

Life among anthropologists in Greek Macedonia*

Greece has been an ethnographic subject since the late 1950s. Although western Greek Macedonia did not attract the interest of social anthropologists until the late 1980s, it was in this region in the late 1920s that the first ethnographic studies of Greek rural communities were conducted by a Greek economist (Karavidas 1926) and an American sociologist (Sanders 1954).¹ Interestingly enough, the first anthropological study of what was at that time Yugoslav Macedonia took place in 1932 in a community situated not far away to the north of western Greek Macedonia by a student of Malinowski (Obrebski 1976: 2001).² With the exception of George Drettas who, in the mid 1970s conducted his research in this region (Drettas 1977), it took 60 years for ethnographers to rediscover western Greek Macedonia.

During the last decade at least a dozen anthropologists have focused on this region, in alphabetical order: Jane Cowan (2001); Loring Danforth (1995); Laurie Hart (1999); Anastasia Karakasidou (1993); Ioannis Manos (2002); Lenio Myrivili (1999)³; Ourania Papadopoulou (2001); Claudia Rossini (1998); Lina Sistani; Riki Van Boeschoten (2000); Piero Vereni (2000); and Maria Yiannisopoulou (1998).⁴ This list does not include the many anthropologists who have visited the area on short field-work trips. Ten of the twelve researchers specifically concentrate their attention on the region of Florina. In just one decade Florina and its hinterland thus became the region

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1 Irwin Sanders's interest in the nomads of the geographic region of Macedonia dates from 1929 (Sanders 1954–5: 124). Sanders travelled around the area between Florina and Bitola some years later and returned for more systematic fieldwork in the region between Epiros and western Greek Macedonia after the Second World War.

2 Joseph Obrebski, a Polish social anthropologist who received his PhD from the University of London under the supervision of Malinowski, carried out fieldwork in 1932–3 in the district of Poretech, about 90km north of what was the Greek–Yugoslav border (Obrebski 1976; 2001). The preference of Sanders, Karavidas and Obrebski for the western highlands of Macedonia may be related to their wish to study the most isolated rural communities.

3 Myrivili is the first anthropologist who conducted fieldwork at the prefecture of Florina, in the 1990s.

4 I have selected for quotation the most relevant publications of the above mentioned anthropologists, excluding work in progress.

of Greece most extensively studied by social anthropologists, and one of the most intensively studied areas of southeastern Europe.

This paper is based on 'lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge' (Okely 1992: 3) during the four years of my life as a resident of Florina. It is an attempt to establish a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context and provides autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest (Reed-Danahay 1997). My focus is on the relationship between anthropological and native knowledge, as well as on local understandings of anthropological discourse.

To understand the social context of Florina it is useful to explain that the prefecture of Florina, with the city of Florina as its capital, is among the less populated areas of Greece.⁵ Its actual population does not exceed 45,000 people,⁶ which offers us a ratio of one anthropologist for almost every 4,500 inhabitants. As a result of this situation – and of other factors discussed below – parts of the Florina population have created an image for themselves of what anthropologists are, and what kind of things they are interested in. This is an interesting phenomenon as most people are not clear what anthropology is about; anthropology has become known in Greece only since the late 1970s.

The historical background of these 45,000 people is heterogeneous (Van Boeschoten 2000). The majority of them, called *Ntopii* (that is, locals), trace their origins to the Slav-speaking peasants of Macedonia. Since the late-nineteenth century *Ntopii* have been divided among supporters of Greek, Macedonian and Bulgarian nationalisms. The other indigenous population categories are the *Vlachs*, the *Gypsies* and the *Arvanites*,⁷ who have predominately associated themselves with the Greek nation state. The present-day population also includes the descendants of Asia Minor Greek Orthodox refugees who settled in the region in 1922 as a result of the compulsory exchange of minorities between Greece and Turkey. All these populations are usually bilingual or multilingual, and the percentage of mixed marriages is increasing, especially among those living in the cities of Florina and Aminteo.

All anthropologists who work on this area study similar phenomena related to the border, to identities, nationalism and ethnicity. The reasons causing the 'stampede of anthropologists to this small prefecture' (Cowan 2001) are related to local and international developments.⁸ At the local level, it is worth mentioning the appearance, in the late 1980s, of a Macedonian human rights movement in western Greek Macedonia. A detailed analysis of the factors that led to the establishment of this movement is beyond the aims of this paper.⁹ Suffice to say that such developments took place

5 Most of the highland border areas of present day Greece are underdeveloped and underpopulated. In the case of the Florina area, population decline is also related to the history of the region and the Greek state's policies towards the *Ntopii* during certain periods of the twentieth century (Cowan 2001; Danforth 1995; Karakasidou 1993; Tsitselikis and Christopoulos 1997).

