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Perceptions of Conflict: Greeks and Turks in each other's mirrors

Hercules Millas

The Greek-Turkish controversy has been approached from a variety of perspectives over the last few decades. While innumerable articles and books have been written on the conflict itself, there are no historical studies on the literature and discourses employed by the parties in question. Such a review would shed light on the historical dimension of the controversy, and more specifically, on the ways in which the parties perceived, experienced, and administered the conflict. It would also contribute to an evaluation of prevalent tendencies today, and to forecasting future developments.

This paper will begin by charting the phases through which *perceptions* of the 'conflict' have passed, before considering the images and role-conceptions of 'Self' and 'Other' employed by the agents. There are three main identifiable phases in the history of agents' perceptions about the past. During the first period, the trend was to place the blame entirely on the 'Other'. In the next phase, and over the last two decades, the controversy was being 'explained' mostly by making references to the (negative) role played by certain institutions and administrative practices, rather than that of individuals. In the third stage, mostly in academic circles over the last few years, the causes of the conflict have been sought in the societies themselves.

Of course, these phases do not constitute neat sequences in which each successive phase totally eradicates the pervious one. Indeed, all three kinds of views continue to find expression among Greeks, Turks, and third parties involved today. The aim of this paper, then, is to investigate these diverse ways in which the parties conceptualize the bilateral conflict, and to

evaluate the consequent dynamics of this conflict.

First phase: Nation-states and the imagined history of a conflict

The Greek-Turkish conflict is one with clear ethnic connotations: such a conflict could not have existed before the era of nationalism. Indeed, it should be emphasized that there was no Greek-Turkish controversy before the nineteenth century, as 'the Greeks' and 'the Turks' did not even exist as national entities then. There were of course different tensions at the time— and probably even worse – between the Christians and Muslims, the Byzantines and the Ottomans. However, the so-called 'historical Greek-Turkish enmity' is a relatively late product of nationalism and of the two nation states. The notorious hatred between Greeks and Turks is less a 'historical' phenomenon and more an outcome of recent national constructions. It was during the nineteenth century that the 'Other' – the Ottoman 'Turk' – was constructed in Greek historiography as the ultimate negative figure: despotic, barbaric, backward, uncivilized, cruel, corrupt, perverted, exploitative, and so on. In general, this image was not different from the one prevalent in the 'West' *vis-à-vis* the 'Turk'. [1] Before the establishment of the Greek nation-state, the image of the 'Other' was either a relatively 'balanced' one, or else the concept of an 'enemy of the nation' was not a prominent one. This is discernible in the memoirs of the Phanariots (the high class Greeks of Istanbul), and even in the memoirs of the fighters of the Greek Revolution of 1821-1830. [2] In these memoirs, the Ottomans and the Turks, and especially the dignitaries of the state, are not characterized as cruel barbarians, but rather as wise people and/or decent opponents. In the same period, and on the other side of the Aegean, the word 'Turk' had not even acquired a positive meaning among the Ottomans. Their world was one of 'states' and religious communities, and not yet one of 'ethnic groups' and 'nations'.

The establishment of the two nation states, Greece in 1830 and Turkey in 1923, brought on the first phase in conflict perceptions identified here: this involved demonizing the 'Other' and exalting 'our nation'. In this changed political and ideological atmosphere, new dynamics appeared: a) the citizens began to perceive of themselves as members of a national group, b) they began to perceive other groups as nations in turn, c) a discourse of 'Self' and 'Other' was constructed, within which permanent national characteristics were attributed to each, uniformly positive and negative respectively. This discourse can be detected in all nationalist texts produced in the two 'nation-states'.

A study of Greek and Turkish novels, for example, sheds light on these different 'Self-Other' perceptions in nationalist discourses, and how they appeared during a certain period, manifesting a new understanding of the past and present. In general, the emergence of modern Greek and Turkish literature was generally in step with the process of nation building and the search for a national identity. The first Greek novel was published in 1834, five years after the establishment of the Greek state, whereas the first Turkish novel appeared in 1872, three decades prior to the emergence of the Turkish nationalist movement and fifty years before the establishment of the Turkish state. [3] There was thus a certain asymmetry between the emergence of nationalism and that of the novel as a literary form. The implications of this can be seen in the different ways the 'Other' was portrayed in the earliest novels of the two communities. In the first Greek novels, the 'Turks' are presented as (meaning that they were *perceived*

as) a nation with common negative characteristics, as the historical enemy, as a source of problems, and as a threat.

[4]

In the first Turcophone novels, however, the Greeks do not appear as the 'Other'. Before the concept of national identity becomes dominant within Ottoman society, the Turcophone novel either does not make much of the Greeks or else, whenever Greeks appear, they are not identified as members of a nation. They are rather presented as individuals, or as citizens of the Ottoman state, sometimes with some positive or neutral ethnic characteristics. They are certainly not portrayed as ethnically negative stereotypes.

