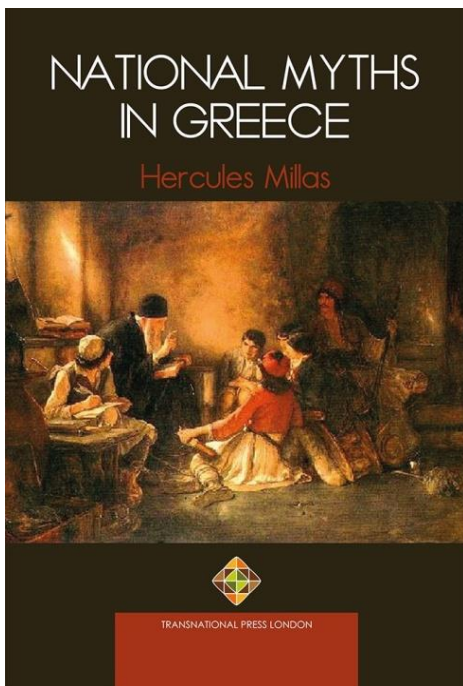


# National Myths in Greece

**National Myths in Greece** by Hercules Millas | Published by Transnational Press London 1 January 2023 [Society and Politics Series: 10] | Paperback: ISBN: ISBN: 978-1-80135-099-0 Buy from Amazon | £24.50  
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The national myths and the efforts to refute them are reliable sources in obtaining a holistic picture of a modern society. My starting point, which was to present the national myths in Modern Greece, turned into questioning “our human capacity” to live in a world distant from myths.

A myth may mean from a “false story” to a “philosophical metaphor” and form a “lie” to a “unifying social story”. Myths are so widespread that one suspects that they constitute the norm of human existence.

The whole endeavour is related to the construction of modern social identities and to the national perceptions vis-à-vis the self and the Other. The case of Greece illuminates drives that may be encountered in all present-day societies. One may read this book as a guide to get in acquaintance with the Greeks, as well.

The questions posed in this study are more numerous than the reached conclusions. For example, an unanswered but meaningful question is the following: “The grownups create stories that differ from the stories of children, but still stories

that by others may be evaluated as myths. What is the difference between the belief in going to the moon riding a broom to meet a prince and the conviction of going to heaven accompanied by an angel to meet a god?”

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*He received the ‘Abdi İpekçi Peace Award’ 1992, the ‘Dido Sotiriou’ award of the Hellenic Authors’ Society in 2004 and the award Free Thinking and Expression of Publishers’ Association of Turkey in 2005. His documentary (jointly with N. Dinc) The Other Town won various awards: The spectators award in the Thessaloniki Film Festival in 2011; special award of the Turkish Film Festival in Boston in 2012; the Best Historical Documentary in Greek Film Fest in Chicago in 2012. His novel The Family Grave received the “Orhan Kemal best novel award” for the year 2021 in Turkey.*

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*National Myths in Greece* is composed of two parts. In the first part, after an introductory chapter on the methodology and the meaning of terms like “nation”, “myth”, etc., in the subsequent three chapters three groups of myths, related to the role of the Church, to Ancient Greece and to the Greek language are presented. In the second part the scope is widened covering human conditions pertaining to human tendencies of mythic thinking. The study shows not only how myths are constructed but rather how they are defended and function.

According to Millas the numerous academic disciplines that study myths – historians, sociologists, anthropologists, physiologists, linguists, philosophers etc. – end up in confining the complex phenomenon of “myths” within some limited branches of knowledge. His approach goes even beyond the so called “multi” disciplinary method, which he sees as being in practice some advice and a wish rather than a method (p. 9-15).

Based on his experience Millas explains that the need of empathy and immunity to nationalism are prerequisites for the study of national myths (p.15-20). After a thorough exposition of what has been presented until today worldwide with respect to myths (p. 24-44) he presents the conditions under which a “myth” may exist: There should be a group of people believing in an idea/truth and simultaneously another group that disbelieves (p. 49-54). Myths exist and come to the agenda only when there is a disagreement: “One’s absolute truth is the myth of the Other”.

In the first part of the book where three basic Greek national “beliefs” – the Church, Ancient Greece and Greek language - are presented in detail on how and why they are formed, and especially how they are still defended, some mechanisms that enable the forming of myths are presented, too. For example “confirmation bias” and “Boomerang effect” (p.79-85); national prejudices and xenophobia (p. 96-106); the role of “the West” in fostering national myths (Chapter 2); historiography that leads to myth-forming (p. 129-144) are explained.

The whole endeavor of national myth formation is a process which is directly related to issues of national identity and to the formation of the nationally constructed Other.

The innovating part of this study appears mostly in Part Two. Mythic thinking is presented as a human tendency. Myths that are taboo - e.g., myths seen as such by very few people in a society; unconsciously internalized social beliefs such the construct of the “nation”; associating both the “nation” and the “religion” to myths; the adults who live in a mythical perception of the world, similar to children’s world of fairy tales; and introducing neuroscience to explain art and literature are all original endeavors.

It is persuasively claimed that empathy that is experienced watching a film and/or a theatrical performance or reading a novel is caused by the inability of the human brain to distinguish real images from virtual ones, i.e., from representations /symbols. This is akin to creating myths. On the other hand, the “fight against” a myth and its abandoning does not preclude the possibility of its substitution by a new myth.

The book studies phenomena such as nationalism, religion, ideologies, science, arts, etc., under a new perspective. The description (definition) of the word “truth” is dealt with as an expression of a “group’s consensus” which sometimes is challenged as a myth.

The arguments in this study are supported by a wide bibliography with covers experts on the relevant issues – with about 250 references, but more heavily on Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Christ Lorenz, Daniel Kahneman and Steven Pinker.