6 According to the national census of 18 March 2001, the prefecture of Florina has a population of 54,751 persons. National census results in Greece tend to overestimate the number of the real population living in rural areas. Many persons, motivated by political interests, return to their villages for the national census day to be counted there.

7 See Gefou-Madianou (1999) for an analysis of the *Arvanites* in Greece.

8 Although this distinction serves the needs of the present analysis, it is oversimplified. The appearance of the Macedonian human rights movement in Greek Macedonia is strongly related to international developments such as the ideology of multiculturalism and the end of the Cold War (see Cowan 2001).

9 See Cowan (2001), Danforth (1995) and Hotzidis (1997) for an analysis of the Macedonian human rights movement in Greece.

within the framework of the dominant value of national homogeneity promoted by the Greek state.¹⁰ Ethnographers of the region were challenged to shift their interests from what until the late eighties were the dominant topics of Mediterranean anthropology to nationalism and minority movements. At the international academic level, one has to take into consideration the impact of those ethnicity and nationalism studies in the Balkans on researchers – including myself – who started their fieldwork in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The region of Florina, because of its population and geographical proximity to Albania and former Yugoslavia,¹¹ has been considered ideal for studies of identity politics, ethnicity and nationalism in the Balkans.

My standpoint in this paper derives from my experience as a resident of Florina, where I lived for four years (from July 1995 to June 1999); I continue to visit the area quite often. My presence in Florina had nothing to do with my origins or my research interests. I grew up in Thessaloniki, the second largest city in Greece, and my grandparents originated from Halkidiki in southern Greek Macedonia, for several centuries an exclusively Greek-speaking region. I first visited Florina as a young boy. My research focuses on identification processes and politics in central Greek Macedonia, an area 200km south-east of Florina (Agelopoulos 1995; 1997; 2000). In 1994, my partner was appointed as a lecturer at the Florina School of Education, and we settled in the city for four years during which I spent most of my week there. Quite soon we established a network of friends: neighbours, people from the local community of academics, students, shop keepers, school teachers, and so on. Florina has a population of less than 13,000 persons, so in many ways it is a face-to-face community.

My aim in this paper is to make three points. First, for reasons that will become evident, I hope to initiate a discussion on the understanding of anthropological knowledge in the local setting of Florina. Such an approach attempts to contribute to an understanding of the ‘silent’ aspects of our ethnographic practices. I argue that in Florina locals are conscious of, and control, the information provided to any one who is a stranger, and that they are particularly conscious of ‘professional strangers’ such as anthropologists. As a result, the power balance between professional anthropologists and locals becomes undermined.

Second, I hope that a personal account of my living experience in Florina will limit the tendency to present this region as ‘typically Balkan’, as an area where backward rural norms dominate local societies. It is worth noting that in the most celebrated travel novel on the Balkans published in the 1990s, F. Maspero includes a chapter on Florina highlighting what he considers the most ‘Balkan’ aspects of the city and its people (Maspero and Sluban 1997). Florina is the only area of Greek Macedonia that Maspero selects to present in his book. Similar tendencies, stressing the marginality and distinctiveness of the area, are present in many NGO reports (Cowan 2001). Very often these reports make extensive use of the available anthropological studies on the region.¹²

10 Since the mid-nineteenth century the Greek state has followed an ethnic model of nation-building. This has had important results for relationships between the state, Greek society and minority movements (Tsitselikis and Christopoulos 1997).

11 The prefecture of Florina is situated in a border area between Greece, Albania and former Yugoslavia. Extensive border traffic between the three countries takes both legal and illegal forms.

12 See, for example, the extensive use of Karakasidou’s material (Karakasidou 1993) in the 1994 British Helsinki Human Rights Group Report on Macedonian minorities (Malcom and Almond 1994) and the use of Yiannisopoulou’s material (Yiannisopoulou 1988) in the Greek Helsinki Monitor report of 29 July 1998 on the same subject.

