

# THE HELLENIC SCHOOL IN BLOEMFONTEIN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1880s, when the first Greek immigrants settled in Bloemfontein,<sup>3</sup> the Oranje-Vrijstaat (OVS; Orange Free State, OFS) was an independent Boer republic, with Johannes Henricus Brand as its state president.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hundreds of thousands of Greeks left their fatherland to seek a better life in other parts of the globe – fleeing the ravages of wars, economic problems and concomitant poverty. Those Greeks who settled in South Africa, initially mostly made Cape Town, Johannesburg (with its gold mines) or Kimberley (with its diamond mines) their new home, albeit that in due course some of them also settled in other areas.<sup>5</sup> One of their major concerns was the education of their children; and how they and their children could adapt to conditions in their new country and be accepted, without losing their language, traditions and culture.

Greek children went to the schools that existed in their new town, city or neighbourhood, but in due course possibilities with regard to providing these children with tuition in the Greek language and with classes that would deal with Greek history and culture, were explored. This was also the case in Bloemfontein, where a “Hellenic School” was in due course established. Consequently it is the purpose of this article to give an account of the history of this Greek/Hellenic School in Bloemfontein.

In an effort to place the role played by the Hellenic School in Bloemfontein in the correct historical context, a section will be devoted to a brief review of the Greek government’s educational policies regarding emigrants and another section will (briefly) deal with Hellenic schools in South Africa in general. Against that background, the Greek teachers’ duties, as determined by the Greek Ministry of Education, and also as arising from the relations of each teacher with community

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mr D Tarnanis, Bloemfontein, 27 February 2004.

<sup>4</sup> For the history of the Orange Free State, 1854-1889, see for example CFJ Muller (ed.), *Five hundred years a history of South Africa* (Pretoria, 1993), pp. 234-251.

<sup>5</sup> *Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους* [History of the Greek nation], Book ΙΑ (Athens, 1978), pp. 60-61, 83-85, 360, 375 and Book ΙΣΤ (Athens, 2000), pp. 52-61, 131-156, 341-342, 526; EA Mantzaris, *The social structure and the process of assimilation of the Greek community in South Africa* (MA, University of Cape Town, 1978), p. 46; Interview with Mr D Tarnanis, Bloemfontein, 27 February 2004.

members, will be discussed. Following this, the “classroom” set-up in Bloemfontein where Greek lessons are/were given is described, as well as the difficulties children experienced regarding their school attendance. In the next section, the teachers’ relationship with the Greek community in Bloemfontein in general, and with Committee members in particular, is reviewed (where the Committee refers to the elected members of the Greek community in Bloemfontein that formed a governing body for the local Greek community).

The efforts and initiatives of the Greek immigrants of Bloemfontein before the functioning of the first official school will be discussed up to 1978. In the larger context of this study, all the teachers that served the Hellenic School in Bloemfontein are mentioned, and their respective roles are briefly discussed. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on both their educational work, and their social conduct during their stay in the city. Finally, the history of another school, the Greek Sunday School, is briefly reviewed.

As is the case with all other aspects of the history of the Greek community in Bloemfontein, very little has thus far been written about this history, and not much archival material is available. Consequently the authors had to rely to a large extent on oral evidence that was gathered in the course of many interviews. The authors are therefore indebted to those members of the Greek community in Bloemfontein who were prepared to share their memories with regard to the Hellenic School in Bloemfontein with the interviewer, and the authors would like to extend a sincere word of thanks to these people. Without their kind co-operation and willingness to provide information, this study would not have been possible, and a piece of Bloemfontein’s educational, social and cultural history would in due course have been lost forever.

## **2. THE GREEK GOVERNMENT’S EDUCATIONAL POLICIES REGARDING EMIGRANTS**

Since the dramatic year of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus (1974), both the Greek Government and the big Greek organisations abroad began paying more attention to the problems of the Diaspora.<sup>6</sup> The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad (GGAE) in 1983 to plan, coordinate, and implement policy regarding emigrants. From Greece’s perspective, a prosperous and active Hellenism abroad could lead to a prosperous Greece in the international community, as well as to the multicultural enrichment of the host countries. Foreign Affairs Ministry resources and projects that support this aim include:

<sup>6</sup> *Ιστορία του ελληνικού έθνους*, Book ΙΣΤ, p. 534; *Ελευθεροτυπία*, *Απόδημος Ελληνισμός* [Free Press, Greeks abroad], 27 November 1999, p. 1.

- (1) The Foundation for Hellenic Culture (with branches in many big cities of the world), which sponsors events, exhibits, lectures and concerts in the Diaspora countries.
- (2) Greek language instructional materials, which are used in Greek schools abroad to advance knowledge of the mother tongue.
- (3) The “Filoxenia” programme, which brings children of Greek origin living abroad to Greece for three weeks.
- (4) The GGAE website, which lists Greek organisations and individuals abroad ([www.mfa.gr/ggae](http://www.mfa.gr/ggae)).<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the World Council of Greeks Abroad (SAE) was created in 1995 as a non-profit, non-governmental organisation to advise Greece on the effects and characteristics of the Diaspora and to act as a formal vehicle for dialogue between Greeks abroad and Greece. A primary project of SAE is the promotion of Hellenic education and culture abroad.<sup>8</sup>

Currently, approximately 2 500 educators, appointed by the Greek Ministry of Education, are working in several countries of the world. The introduction of the “Familiarity with Greek certificate” motivates Greek children abroad to study Greek, as the knowledge of a European language might open an extra door on an educational and/or professional level. Additionally, the decision was taken to support and introduce Greek studies at universities in the host countries.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. HELLENIC SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA: A GENERAL ORIENTATION

When the first Greeks came to South Africa, they found it difficult to learn one or more of the local languages, but in due course they did learn Afrikaans and/or English. They did try to keep their traditions intact, but with regard to assimilation, Dr Piet Koornhof, then Deputy Minister of Immigration, stated in 1968: “Assimilation is a complete acceptance of the language, ideals and way of life of his adopted society. The immigrant could not or should not forget the land of birth, but the children could and should.”<sup>10</sup> The local authorities gave no aid to Greek ethnic education; indeed, the immigrants had some obstacles to overcome. As the Greek children entered the South African education system, they not only had to deal with new languages and

<sup>7</sup> M Rouvelas, *A guide to Greek traditions and customs in America* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Bethesda, 2002), pp. 368-370; *Λαϊκή επιμόρφωση και μετανάστες* [Public education and emigrants] (Athens, 1985), pp. 159, 178.

