching of the term diasporas. This essay will focus on ethnographic experience in the Greek communities of Georgia and how they apprehend the term diaspora and when the latter becomes relevant to their lives and why. In other words, I will argue that the question of "when is diaspora", instead of what and why, could be a more fruitful approach in examining the wider socio-political issues that urge for the re-emergence of diasporas.

In 2006 the Institute of Migration Policy organized a conference in Athens entitled "Migration in Greece: Experiences, Policies and Perspectives". The conference attracted a surprisingly large number of participants working on different aspects of migration. I myself presented a paper concerning the connection between diaspora and migration, where I tried to critically discuss the traditional definition

of diaspora in relation to national perceptions and ideologies. After the completion of the presentation, one of the participants, a political scientist, criticized my approach, because it questioned the fundamental definition of diasporas as communities cut off from a certain national body.

I started my paper with this brief story in order to illustrate that, despite the engagement of many different disciplines with diasporas, a definition of the term could still be a complex affair. Furthermore, it shows that any similar attempt should take into consideration historical perceptions of nationhood, ideologies of belonging, and disciplinary boundaries. On the other hand, the realization of this difficulty might function as common ground among diverse experiences often described as diasporas. In this context, a straightforward definition might be a chimera, but studying the conditions that produce diasporas as socio-political and academic categories might be a more fruitful approach.

Time and space are the most important ingredients in the formation, but also the evocation of diasporas. The two dimensions shape the horizon upon which diasporas conceive themselves as communities, emerge as alternative national Others and rise in everyday discourses as part of the ways people perceive their past and future. The discussion of the latter involves expectations and memories, desires and losses. It endows places with almost sacred or utopian dimensions and it turns others to real or symbolic prisons. Taking a closer look at the construction of these fears and desires would contribute to a “from below” understanding of Diaspora and will point out to the way these hopes and desires take part in the micro-politics of the post-national and global.¹ In this paper, I will start with a discussion of certain theoretical conceptualizations of diasporas and then, I will turn to my ethnographic experience illustrating how different perceptions of past and future correlate with wider spatio-temporal frameworks involving the notion of diasporas and various expressions of utopias.

Debating Diasporas: From Typologies to Postmodern Diasporas

There is an innate opposition embedded in the etymology of the term *diaspora*, of Greek origin, which reflects how double-edged the concept can be: *dia-* (a preposition which, when used in compound words, means division and dispersion)

¹ The concept became central in the work of many postmodern thinkers because of its potential emancipatory force against the social-political structures of capitalism and inspired the agenda of micro-politics, see Gilles Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983 and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984. However, the abstractness and the appraisal of the deterritorialized individual, which are embedded in these approaches, have rather weakened this project from its social and political force.

and *-spiro* (literally, to sow the seeds). This suggests, on the one hand, the idea of dispersion and on the other, that of stasis and stability (sowing seed, suggesting new life and new roots). In this part of my paper, I will concentrate on the dominant theoretical frameworks that attempted to offer a conceptualization of these contradictions. I will first look at Safran's approach, often used to describe the historical diasporas and then, I will turn to the postmodern ideas of the concept, mainly following Clifford.²

Since the 1990s with the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the following upheavals in world politics, diasporas have been reinvented in academia as "exemplary communities of the transnational moment".³ One of the first attempts to manage the proliferation of the use of the term belongs to William Safran. Based on the study of the Jewish historical experience, Safran tried to set the criteria in order to build a typology, according to which a community could be, or not, categorized as such. His criteria underlined the attachment of diasporas to an initial place of origin which through their collective memory and mythology is defined as their Homeland. At the same time, these communities grow a feeling of rejection in their host country, which increases their desire for return to the homeland. This return becomes an almost metaphysical destiny and contributes to the development of personal or more official ties with the homeland. Let's try to test this view in the Greek communities of Georgia.

Safran's argument is constructed around the notion of an original center, the homeland, which is naturalized and fixed. The etymological analysis of "diaspora" revealed an embedded dual metaphor between roots/routes. Research has pointed out that this binary opposition becomes as natural as subjective and political.⁴ For instance, the communities of Pontic-Greeks I have worked with and that originate from the Black Sea coast of Turkey (known in the Greek historiography with the name of Pontos) have always presented an ethnological and linguistic diversity well documented in historiography since ancient and Byzantine times.