Cowan argues that, despite the anthropologists' intentions, the 'Florino-centrism' of the recent anthropological research on Greek Macedonia contributes to producing an exotic image of Florina (Cowan 1997: 265). A personal account will present Florina in an alternative way: as a place where the distinction between the local and the non-local cultural patterns is an open-ended dynamic process.¹³ Furthermore, it will illustrate that any inflexible categorisation of societies and cultures, such as the Balkan vs. non-Balkan, limits our ability to conceptualise the multiple perspectives from which a society can be understood.

Third, I intend to contribute to an understanding of the production of anthropological knowledge other than through discussion of the politics of ethnographic writing. My focus is on the muted interaction between the professional anthropologist and the people of the societies he studies. Such an analysis highlights questions relating to the anthropologist's responsibility for the use of his or her ethnographic accounts.

A certain kind of self-reflexivity meditates the writing of this paper. I accept Hastrup's point that reflexivity in ethnography is not a problem but a paradox to live with (Hastrup 1993: 178), a paradox that we have to be conscious of. Excepting Friedl (1970), self-reflexive accounts in Greek ethnography have been appearing since the eighties (Campbell 1992; Herzfeld 1983; 1997; Cowan 1988). Recent monographs and papers by Greek anthropologists such as Seremetakis (1991), Gefou-Madianou (1993; 1998), Panourgia (1995) and Bakalaki (1997) follow a self-reflexive ethnographic approach and discuss self-reflexivity in relation to native anthropology. Gefou-Madianou (1998) and Bakalaki (1997) specifically focus on the relationship between native anthropology and academic politics in Greece.¹⁴ They concentrate their attention on academia because higher education has been the first domain in which anthropology became localised in Greece. This paper also focuses on a context where anthropology has been localised: a provincial town in a border area. I argue that the differences between anthropology becoming localised in Florina and in a Greek University highlight important aspects of anthropological practice.

Fieldwork. The anthropologist's dilemmas

In the classical anthropological tradition, ethnographers are expected to learn to think, feel and often behave like a native. Things became more complicated under the influence of issues raised in anthropology during the seventies, especially when anthropologists started doing fieldwork in what they considered to be 'their own societies'.¹⁵ Central to the debate about native anthropology is a discussion of (i) who belongs to which society, and (ii) what differences exist between knowledge produced by native

13 An understanding of the relationship between local and the non-local cultural patterns is possible using many different approaches besides autobiographic writing (Iosifidou 1998).

14 Gefou-Madianou pays particular attention on Greek and EU academic policies and the challenges for Greek anthropologists working in Greece (1998). Bakalaki examines how the identity of the native may be achieved and the consequences this has for native anthropologists in relation to their identification with the discipline (1997: 503).

15 For a discussion of native anthropology, see Abu-Lughod (1991), Hastrup (1993), Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987), Narayan (1993), Okely (1992) and Strathern (1987). See Gefou-Madianou (1993; 2000), Papataxiarchis (1998) and Bakalaki (1997) for a more detailed discussion of native anthropology in Greece.

and non-native anthropologists (that is to say, how native anthropologists construct otherness). When it comes to my own experience in Florina, I do not claim to be thinking, feeling or behaving like a Floriniotis (person from Florina).¹⁶ But living there I gradually developed representations and practices common among Floriniotes. This did not occur because of my wish to study the region and its people. Rather, my anthropological background influenced, and even prevented me from approaching, Floriniotes.

During my first months in Florina it became clear to me that both my theoretical knowledge of how social categories are constructed and my familiarity with the history of the region had a clear effect on the way I perceived the area and its people. For example, I kept asking people all the time if they were Ntopii, Vlachs, Arvanites or refugees, even in cases when this was totally irrelevant to the context. On one occasion, while drinking with some friends at the *Dhiethnés kafeneio* (coffee shop), I came up with the suggestion that the film director Theo Angelopoulos features this coffee shop in most of his movies because of the role of the building in the city's history.¹⁷ Everybody in the group laughed at this proposal. I was later told that Angelopoulos likes this coffee shop because of the way the sunlight filters through the old glass windows on certain winter days.