<sup>8</sup> Rouvelas, pp. 368-370.

<sup>9</sup> *Hellenic Association of Natal* (newsletter), October 2003 - January 2004, pp. 69, 70; *Η Κύπρος μας* (newsletter), January - April 2001, pp. 17-22.

<sup>10</sup> Mantzaris, *The social structure...*, pp. 114, 118.

cultures, but even with possible suspicion and repulsion on the part of schoolmates and teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Ever since their arrival in Cape Town and in the Transvaal, some Greeks wanted to establish ethnic schools, though their efforts met with little success. Many of the pioneer immigrants wanted to return to their homeland as soon as possible. Thus, they did not see the need to establish Greek schools as they thought their children would learn Greek upon their return to Greece.<sup>12</sup> As the second generation grew up, the need for Greek education became evident and the Greek communities entrusted that work to their priests or to local Greeks.<sup>13</sup>

When the first officially appointed Greek teachers arrived in South Africa at the end of the 1970s, it was expected of them to speak English so as to be able to communicate with their pupils. Hellenic education had changed fundamentally. In the early days, the primary aim of the community schools was to teach youngsters so that they would be able to return to Greece. Lately, there has been a shift in the aims of the parties involved. For instance, parents want their children to retain their Hellenic culture and identity – but within the South African context.

Several attempts to start a Greek school in South Africa during the first two decades of the twentieth century proved to be frustrating. In 1916, G Christoforides, a qualified teacher, started a private school in Johannesburg, which soon closed owing to poor attendance. The efforts of Archimandrite Mavrogordatos in 1919, that of another professional teacher from Greece, D Deligiannis, in 1924, as well as that of Archimandrite Nikolopoulos in Pretoria, proved to be fruitless. However, after World War I, Greeks started to realise that they were in South Africa permanently and that there was a constant risk that their children could be assimilated into the host society. This prompted the leaders of the community to move towards the establishment of Greek schools. In 1928, the ambitious idea of the “Great School of the Nation” in Johannesburg was born, but it soon foundered.<sup>14</sup>

In 1933, in Cape Town, Archimandrite Mavreas rejuvenated the Greek school, which had been dormant for some years after the initial efforts of Archimandrite Katsis in 1912. Although it was always the priests who ran the schools, giving catechism classes to young children and adults, that was not the case in Pretoria. There, Eleftheria Voutsas, a qualified teacher from Greece, arrived in the early 1920s

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> EA Mantzaris, *Class and ethnicity the politics and ideologies of the Greek community in South Africa circa 1890-1924* (D.Phil., University of Cape Town, 1982), pp. 202, 354; Mantzaris, *The social structure...*, p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Hellenic Community of Cape Town, *A history of 100 years* (Cape Town, 2000), p. 80; D Paizis, *A short history of the Greek community in Port Elizabeth* (Port Elizabeth, s.a.), p. 13; K Παϊζης, *Η γλώσσα των Ελλήνων της Νότιας Αφρικής* [The language of the Greeks of South Africa], pp. 30-31, 52.

<sup>14</sup> Mantzaris, *Class and ethnicity...*, pp. 301, 372-376; EA Mantzaris, "Greek orthodoxy in South Africa: a historical periodisation" in *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 83, p. 219; Παϊζης, p. 88.

and started the first Greek school at the Orthodox Church. Initially, the school had eight pupils, but soon more pupils attended classes in the afternoons. Mrs Voutsas was succeeded in 1962 by Michael Keramianakis, who taught for a period of almost 40 years.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, by the 1960s, the need for a proper Greek education became even more conspicuous as droves of Greek immigrants arrived in South Africa. The larger and richer Greek communities, such as those in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria, could afford the services of salaried professional teachers, whereas less populous communities, such as those in Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth, had to make do with priests who doubled as teachers.<sup>16</sup>

In 1963, about 215 Greek children attended the 18 community schools in Johannesburg. Approximately 50 went to the "Bertolis School" and another 55 to Mr Tragelis's school. In Cape Town, a concerted effort was made in 1957 to have the Greek school function in a systematic, effective way. Several qualified teachers taught in classrooms hired from the local government or from private schools. In 1969, the school expanded into five branches, catering for the needs of Greek community members in surrounding areas, with about 40 children attending the schools. Hellenic communities throughout the country built new churches, and new schools were opened as it was calculated that there were more than 120 000 Greeks in South Africa at that time (i.e. the 1970s).<sup>17</sup>

The main subjects that were taught in these schools were Greek language, history, geography and religion and they were open for a few hours in the afternoons. Teaching was based on the Greek Ministry of Education's specifications and the textbooks were the same as those used in Greece. Thence, several problems arose since these books were entirely ineffective for South African Greek children as they were intended for the children in Greece. Furthermore, they were written in the purists' language, the diehard tongue that has no future even in Greece. The child actually had to learn four languages: English, Afrikaans, demotic Greek (which was used at home) and the language of the Greek school. Consequently, the children resorted to English and developed a negative attitude towards Greek.<sup>18</sup>

In 1979, the Greek Government decided to send teachers, seconded from its Ministry of Education, to places all over the world to teach the Greek language for terms of three to five years. Educators who went abroad had to face many difficulties, the most serious being the infighting in communities and in schools.

<sup>15</sup> Hellenic Community of Cape Town, pp. 39, 64-65; Mantzaris, "Greek Orthodoxy...", p. 213; Hellenic Community of Pretoria, *90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hellenic Community of Pretoria* (Pretoria, 1998), pp. 111-113.

<sup>16</sup> Παῖζης, p. 88; D Paizis, "The Greeks in Port Elizabeth" in *Looking Back. The Journal of the Historical Society of Port Elizabeth* 38, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Παῖζης, pp. 89-91; Hellenic Community of Cape Town, pp. 46-47, 50, 80; Mantzaris, *The social structure...*, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> Παῖζης, pp. 90-94; Mantzaris, *The social structure...*, pp. 100-101.