The administration system of the Ottoman Empire (millet), which was based on

² James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Massachussets, Harvard University Press, 1997. William Safran, "Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return" in *Diaspora*, 1 (1), 1997, pp. 83-99. Here, I present only two works in order to sketch how different approaches tried to define the human experience labeled as diaspora because of their influence and almost exemplary status. There are, of course, many other that criticize the aforementioned models and tried to move beyond.

³ K. Toloyan, "The Nation and its Others" in *Diaspora*, 1 (1), 1997, pp. 3-7.

⁴ Liisa H. Malkki, "National Geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugee" in *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1), 1992, pp. 24-44.

the religion of the infidel communities permitted, at least to a certain extent, the perpetuation of cultural diversity, as long as the communities fulfilled their tax obligations. This way, local identities often weaved around various cultural and linguistic idioms were preserved, something that was supported by the inexistence of a Greek national center until the 19th century. The decentred character of these communities strengthened their appreciation of these local cultures expressed in their traditions, idioms and community histories. This factor makes any strict outline of the homeland as the initial center rather difficult, if not unproductive. Safran's approach in the above ethnographic context might result in the homogenization of these diverse experiences or memories of dislocation both internally (social and cultural organization of the group) and externally (in comparison to other groups with similar historical backgrounds). Furthermore, it will naturalize the center (metropolitan Greece) which became important much later, as I will illustrate.

In contrast, there is another intake in the definition of diasporas that tries to be anti-essentialist, in the sense of not connecting diasporic communities to a center/nation-state or the feeling of loss and return. Clifford considers diasporas as a new form of consciousness, collectivity and solidarity in a period that fragmentation and deterritorialization are praised as dominant paradigms.⁵ What is essential for the definition of diasporas, here, is their comparability. In other words, what is important is to compare diasporas with national histories, indigenous ideologies, policies of assimilation in order to understand how in this context, dispersion is often stigmatized and marginalized. Against these forces of homogeneity, diasporic groups often find recourse to a discourse of nostalgia praising difference. In this way, diasporas form a reaction to the described political and cultural hegemony. On the other hand, they often construct relations to transnational movements (political, cultural, religious) that try to overcome the obstacles of national boundaries and territoriality.

Although this approach to diasporas might seem less homogenizing, a closer look might raise questions. Clifford invests too much in the hybrid and deterritorial character of diasporas. As experience has shown diasporas - the Greek example examined here is illustrative - are not indifferent to nationalism.⁶ Furthermore, the double consciousness (here and there) attributed to these communities is rather presented as a general characteristic that endows diasporas with an emancipatory force from the boundedness and other constraints of nation-states. However,

⁵ Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

⁶ See Benedict Anderson, "The New World Disorder", in J. Vincent, *The Anthropology of Politics. A Reader in Ethnography, Theory and Critique*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, pp. 261-270.

double consciousness is not a common idiom of all diasporas, but a feeling of belonging to certain contexts or one of rejection from others. Furthermore, this feeling does not necessarily exclude homogeneity. For example, the Greek-Georgians in Batumi (western Georgia) compare and consider themselves “more Greeks” than other Greek communities in Georgia, based on their own linguistic competence, in comparison to the Turkish-speaking Greeks (Romioi) of Tsalka (central Georgia).

In this part, I examined two dominant approaches to diasporas. The former depicts diasporas as an indivisible part of national histories, whereas the latter apply the term to various communities taking into account their deterritorialization and non-essentialist identity running often the risk of succeeding the opposite. The examination of the wider social, cultural and economic context that leads to the formation or evocation of diasporas is a crucial part of the quest for a definition. Brent Hayes Edwards argues for a definition, which “forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference”.⁷ Edwards associates diaspora with cultural and political linkages across communities that retain their differences and distinctiveness, but also, they move beyond. I think that this point on difference is crucial for the discussion of the emergence and use of diasporas since it avoids the essentialist discourses mentioned before, without though excluding the use of such discourses by the diasporic groups themselves. Difference is a constitutive element of representation and as a result it is context-bounded and empties the discourse of diasporas from risky generalizations.

