LEVEL: ADVANCED

TWO AVATOS: THE NEW AND THE OLD, THE WEST AND THE REST

Some of the critical issues and keywords that the text below includes:

- Greek-ness
- The Bey Village (Beyköyü)
- Refugees
- Hodzha
- Cultural heritage

If English is not your first or second language, avoid using online translations.Your language skills will improve if you use dictionaries!

Can you locate the areas we are discussing in this case study?



LEARN TO UNLEARN

The meaning of the word Avato is Unpassable. It was given that name because the New Avato used to be a large, wild forest with a swamp right off the Nestos river. When Greek Christian refugees from Eastern Thrace (Kestritsa, Hariupoli, Saranta Ekklisies) fled the Ottomans in approx.1920, they started building the area from scratch. In the beginning of their arrival, they were received, welcomed, and hosted by the Afrogreeks and other Muslims of the area known as Beyköyü because the Beys used to own the land. When the forest transformed into a living village, the Unpassable place kept its name and included Beyköyü as well.

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THE DIVIDE

From the outside and from formal administrative perspective, it seems like Avato is one village, like as we discussed above, with a rich mix and peaceful coexistence of cultures, religions, and ethnicities. However, if one visits the village, they will immediately be encoutered with a separation between Avato and Beyköyü or New Avato and Old Avato. The one is Christian and mostly White, where the other is Muslim and also Black.



The Nestos River of Bulgaria and Greece. Its delta is located between Xanthi and Kavala, near Avato.

Notes from the Field:

Presently, as I witnessed it with my own eyes, the New Avato has a very welcoming center which I reached on the main road as I entered the village: I saw the medium-sized square with a playground in its middle. Right behind I could see the church and the primary school called Primary School of Avato. Across the square, I found a bank, a community center, a mini market, and the Cultural Center of Avato. Inside the center, there is an adequate display of old systems of weaving, wheat grinding, sifting, and more. The cultural association has managed to safeguard older traditional dance costumes, photos on the walls, informative historical maps, and many musical instruments. Some board members welcomed me and gave me a tour at once, they were very hospitable. As soon as I arrived, they asked me 'What is the occasion of your visit?'. I replied 'I came to learn about the history of the place' and immediately a woman clarified 'Are you here to see the Blacks?', I said 'Well, them too.'. The woman's husband added that I would need to walk down the vertical street to find them but to beware of the stray dogs while I am walking to Old Avato. The next day, as I entered Old Avato, I came across a bus stop, a small refreshments shop, a mosque, and a large tree with a bench. Next to the shop, I noticed a much smaller school, the Minority Primary School of Avato. I was welcomed by people who were sitting under the tree and was told that not many children go to this school anymore because they rather go further away to schools that teach Greek more intensively. Just a few minutes after my arrival, it was time for the first prayer of the evening. By clicking on the recording, you will hear:

Allahu Ekber	Click Here	*God is Great*
Eşhedû en lâ ilâhe illallah		*There is no god but God*
Eşhedû enne Muhammeden resulullah		*Muhammed is the Prophet of God*
Hayya ale-salah		*Come to prayer*
Hayya alel-felah		*Come to salvation*
Allahu Ekber		*God is Great*
Lâ ilahe illallah		*There is no god but God*

Transliteration and translation were found via turkeytravelplanner.com



One of the oldest photos of the Old Avato with many faces unidentified. Courtesy of the residents' photographic archive.

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STIMULUS MATERIAL



Above, the aforementioned cultural center located in New Avato.
On its balkony you can see the greek flag and near the entrance a small, miniature Christian Orthodox church.

The official name is Center for the Cultural Heritage of Avato. As an informal community group it was founded in the 50s and it became a legal entity in the 90s.

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SKILLS, PRACTICES AND EXCERCESES

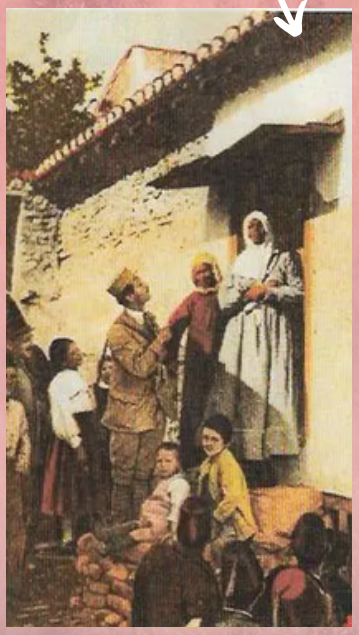
After reading about the two Avatos and looking at the **STIMULUS MATERIAL**, think of Greek citizens of african descent as an indigenous group.

Can you identify elements of colonialism, europeanisaiton, christianisation, whitewashing, even in its slightest form? Is it systemic/institutional or societal ? Are there signs or racist intentions behind the actions or maybe ethnocentrism, possibly ignorance?

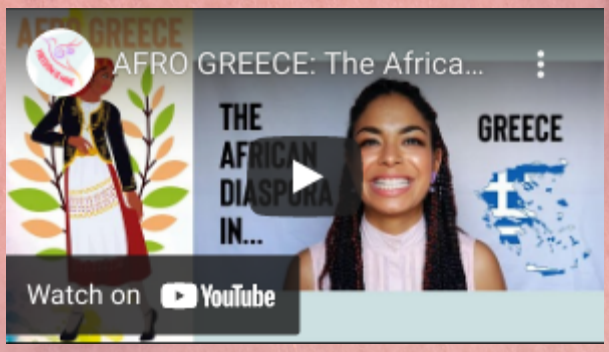
TOO DIFFICULT?