These conflicts were often the result of passions that ran high because of political or personal reasons.<sup>19</sup>

In South Africa, classes were held in community halls during the afternoons and pupils were third and fourth generation Greeks whose conversational language was English. Meanwhile, Greek schoolbooks were brought into line with the modern educational theories of the 1980s, and, most importantly, they were now written in demotic Greek. These books were also sent from Greece to Greek schools abroad. In 2001, 112 educators taught the 2 838 children who attended South African Hellenic schools.<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. THE DUTIES OF THE SCHOOLTEACHER

Until 1979, when the first schoolteacher appointed by the Greek Ministry of Education arrived in Bloemfontein, Greek education in Bloemfontein was non-existent. Since then, ten teachers have served the Hellenic School of the city up to the end of 2008. The basic function of the Greek teacher is to teach the children of the Greek community the language of their mothers and fathers. Additionally, Greek history, geography, and the Greek Orthodox religion are also taught to some extent.

The teacher's duties also include the organising of events on Greek national days of remembrance, namely the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, which was the beginning of the Greek revolution against the Turkish occupation (1821),<sup>21</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, the beginning of the war against Fascist Italy (1940).<sup>22</sup> The children have the opportunity to participate in several additional school events every year. The Three Hierarchs' Day (30<sup>th</sup> January) is considered "Protectors of Education Day": when the school year officially starts, the priest blesses the children with Holy Water (in Greek: *agiasmos*). Another event is the carnival (in Greek: *apokries*), which is a cheerful ancient masquerade feast with members of the community dressing up for the occasion. Mother's Day and Father's Day are not as important in Greece as in Western countries and South Africa. Yet, the Hellenic School of Bloemfontein used to organise an annual event on those days. The "Dormition" of the Mother of God (15<sup>th</sup> of August) is a great celebration (in Greek: *paniyiri*), which takes place in the

<sup>19</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private collection (Chios). Notes for a speech by M Aleksakis, Athens, 27 June 2002; Paizis, pp. 13, 21.

<sup>20</sup> *Λαϊκή επιμόρφωση και μετανάστες*, p. 130; Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). M Pagourtzi, Greek education in Africa (report), Athens, February 2002, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the Greek revolt see, for example, JC Bradford, *International encyclopedia of military history* (New York, 2006), pp. 556-557; RE Dupuy and TN Dupuy, *The encyclopedia of military history: from 3500BC to the present* (revised edition, New York, 1977), pp. 776-777; S Sandler (ed.), *Ground warfare an international encyclopedia 1* (Santa Barbara, 2002), p. 338; CM Woodhouse, *Modern Greece a short history* (London, 1968), pp. 206-208.

<sup>22</sup> For more on Greece during World War II see, for example, Woodhouse, pp. 238-256; R Holmes (ed.), *The Oxford companion to military history* (Oxford 2001), p. 374; Sandler (ed.), pp. 337-338; Dupuy and Dupuy, pp. 1075-1076; N Frankland, *The encyclopedia of twentieth century warfare* (New York, 1989), p. 177.

church's courtyard every year. Lastly, there is the Christmas school feast that also means the end of the school year.

During these events, the children recite poems, sing Greek songs, present sketches with patriotic or religious themes, dance traditional dances and participate in joyful games. These celebrations are always an opportunity for the Greeks of Bloemfontein to assemble and have fun together. Furthermore, some excursions, usually to nearby destinations, are organised by the teachers of the Hellenic School. Moreover, with the teacher's assistance, the children make calendars or other works of art, which they then present to the community.

## 5. THE "CLASSROOM" AND SCHOOL PROGRAMME

The Hellenic School of Bloemfontein's classes were presented in the community hall at the Greek Orthodox Church, on the corner of Andries Pretorius and Breë Streets; there is no separate room for the lessons. Certain plans made in 1980 regarding the building of a school, never materialised.<sup>23</sup> When the school started functioning in 1979, neither books nor desks or even a blackboard were available. Gradually the essentials were acquired, and as the years passed, more teaching aids were added, for example: a television set, a video player, a slide projector, microphones and speakers. The Greek Ministry of Education provided the school with video tapes and slides.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately all these were stolen when thieves broke into the hall in 1989, and the items were never replaced.<sup>25</sup>

The hall also included a big stage with side scenes and a curtain, but in 1990 the community decided that more space was needed in the hall and so replaced the stage with a much smaller and plainer one. Two bookcases were placed on either side of the scenes and several associations in Greece provided books. Later, many of these books disappeared because of bad management of the library.<sup>26</sup> The school events usually take place in this hall or in the churchyard. From March 2003, the Greek lessons were given in a classroom kindly made available by the Saint Michael's School, an Anglican school for girls, situated in the Brandwag suburb, not far from the University of the Free State. The parents of the children maintained safety to be the reason for this change, but all school feasts are still held in the community hall at the Greek Orthodox Church. At the moment (2009), the lessons are given at the Eunice Girls School, which is adjacent to the University of the Free State.

<sup>23</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Minutes of the meeting of the Committee, *s.a.* (Henceforth, when reference is made to these minutes, only "Minutes" and the relevant date will be indicated.)

<sup>24</sup> Minutes, 12 April 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004.

The Hellenic School in Bloemfontein has always functioned on an afternoon basis (from 14:30 to 17:30, or sometimes to 16:00) and sometimes on Saturdays (9:30 to 12:30).<sup>27</sup> This means that children have to attend the Greek school after their daily English or Afrikaans schooling. Their schedule is already overloaded with homework as well as participation in the sports activities of their respective schools. The ideal of involving Greek children in typical Greek sports is impossible to realise; thus they attend the Greek school only once or twice a week.<sup>28</sup>

Most of the Greek children would not attend the Greek school if they had a choice. They even prefer to speak English or Afrikaans (but mostly English) to one another, languages that are easier for them to learn and speak. Of course, the Greek children's parents and grandparents prefer their offspring to speak Greek, and consequently send them to the Greek school. In the hearts and minds of the Greek children, the Hellenic School presents not just an opportunity to learn a language, but also an additional chance to meet and socialise with each other.<sup>29</sup>

The teacher separates the children into "grades", depending on their knowledge of the Greek language and their age. With regard to their number, about 40 to 50 children register at the Hellenic School every year. The number of children who regularly attend, however, are at least ten less than the original number.<sup>30</sup> The schoolteacher has the support of the school committee: a body composed of parents, mostly mothers, who work as assistants when the school needs to organise a function.<sup>31</sup>

## 6. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHER AND THE COMMUNITY

Every teacher who serves in Bloemfontein naturally develops a relationship with the permanent Greek residents, managing to become admired by many, although not by all.<sup>32</sup> However, and perhaps what is most important, the teacher has always been the connecting link between the Greek immigrants and the motherland. He or she is the person who brings to the foreign country the tone of the changes prevailing in the homeland. It must be kept in mind that the vast majority of the Greek immigrants, as well as their children, have in mind an undeveloped Greece or a place of origin they

<sup>27</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School - Parents of the children, 6 February 1980 and 28 January 1988 (communications).