Other Places: The Greeks in Batumi

In the previous part, I tried to briefly present some dominant questions that relate to the discussion of diasporas and their examination. Here, I will turn to my ethnography in order to depict how Greek-origin Georgians discuss diaspora issues. I arrived in Batumi in May 2004 on the same day that the new Georgian president visited the city after the removal of the local governor, who had been accused of dictatorial tendencies. The new Georgian flag adorned all the public buildings and many private houses. Batumi is the capital of Abkhazeti, in south-western Georgia, which belonged to the Ottomans for almost 300 years (16th-19th

⁷ Brent Hayes Edwards, “The uses of Diaspora”, *Social Text*, 19: 1, 2001, pp. 45-74, and Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Transition and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 13.

centuries). As a result, it includes a considerable Muslim Georgian population.⁸

Achara was granted autonomous status in the Soviet period; after independence the authorities saw this as the cause of many problems.⁹ Tensions were intensified by the former governor of Achara, Aslan Abashidze, whose family ties to the region were particularly strong; his family played a vital role in the liberation of Achara from the Ottomans. The region, and especially Batumi, is wealthy because of the port – the biggest in Georgia – and the customs posts along the border with Turkey, which control most of the cross-border trade. I was meeting a representative of the Greek local association. Ania arrived right on time. She was in her early forties, well-dressed in professional attire, though less elegant than the women of Tbilisi. We left the hotel to visit the community club, owned by the association in Batumi.

‘You know, Achara is special in Georgia because there are so many minorities living together’, Ania told me as we are walking towards Argos. ‘Do these minorities that you mentioned still lead a good life in Achara?’ I asked. ‘We have become fewer as you can imagine. But there are still minorities, Armenians, Ukrainians, and Russians. The president of our association is also the president of the committee of all the diasporic communities in Achara and our office here is the headquarters of the entire organisation’. ‘Is there a big association?’ I asked. ‘It used to have more members, but still. Membership is not restricted to Greeks. We have Armenians, Russians, and a French person married to a Pontic-Greek in our “Greek-Georgian Friendship Club” as we call our association.’ ‘Was there any specific reason for selecting this name?’ Ania responded enthusiastically. ‘It’s because I think that expresses our mission better. With all these various peoples living together in Achara, we influence each other and in the end you get an amalgam. Like the Greek-Georgians that live in Greece. Because, you know, we are not Greeks like you. We are Greek-Georgians.”

Batumi is represented in the Greek history of the Black Sea as the cradle of the most affluent Pontic communities in Georgia in the 19th century. Families of merchants migrated to the area of Batumi between 1878 and 1881.¹⁰ Since the 1830s though, these migrations were parallel to the foundation of the Greek state and a gradually

⁸ Achara comprises the following ethnic groups 93,4 % Georgians, 2,3 Armenians, 0,6 Greeks, 0,4 Abkhazians, 0,2 Ukrainians, 0,2 others (Wikipedia, 2002). See also T. Sakhokia, *Mogzaurobani. Guria, Achara, Samur Zaqano, Apkhazeti* [Travel writings. Guria, Achara, Samur Zaqano, Aphazi], Batumi: Sabch’ot’a Ach’ara, 1998.

⁹ Achara had been an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Soviet Georgia since 1921 (ASSR). After Georgia’s independence, it kept its autonomy.

¹⁰ Michel Bruneau, “Ἐ diaspora tou Pontiakou Ellénismou ke I Ellēnes tēs prōēn ESSR, ē edafikē skhesē” [The diaspora of the Pontic Hellenism and the Greeks of the former USSR, the territorial realtion] in Michel Bruneau [ed.], *I diaspora tou Pontiakou Ellinismou*, Thessaloniki: Herodotos, 2001.

developed program of Hellenization. The ‘Hellenic’ was constructed in the western literary imagination long before Greece came into existence as a state. As Leontis argues, for the western imagination of the 18th century Hellas was a place that existed in reality, but at the same time it seemed to belong to the realm of myth, imagined as the space of the mythical European origin, the birthplace of European values and spirit.¹¹ This perception inspired almost all the educated, merchant Greek families living dispersed in the Balkans and the Black Sea region, and who started to feel more connected to each other because of the gradual opening of the market and the increasing commercial opportunities that took place in the region in the 18th century according to Hobsbawm.¹²

In the 19th century, with nationalism rampant throughout the West, the common goal of independence transformed these Greek groups into a ‘Greek diaspora’.¹³ When Greece was founded during the 1830s, the relation with its diasporas changed because the gradually empowered national center wanted to be recognized as the only legitimate center of Greekness, something that launched the question of authenticity among the various Greek groups.¹⁴ A Hellenization project (schools, Greek language books, centralized curriculum, Greek priests and teachers, opening of consulates in the areas where Greek diasporic communities lived) started to be applied among various diasporic communities, those in the Black Sea and the Caucasus included. Because of the social and economic background of the community in Batumi, a high number of its members either attended Greek schools in Pontos or sponsored similar ones in Georgia. The result of this fact is registered in what I have heard in Tbilisi, “If you want to see *real* Greeks who speak *real* Greek you should go to Batumi” (my emphasis) – friends in Tbilisi told me. It also illustrates how the re-education of these diasporas in the past affected their

¹¹ Artemis Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism. Mapping to Hellenism*, Ithaca/ London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

¹² Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848*, London: Abacus, 2002.