If fieldwork is a cross-cultural experience, where does the anthropologist stand in relation to the supposedly distinct cultures he or she observes? The point is that my everyday presence in Florina was a continuous dialogue between aspects of my *sens pratique* (gender, age, class, education, profession, to mention a few), my knowledge of anthropological studies of the region and my experience of living there. My perception of local life gradually came to include 'native' ways of thinking that challenged my previous understanding of local categories and cultural idioms. Furthermore, the permanent presence of anthropologists in the area and my relationships with them (as well as the visits of other anthropologists, mainly during the summer) had an interesting result. I was occasionally asked to interpret local behaviour for my fellow anthropologists, to offer my opinion, or to follow them at significant moments of their fieldwork (such as attending festivities). My discussions with them often functioned as tutorials, providing me with important insights into the society of Florina as well as with theoretical challenges. On the other hand, the activities of these anthropologists produced a certain kind of scepticism among my local friends about the methodology and purpose of ethnographic work in the region. Thus, I was forced to think about the difference between 'anthropological' and 'native' discourses of knowledge. I found myself in a stage of what Turner (1967) calls betwixt-and-between liminality. For the Floriniotes, I was neither a true local nor a complete stranger; and for my fellow anthropologists I was partly a local informant, partly a colleague.¹⁸

16 Since there is no commonly accepted system of transliteration for the Greek alphabet, I adopt the system proposed by the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. Personal names, place names (for example, Halkidiki) and names of populations (for example, Ntopii) follow the customary English form of their transliteration.

17 T. Angelopoulos has filmed three movies in Florina in recent years (*The Bee-Keeper*, *The Suspended Step of the Stork*, *Ulysses's Gaze*). The last has become internationally known because of the 1998 Cannes Film Festival awards.

18 This situation encouraged me to be self-reflexive. Long before there was any discussion of self-reflexivity in the social sciences, Turner pointed out that 'liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection' (Turner 1967: 105).

This was an experience similar to but also different from my fourteen months' fieldwork in central Greek Macedonia. The Floriniotes placed me in a different position to my fellow anthropologists in their model of power relations in their society. For example, they expected me to be interested in local politics more as a resident and less as a social scientist. On the other hand, I had a more relaxed attitude in my everyday interactions with Floriniotes compared to my interactions with the locals in my fieldwork site (see Agelopoulos 1997). Thus, I did not have the restrictions and anxieties of fieldwork. However, I came upon other types of social control such as when I argued with neighbours, something I avoided during my fieldwork.

Forms of otherness, forms of knowledge

Hastrup's distinction between knowing and understanding initially proved to be a useful one for my needs. She argues that the difference between the 'anthropological' and the 'native' discourses of knowledge lies in the distinction between knowing and understanding. Knowing is an intimate and implicit native form of conceptualising the world, while understanding is an external and explicit form of expert professional knowledge.¹⁹ According to Hastrup, doing anthropology is to bridge the two. Although this may prove to be a never completed endeavour (Argyrou 1999), it is obvious that the process of ethnography involves both an intimate and implicit knowing and an external and explicit form of expert professional knowledge (Hastrup 1993: 175). The most important characteristic of professional anthropological knowledge is the awareness of heterotopia. Heterotopia implies that anthropologists relativise the space of fieldwork, thus producing a general knowledge out of the particular (Hastrup 1993: 182). The sense of heterotopia is based on the recognition of the existence of significant others: other people, other places, other cultures, as often referred to in the classical anthropological literature (for example, Beattie 1964). To put it simply, heterotopia implies an understanding that takes into account the possible comparisons between our world and other worlds. In my case, heterotopia was the result of being conscious of a number of factors (my professional training, my self understanding and self location) that influenced my relationships both with Floriniotes and other anthropologists. My experience was similar to what Narayan (1993: 678) describes as the challenge to native anthropologists in constructing otherness: in order to comprehend Florina I had to discover how the experience of my everyday interaction with Floriniotes related to broader theoretical categories applied in anthropological analysis.

The sense of otherness is therefore the key difference between the 'anthropological' and the 'native' discourses of knowledge. Given their need to relativise their fieldwork experiences, most anthropologists perceive otherness as a useful phenomenon; most Floriniotes on the other hand, see it as a tricky and risky subject. This brings us back to the research projects of all those anthropologists who study the area. In my discussion of the sense of otherness in Florina I would like to involve three agents: the Floriniotes, other ethnographers of the region, and myself.

19 The distinction between knowing and understanding has a long history in both anthropology and philosophy. See Vendler (1984) and Ardener (1989) for a review of similar distinctions in anthropology, and Dummett (1978) for an analysis of the same distinction in the European philosophy of knowledge. Dummett argues that the first modern philosopher to draw this distinction was Frege.