<sup>28</sup> Minutes, 8 December 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Interviews with Mrs A Morfi, Bloemfontein, 13 November 2003; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004; Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios): E Georgakis, *O μετανάστης*, Bloemfontein, 1982 (unpublished manuscript), p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes, 8 December 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes, 31 January 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Interviews with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004.



have never personally seen.<sup>33</sup> The teacher is called *daskale* by all Greeks, young and old alike. This Greek word is a respectful and formal word for “teacher”.

The Committee members (i.e. the members of the local Greek governing body) watch the school’s progress closely and receive good cooperation from the teacher. Furthermore, the teacher regularly attends Committee meetings, a fact that shows the importance that the community attaches to Greek education. It is only natural to presume that the Committee sometimes interferes with the schoolteacher’s work, but in reality this does not happen often; only when problems arise. In this regard, the most common problem is a decline in the school attendance of children.<sup>34</sup>

The Greek Ministry of Education pays the teacher. All the educators abroad receive their salary in Greece and an additional one, as motivation, depending on which country they find themselves in. In South Africa, this extra pay was US\$ 800 per month in 1990 and US\$ 1 317 per month in 2002.<sup>35</sup> Yet, the truth is that an employer-employee relationship develops between all the teachers and the Committee. The community offers the teachers benefits, such as a monthly “salary”, which in 1978 was R400 and in 2002 as much as R1 500, a furnished flat and a car, to mention only a few. Sometimes they set requirements irrelevant to the teacher’s conventional duties – something that was at the bottom of several disagreements and tension.<sup>36</sup>

The parents of the children pay a small amount in tuition fees to the community to cover the school’s expenses. Thus, the diminished attendance of the pupils also has an economic impact: the smaller the number of pupils involved, the more deficient the school’s financial balance becomes. The Committee usually asks the teacher to explain this state of affairs. Furthermore, the Committee members themselves, on occasion, propose ideas to make the school more attractive to the children.<sup>37</sup>

## 7. THE YEARS UP TO 1978

### 7.1 The early years of Greek education in Bloemfontein

As has already been indicated in the introduction, the first Greeks settled in Bloemfontein in the 1880s. But in contrast to places like Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, few Greeks made Bloemfontein their home, and by 1923 there were only about 50 Greeks

<sup>33</sup> Interviews with Mrs A Morfi, Bloemfontein, 13 November 2003; Mrs M Kitsopoulou, Bloemfontein, 25 February 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, 8 December 1986; Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Mr E Georgakis - Mr H Savas, 5 May 1981 (letter).

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, 28 April 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Minutes, 3 May 1982 and 5 June 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes, 19 October 1986.

in Bloemfontein. By 1956 there were some 21 Greek families in Bloemfontein, and by 2004 there were approximately 140 Greek families in the city.<sup>38</sup>

Many Greek immigrants who settled in Bloemfontein soon realised their children's need to learn the Greek language. Besides, many of them emigrated with the conviction that after a few years they would return, and their children would grow up in the motherland. The years, however, passed, they started families, and the new generations grew up in an environment that did not encourage the use of the Greek language.

Before World War II, the "Bertolis School" in Johannesburg (run by Father Elias Bertolis and his son) was the only feasible solution for a Bloemfontein Greek who wanted his/her child to study in a properly structured Greek educational institution. Yet, that school was expensive and only a few children from Bloemfontein stayed in its hostel for a year or so.<sup>39</sup>

Occasionally, two Greeks gave private Greek language lessons in Bloemfontein, namely Clara Roundy-Christoforou,<sup>40</sup> and Dorothy Manidis, the wife of Georgios Manidis, who served as chairman of the Committee for a decade. Dorothy Trupos, as her maiden name was, returned to Greece with her family in 1939, and they were trapped there because of the war. What is more, she was involved in the resistance against the German occupation (1941-1944).<sup>41</sup> At the end of World War II, she returned to Bloemfontein with sufficient knowledge of the Greek language to teach some children privately from time to time.<sup>42</sup>

## 7.2 Hristos Tarnanis

Hristos Tarnanis, an emigrant from Asia Minor (1924), completed the third grade (equivalent to grade 9 today) at the "Anaksagoras School" of Izmir (Smyrna) in Turkey. Nevertheless, he was a cultured and perceptive person, who dedicated a large part of his life to the common benefit of the Greeks in Bloemfontein. Later, in 1955, he was the chairman of the first Committee. He soon realised that the youth was the future of Hellenism in the foreign country. "What I do, I do it for the youth", he used to say. Pure Greek and lover of the Greek language that he was, he got upset when he heard parents speaking English to their children.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; *Hellenic community of Bloemfontein, 22<sup>nd</sup> annual ball* (brochure), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Interviews with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Mrs A Morfi, Bloemfontein, 13 November 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the resistance against the German occupation see, for example, Holmes (ed.), p. 374; Woodhouse, pp. 246-253.

<sup>42</sup> *H Ομόνοια* (newsletter), April-June 1998, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Mr D Tarnanis, Bloemfontein, 27 February 2004; Mrs A Morfi, Bloemfontein, 13 November 2003.