[5]

The appearance of the Young Turks marked the end of this school of writing. The 'Ottomanists' stopped writing and publishing their works around 1912, and a new generation of authors appeared. [6] From then on, nationalism existed not only as an ideology and political movement, but also as a rhetoric that ran through all texts: historiography, textbooks, literature, newspapers, and so on. This national discourse functioned to legitimize all military and/or political actions taken against the 'Other'. In the era of nation states, depictions of the 'Other' in Greek and Turkish texts were almost identical, but always as a mirror image of each other: the enemy, a source of political problems and a threat to 'our' freedom, was juxtaposed with 'us', and the corresponding positive connotations.

The political situation and wars between the two countries (the war of 1897, the Balkan Wars of 1912-1914, and the Greek-Turkish clash of 1919-1922) do not suffice to explain such negative imagery of the 'Other'. The literary texts did not depict the actual environment of the writers but rather sketched the 'Other' in accordance with a *nationalist ideology* and a *constructed past*,

indifferent to personal experiences. A comparison of the image of the 'Other' in the memoirs and novels of three Turkish authors is illustrative here. In their memoirs, where actual events

are narrated, almost all the Greek figures have 'normal' and positive personalities, whereas in novels written by the same authors and at the same period, almost all Greek characters are described extremely negatively.

[7]

This negative image is congruent with images of the 'Other' found in the textbooks and historiography of each country. [8] A study on textbooks from the late 1980s in the two countries showed that both sides had developed a simplistic narrative of 'us' and 'them', lacking any positive references to the 'Other'. [9] All the blame for past incidents was attributed to the 'other side', while any notion of 'our mistakes' was absent.

Second phase: Blaming certain agents and institutions

Parallel to this black and white nationalist approach, alternative explanations of the Greek-Turkish controversy emerged, hesitantly advanced by some marginalized groups. This occurred particularly after 1920 in Greece and after 1950 in Turkey. The initiators of this approach were mainly the Marxists of both sides, as well as a few adherents of ecumenical or universal religious views. These small groups produced texts that were mostly critical of their 'own side', and generally directed their criticisms at the choices of the state and its policies. For example, they critiqued nationalist textbooks, or protested against actions taken against the ethnic minorities. The Marxists blamed 'capitalism', 'nationalism' and the 'dominant' classes for the precarious relations between the two countries, while the 'religious' writers advocated closer ties, and traditional values.

In the field of literature, the adherents of Marxism or Socialism would self-identify as internationalist. Examples in the Greek case are Dido Sotiriou and Kosmas Politis, and in the Turkish case, Nazım Hikmet and Orhan Kemal. In many cases, these writers present class consciousness and the class struggle as more important than ethnic ideals and perceptions.

The 'religious' group made a more limited contribution to literature because, traditionally,

they did not choose modern literary genres to express their views. In Turkish literature, the novels of Samiha Ayverdi (1906-1993), and in the Greek case, the writings of Ph. Kontoglou (1895-1965) represent examples of this category. [\[10\]](#)

In the field of historiography, the 'critical' historians resemble the authors mentioned above: there are no clear dividing lines between historians and literary writers as regards their worldviews. The 'stories' narrated in the literary texts do not always develop in parallel with the prevailing historiography in each particular period and/or ideological field. Indeed, in many instances, it is the novel that introduces new historical concepts and interpretations, and the historiography that picks up the trend. In all cases, the two 'genres' have complemented each other. In the 1860s in the Greek case, and the 1910s in the Turkish case, it was the literary narrative – novels, short stories, poetry and literary criticism – that established the main ethnic interpretations and themes of ethnogenesis in these countries. In later years, it was again Marxist literary writers who first introduced the class oriented historical interpretations that historians would later use. In Turkey, the state-supported Turkish History Thesis of the 1930s and the 'Anatolianism' initiated by some intellectuals in the 1950s were also mostly popularized by literary writers and their texts. Over the last few decades too, young novelists in both countries have dared to criticize practices of 'our' recent history, in line with young historians.

Marxist Historiography in Greece

Greek nationalist historiography was first seriously challenged from the first quarter of the twentieth century. Following the Russian revolution of 1917, the Marxist movement in Greece developed relatively rapidly, proposing an alternative world-view once again populated by state agents and external forces. The Greek Communist Party of the time opposed the expedition against the Ottoman State that was defeated in the First World War. This was not only because it was opposed to irredentism in general, but also because it was against British policy and in favor of the Turkish Kemalist resistance, known to have friendly relations with the Lenin regime.