¹³ In the Greek historiography, the Greek diaspora is divided into three periods: 1. Late 14th century-19th century, featuring migration of the Greek population from the Byzantine center – Constantinople – to the West, 2. 1830s (foundation of the Greek state) to World War II, featuring migration from Greece to southern Russia, the Caucasus and North and South America and 3. Mid-1940s to 1970s, featuring migration from Greece to the Americas, Australia and Western Europe (West Germany). The temporal and geographical span shows the complexity and diversity of the communities labelled and homogenised as Greek Diaspora. See Iannis K. Hassiotis, *Episkopisē tēs istorias tēs neoellēnikēs diasporas* [Review of the history of the modern Greek diaspora], Athens: Vaniias, 1993; and Michel Bruneau, “Ē diaspora tou Pontiakou Ellēnismou ke I Ellēnes tēs prōēn ESSR, ē edafikē skhesē” [The diaspora of the Pontic Hellenism and the Greeks of the former USSR, the territorial realtion] in Michel Bruneau [ed.], *I diaspora tou Pontiakou Ellinismou*, Thessaloniki: Herodotos, 2001.

¹⁴ Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology Through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

hierarchization in the present. The different linguistic or cultural traditions did not disappear, but they were politicized living traces in today's identity politics. For example, the comparison between the Greek and Turkish-speaking Greek communities of Georgia is a case that should be taken into account.

According to Lefebvre, our perception of space reflects the dialectics between practice, conception and imagination.¹⁵ The Greek center was constructed through western imagination, contradictory ideas and traditions about Greekness and state policies, for example among the Pontic communities and metropolitan Greece. Following once more Lefebvre, we must also consider how social spaces generate different "topoi"¹⁶ (in plural).¹⁷ In other words, how space is transformed in a more personalized, historicized and localized experience and how people emplace themselves in it. As a consequence, we should consider how the community in Batumi formed their own social space and identity not only in relation, but also, against or through the Greek, national history.¹⁸

This im-placement is tied to history according to White.¹⁹ He considers history as "a congeries of 'places' (topoi)",²⁰ different placements in time and place, a process which becomes distinct and meaningful by systems of control, or, as Foucault would say, regimes of power and knowledge. In the dominant paradigm of Modernity, time is depicted as linear and progressive, in the same way that space is imagined as homogenous and continuous. Nevertheless, a closer look at the Greek imagination of the pre-revolutionary period seems to underline the role of the idealized past and the role of ancient Greece stressed within the Enlightenment project. At the same time, the hellenization project focused on the concentration of these fragmented and decentred diasporic communities around the Athenian center.

In this framework, these communities exist in reality, but they are different for this emerging center of power. They are "counter-sites"²¹ real spaces that nevertheless,

¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974].

¹⁶ In ancient Greek, the term was used in rhetoric to refer to a stock theme or expression that could impress the audience. In Modern Greek it means "place". This double meaning illustrates Lefebvre's point that space is "used" and "written".

¹⁷ Lefebvre, pp. 22-23.

¹⁸ Arjun Appadurai, "The production of locality", in R. Fardon [ed.], *Counterworks: Migration the diversity of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1995, pp. 204-225.

¹⁹ Hayden White, "The Future of Utopia in History", in *Historein. A Review of the Past and Other Stories*, vol. 7, 2007, pp. 11-20.

²⁰ White, p. 11.

²¹ Foucault was interested in the institutionalized "sites" of power, categorized "counter-sites" into six major functional categories that ultimately risk being overly general and restrictive. However, as Harvey underlines, Foucault's attempt to turn our attention to the heterogeneity of perceptions of discourse

contest all other spaces, which lack the illusion of utopias and they can be reached only “through a different way of seeing, a different interpretive analytics”.²² These different lenses are not unrelated to issues of power.²³ However in his discussion of the distinction between these two topoi, Foucault (1986) uses reality in order to compare utopias and heterotopias.²⁴ Although this division, real/unreal, in the light of postmodernism could be considered as invalid, I think that Foucault points to a different time framework. Utopias are directed towards the future, whereas heterotopias are towards the present. This interpretation could help our discussion of how both (future/present) are connected and transformed into horizons of interpretations of memories and desires.