Around 1943, Mr Tarnanis rented a small room somewhere in what is now the Sanlam Plaza in the city centre of Bloemfontein, and putting in a few little tables and benches transformed it into a school.<sup>44</sup> Only a few children and some university students attended that “school” to learn the basics of the Greek language. Yet, grandparents today remember those days with nostalgia while others regret their lack of participation.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of the Greeks did not support that attempt, probably because of an indifferent attitude towards the aim of the project. Thus, the “school” closed after two years.<sup>46</sup>

### 7.3 The priests that taught Greek

Around 1960, Father Agathaggelos, the priest of the Orthodox Church in Welkom, visited Bloemfontein and held Greek language classes in a classroom of the President Brand School (later the Musicon). However, only three or four children got involved in these courses, and so this activity soon came to an end.<sup>47</sup>

Father Ierotheos Petrakis gave Greek lessons in the Greek Orthodox Church’s community hall during his stay in Bloemfontein. It was not an officially organised school, but many children learnt how to write and speak a little Greek.<sup>48</sup> Father Petrakis was strict and a perfectionist. This attitude deterred children from going to his “school”. It appears that he also did not communicate well with the children. Yet, he kept the school functioning according to the Committee’s requirements, even though he received no remuneration.<sup>49</sup>

## 8. THE TEACHERS APPOINTED IN BLOEMFONTEIN BY THE GREEK MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

### 8.1 Evaggelos Georgakis

In 1978, the Greek Government decided to send educators to Greek settlements in South Africa to aid them in keeping contact with the motherland. The Committee of the Hellenic Community of Bloemfontein immediately acted so as to acquire a teacher for their children as well.<sup>50</sup> It must be stressed that all the teachers who

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mr D Tarnanis, Bloemfontein, 27 February 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Interviews with Mr K Trissos, Bloemfontein, 25 February 2004; Mrs A Morfi, Bloemfontein, 13 November 2003.

<sup>46</sup> *H Omónoia* (newsletter), April-June 1998, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Mrs M Kitsopoulou, Bloemfontein, 25 February 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004; Mr S Tyrannis, Bloemfontein, 17 October 2003.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Committee of the Hellenic Community - the members of the Community, December 1978 (communication).

served the Greek school of Bloemfontein were primary school teachers, while in other, bigger cities, high school teachers, theologians, and even gymnasts were sometimes appointed.

The first Greek teacher, Evaggelos Georgakis, who had previously served in West Germany for a year, arrived in Bloemfontein with his wife, Niki, at the beginning of 1979. He was 50 years old and had two adult children who never came to South Africa. The community granted them a furnished apartment opposite the President Hotel, with all expenses paid. Being a sociable man, he was invited to a Greek home every weekend. He participated in all the feasts and other social activities, while he danced the traditional Greek dances very well.<sup>51</sup>

The school functioned in the community hall at the Greek Orthodox Church, but there were neither desks nor a blackboard or anything else that reminded one of a schoolroom.<sup>52</sup> However, in 1979, 42 children were taught the Greek language, history, religion, and geography.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the teacher was requested to give lessons to adults who wanted to improve their Greek – an opportunity that many people looked forward to. All the Greek national feasts were celebrated in the hall; the children, under the teacher's guidance, recited poems and performed small plays, and the teacher, as was the custom, made a speech. In 1980, after money had been collected from community members, desks were bought as well as a Greek typewriter. Until then, all the Committee's as well as the school's communications were written by hand.<sup>54</sup>

The greatest problem in those years was transporting the children to the Greek school in the afternoons. The majority of the parents worked and others did not have a car available. Although the community had not yet acquired a car for the teacher (only for the priest), Mr Georgakis took up this duty. Every day, using a borrowed car, he picked up the children who had a transportation problem at their daily schools, and when the Greek school closed for the day, he gave them a lift back home. Although it was tiring work, he was rewarded with extra pay (R100 a month) by the community.<sup>55</sup> His "salary" in 1982 was R400 a month.<sup>56</sup>

Mr Georgakis also wrote a 240-page manuscript with the title "Ο μετανάστης" (*The emigrant*). It was typewritten in a very simple style, in order, as he said in the preface, to be understandable to everyone. It was divided into three sections. The first one describes the history of two friends who left their village and emigrated

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with Mr S Tyranis, Bloemfontein, 17 October 2003; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004; Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004.

<sup>52</sup> *H Ομόνοια* (newsletter), October-December 1979, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic Community - Director of Department of Education of Free State, April 1979 (letter).

<sup>54</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). The Committee of the Community - the members of the Community, s.a. (communication).

<sup>55</sup> Minutes, 7 March 1982.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes, 17 January 1981.

to West Germany (it is unknown whether these persons are/were real, yet, it was a very common story for Greeks during the 1960s). In the second part, these same people settle in Cape Town, South Africa. Then the style becomes very personal and the writer deals with his stay in Bloemfontein. He mentions many persons and situations, while he alludes to the strengths and weaknesses of the Greeks, which of course, followed them abroad. Finally, the third section contains certain elements regarding the history of South Africa.<sup>57</sup>

This “book” includes a few photographs (although not of good quality) and it is an interesting source relating to the history of the Greeks in Bloemfontein. However, one could question the accuracy of its contents, considering the subjective style it is written in. Approximately ten copies of this manuscript were made by the teacher (bound by a string), which he offered to some of his friends, but unfortunately it is difficult to find any of these copies today.<sup>58</sup>

Evaggelos Georgakis, by his own admission, spent four good years in Bloemfontein.<sup>59</sup> He requested the Greek Ministry of Education to stay for one more year but they did not grant the request. On 14 August 1982, the community organised a farewell party for him and he was also given a R100 gift.<sup>60</sup> One year after his return to Greece, he went to England to have a tumour removed from his brain, but did not survive the operation. Even today, certain Greeks of Bloemfontein keep contact with his family, while everyone has a good word to say about him.<sup>61</sup>

## 8.2 Evaggelos Kyriazis

After Evaggelos Georgakis’s departure, which took place before the end of the school year (probably because of his illness), the Committee members asked for another teacher via the Greek Consulate in Johannesburg.<sup>62</sup> Evaggelos Kyriazis arrived in Bloemfontein on 12 January 1983 and took up his duties as teacher.<sup>63</sup> A young man of 27 years old, he stayed in the flat which the community provided. He associated with a couple of Greeks from the Peloponnese, which was also his homeland, though

<sup>57</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). E Georgakis, *Ο μετανάστης*. Bloemfontein, 1982 (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>58</sup> Interviews with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004; Mr S Tyranis, Bloemfontein, 17 October 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Mr S Tyranis, Bloemfontein, 17 October 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, 1 August 1982.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, 1 August 1982 and 18 October 1982.