Most Floriniotes, regardless of their self-representation (whether this relates to political, class, educational or linguistic affiliation, or gender) perceive the border distinguishing representations of insiders and outsiders (i.e. otherness) as something they have to control with great caution. This is not surprising, given the negative consequences of the violent incorporation of the area into the modern world²⁰ and the dominance of the Greek ethno-national state. Given this context, it must be noted that additional factors contribute to the creation of otherness at the individual level. In my case, for example, cohabitation with my partner without being married was considered a crucial factor differentiating us from the norms and practices of Florina. In addition, my six years of postgraduate work in Britain had influenced my routines and thus fabricated an extra idiom of otherness.²¹ But more than everything else, Floriniotes took my never ending questions as expressions of my difference from them (Bakalaki 1997: 511).

Attitudes towards otherness in Florina depend on the feelings of proximity of the other. I have experienced at least five modes of distance and proximity.²² Although these modes are interrelated, they should not be considered as stages in a developmental process of incorporation – other modes may exist. For example, I have heard about but not experienced what can be called ‘polemic denial of otherness’. In such a situation locals argue dynamically with non-locals and deny absolutely the existence of any form of otherness (linguistic, political or national) in Florina. In addition, it must be pointed out that my limited ability to understand some of the local languages and dialects obviously did not allow me to experience the most intimate modes of belonging among speakers of these languages and dialects.

I have personally and sometimes simultaneously experienced the following modes of proximity: (i) pretended ignorance of the other; (ii) restrained translation; (iii) attempted assimilation of the other; (iv) self-confident otherness; and (v) professional otherness.

In the first mode, Floriniotes pretend that otherness should not be publicly exhibited or admitted. This is a phenomenon more complicated than dishonesty (du Boulay 1976) that applies to every other, and not just to ethnographers (Herzfeld 1980). To give an example, a lorry driver from Crete heard some Vlachs talking in Vlach at the *pazári* (open market) of Florina and asked what kind of language these people were speaking; he was a friend of my father and stayed over at our place. My landlady, who was present at the incident, rushed to reply that ‘they were speaking

20 Modernity is marked by the nation-building process. In the twentieth century, this area experienced 25 years of war (the Macedonian struggle, the Balkan Wars, two World Wars and the Greek Civil War). In the local context these conflicts were provided with national dimensions.

21 This is a phenomenon experienced by many Greek anthropologists who studied outside Greece. For example, Gefou-Madianou argues that Greek anthropologists studying outside Greece but conducting fieldwork within Greece have different ways of perceiving the culture they study. They may experience it as natives or examine it in line with their academic training outside Greece as something exotic (Gefou-Madianou 1993). Similarly, Bakalaki notes that ‘for most Greek anthropologists in Greece, our main frame of reference and source of professional identity is not an “other” culture in which we specialise, but our membership in the Euro-American academic world’ (Bakalaki 1997: 506).

22 These modes of otherness can also be perceived as patterns of intimacy, idioms of trust or forms of openness. For the needs of the present analysis, I focus on the exclusiveness–inclusiveness aspect that emphasises otherness.

Greek with a heavy accent'. On another occasion, François, a multi-lingual French officer of KFOR²³ who use to spend weekends in Florina, told me that he had heard some cleaning ladies in his hotel speaking a language that he was unable to recognise. He asked Takis, the hotel owner, what the nationality of these ladies was. Takis replied, 'Why are you interested in the languages we speak here? We all speak Greek!' François later found out that the cleaning ladies were speaking Pontic Greek, a dialect closer to the ancient Greek Koine language than to modern Greek.²⁴ This kind of manipulation of otherness implies an initial contact during which Floriniotes pretend that otherness should not be an issue worth mentioning.

The second mode, which I call restrained translation, appears in cases where the other is somehow aware of the dimensions of otherness. In such contexts Floriniotes attempt to explain every little aspect of their life that may be perceived as an indication of exclusiveness. For example, they can argue for hours about the reasons why grilled meatballs are called *kebápia* in Florina and *sutzukákia* in all other areas of Greece.²⁵ In more public settings Floriniotes often disagree on the names of local dances. Those with a strong Greek nationalist attitude insist on calling the most popular local Ntopii dance *litós* instead of *Pushchéno*, its original name in Macedonian. The reason for attempting such a translation is to control the meanings attributed to otherness. Such an attitude must be understood given the nationalisation of 'folk' cultural elements, a practice related to the ethnic nations model in eastern Europe.