In 1924, Yanis Kordatos (1891-1961) decided to challenge the 'taboo' of the Greek Revolution (1821). He claimed that it was not a 'national' uprising against the Turks, but rather a class war, waged by the oppressed masses against oppressors who happened to be both

Ottoman and 'Greek' (Christian Grecophone) dignitaries and landlords. [11] A young lawyer who had dedicated his life to history writing, he was also a former secretary of the Greek Communist Party. Starting with his first book, he showed that not only the Sublime Porte, but also the Patriarchate of Istanbul was against the Revolution. He published his studies in a hostile social environment, facing fierce opposition and threats, but he insisted on claiming that modern Greeks were a new nation and not the 'continuation' of an ancient people. Indeed, his thesis resonates strongly with the arguments of Benedict Anderson.

[12]

Kordatos was the first to use the word 'ethnic' (ethnotita) to describe the Grecophone communities of the Middle Ages, distinguishing them qualitatively from the modern 'Greek nation'.

The approach of Yanis Kordatos, apparently influenced by Marxist historiography, was a negation of the traditional nationalist paradigm. He published studies on Ancient Greece, the Byzantine period and on modern Greece, as well as other studies on the life of Christ, Greek philosophy and Greek literature. It is interesting to note that, even though he negated the 'diachronic' existence of a Greek nation, all his work was concerned with the cultures and the people that traditional Greek national historiography considered 'Greek'. A more careful analysis of this work shows that his approach involved a class analysis that was not completely disconnected from the national paradigm. Agents such as class and the state were accorded explanatory significance, but within a national framework where historical events continued to be found significant.

This blending of the two paradigms is evident upon examination of the portrayal of the 'Other' vis-à-vis 'us' in such works. The Turks, although not presented with permanently negative racial characteristics, still appear as backward and generally negative characters, for 'historical' reasons. For example, according to Kordatos, the Ottomans had hindered 'relations of production', which harmed the modern Greeks, but they are not 'negative' as a nation. On the other hand, the Greeks are shown not to be a continuation of the glorious ancient past, nor as exhibiting intrinsic positive virtues.

This controversial approach is also employed by Marxist historians who came after Kordatos. Nikos Svoronos (1911-1990) for example - who stated in the 1970s that modern Greek national consciousness appears for the first time in the thirteenth century (and not in Ancient Greece) – does not express a very different opinion on the 'Other' either. Thus Greek Marxist historiography did not revise the traditional image and 'role' of the Turks, though it also refrained from reproducing extreme nationalist stereotypes. [13]

Marxist Historiography in Turkey □ □ □

A radical challenge to nationalist interpretations appeared in Turkey just as it had in Greece, first with the Marxist intellectuals, and later with liberal academics who followed the trends of a more international, post-nationalist environment. The Marxists who operated more as *'intellectuals'* than historians challenged the 'black and white' ethnic approach that juxtaposed the righteous Turks with the devious 'Other'. This tendency was mostly visible in literary texts such as novels, or newspaper articles, and in many cases, it seriously challenged old and established historical 'truths', once again with agent-driven explanations. Kemal Tahir (1910-1973) is a novelist who introduces the Marxist 'Asiatic mode of production' into Turkish historiography in order to stress the 'peculiarity' of his national history. One of the earliest Turkish Marxist historians, Mete Tunçay (1936-), has also played a major role in questioning national narratives.

Particularly after 1980, a group of *historians* appeared, conscious of a Marxist tradition, and organized around the 'The Economic and Social History Foundation of Turkey' and the publishing house 'İletişim'. They published a series of journals and books in line with recent developments in historiography. These dealt with local history, and with 'taboo' issues such as the past and present of ethnic and minority groups in Turkey, and the population exchange of 1923. They also reviewed Turkish historiography critically. This group is distant from nationalist discourse, critical of ethnocentric approaches, aware of new developments in the field of historiography, and ready to explore new points of view in history. Examples of this trend of writers are Zafer Toprak and Şevket Pamuk, who deal mostly with the economic history of Turkey, and Çağlar Keyder, who writes on Ottoman history.

[\[14\]](#)

Class and economic analyses are predominant in such 'agent-centric' works. For some, such as Keyder, Christian minority groups are not seen as 'foreign' bodies within the Ottoman state, but as an economically productive, positive power. Social upheavals such as ethnic cleansing are explained in terms of economic strife. When the relationship between states is on the agenda, the model becomes rather Leninist: 'imperialist' motifs are used to explain the intentions of the 'Western' powers. This group of historians, mostly not committed to a particular party discipline, is also characterized by its willingness to cooperate with the 'Other'. The two sides show a readiness to study issues in which they both show an interest, and to produce jointly authored historical texts.