<sup>63</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - Greek Consulate, Johannesburg, 12 January 1983 (communication).

he did not like the way these people showed off their wealth.<sup>64</sup> At the beginning of September 1983, he was transferred to Johannesburg.<sup>65</sup>

### 8.3 Froso Haldezou

Mrs Haldezou, sister of the then vice-chairman of the Committee, was of Plomari, from the island of Lesvos, and in August 1983 she came to Bloemfontein with her husband and their child. Her spouse, an ex-sailor, worked in the roadhouse business of his brother-in-law.<sup>66</sup>

Froso Haldezou immediately started teaching in September 1983, after the departure of Evaggelos Kyriazis. She was a good teacher. During her stay in Bloemfontein, she also had three more children. Yet, that was at the expense of the school, which, because of the pregnancies, repeatedly had to be closed for long periods. "The children joyfully went home and told their parents that they would not have to go to Greek school as long as the teacher was pregnant."<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, certain parents ascertained that sometimes their children looked after the teacher's infants when they should have been in school learning Greek. This situation dissatisfied many parents who ceased sending their children to school.<sup>68</sup>

The Committee members, considering the complaints as well as the potential financial problems that could develop,<sup>69</sup> informed the Education Department of the Greek Consulate in Johannesburg of this situation, asking them to recall Froso Haldezou, and appoint another teacher for the year 1987.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, the education counsellor visited Bloemfontein, and a meeting took place in the community hall where all concerned were present, i.e. the teacher, the Committee members, and the parents. The main argument of the community members was that in 1979, the first year during which the school functioned, 42 pupils attended out of a total number of 80 Greek children. In 1986, only 28 children participated in the school out of a total number of 120. Whether these numbers are correct is unknown. In any case, the counsellor tried to pacify all concerned, but the fact is that Mrs Haldezou left Bloemfontein by the end of the year 1986, being transferred to Springs.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - Greek Consulate, Johannesburg, 31 August 1983 (communication).

<sup>66</sup> Interviews with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Minutes, 4 February 1985, 18 June 1985 and 18 September 1986.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes, 19 October 1986.

<sup>70</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). The Committee of the Community - The counsellor of the Education Department of the Greek Consulate, Johannesburg, 19 September 1986 (letter).

<sup>71</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). The Committee of the Community - Mrs F Haldezou, 22 June 1987 (certificate).

## 8.4 Theodoros Vroulitis

Mr Vroulitis was the teacher of the Greek community of Harrismith. He was married to Ismini, daughter of a Greek immigrant family. He was transferred to Bloemfontein, where his wife's family had settled earlier.<sup>72</sup> He took up office in January 1987, when the significant number of 55 children registered at the Hellenic School, which was divided into two levels. Lessons were given every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday morning, 20 hours a week in total. The teacher received a monthly salary of R1 000 from the community.<sup>73</sup>

Looking over the communication papers that Mr Vroulitis regularly sent to the parents, the Committee, and elsewhere too, it becomes clear that he was a very tidy and methodical person. The school functioned like clockwork, and he compiled handwritten statistical tables as well as lists stipulating the children's progress, their absences, etc. Sometimes, he reproached negligent parents in writing for not sending their children to school. Furthermore, he was very strict regarding the school programme, and he did not hesitate to expel from the school or fail children who did not do well or who were frequently absent.<sup>74</sup>

During Greek national festivals Vroulitis was often given the chance to address the Greeks, and he pointed out the need for maintaining their language, their religion, and also their ethics and customs. His writings – that which have been saved – almost always include patriotic and moralising messages.<sup>75</sup>

Theodoros Vroulitis organised many festivities, not only for the school, but also for the community. Through several fund raising efforts arranged by him, he managed to collect a significant amount of money on behalf of the community. Moreover, during numerous Greek festivals and other events, he was the person who spit-roasted the lambs, and selected the music that would be played. For these services, the community rewarded him with some extra money.<sup>76</sup> He also had the support of his wife, who occasionally helped him, but mostly painted very beautiful Greek pictures on canvas and used them as decor at school events or other social occasions. Unfortunately, the majority of these works disappeared.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, Mr Vroulitis initiated the publication of the community's quarterly newsletter, with the title *Η Ομόνοια* (*The concord*). This "magazine" appeared for the

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes, 28 January 1987.

<sup>74</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - The counsellor of the Education Department of the Greek Consulate, Johannesburg, 30 April 1987 (pupils list); Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - The Committee of the Community, 10 February 1988 (update).

<sup>75</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - The parents of the children, *s.a.* (communication); *Η Ομόνοια* (newsletter), December 1987 - February 1988, pp. 5-8.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes, 27 May 1987, 12 March 1989 and 19 February 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Interviews with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

first time in December 1979 with the title “Newsletter”, and since December 1986 under the title *Η Ομόνοια*. Although the quality was bad, one can find in it interesting elements relating to the history of the Hellenic community of Bloemfontein.

It appeared that everyone was happy with this active and creative school-teacher. When his formal services ended in December 1989, he requested one year’s leave without payment from the Greek Ministry of Education. He intended staying in Bloemfontein, where his family was, and to continue being the Greek teacher there. The Education Department of the Greek Consulate in Johannesburg agreed, and a private contract was signed between Mr Vroulitis and the Committee of the community.<sup>78</sup>

Then, in September 1990, after disagreements with the community and Committee, Theodoros Vroulitis was released from his duties as teacher of the Hellenic School of Bloemfontein. He was paid the sum of R3 250 for the outstanding balance of his contract.<sup>79</sup>

## 8.5 Nikolaos Karaiskos

Nikolaos Karaiskos succeeded Theodoros Vroulitis. The new teacher was a young man, unmarried, and he had completed three and a half years of postgraduate studies in England.<sup>80</sup> Only a few children attended the Greek school when he took over. What is interesting is that only Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays were the schooldays. Yet, he requested the parents’ collaboration, aiming at a dynamic start for the next year (1991). In addition, many teenagers as well as adults expressed the wish to participate in Greek courses.<sup>81</sup>

Although the teacher wanted a R1 000 monthly “salary”, the Committee members decided to offer him R740 per month plus R20 for every pupil over the number of 37. Obviously, this arrangement was made with a view to motivate the teacher to attract as many children as possible. He consequently promised to publish the newsletter (*Η Ομόνοια*), and collect the tuition fees from the parents. Nikolaos Karaiskos was the first teacher to whom the community made a car available. Its purchase was achieved after the community members had made a financial contribution.<sup>82</sup>

There were no complaints regarding Mr Karaiskos’s work or his conduct. He was loved by everyone, although he only associated with young people of his own age.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, arrangements were made with the Consular Education Depart-

<sup>78</sup> Minutes, 13 December 1989.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes, 18 June 1990 and 13 October 1990.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004; Minutes, 12 September 1990.

<sup>81</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Hellenic School of Bloemfontein - The parents of the children, 19 September 1990 (communication).