These interpretations, I think, are central in the study of diasporas, because they fuse space and time blending together desire, latency and expectation, necessary ingredients of the so-called nostalgia of the diasporas.²⁵ In this framework, diasporas could emerge, at certain times, as categories of alternative being, living and feeling challenging the dominant one. This is important, because, as I have shown, the creation of the Greek nation-state fixed a legitimate center of Hellenism, based on imaginations of the past, which cultivate desires for the future regarding these *other* Greek places, such as the diasporic communities, as satellites of the center. These diasporic communities started to be considered as same but different, less authentic than the Greek center, but still Greek, and thus, they needed to be re-educated. Greece, that was conceived as European heterotopias, started to produce its own.

During this processes “nation-state” became the almost metaphysical destination of diaspora, its destiny and an evangelized utopia.²⁶ The focus in the production of different conceptualization of time and space forces us to re-conceptualize the center as such, as well as its mechanisms to construct otherness. This examination also gives us the opportunity to consider how these other places, such as the aforementioned diasporic communities, might have alternative perceptions of Greekness that emerge from their particular historical experience, influenced by the

remained uncompleted since the French philosopher does not proceed to the construction of an alternative reading that could result to various forms of emancipation and resistance avoiding essentialism.

²² Edward W. Soja, “Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-L.A.” in *Strategies* 3, 1990, pp. 6-39, p. 8.

²³ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Edinburgh: University Press of Edinburgh, 2000.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces” in *Diacritics*, Spring: 1, 1986, pp. 22-28.

²⁵ See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* Vol. 3, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986, for a discussion of various cultural forms permeated with hope of organizing life in the West.

²⁶ Partly this vision supported the ideology of expansion of Greece beyond its borders in early 20th century.

central utopian project of the 20th century: the formation of the Soviet Union. In the following part, I will examine how some of these perceptions that Ania mentioned above rise as a result of the Soviet engineering.

Alternative Realities

In the previous part, I discussed the impact of the creation of the Greek nation-state on the formation of a Greek diaspora. I argued that the engagements of various Greek-speaking communities in the project of ethnogenesis produced a Greek diasporic consciousness. At the same time, I pointed out that the formation of the Greek state transformed these diasporic communities to *topoi* of dispersion from the “original” center. Experiencing Otherness as well as different historical conditions contributed to the alternative ways that Ania and their people conceive themselves. In this part, I will illustrate how the wider socio-economic relations between West/East generated, and how other ideas and imageries regarding Nation/Diasporas among the Greeks in Batumi generate.

Ania referred to symbiosis and amalgamation. She spoke of difference as resulting from the “special character” of her region. But what is this special character? The Greeks who lived in Georgia in the 1920s were far from a homogenous group, as I have discussed. After the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War that lasted until 1921, the reactions of the peoples of the former Russian Empire obliged Lenin to reconsider his stance on the idea of nations²⁷. According to Jameson, Marxism offered two important aspects to the utopian thought of the 19th century: presentism (the future is embedded in the present, firstly, in economic terms, for example industrialization as a way to accelerate the birth of a working class), and the social agent of change (the proletariat).²⁸ The history of the Soviet Union, especially in the first years was a struggle between the utopian ideas and the pragmatics of the political landscape of the country.

Lenin reconsidered his social engineering by stressing the instrumentality of nations as a form of creating solidarity, especially when the expression of these

²⁷ Following Marx’s ideas about nations, Lenin considered them in his early writings, as a pathogen of the bourgeois societies used to control the means of production and obstruct the working class alliances. In 1913, Stalin in his “Marxism and the National Question” (*Works, Vol. 4, 1917-1920*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953, pp.300-382), expressed the official Bolshevik line on the issue arguing that the nation was a historical formation whose existence should not be denied but which was far less important than class.