This not only indicates a widening of the spectrum of research in history writing, but also a change of philosophy and mindset, transcending ethnocentric approaches. These historians seem to believe that one-sided 'national interpretations' are inadequate when it comes to producing historical narratives of international validity. They are certainly more 'cosmopolitan' in their understanding of the 'Other', as well as more relaxed in their exchanges with the 'Other'.

Today there are many young historians and academics, as well as columnists and other intellectuals – though not yet politicians – who write in a similar vein. They tend to place the blame for the tensions in Greek-Turkish relations on external actors, referring to past or present 'mistakes' made by 'agents' such as the state, the mass media, the education system, or politicians. This is what distinguishes this phase in conflict perception from the previous one.

A further implication is that once the 'reason' for the conflict is determined in this way, the future is visualized with relative optimism: if these agents are merely controlled, the situation will improve. When the blame is placed on more abstract phenomena such as 'nationalism', 'racism', 'fanaticism', or 'prejudice', these concepts are again evaluated as the outcome of actions by the above-mentioned concrete agents, generating the same semi-optimistic prospect.

Third phase: a critical view of society and national identity

The third shift in perceptions of the Greek-Turkish conflict to be examined here originates in the attention it has attracted among *third parties* over the years. There are some interesting studies on the Greek and Turkish communities by anthropologists, social psychologists, and experts of conflict resolution. These studies approach the communities in conflict as their main field of interest. They do not assume any 'agents' and/or 'external forces' who act to destroy an assumed 'normal' state that would have existed otherwise. This kind of a study presupposes an impartial approach.

The parties involved in the Greek-Turkish conflict have long made simplistic or 'pseudo-academic' references to the 'psychology' of their opposite parties. These mostly exhibited the same shortcoming, however: each party tried to show the 'other side' as 'sick'. This method was not used as an explanatory tool, however. It rather represents a variant of the approach classified as 'the first phase' above. The Greeks, for example, used the argument that the (barbarian) 'other side' were jealous of Greek civilization, while Turkish 'analysts' argued that their 'Other' could never overcome the ill-feeling that came with being ruled by the Turks – of being 'our recent slave'. Eventually, substantial efforts to look deeper into the 'psychology' of the parties involved were initiated by third parties, and by people who did not identify themselves 'very strongly' with either national identity of the parties in conflict.

In *Ours Once More* (1982), Michael Herzfeld tried to 'understand' the making of modern Greece through the process of the creation of a canon of folkloric treasure. His study explores the way in which ideology and identity assume a role in forming the foundations for a modern nation. The Greek-Turkish conflict is not the main issue in this book, but national identity is still seen to be in a constant dynamic with the 'Other'. [\[15\]](#) *Turks and*

Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict

, written by psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan and historian Norman Itzkowitz, is a clear effort to analyze the conflict by reference to the 'inner world' of the parties.

[\[16\]](#)

The writers worked conscientiously, but were not very successful because of reasons they clearly stated in their study: the Greeks and Turks are in a conflict because of their national identity, and their consequent perceptions of the past and present, and projections of the future. Volkan is a Turk, and this was heavily noticeable in his prejudiced judgments

vis-à-vis

the Greeks.

[\[17\]](#)

In contrast, Benjamin Broom's

Exploring the Greek Mosaic

(1996), which covers national images as well as his conflict resolution work in the field of Greek-Turkish relations, is a ground-breaking effort. Broom has tried to identify what lies behind the accusatory discourse of the parties: fear, insecurity, and shame.

[\[18\]](#)

Lately, in a new approach to the Greek-Turkish 'phenomenon', Greeks and Turks have themselves begun to develop critical stances on their societies that do not involve 'external agents' as an explanation. Instead, they see the society itself, with its predetermined identity, as creating many of the fears, and consequently the tension. Alexis Heraclides, in *Greece and the Danger from the East*

[\[19\]](#)

criticizes Greek prejudices and certain irrational policies towards Turkey. In

Echoes From The Dead Zone

(2005), the Cypriot social anthropologist Yiannis Papadakis, describes the prejudices with which the Greeks and Turks operate, based on his own personal experience.

[\[20\]](#)

Studies have also been published recently that question historical discourses and taboos that have applied for decades. For example,

Our Undesired Citizens

by Giorgos Margaritis tells the story of the killing and expulsion of Greece's Albanians, and of the Jews whose extermination by the Nazis went unhindered. On the Turkish side too, many articles and books have been written in the same vein. Self-criticism with reference to society as a whole, past and present, is widespread, particularly in the mass media. The question of the 'character of our society' is not an academic issue in Turkey but a political and ideological one, fiercely debated by journalists and academics on a daily basis. In approaching the question, references are made to 'facing our history', dealing with 'our identity' – whether to self-identify as Turks or citizens of Turkey –and to the historical dimension – the Kurdish, Armenian, and general 'minorities' issues. Greeks come to the agenda through the minorities debate and the Cyprus issue. Such publications about Turkish identity and the 'Other' are numerous.