The third mode of dealing with otherness is applied in cases where Floriniotes know that the other is fully aware of the dimensions of the insider–outsider border and trust him or her to a great degree. In such cases, a translation of otherness is not necessary. Both parties know one another quite well. A friend of mine at Florina is a middle-aged Ntopios shop owner. On 8 June 1998 we went together to a *paniyíri* (village festival) at an exclusively Ntopii village where he knew quite a few people. He chatted with most of them in Macedonian, and after a while turned to me and apologised because he was aware that my knowledge of Macedonian (*Ntopia*, as he named the language) is limited. He told me that he was actually not excluding me but accepting my presence. 'If I was to reply in Greek to someone addressing me in Ntopia in front of you,' he told me, 'that would have mean that I do not trust you'. I perceive this version of dealing with otherness as an attempt to assimilate the other into the realities of the Florina society.

Furthermore, there are situations where differences between the local population categories are accepted as a fact that does not need to be controlled or interpreted. In such cases one experiences a self-confident otherness which, by definition, requires an instrumental understanding of identification. Similar attitudes are more often observed among upper middle-class Floriniotes who share a certain feeling of security regarding their social status. At a dinner party during the 1997 carnival, local academics competed with one another telling multi-lingual jokes and popular stories about the different backgrounds of ancestors who were Arvanites, Ntopii, Vlachs and refugees without feeling the need to hide anything about their origins.²⁶ In another

23 KFOR is the NATO military force operating in Kosovo, a few hours driving from Florina. Some KFOR officers and NGO personnel use to spend their summer weekends in the cities of northern Greece.

24 Most refugee populations in the villages in the Florina are Pontic Greeks.

25 Both words are Turkish. The equivalent Greek word (*kreatosferídhia*) is rarely used in Greece.

26 Brown (1999) has experienced a similar phenomenon among the Krushevo Vlachs.

similar case, local musicians recorded and published Ntopii songs without any attempt to change the Macedonian names of dances and villages, and without denying the close relationship between Florina Ntopii dances and dances in the nearby Bitola region.²⁷ It is worth noting that the public presentation of the CD they produced attracted a large audience. Expressing such forms of self-confident otherness implies a political statement. The point is to deny the nationalisation of local cultural idioms imposed by nationalists on all sides.

Finally, I have also experienced a mode of otherness specifically related both to my profession and my categorisation as a resident of Florina. I recall many cases where people invited or advised us to participate in social gatherings because they believed that as ‘an anthropologist’ (*anthropológhos*) living in Florina I should find them interesting. In Turner’s terms, such occasions can be recognised as the positive aspects of my liminality in Florina (Turner 1967: 99). After some time I was not surprised when such invitations came from my partner’s colleagues, other local scholars and people involved with local politics. However, I was surprised when our neighbours, a middle-aged couple retired after three decades of hard manual work in Australia, invited us to a summer village festival by pointing out that ‘as an anthropologist and sociologist you should attend this particular *paniyíri*’. I asked them how they acquired an image of my professional interests. Their reply was revealing: as a retired couple who had lived many years abroad, they were fans of local festivals and followed almost all of them. During the previous summer they had met the same (non-Greek) anthropologist at most of these festivals and were involved in discussions with her. Obviously, their fluent English made for easier communication with the ethnographer.

Forms of sameness, aspects of nativeness

As already noted, I have sometimes simultaneously experienced more than one of the modes of proximity analysed above. This means that my presence was perceived and evaluated differently by Floriniotes, and implies that not all strangers were pigeon-holed in the same category. If representations of a stranger’s otherness differ, so do the representations of sameness different locals hold of themselves. Anthropologists often point out this phenomenon by stressing that ‘the meaning of native is far from given’ (Bakalaki 1997: 502; Madianou 1993: 172–3) and that ‘natives are hardly ever homogenous groups’ (Hastrup 1993: 176). In the case of Florina, one encounters a numerically limited but symbolically powerful category of locals who conceptualise and exhibit sameness in quite sophisticated ways. This is the case with Ntopii supporters of the Rainbow Party who have gradually established a special interaction with anthropological discourse that has no equivalent among the rest of the Florina population. This interaction allows us to address in depth the relationship between anthropological and native knowledge as well as the various local understandings of anthropological discourse in Florina.