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Introduction/Prospectus: To reconsider the relationship of Marxism and Utopian Thought”, pp. 362-363, in Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, *The Jameson Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 361-368.

national feelings was oppressed by the Tsarist regime. In this framework, he shaped his project of national awareness and development launched in the 1920s in the Soviet Republics, as part of 'korenizatsiya' (rooting) in order to create a new social and political order. In this context, Greek language school started to function and a new generation of Greek language teachers was trained in Georgia. Respect to national sensitivities was eliminated after 1929 with the gradual enforcement of the Stalinist planning for the increase of the industrial production at the expense of the rural structures of the country. The political terror, that accompanied this program, was sealed for the Greeks of Western Georgia (Batumi and Sukhumi) with their deportations in 1949.²⁹

Stalinism increased the distance between the utopia and its daily bureaucratization and enforcement. Within this context, the utopian world that was evangelized in the time of the Revolution gradually became part of the Party's rhetoric and an ideological idiom.³⁰ The economic and political centralization turned the initial vision of change into a nightmare, a dystopia, a term that emerged in 1950, according to Jameson³¹ due to the totalitarianism of this period that strengthened the belief in the West that utopias are "breeders of illusions and therefore, inevitable, of disillusion".³² The post-war years are formative for the emergence of what would soon be called the other side of the Iron Gate. This period contributes to the construction of the total Other/Enemy, as Buck-Morris argued, which had an enormous impact on the coherence of the imaginary and was based, "on a politically imaginary of mutually exclusive, potentially hostile nation-states".³³

Although Stalinism was traumatic for the Greek communities of western Georgia (they were deported in 1949), Ania seems to "forget" this part of her past, maybe as a way to underline her present needs and losses, as I will discuss. She chooses to shift her narrative to the idealized Soviet rhetoric regarding the co-existence of nationalities. As Khrushchev (1953-64) believed, the peoples living in the Soviet Union were destined to come closer dialectically through the blooming of their

²⁹ Eleni Sideri, "Cosmopolitanism in the Black Sea: from imperial Russia to the Stalinist deportations and the post-Soviet diasporas", Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA)-UK, 6, 2006, pp. 10-14.

³⁰ The Marxist tradition considers bourgeois ideology as a form of false consciousness, whereas socialist ideology might hide emancipatory and revolutionary possibilities. Bloch, however, believes that there are deceptive and emancipatory qualities in both ideologies and utopias (Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* Vol. 3).

³¹ Fredric Jameson, *I arkheologies tou mellontos. I epithymia pou legete outopia* [Archaeologies of the future. The desire called utopia and other science fictions.], Vol. 1, Athens: Topos, 2008.

³² Wallenstein, quoted from Ruth Levitas, "For Utopia: The (limits of the) utopian function in late capitalism society" in B. Goodwirth [ed.], *The Philosophy of Utopia*, London: Franc Cass, 2001, pp. 21-44

³³ Susan Buck-Morris, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The passage of mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000, p. 13.

ethnic cultures until their final merging into the supranational category of the “Soviet People”. This natural, almost metaphysical merging would occur independently of the nationalities’ own will. Khrushchev failed to explain exactly what the utopian category of the Soviet People meant or to lay down a timetable for its establishment: his announcement thus expressed wishful thinking rather than a pragmatic political agenda. The various ethnic cultures did in fact flourish, but this did not lead to their gradual rapprochement. On the contrary, it strengthened the sense of living separately under an umbrella system intended to provide basic economic and social services to all, a general line that was followed with variations in rhetoric, by his successors. In this context, for Greeks like Ania, Greekness is detached from the territoriality of the Greek nation-state and becomes a political component of their “Sovietness”.

In the meanwhile, post-war Europe was about to produce another duality between Eastern/Western Europe. The Soviet Union as *political* space after World War II has constituted a social and political Other that acted as an important oppositional pole to ‘the West’. This role as the West’s Other became a key factor in the shaping of assumptions about ourselves and the others since the beginning of the Cold War. However, with the emergence of the latter in the case we are discussing, Nation and Diaspora are being separated in opposing ideological camps. For the official Greek state, and many Greeks without ties with these communities, the history Soviet Greeks, as they were known, was silenced for many years, until the late 1970s. During this period, diaspora seems to fall into disuse as social and political category of belonging. Many of the stereotypes regarding social regress that the Greeks from Georgia had to confront when they migrated to Greece since the 1990s, had their origin in that political division.³⁴

The different experiences of this period contribute to the development of an alternative idea for the role diasporas have today. For Laliotou, the emergence of different potentialities of reality is embedded in the discussion of utopias whose return today has not been irrelevant to the political changes of the 1990s.³⁵ During this period, “diaspora” is been re-coined as a prominent analytical category. In this period, diaspora is seen as an important potential expression of collective identity constructed through different understandings and readings of the Nation and its history. Nevertheless, the concept of diaspora emerging in Ania’s narrative could be developed into a new vision regarding what the diaspora should be as a category of

³⁴ Eleni Sideri, “In quest of Eastern Europe: troubling encounters in the post-Cold War field” in *Anthropology Matters*, 8:1, 2006. Available online at: http://www.anthropologymatters.com/journal/2006-1/sideri_2006_inquest.pdf.