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The most novel characteristic of this 'third phase' in 'explanations' of the Greek-Turkish conflict is the two-fold shift in the focus of attention that has occurred. Firstly, there has been a change from interest in the 'Other' and his 'shortcomings', to interest in 'our side', and its shortcomings. Secondly, the source of tension is no longer identified as the 'agents' (textbooks, nationalism, politicians etc.) and 'external factors' at work, but rather the national identity itself. In other words, the existence *as a nation* of those involved is being examined. Even though a clearly declared common interest of study is not in evidence, both societies seem to be simultaneously preoccupied with the national identity that shaped the consciousness of the two nations, and particularly their images of 'Self' and 'Other'. In this latest phase of perception, the perceptions of the nations themselves have been recognized as a decisive factor in shaping the environment in which Greek-Turkish relations evolve.

The Content of such Perceptions: National identity and the 'Other'

Having analyzed perceptions among Greeks and Turks in terms of phases, it is useful to consider their content. A relatively reliable source of information is the body of surveys and opinion polls conducted in both countries. Their results, notwithstanding certain reasonable reservations, remain far more trustworthy than the personal opinions, and 'feelings' of individuals. The limited results available demonstrate that images of the 'Other' have not changed substantially, even though 'behavior' has done. This is a paradox that requires explanation.

After the earthquakes of 1999, a rapprochement followed in Greek-Turkish relations, but the same cannot be said of each party's images, perceptions and expectations of the 'Other'. A comparison of two opinion polls evidences this: the first was conducted jointly by ICAP in Greece and by PIAR in Turkey, and was published in both countries in 1989; the second was conducted by Kappa Research in the Balkans in 2003, and published in 2004 in Greece. According to the first poll, in 1989, 73% of Turks did not trust Greeks, while 81% of Greeks distrusted Turks. According to this poll, the Greeks and Turks trusted each other much less than they did other countries such as Great Britain, the US, the Soviet Union, West Germany, France, Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. Fifteen years on, the second opinion poll showed that only 18% of Turks believed that Greece was supporting Turkey's bid for EU membership, whereas this percentage varies from 23% to 63% in countries like Albania, Bulgaria, FYR and Macedonia. Moreover, 90% of Turks perceived Greece as a threat, while 96% perceived Greek Cyprus as such. The next country the Turks identified as a regional threat was Bulgaria, but only by 48%. According to the same poll, 91% of Greeks perceived Turkey as a threat.

This does not mean, however, that the policy shift after 1999 has had no effect on the opinions of both parties: it has done on the political level. An opinion poll conducted by Strategy Mori [22] showed that 71% of Turks did not see a Greek-Turkish war as probable. A poll by Kappa Research [23] showed that 66% of Greeks advocated good relations with Turkey, but only 40% wanted to see Turkey join the EU. Thus it seems that the political climate has improved, but that ill feelings persist. A clue to this discrepancy was seen in a study conducted by academics on students of primary and intermediary education [24]. The reason why students had a negative image of the Turks did not relate so much to what they are today, but rather to what they are believed to have done in the distant past.

These results support this chapter's earlier conclusions: they demonstrate that these nations' perceptions about the past are influenced by their identities and 'grand narratives', i.e. the story in which they place themselves and their nation. The 'Other' is needed, to set the imaginary boundary according to which the 'Self' can be defined. The Greek national identity 'needs' a negative 'Other', more specifically, a negative 'Turk', in order to be at peace with the Greek national 'grand narrative' and national identity.

The religious sub-text of the Greek narrative of national identity

One historical and cultural theme is particularly popular in Greek society, adding meaning to the 'story of the nation', and consequently to the story of Tourkokratia [lit. Turkish rule, denoting Ottoman rule]. This is the story of Christ – a highly legitimate narrative that presents a series of well-known divine and human interventions which, as in the story of the 'nation', influence people's ideas about their present and future lives, in this world and the next. The story of Christ is associated with metaphysical concerns and a search for immortality; the story of Tourkokratia is often narrated and perceived in terms of the metaphorical framework of the story of Christ. Thus national and religious identities are united in the same story motif.

Life is twofold, the story goes: darkness before Christ and hope after him. The same seems to apply to the story of the Greek nation: Greeks are presented as living in total darkness in Tourkokratia, from before the Liberation War of 1821 until the day the nation-state was established. In both cases, this happy event is called 'Resurrection' in Greek (Anastasi), and there is a similar cyclical plot: first a fulfilled life in Heaven (as in glorious ancient Greece), followed by sin and punishment. [\[25\]](#) Next comes the suffering (of Christ and of the Greek heroes) and afterwards the sacrifice (of Christ and of the Greek heroes). This is followed by the Resurrection, of God and of the nation (ethnos). Naturally, life after death is secured, both for the Christians and for the Greeks – through the 'eternal' nature of the nation.