The Rainbow Party supports the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greek Macedonia and argues that specific rights have to be institutionalised for the ethnic Macedonians of Greece. Both in Florina and in international fora, the party represents the most straightforward, dynamic and institutionally organised expression of Macedonian national identity in Greece. However, we have to be careful not to equate

²⁷ I refer to the CD *Traditional Music of the Florina Highlands*, edited by K. Tsonis (1998).

electoral results and Rainbow Party policies with expressions of Ntopia or/and Macedonian identity in Greek Macedonia. As many ethnographies of the region point out, the relationship between Macedonian national identity and Ntopia identity takes many different forms (Cowan 2000; Danforth 1995; Karakasidou 1997; Vereni 2000; Yiannisopoulou 1998). This is of no surprise given that in the geographical region of Macedonia, as in other parts of the world, national, cultural and linguistic boundaries very often cross-cut each other.

The party gets the majority of its votes in western Greek Macedonia and particularly in the Florina rural communities. Its appearance caused strong nationalist reactions in Florina society. During the period of the dispute between Athens and Skopje over the name 'Macedonia', the party's office at Florina was destroyed by a group of locals. In 1994 the Rainbow Party participated for the first time in elections for the European Parliament. It received, nationwide, 7,263 votes and 2,332 votes in the Florina prefecture (0.1 per cent nationwide; 6 per cent locally). In the 1996 national elections, Rainbow co-operated with the Organisation For The Reformation Of The Greek Communist Party, a small hardline extra-parliamentary communist party, and received, on a national scale, 3,485 votes and 746 votes in Florina region (0.05 per cent nationwide; 1.71 per cent locally). In the 1999 European elections, Rainbow lost approximately 40 per cent of its votes, compared with those achieved in the previous European Parliament election. Rainbow votes represented 3.61 per cent of total votes in the Florina prefecture and 0.08 per cent of the vote nationwide. It should be noted that Rainbow decided not to participate in the last national elections in April 2000.²⁸

Otherness and sameness are often exhibited by Rainbow Party activists to stress the existence of clearly distinguishable fixed identities and to present all Ntopii as a nationally homogenous population. As Cowan (2001) puts it, this effort involves an attempt to narrow and fix the meanings of certain cultural forms, so that they underwrite and authenticate a particular minority identity. One interesting aspect of the practice of otherness by Rainbow Party activists involves their interaction with ethnographers. This interaction simultaneously refers to two of the five modes of otherness discussed above, namely what I call restrained translation and professional otherness.

Activists are aware that anthropologists are widely accepted among the international academic community as experts on cultural classification (Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987) and attempt to 'treat the anthropological power of textual production as a resource' (Okely 1992: 22). Being aware of the dominance of the western anthropological discourse turns Rainbow Party activists into 'anthropological natives' (Hastrup 1993: 180) who practise a form of indigenism.²⁹ They have a great interest in anthropological accounts of the region. In August 1998 the Florina municipality organised a

28 Manos argues that the dramatic decline in the Rainbow Party's vote in the 1999 Euroelections 'was probably one of the reasons for the non-participation of the party in the national elections of April 2000' (Manos 2002). In my discussions with Floriniotes, four additional factors that possibly contributed to the party's decision to cease participating in elections were mentioned: the split into two different fractions; the discouraging international environment following the Kosovo war and the developments in Tetovo and Skopje; the biased publicity in Greek media; and, finally, the understanding that a minority party with no specific number of votes has a stronger international voice and presence than a minority party that represents less than 0.5 per cent of the total number of votes cast in Greek Macedonia.

29 Iosifidou provides a similarly interesting case on understanding of western academic discourse among Greek Orthodox nuns (Iosifidou 1998).

festival for the immigrants who return to Florina every summer. The association of bookshop owners of the city organised a small exhibition of books at the central square. Among these books I recognised the 1997 volume co-edited by B. Gounaris, I. Michailidis and myself entitled *Taftótites sti Makedhonía (Identities in Macedonia)*. When I asked about the book, I was told that ‘the book sells well among people of the region’. A bookshop owner who knows me personally said, ‘Rainbow activists buy this book more than anyone else’.

Rainbow Party activists and anthropologists often meet one another away from Florina: at international NGO meetings, academic conferences, at Floriniote-diaspora activities or even on the internet; among the first³⁰ clients of the first local internet provider at Florina were three anthropologists and four Rainbow Party activists. Such meetings allow activists a wider insight into how anthropologists work. At a conference on Slavonic languages of Greek Macedonia held at Panteion University Athens in October 1998, a lively discussion about anthropological research methods and theory took place between researchers and three Rainbow Party members (KEMO 2001: 218–67). The party has even established its preferred ethnography of the region. On its internet site (*www.florina.org*) only one ethnographic monograph is listed, which is surprising given the publicity that some other ethnographies of Ntopii have attracted over the last decade, both inside and outside Greece.