³⁵ Ioanna Laliotou, “Timely Utopias: Notes on Utopian Thinking in the Twentieth Century” in *Historein*, 7, 2007, pp. 58-71.

socio-political belonging.

Ania's last statement expresses these differences about who should belong to the Greek diaspora. Ania used the hyphenated term "Greek-Georgian" to express her identity and to distinguish herself from me, trying to underline the special nature of her identity in comparison to mine. This was the only time I heard someone refer to such a designation in Georgia. Ania's visit to Greece must have influenced her terminology. Anthropological works examining various aspects of the lives of the refugees who left Asia Minor and Pontos in 1922 and moved to Greece reveal their gradual integration into the present and past of the Greek nation-state through the creation of hyphenated identities.³⁶ However, Ania seems to understand this hyphenation in a different way.

Within these umbrella designations referring to broad areas of origin, where the refugees had lived the hyphenation does not refer to the linguistic form in Greek, but to the social value of these identities, which could be established only in relation to the dominant Greek identity. Greekness acted as the legitimate framework within which local cultures were expressed. These local identities represented the cultural diversity and richness of Greekness, but raised no claims to political rights beyond this formal category. In this sense, political belonging to the Greek imagined community meant inclusion through subordination to a homogenous Greek identity that claimed to consist of the best of the subordinate local cultures.

Since the 1990s, globalization has questioned the meaning of "nation-state" and has been calling out for new, post-national forms of membership. In this framework, reimagining the past in the light of present conditions (migration from the former Soviet Union to Greece) and the future (repositioning of Greece in world politics) has become extremely important. For example, the political changes forced the Greek state to find new ways to approach old and new diasporas. The emerging vision of this global Hellenism was expressed institutionally with the creation of the Council of Greeks Abroad (SAE) in 1995. SAE is a non-governmental organization, whose mission statement emphasises:

- The re-unification of the Hellenistic world and promotion of Hellenism in

³⁶ See: Renee Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social life of Asia Minor Refugees in Pireus*, New York/Oxford: Bergham Books, 1989; Patricia Fann, "The Pontic Myth of Homeland: Cultural Expressions of Nationalism and Ethnicism in Pontos and Greece 1870-1990", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 1991, Vol. 4(4), pp. 340-357; Maria Vergeti, *Apo ton Ponto stēn Ellada. Diadikasies diamorfōssēs mias ethnotopikis taftotētās [From Pontos to Greece. Processes of formation of an ethno-regional identity]*, Thessaloniki: Afi Kyriakidi, 1994; Anastasia N. Karakasidou, *Fields of wheat, hills of blood: Passage to nationhood in Greek-Macedonia 1870-1900*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000.

order to bolster lobbying power;

- Economic, social and political strengthening of the Greeks abroad, especially the more vulnerable ones;
- Motivating all Greeks abroad to contribute to and participate in the SAE.³⁷

Furthermore, in the revision of the Greek Constitution in 1999, article 108 clearly states: 'The State provides for the maintenance of Hellenism Abroad and the preservation of its ties to the motherland'. It is obvious from its structure and mission statement that SAE is greatly concerned with the political agendas of the Greek state. Yet this global Hellenism is defined through the old vocabulary of the nation (common language, history, religion, culture).³⁸ In other words, it is global, but still to great extent centred.

Once more, diaspora is considered as a subdivision of the Hellenic culture produced and defined by the national center, although this relation is seen through a transnational –but not completely decentred- organization. However this view of diasporas does not seem to remain unchallenged, as Ania's interpretation of diaspora illustrates. Her hyphenation with the term Greek-Georgians encourages equality in her membership into two or more heritages and historical backgrounds. These contradictory considerations of the role of diaspora allude to different experiences of the past, different present needs and different aspirations for the future. Sargent suggests that the construction of national identity - and will add that of diasporic identity as well - is not unrelated to utopias of any form (heterotopias, dystopias or eutopias).³⁹ The study of how these specific forms are imagined and in what ways they relate to the idea of nation/diaspora might be rewarding in opening new paths to the discussion of new forms of political belonging.