The rhetoric of Greek nationalism draws extensively upon the story of Christ and his

suffering. The grand narrative of the Greeks is thus based on an older religious motif that is easily understood by the greater community. This is the idea that eternal life is secured for all those who have suffered and persevered, following the example of Christ's sacrifice. The martyrs and heroes of the nation have suffered for the sake of its continuing existence, and are thus, like saints, respected on similar grounds. The heroes of the war of 1821 against the Turks are frequently referred to as 'ethno-martyres', which means 'martyrs of the nation' in Greek. These people have willingly chosen to die for a belief, as did the early Christian saints: the Church of Greece has officially proclaimed some heroes of the Liberation War to be martyrs. The myth of the nation cannot adequately fulfill its 'meaning' without a negative Tourkokratia: why should one rejoice in the formation of the Greek nation-state if life before the state was pleasant? How else could one justify the sacrifices made for the nation? Is it possible to have resurrection without suffering, reward for the many without the sacrifice of the few?

Greek metaphors that describe national sacrifices also borrow themes from religious imagery. Heroes die 'on the altar of the home country' (*sto vomo tis patrihas*), and historical developments are often presented as predestined. Those who do not agree with the general ideology of the state are treated as traitors, who have betrayed their benefactor as Judas did. Furthermore, the Greek War of Independence is officially presented as having started on 25 March, which is Annunciation Day (Heralding of Christ) according to the Orthodox calendar. This date is nowadays a national holiday, celebrated with devotion, despite available historical evidence demonstrating that nothing of particular importance happened on 25 March 1821. Yet this date stands for the beginning of a process of suffering that brought about the end of Tourkokratia and suffering, the resurrection of the nation, and the start of eternal life for the Greek state and its heroes.

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Greek sources for the Turkish narrative of national identity

The Turkish national identity was similarly founded in a dynamic with an entity that can be seen as the 'Other', an imagined Greek. Yet Turkish nationalists imitated many Greek practices and much Greek discourse as they developed their theses and practices. They perceived the 'Greek' both as a threat against Turkish sovereign rights and as an example to be followed. Thus the Greek Revolution of 1821 gave an impetus to Turkish national revival: foreign affairs started to be managed by Muslim dignitaries (Tercüme Odası), the Janissary was dismantled (1826), and the army modernized, because the revolution was perceived as a signal of the

impending destruction of the Ottoman Empire. These concerns can still be found in abundance in Turkish historiography and textbooks. [27] The subsequent Greek territorial and irredentist expansions, such as the war of 1897, the revolt in Crete and its annexation to Greece, the Balkan Wars and finally the Greek invasion of Anatolia (1919-1922), further stimulated Turkish nationalism. Starting with the Young Turks, a major project of 'nationalizing' (*Türkleştirme*) was launched and continued for decades.

The imitation of Greek nationalism is apparent, though not recognized by Turkish nationalists. Economic boycotts and the 'cleansing' of minorities was first practised by the Greeks in 1904-1905 in Macedonia. The first massacres of the 'undesired' started in 1821 in Tripolis (Treblice) in the Peloponnesus. The policy of uniting all of 'our nation' became known as *Megali Idea* (1844) by the Greeks, and as *Büyük Mefkûre* among the Turks about fifty years later, in both cases meaning the 'Great Ideal'. The Greeks claimed they were the heirs of ancient Greek glory, while the Turkish History Thesis (1933) claimed the same. The image of the negative Greek is closely associated with the nationalist grand narrative on the Turkish side. The silencing and distortion of the history of the Ionian and Byzantine civilizations in mainstream historiography is only one of the indications of the above processes; textbooks which reflect the official view provide another. The 'national' literary texts leave no doubt about the persistence of feelings of insecurity vis-à-vis the 'Other'.

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Contents in Common

Perhaps the greatest similarity in the content of perceptions on both sides is their unease regarding their sovereign rights. The Greeks perceive a threat from a powerful neighbor who had once occupied their land for centuries. The Turkish side perceives a potential threat originating from a neighbor who makes 'historical' claims on its lands. In 2003 and 2004, three workshops were held, at which two questions were asked to a group of 74 NGO representatives, composed of Greeks and Turks who worked together. In other words, the group was composed of selected, persons of significant good will. The first question was

whether they had any complaints regarding the other side. The answers were given cautiously but the grievances were clear to see. The Greeks had identified an arrogant 'Other', while the Turks described a prejudiced and provocative Greek. The second question was indirect: what kind of complaints do you think the other side has against you? Due to the indirect nature of the question, the answers were almost all about historical issues relating to sovereignty rights, national insecurities and fear. Each side perceived an 'Other' who had very negative ideas about their own side. The Greeks imagined a Turk who saw an irredentist, arrogant, ungrateful, spoiled, hostile, nationalist Greek. The Turks saw a Greek who thought of the Turk as an invader, as an uncivilized, aggressor who does not respect the Greeks. [29]

Greeks and Turks today – an assessment□

What can these trends in 'Self-Other' perceptions tell us about present-day Greek-Turkish relations and future expectations? Before this can be understood, it is necessary to analyze the *contexts* or 'spheres' in which these perceptions form.

