

Stavroula Pipyrou. *The Grecanici of Southern Italy: Governance, Violence, and Minority Politics.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 256 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4830-2.

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In the Grecanica area of Reggio Calabria in southern Italy resides a tiny linguistic minority that passionately fights for its preservation and official recognition. The Grecanici are the subjects of this lucid and sophisticated ethnography that tells their stories of how they “have successfully crafted a place in contemporary politics through minority claims, narrating how minority relations have been turned into contexts of power, authority, and governance” (p. 4). Based on extensive anthropological fieldwork, the book also discusses the theoretical implications of the analytics of power and how the scales of governance are realized at the intersections of local and global encounters. These nexuses of relatedness have furnished Grecanici with effective and affective governance, especially since their forceful migration from their rural areas to the city of Reggio Calabria because of the landslides in the early 1950s. It was then that they commenced systematic management of being Grecanico as a linguistic and cultural asset.

Stavroula Pipyrou borrows from Michel Foucault the concept of governance and discusses how resource management and decision making are not necessarily only in the hands of “the government.” The Italian state is only one fragment of power that the Grecanici have been subjected to: a complex regime of truths has been in opera-

tion through the decades, a governance that is based neither on domination nor on coercion, neither on freedom nor on consent. The author also borrows, and expands, the concept of fearless governance as it pertains to unruly populations seeking self-governance at every turn and at any expense. Grecanici fearlessly contest and “skillfully maneuver the intricate, multiple, and often contradictory realizations of governance” (p. 7). Fearlessness, according to Foucault, is the courage to say anything based on qualified knowledge (in acts of speaking). But Pipyrou operationalizes the concept even further and examines it in the practices employed by Grecanici in their quest for recognition.

Up until the landslides and the forced relocation of the 1950s, the Grecanici lived in isolated rural areas and met all the familiar stereotypes of the derogatory dirty peasant, the second-class citizen, who spoke an inferior language, which was transmitted only through familial pedagogy. The 1861 unification of the Italian nation-state meant also a process of modernization that rendered the Grecanici to live in extreme conditions of poverty, with high mortality rates and constant depopulation. The Mussolini policies promoting monolingualism stigmatized the Grecanici language further, and parents started consciously avoiding speaking the language at home. Narratives of vic-

timhood, bitterness, and ambivalence became part of their lives: both natural disasters and political disempowerment were the facts of life.

Despite this social suffering and displacement, and because of European policies, the language has been revived in the past few decades: “the language that once brought them shame, now brings them recognition” (p. 13). The Grecanici looked outside Italy to enhance their minority position, since recognition now can come from global actors and new global frameworks of representation and governance shape local particularities. The local and the global are drawn into the same fearless game.

In addition to the trope of victimhood, recent school education in Grecanici language changed the ways the minority perceived itself. A certificate in language fluency brings recognition and even employment. But individual gains require constant struggle and minority members are constantly reminded that official recognition of a linguistic or ethnic minority does not necessarily mean that these benefits are guaranteed. They are still caught in the midst of multiple national interests and agendas. On the one hand, for some Italian nationalists, it has been their duty to prove that the language and the people do not exist. Given the great urban-rural divide in Italy, the Grecanici are seen as just local variation within the Italian nation. On the other hand, some Greek nationalists, in their efforts to unite the Greek-speaking populations around the globe, view the Grecanici as part of the Greek national community and maintain that they should be embraced as such.

Hellenism, however, still remains a “preordained category of relatedness” (p. 10). Despite their devoutness to Catholicism, language and history define the identity of the Grecanici. Grecanico language has Archaic Doric, Hellenistic, Byzantine, and local Romanic and Italian linguistic elements, revealing multiple influences. Greek colonization of southern Italy and Sicily took place be-

tween the eighth and the sixth centuries BC. A second wave of newcomers arrived in 1148, when Byzantine populations from the Ionian Islands and mainland Greece found refuge in Calabria. But, by the time of Italian unification, the Christian Orthodox denomination had been abolished and the Greek language was spoken in only a dozen villages.

When they moved to Reggio Calabria in 1951, the Grecanici were met with hostility, and although Calabrians themselves were always conceptualized as peripheral and oriental within the Italian imaginary, they thought of the Grecanici as allogot peasants. Upon their arrival in the urban setting, the Grecanici lived in kinship clusters, the same household usually hosting three generations. They were highly endogamous, and marriages between first (parallel or cross) cousins were permitted. Although they used a bilateral kinship classification system, the transmission of patronymic names indicates an emphasis on the patriline. Grecanici politics were based on clientelistic frameworks that were (and still are) familial in their conceptualization. The language that frames clientelism is that of family and kinship. For example, the name of the Calabrian Mafia, Ndrangheta, is a word of Greek origin. Within this frame, women are used as a commodity to strengthen their patriline and the mafia networks.

Twelve languages are officially recognized as minority languages by the Italian state, but UNESCO declared the Grecanico language as severely endangered. There is a Greek essentialism in operation and a sorrow for the disappearance of the language. Greek roots mean belonging to a higher civilization and a lost grandeur of the past. The Greek Orthodox Church sporadically tried to convert them back to Orthodoxy by sending priests to conduct masses, baptisms, and marriages. Associations were also formed in Greece to help the Calabrian Greeks. While their “Greekness” might serve as a trope in their quest for recognition, it is their “fearless governance,” based on qualified

knowledge that led them to challenge the political status quo within Italy and the European Union.

The early criminal anthropologist, Cesare Lombroso, who was searching for physiological determinants of human behavior, classified them as medium in height, stubborn, wild in heart and spirit, and passionate for dominance. A postmodern “fearlessness” describes them over a century later, and although the ethnography superbly interprets their post-World War II quest for recognition, it would have been enriched if more archival and historical sources had been discussed. For example, following the German neoclassical tradition, linguist, or “archaeologist of words,” Gerhard Rohlfs (1892-1986) studied the “Griko” language spoken in a few places in Salento and in south Calabria. His extensive historical study concluded that the vernacular is a direct descendant of the language originally spoken by the Greek colonists of Magna Grecia. This connection, however, had been established even earlier through the work of Vito Domenico Palumbo (1857-1918), a native of the area, who envisioned reestablishing cultural contacts with mainland Greece. Following the trend of nascent nationalism, he studied folklore, mythology, and songs of his people. Pipyrrou mentions all these authors but does not look closely at their contemporary relevance. How do these early and romantic ideologies inform today’s activism? What role did the excavation and archaeology of ancient Greek sites play in the development and consolidation of their “otherness?” In addition, how do we compare the experience of the Calabrian Grecanici with those of Grecia Salentina, where kinship, clientelism, and the mafia might have interrelated differently?

Local issues in global stages are the main themes of this ethnography, and the author provides an anthropological account of these contested people through ethnographic vignettes and theoretical lucidness. It adds to the literature of the Mediterranean basin, the Balkans, and southern Europe at large. It also provides a compara-

tive ground for the study of any peripheral/marginal group striving for recognition of a local status in a global setting.

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