Rainbow Party activists also attempt to contribute to the ethnography of ‘their culture’.³¹ Some anthropologists who work in the region explain this strategy in their writings (for example, Manos 2002). A very clear manifestation of such an attempt has been the scepticism over the ethnographies of ‘their culture’ raised by the political representative of the Rainbow Party. In a recent interview, Pavlos Voskopoulos argues that ‘we Macedonians aren’t going to be tucked away in our shell, like picturesque Indians, with our own different little language and our dances and our music, for all sorts of researchers to come along to see how we’ve preserved our folklore and our traditions’ (Voskopoulos 1999).³² Voskopoulos’ interview is republished in *EthnoAnthropoZoom*, the official journal of the Department of Ethnology of the St Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje.

Beyond distinctions?

Voskopoulos provides an illuminating insight into the complex relationship between the ‘anthropological’ and the ‘native’ discourses as I experienced them in Florina.³³ In the ‘anthropological’ discourse, otherness, as a precondition for the production of anthropology, refers to the awareness of heterotopia and is therefore relativised. In the discourse of Floriniotes, otherness is perceived as something available for careful manipulation because of its political significance. If the representations of sameness locals hold for themselves differ, it becomes obvious that the distinction between local and non-local patterns is an open-ended process. The modes of proximity discussed

30 ‘Misirkov’ (nickname) has been the most well known Rainbow activist to acquire on-line access via the first internet provider at Florina.

31 See Hastrup (1993: 180) and Reed-Danahay (1997: 2) for a discussion of similar experience.

32 The same argument was presented by P. Voskopoulos during the 1998 conference held in Athens (KEMO 2001: 261).

33 The reaction of Rainbow supporters is similar to the reactions of other indigenous movements to those who exoticise their culture (see Hastrup 1993).

illustrate that nativeness is experienced not as a quality inherited by the individual but as a condition. In other words, nativeness becomes the product of the interaction between the individual and others. The above has important consequences for anthropologists, especially for those categorised by the international academic community as native anthropologists.

With regard to 'what we study' we have to accept that the idea of a culture existing before the anthropologist arrives, and persisting during and after his stay, is problematic (Turner 2000: 55). With regard to our self location and social status, we are once again forced to ask, who holds the power to define otherness? The case of Florina illustrates that from the moment anthropology becomes localised outside academia, various categories of locals are involved in the process of defining otherness (Brettell 1993; Driessen 1993).³⁴ Attempting to comprehend these categories in an insider-versus-outsider form or as double identities oversimplifies a process of representation and power (Strathern 1987). This power process is experienced during 'fieldwork' but continues after the completion of the anthropological text. If that is the case, it becomes difficult to insist upon essentialist distinctions between ethnographers and natives as well as between native and non-native anthropologists.

Throughout the four years of my life in Florina I have found myself operating as an anthropologist, as a native and as an informant both for other colleagues and for Florinotes. As Turner argues, 'paradoxically' it is in the liminal period, 'in this fruitful darkness', that 'the basic building blocks of culture are exposed' and the conflicts arising from distinctions of status are laid open (Turner 1967: 110). My standpoint provided me with the opportunity to negotiate and reflect upon the different modes of proximity I experienced and to access multiple 'local' and 'anthropological' views of the world from perspectives I was not previously aware of. By presenting a personal account of my betwixt-and-between presence at Florina I intend to overcome the marginality attributed to the region and thus contribute to an understanding of the relative distinctions between ethnographers, natives, native ethnographers and ethnographic natives.

I was forced to think about 'anthropological' and 'native' discourses as I was unable to dissociate myself from my professional identity. Although my relationship with Florinotes was not initiated by an academic interest, by writing this paper it becomes possible for other scholars to categorise me among the professionally recognised ethnographers of Florina. The one thing that I am not sure about is whether or not I am prepared for my positioning, by Florinotes, as one of the ethnographers of Florina.

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34 On an epistemological level, it is interesting to note the similarities between 'native' and 'anthropological' strategies for comprehending otherness. My typology of Florinotes's attitudes towards otherness parallels Argyrou's analysis of strategies of mediation practised by anthropologists. The first and the second modes of proximity discussed above correspond to Argyrou's first strategy of mediation utilised by anthropologists, while the third, fourth and fifth modes of proximity correspond to Argyrou's third strategy of mediation (Argyrou 1999).

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