<sup>82</sup> Minutes, 12 September 1990.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004; Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004.



ment in Johannesburg, as well as the Chairman of the Hellenic Associations of South Africa, and by the end of 1991, Nikolaos Karaiskos was transferred to the South African Hellenic Education and Technical Institute (SAHETI) in Johannesburg.<sup>84</sup> This is a very expensive private school (albeit that it gets support from the Greek government), which opened its doors in 1974 and is attended by both Greek (about 800) and non-Greek (about 200) children.<sup>85</sup> According to P Safianos “Nikolaos Karaiskos was extremely good for the Greeks of Bloemfontein”.<sup>86</sup>

## 8.6 Spyros Tsartsidis

Spyros Tsartsidis was appointed to a Greek school somewhere in Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of the Congo), but unforeseen problems forced him to leave.<sup>87</sup> He reached Bloemfontein in mid-1991, before Nikolaos Karaiskos’s departure, and they lived in the same apartment for a while.<sup>88</sup> Mr Tsartsidis was about 28 years old when he came to Bloemfontein. He was a keen storyteller, and very talkative. He also liked the army and participated in parachuting. He used to dress up as a military man and wear parachutist badges. A very sociable man, he easily associated with Greeks as well as with Afrikaans-speaking people. Yet, he was often involved in quarrels, and once he badly injured his arm in a fight. That also led to him meeting his future wife, who was a physiotherapist, and with whom he still lives in Greece with their two children.<sup>89</sup> Their wedding took place in a non-orthodox church because of friction between the priest and the teacher, even though Father Vasladelis invited him to the church and taught him how to chant.<sup>90</sup>

Mr Tsartsidis was very strict and consequently only three or four children attended the Greek school. Nevertheless, he knew how to organise a successful school feast, and he also enjoyed public speaking.<sup>91</sup> During his sojourn in Bloemfontein, only one issue of *H Ομόνοια* was published.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Mantzaris, *The social structure ...*, pp. 97-103, 181; Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Annotation of the Federation of Hellenic Communities of South Africa – the General Secretariat of the Greeks Abroad, SAE conference, Thessalonica, November 1995, p. 1; *The Star*, 25 March 1998, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004; Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Interviews with Mrs D Fatsea, Bloemfontein, 2 February 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004; Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Father E Vasladelis - The Committee of the community, 27 October 1993 (declaration of a good collaboration).

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004; Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004.

<sup>92</sup> *H Ομόνοια* (newsletter), July - September 1995.

One of Mr Tsartsidis's contributions was the placement of a heroes' monument in marble in the corner of the school courtyard with the ancient sign on it: "ΑΝΔΡΩΝ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΩΝ ΠΑΣΑ ΓΗ ΤΑΦΟΣ... 18.3.1992" ("For eminent men every land is a grave"). Theodoros Tsartsidis stayed in Bloemfontein for five years and left at the end of 1994.

### 8.7 Dimitris Margaritis

Dimitris Margaritis took over the Hellenic School of Bloemfontein when the 1997 school year started. A young man, 26 years old, he was a quiet and shy person, "almost like a pupil".<sup>93</sup> The Committee provided him with a car, as well as a R1 000 monthly "salary". He, in turn, also had to present Greek classes to adults, and assist the community when a social event was to be organised.<sup>94</sup> Mr Margaritis was a novice, very shy, and a totally inexperienced teacher. He left Bloemfontein in December 1997.<sup>95</sup>

### 8.8 Georgios Tsiftsis

Georgios Tsiftsis, his spouse, and their two children arrived in Bloemfontein in January 1998. They first stayed in a guesthouse, then in a townhouse, and later the community rented the apartment belonging to a Greek for them. Meanwhile, a third child was added to the family. Mr Tsiftsis was about 33 years old, of good character, who from the first moment he came here impatiently wanted to meet all the Greeks of Bloemfontein. Father Vastadelis was the person who assisted him in this. With his conduct and also his work, Tsiftsis earned the appreciation and love of all the Greeks of Bloemfontein, while his wife, Varvara, always stood by him, lending a hand in any way she could.<sup>96</sup>

His activities started with the republication of *Η Ομόνοια*, which was available on a quarterly basis throughout the period of Mr Tsiftis's stay in Bloemfontein. Reading his articles in this newsletter, a romantic and sensitive man is revealed who was indignant of injustices all over the world. Many times, he identified and accused globalisation and the "new order" as the root cause of the suffering of countless people. Although an ardent patriot, he did not hesitate to stigmatise the faults of "neo-Hellenes" (the recent Greek generations). Furthermore, on many occasions he reminded the readers of the sacrifices that Greeks had made in the name of freedom and democracy. This "magazine" also contains articles written by Greeks of Bloemfontein, as well as of the motherland, usually in a patriotic, informative

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>94</sup> Minutes, 5 June 1997.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004; Father E Vasladelis, 21 May 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004.

though seldom humoristic style. Additionally, the teacher interviewed some of the older Greek immigrants of Bloemfontein, who talked to him about the old times. Moreover, through his initiative, clothes and games were collected for children suffering from HIV/AIDS.<sup>97</sup>

Georgios Tsiftsis organised a large number of school events in the Hellenic community hall at the Greek Orthodox Church, providing entertainment not only for the children, but for the adults as well. He did not limit the events to typical national Greek feasts, and displayed sketches and children's handicrafts, and organised entertaining games in the courtyard, to name only a few. He additionally arranged many volleyball, table tennis, and friendly soccer events in which quite a number of adults as well as teenagers were involved. Through his prominent work, the teacher's goal was not only to entertain the community, but more importantly, to bind them together. Furthermore, Tsiftsis participated in the founding of both a theatrical and a choral group consisting of Greeks.<sup>98</sup>

One of his important achievements was the organisation of the school library. Sending letters to many cultural associations and also newspapers in Greece, and after having been interviewed by a Greek radio station, he managed to attract the attention of several people who sent a number of books to the Hellenic School of Bloemfontein. Both the children and the adults could borrow these books of diverse content.<sup>99</sup>

The children loved Georgios Tsiftsis; they did not grumble about going to the Greek school as he was a pleasant man with a great sense of humour.<sup>100</sup> He arranged many excursions for the children as well as for the parents of the Greek school's children, which was much appreciated by them.<sup>101</sup> He often arranged fund raisings to collect money for the benefit of the community. Furthermore, he held classes for adults, and he also visited Kimberley once a month, giving lessons to a small number of local Greek children. For these services, the teacher received an extra payment from each learner.<sup>102</sup>

In 2001, Mr Tsiftsis found a way to separate the area where the Greek lessons were given from the rest of the hall. He commissioned an Afrikaans-speaking Lebanese carpenter to make four wooden wheeled panels and commissioned an Afrikaans-speaking lady artist to paint traditional Greek pictures on them. The artist also added some maxims on them, hoping that they would inspire the pupils. These panels were eventually displayed and a so-called "classroom" was created. This

<sup>97</sup> *H Omónoia* (various newsletter items), 1998-2002.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *H Omónoia* (newsletter), January - March 1999, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Interviews with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004.