A study on the images of Turkey in the Greek press has revealed a general understanding of 'Turkey', reflecting a sort of national consensus on the one hand, but also a set of fluctuating opinions, influenced by the political atmosphere of the period in question. The first trend operates within the sphere of *consensual nationalism*, i.e., the manifestation of the minimum national consensus that creates the group called 'the Greeks'. The second may be seen as *contingent nationalism*

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and is mainly political, liable to change according to local and international realities. Thus there may be different opinions within a nation-state about the 'Other', but these do not challenge the first 'sphere'. Contingent nationalism may elicit sudden and/or frequent changes, whereas consensual nationalism displays durability.

Analyzing Greek-Turkish relations from this perspective, the crucial area becomes this latter

sphere, and any changes that occur in national identity, secured by national consensus.

This differentiation enables us to interpret the changes within the contingent sphere – the three ‘phases’ of perceptions of Greek-Turkish relations mentioned above – as compared with the relative endurance of the consensual sphere, i.e., of national identity. This ‘difference’ between the two is expressed in language in various ways. Some people make a distinction between ‘nationalism’ and ‘patriotism’, (εθνικισμός/πατριωτισμός – *milliyetçilik/ yurtseverlik*); others speak of ‘nationalism in the good sense’ (εθνικισμός με την καλή έννοια - *pozitif milliyetçilik*) versus ‘racism’ or ‘chauvinism’. Yet it is more constructive to see national identity as a belief that can generate various political programs. With this differentiation in mind, it becomes possible to understand how and why nations change their political targets, while at the same time preserving their identity. It also becomes possible to explain how a nation (or a country) can change its political position *vis-à-vis* another nation, but keep intact its myths and all related feelings towards the ‘Other’. These occurrences take place in different spheres.

National identity is associated with national myths about the ‘Self’ as well as the ‘Other’. These myths and images operate within the sphere of *consensual nationalism*. In this sense, the ‘Other’ also obtains a diachronic character. This is why stereotypes about the ‘Other’ persist, even though people declare that they do not feel ill-will towards the ‘specific/concrete/real’ ‘Other’. The specific ‘Other’ does not change the character of the ‘historical/imagined/abstract’ ‘Other’, who forms the basis of *consensual nationalism*. These clarifications are indispensable in order to understand what has changed lately in Greek-Turkish relations and in the related perceptions and images.

Conclusion

This study's findings highlight that 'nations' – in this case, the great majority of Greeks and Turks – are far from having transcended their historical prejudices. Their concerns are about a (real or imagined) negative past that presupposes a fearful future. In short, despite the many different opinions that may exist among individuals on such matters, it is as if *in general* the Greeks regret that the past five centuries were the way they were, and hold the 'Other' responsible. Meanwhile, the Turks regret that the 'Other' thinks this way about the past, and about the 'Turk' today.

Furthermore, there is no symmetry in the complaints and prospects of the two sides. For example, Greek identity is associated with a 'lost' grandeur (expressed as history) – due to the 'Other'. It is irretrievable, 'irreversible', 'non-reimbursable'. It is a story of mourning and distress. The Turks believe that they have a 'misinterpreted' grandeur – the Ottoman past. This can be retrieved through the 'testimony' of the 'Other'; and they ask for this. It is a matter of self-image, hence their persistent discourse about 'friendship' and 'resemblance'.

Almost all complaints voiced by each side seem to be associated with one main concern: sovereignty rights. Historical and current grievances, as well as future concerns are connected directly or by way of insinuation to this 'national' issue *par excellence*. Even questions of images and interpretations of the past are seen as factors that may eventually create a climate that will endanger 'our' national integrity, and 'our' liberty.

Transcending national prejudices and developing a 'neutral' attitude towards the 'Other' is a complex process that is related to national identity and to the founding myths of each nation. Indeed, the entire enterprise is usually presented as an effort in which, on the one hand, the 'Other' would be stripped of its negative characteristics, while on the other, 'our' national identity and 'our' related myths would be preserved. This sounds like a contradiction, an oxymoron. In reality, the negative 'Other' is constituent of national identity. The revision of this historical 'Other' presupposes a revision of 'our' history.