The Definition as a New Quest

In this paper, I tried to examine the possibility of a valid definition of the term diaspora. I started with the discussion of two main approaches (Safran's and Clifford's) pointing out that, although both of them seem contradictory, they, nevertheless, lead to the same impasse. Then, I turned to my ethnography in Georgia (Batumi). I have shown that the polarization and politicization of

³⁷ From the SAE official website: <http://www.sae.gr/?id=12382&tag=ΣΑΕ%20Οργανισμός%20Στόχοι>.

³⁸ The Greek Nationality Law pays special attention to these factors.

³⁹ William Safran, "Diasporas in modern societies: myths of homeland and return" in *Diaspora*, 1(1), 1991 pp. 83-99.

Nation/Diaspora was a product of the European modernity. Then, I examined the different experiences and ideals of political membership between Greece and the Greek diasporic communities in Soviet Georgia. Finally, I drew my attention to the re-emergence of diasporas in the 1990s and the different desires from the Greek state and the Greek diasporas.

I argued that concentrating on the difficulty of inventing *a definition* regarding diaspora forces us to examine the historical context within which diaspora rises as a conceptual framework, but also how the latter is understood within and against human perceptions of time and space. Drawing from that point, I discussed the questions of *topoi* and I turned my attention to the conditions that generate various forms of utopias. By examining the historical factors that contributed to the creation of a Greek diaspora, I pointed to the imageries and practices that formed the context of its rise: the Enlightenment ideas, the political and economic exigencies of modernity that cultivated the European nationalisms, national state-building. However, diaspora history is not constructed only in connection, but also, in opposition to the national one. Thus, the examination of the diaspora in Batumi has shown the way that different socio-political experiences could lead to other demands and alternative visions of both past and future.

Both these dimensions are encountered in the feeling of nostalgia that seeks to map new life trajectories. Ania by “forgetting” deportations focused in her narrative on the Soviet ideal of full and equal participation to civil rights. Although this remained a dream for many of the Soviet citizens, the ideal is alive for people like Ania who feel that they are deprived today from what they consider their rights.⁴⁰ In this way, Ania negotiated her community’s experiences and memories in the light of today’s problems and losses. This negotiation might generate nostalgia, but not in Safran’s sense (pain for the loss of the homeland). Instead, as Liakos puts it, nostalgia is the means to envisage “the future in a different way from what has been realized, and re-enacting the possibilities of the past in juxtaposition to the present”.⁴¹ This re-enactment involves strategies of remembering or forgetting, claiming authenticity and superiority, disenchanting the anti-essentialism of post-modern diasporas found in Clifford’s definition.

Jameson argued that unsuccessful utopias might be the more effective since they leave behind a vacuum that could be satiated with desires and daydreams.⁴² The

⁴⁰ Difficulties in obtaining visas and the often traumatic experiences from migrations increased the intensity of this feeling.

⁴¹ Antonis Liakos, “Utopian and thistorical thinking: interplays and transferences”, p.47, in *Historein*, 7, 2007, pp. 20-58.

⁴² Jameson, *I arkheologies tou mellontos*, p.20.

fall of the Soviet Union was characterised as the end of History, which was translated as triumph of capitalism. However, hopes were soon disillusioned by the discontents of globalization.⁴³ In this context, the re-emergence of utopias not as systematic projects, but more as “critical impulses” or comment on the social life becomes prominent.⁴⁴ The question is how the latter could be translated into such ways both in terms of content as well as of form in order to become meaningful. In this framework, diasporas have re-emerged in socio-political and academic vocabulary trying to map new political contingencies with nation, but also move beyond, embracing the transnational prerequisites of the economic landscape. However, a fixed definition of diaspora or one resulting only in relation to the nation is hardly satisfactory. In today’s context, where the discussion for equality and more open forms of political membership is more acute than ever, diaspora re-emerges as an identity with use-value, but contradictory understandings for Ania and her people, as well as the Greek foreign policy. However, as Edwards postulated, the examination of the meaning of diaspora becomes meaningful only “though and across difference”. In this way, the embedded contradictions and ambiguities could be revealing wider meanings, potentialities and expectations expressed through the concept in different periods, and this may help us comprehend the dialectics of desire and power.

⁴³ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality*, Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995, and *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, New York: New York University Press, 1997.

⁴⁴ Peter G. Stillman, “‘Nothing is, but what is not’: Utopias as Practical Political Philosophy”, p. 19, in B. Goodwin [ed.], *The Philosophy of Utopia*, London: Frank Cass, pp. 9-25.