<sup>101</sup> *H Omónoia* (newsletter), January-March 1998, p. 17; April-June 1998, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

partition was removed in 2003, when more space was needed for a big function in the hall, and unfortunately it was never put back.<sup>103</sup>

Georgios Tsiftsis became part and parcel of Hellenism in Bloemfontein. He associated with all the Greeks without exception and was also compassionate towards people with health or personal problems.<sup>104</sup> He was familiar with all the community members, and he never behaved badly or lost his temper. He always was a gentleman.<sup>105</sup>

When his five-year contract expired at the end of 2002, he requested the Greek Ministry of Education to prolong his stay in Bloemfontein for one more year. They did not accede to this request and Georgios Tsiftsis returned to Greece as the friend of many of the Greeks in Bloemfontein. However, after his successor, Georgios Kateleon (see section 8.9, *infra*) had returned to Greece at the end of 2004, Georgios Tsiftsis returned to Bloemfontein and taught until the end of 2008, when he went to the SAHETI School in Johannesburg. For the same period (2005-2008), Mrs Dina Nani was also a Greek teacher in Bloemfontein.

### 8.9 Georgios Katoleon

In January 2003, Georgios Katoleon arrived in Bloemfontein with his wife Hristina and their seven-year old daughter, Marianna. They rented a house in the suburb of Westdene where they lived for two years. Both these years the Greek School functioned in a classroom made available by Saint Michael's School. Yet, all the events in connection with the Greek School continued taking place at the Greek Hall; i.e. at the Greek Orthodox Church.

Katoleon started teaching traditional Greek dances, but soon ceased to do so due to the lack of both time and interest. Furthermore, with his wife's assistance, they twice published the school's calendar. The 2003 calendar contained pictures of various Greek areas while the 2004 one contained traditional Greek recipes. The Katoleon family returned to Greece in December 2004, but not before Georgios started researching the history of the Greek community in Bloemfontein for a Master's degree in History, under the supervision of Professor André Wessels, University of the Free State, which he successfully completed in 2006.

## 9. THE GREEK SUNDAY SCHOOL

Religion is traditionally an integral part of the Greek education system, and consequently the history of the Greek Sunday School in Bloemfontein will be briefly

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Interviews with Mr H Savas, Bloemfontein, 11 February 2004; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004.

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with Mrs M Kitsopoulou, Bloemfontein, 25 February 2004; Mr P Sofianos, Bloemfontein, 19 March 2004; Mr G Kritzas, Bloemfontein, 22 April 2004.

discussed. Several Greek children used to attend the Anglican Sunday school when there was no Greek Orthodox priest in Bloemfontein. The priest was also responsible for Sunday school after the Divine service,<sup>106</sup> but certain factors made it impossible for him to fulfil this duty. Perhaps the parents as well as the children were not motivated to stay for Sunday school after the service.<sup>107</sup>

In 1986, a new arrangement regarding the Sunday school was put into effect. It was decided that Theano Karidi, a woman interested in literature and a very religious person from Cyprus, would run the Sunday school. It took place in the community hall simultaneously with the service. The parents went to the church and their children to the hall, and only when the Divine service was about to end, all of them attended the last portion of it.<sup>108</sup>

Mrs Karidi managed to attract roughly 60 children, and later in 1990, when she left Bloemfontein, Mrs Andrula Kotaridu took over from her with 30 children attending the Greek Sunday school. From 1998 until 2002, three young women conducted the Sunday school, namely Maria Sava, Irini Retsina and Irini Sofiadeli. Communication between the children and the catechist was in Greek, though in later years in English. Bible verses were explained, as well as Church life; the children learnt poems, and also sang religious songs.<sup>109</sup> The Sunday school was frequently involved in the organisation of school functions, taking into account that more or less the same children attended both schools.<sup>110</sup> Only pupils attended the Greek Sunday school, and it seems that during certain periods more children participated in the Sunday school than in the Greek school.

## 10. EVALUATION

The majority of the Greeks who settled in Bloemfontein successfully furthered the education of their children, notwithstanding the fact that most of them were illiterate people, occupied all day long by running their businesses. What is true is that Greek education could not be developed as early in Bloemfontein as in other, bigger South African cities. Yet, the efforts towards this aim depended on individuals who faced difficulties owing to the parents' and children's lack of time, the lack of expertise of some of the educators, and especially the lack of interest evinced by some of the community members.

When the first teacher appointed by the Greek Ministry of Education arrived in Bloemfontein in 1979, and the Hellenic School officially functioned, it was con-

<sup>106</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). Archbishop Pavlos - Father Polikarpos Neonakis, 1 June 1979 (letter).

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Father E Vasladelis, Bloemfontein, 21 May 2004.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *H Ομόνοια* (newsletter), January-March 1999, p. 8.

sidered a great contribution by the Greek state. The immigrants henceforth tried to take advantage of this opportunity, motivating their children to attend the Greek school. However, problems arose on occasions. It is obvious that the personalities as well as the abilities of the teachers were diverse, but the truth is that the majority of them did fairly well – and sometimes excelled. Consequently, it cannot be denied that in 1989, the Greeks of Bloemfontein were proud to declare “there is no Greek child in town unable to speak his/her grandparents’ language”.<sup>111</sup> The Hellenic School in Bloemfontein continues to play an important role in keeping up the links between the local Greek community and the fatherland, and in upholding the Greek language, culture and traditions. The Greek community and its school in Bloemfontein is small if compared to similar communities in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban, but its history is not less important.

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<sup>111</sup> Georgios Katoleon Private Collection (Chios). History of Hellenism in South Africa - Hellenic Community of Bloemfontein, 23 March 1992 (open letter).