Meanwhile, the political programs of Greece and Turkey could still be changed relatively easily for the better, as occurred after 1999, without a decisive step being taken to revise historiography. In this case, however, national myths and images of the 'Other' might remain active or 'dormant in the subconsciouses, ready to materialize at the first political crisis.

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[1] See Stefanos Pasmazoglou, *Ευρώπη-Τουρκία (Europe-Turkey)*, Vol. 1, Athens: Themelio, 1993, pp. 59-86.

[2] See H. Millas, *Εικόνες Ελλήνων και Τούρκων - σχολικά βιβλία, ιστοριογραφία, λογοτεχνία και εθνικά στερεότυπα*, (Images of Greeks and Turks - textbooks, historiography, literature and national stereotypes), Athens: Alexandria, 2001, pp. 293-300.

[3] *Leandros* by Panayiotis Soutsos and *Taaşuk-ı Tal'at ve Fitnat* by Şemsettin Sami are considered the first Greek and Turkish novels respectively. See: H. Millas: 2000 (pp.173-184) and 2001, where approximately five hundred novels by around one hundred and fifty Greek and Turkish writers are presented and analyzed.

[4] Only forty years before, the image of the 'Turk' in Grecophone literature was not negative, as is readily noticeable in the politically oriented poems (and other writings) of Rigas Velestinlis, and other Greek intellectuals (Millas: 1994, pp. 87-122, 257-294). After 1834, literary authors such as I. Pitsipios, Gr. Palaiologos, St. Ksenos, D. Vikelas, and A. Papadiamantis portray an unsavoury Turk who is in confrontation with 'us'. This tendency persists in the 20th century.

[5] Millas, 2005.

[6] Some Turkish (actually Ottoman) novelists who did not write of a negative 'Other' are Şemsettin Sami, Ahmet Mithat, Halit Ziya, and Recaizade Ekrem. These authors were reluctant in writing and publishing after the political dominance of Young Turks. This is probably because their views were not welcomed by the authorities, and possibly by the public as well. Some well-known 'national' writers who portrayed a negative 'Other' are Ömer Seyfettin, Halide Edip,

Yakup Kadri, Samim Kocagöz, Tarık Buğra, Peyami Safa, and Atilla İlhan.

[7] See Millas: 1996. Considering the totality of their published works, the three writers, Ö. Seyfettin, H. Edip and Yakup Kadri, portrayed 17 Greeks very positively with only three exceptions in their memoirs, whereas in their novels they portrayed a total of 69 Greeks very negatively, again with only three exceptions.

[8] Millas, 2001 and 1991. During periods of improved bilateral relations and in a more relaxed international milieu, negative images of the 'Other' were softened to an extent, while the main nationalist traits were preserved. The 'Other' even appears as a 'friend' on occasion, as somebody who 'likes us', and who is 'honest'. However, a closer inspection reveals that this positive 'Other' has actually lost his ethnic identity: he is the one who has assimilated and become one of 'us'. Thus he thinks, feels and behaves 'like us' and 'confesses' that the Greeks are traitors, aggressive, etc. I call these characters the 'naively positive Other' because naiveté characterizes the concept of an 'Other' that actually has a changed identity and exists no more.

[9] Millas, 1991.

[10] Millas: 2000, pp. 108, 311.

[11] See for example: Yanis Kordatos, *Istoria tis Neoteris Elladas*, vol. 1-4, Athens, 1957-1958.

[12] See Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, London-New York: Verso, 1990.

[13] N. Svoronos, *Histoire de la Grece Moderne*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1972.

[14] See for example: Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Milli İktisat* (National Economy in Turkey), Istanbul: Yurt, 1982; Şevket Pamuk,

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[15] Herzfeld, Michael. *Ours Once More, Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

[16] See: Volkan, Vamık

[17] See: Millas 2000.

[18] See: Benjamin Broom.

[19] Alex Heraclides, *Η Ελλάδα και ο Έξ Ανατολών Κίνδυνος*, 2001. Turkish version: 2002.

[20] See: Papadakis, Yannis

[21] See Behmoaras, Mahçupyan, Millas 2002, Neyzi, *Etnik Kimlik, Kimlik Tartışmaları* - shown in the bibliography below.

[22] See To Vima, 13th March 2001.

[23] See To Vima, 5th January 2007.

[24] See To Vima, 9th December 2001.

[25] Many texts show that the Byzantines and the Orthodox Christian-Grecophones of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries presented Ottoman domination as a result of divine will, punishing the sins of the community.

[26] Millas, 2006.

[27] Millas, 2002.

[28] Millas, 2000b and 2001.

[29] Millas, 2004.

[30] Millas, 1999.