Initiate a small research project of the African history of Greece. Use visuals, such as posters, images from newspapers, propaganda items, photos from open archives, to map out different timelines/eras and its interaction with Greek populations.

THE FOLLOWING MATERIAL MIGHT HELP:



Ev. Hekimoglu writes: 'Negro residents of Thessaloniki who were registered of turkish ethnicity during the demographics.'



Afro-Greek history and culture video all the way from the Minoans to the present day that even mentions how ancient Greeks refered to all Africans as 'Ethiopians' and the word Ethiopia comes from the Greek words for 'burnt face'.



Documentation of some of the Afrogreeks of Avato from a greek reporting channel (2016)

For further information and stories on broken roots, take a look at *Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Decolonising the Mind*

https://www.uibk.ac.at/anglistik/staff/davis/decolonising-the-mind.pdf

Just because a community might have 'broken roots' (to use Ngugi wa Thiong'o's phrase) does not mean that they lack the opinion of self-identification.

How can anthropological fieldwork help us decolonise the way we look and write about people?

What ethnographic methodological tools can one use in order to better understand a heterogeneous population to their own ?

Search for different ways of interviewing, different ways of documenting and different ways of analysing .

Do your best for your in-depth research to empower the community in question in the near and far future, offer a platform for advocacy and representation and create allies across geographical boundaries ?

The radical absence of the 'other' not only postulates an atomistic image of social existence in general; that is, it denies the idea of the social totality. As European colonial practice was to show, the paradigm also made it possible to omit every reference to any other 'subject' outside the European context, i.e., to make invisible the colonial order as totality, at the same moment as the very idea of Europe was establishing itself precisely in relation to the rest of the world being colonized.

Anıbal Quijano



QUESTIONS & IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION, DEBATES, REFLECTION

How would the acknowledgement of the existence of the AfroGreek population help current incoming African migrant and refugee populations feel less of an outsider or an intruder ?

See coloniality as a trace after the colonial project, i.e. the educational system that remains. How could the history books in greek schools try to be more inclusive of Greece's full history?

There always needs to be a story to convince one to be an advocate of decoloniality. Certain narratives are being funded from states, what do you think about the case of the history of African Greece?

More quotes from the Black residents of Avaton:

If I come out and tell them that I am a descendant of Democritus, they will freak out...

Our grandparents were brothers. After that I do not know where it (history) goes…

Something that is not cleansed with soap, can be cleansed over generations…

An Ottoman bey, took my grandfather to work in his fields…

My motherland will always be Greece…

Xanthi is our country…

Even though I give them ID, some police do not believe I am Greek.

In other countries people are excited to know that I am Greek. In my country, I never received this joy.

Do not forget:

The AfroGreeks or African Greeks or Black Greeks of Avato and Evlalo were given this title from online and offline media outlets such as newspapers, television shows and documentary type interviews. These labelling names do not represent the community and their self-identification.

READING TIPS

Karakasidou, A. N. (2009). Fields of wheat, hills of blood. University of Chicago Press.

Tools for Citizens (2017) civilsocietytoolbox.org

SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINERS AND EDUCATORS

LEVEL: ADVANCED

DECOLONISING METHODOLOGIES

COMPLEXITY

This section is meant to engage an audience of people with an advanced level of knowledge about minority groups, colonialism, and post-/de-colonial perspectives.

GROUP SIZE & TYPE

8-15 participants, foreigners and/or locals, ideally MA or Ph.D. students from social sciences or humanities, professionals who have worked as researchers, journalists, or educators in the Balkans or South Eastern Europe and beyond.

TIME

90 minutes or 2 hours in case of the need to wrap up and/or set a follow-up activities

OBJECTIVES

- Reflect critically on how scholars and activists often refer to decolonial methodologies "as a cure" against patriarchy, colonialization, and racialization;
- Understand decolonial best practices on a transnational level;
- Stimulate critical thinking on knowledge production and intellectual property
- Juxtapose decolonial practices worldwide with decolonial practices in the Balkans
- Identify healthy and meaningful ways to raise visibility about a minority group.

MATERIAL

Internet connection, laptop, projector, flipchart posters, handouts.
Read Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith

PREPARATION

- Make sure to feel comfortable with all the above exercises and levels.
- Organise activities in two sections of 45 minutes each.
- Divide participants into small groups in order to initiate in depth research and have diverse findings to discuss as a follow-up activity.
- Discuss Linda Tuhiwai Smith's quote: "when indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed."
- Be open to critical perspectives from the participants, especially in relation to most-debated issues of colonisation, knowledge production and race. Throughout, make sure that everyone in the group feels heard.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- If this activity is taking part in an academic institution, bring in the marginalised people you are focusing on as experts where they are compensated for sharing their knowledge
- Open this visiting session or all students so they can get extra study credits
- Refer to the book above in order to stimulate further the discussion and research activism among the audience
- Arrange a follow-up meeting by cross-referencing all the knowledge produced so far by inviting more community members as consultants in your institution/university.