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The image of the Greek minority of Istanbul in Turkish literature: past and recent tendencies

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Apart from being a source of aesthetic pleasure, literary texts are rich in information. The study of the Turkish novel, for example, sheds light on many aspects of Turkish society: the way the authors perceived their social, political and cultural environment, how they compartmentalized these 'realities', how these perceptions changed over time, how and when different ideologies appeared and vanished within the society, how identities *vis à vis* the 'Other' developed and were expressed, how all these developments were accompanied by a related language and use of words and symbols, etc. The deconstruction of literary texts reveals a world of perceptions almost as rich as our complex real world.

In this article I shall show how the Greek community of Istanbul has been presented in Turkish novels, from 1870 up to the present day, how this image of the 'Other' can be interpreted as a manifestation of defining 'oneself', i.e. defining the communal and/or ethnic (Turkish) identity, and how these perceptions of the 'Other' can be evaluated in terms of ideological and political tendencies. I shall first present the main points of my findings, then attempt to interpret them. This research is based on a study of approximately four hundred novels, some of the results of which are published (see Millas 1996, 1999, 2000 and 2001).

Ottoman Understanding

It is conventionally accepted that the first Turkish novel was published in 1872 (see below), i.e., three decades before the dawn of the Turkish nationalist movement of the Young Turks and fifty years before the official establishment of the Turkish national state. In the 'Ottoman' novels the Greeks of Istanbul are perceived and portrayed as Ottoman citizens, for the most part with positive characteristics, and definitely not as national negative stereotypes. The 'Rums' of Istanbul are not associated with the 'Yunan' (the Greeks) of Greece [1] . Beyoğlu ('Pera' in Greek), the cosmopolitan district where most of the Greeks lived at that time, is presented as a lively, colorful, positively modern area associated with joy and culture. Indeed, not only the Greeks but also the 'Western world' as a whole is portrayed positively in the novels of the 'Ottoman period'.

In *Taaşuk-ı Tal'at ve Fitnat* ("The Love of Talat and Fitnat", 1872) by Şemsettin Sami (1850-1904), for example, the Western women (the "madams"/ *madamalar*) are compared to 'our' Muslim women and the former are depicted as freer but also more honest, chaste and trustworthy. [2]

In the novels of the prolific writer Ahmet Mithat (1844-1912) all non-Muslims are positive figures, almost without exception :

all his characters are portrayed mainly in terms of their 'human' aspects and definitely not as national stereotypes. A. Mithat, a writer who appears to have been influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, wrote that 'all religions invite human beings to pray to the same God'. He also proposed that Ottomans should acquire the way of life and laws of the West, and that 'it is enough for human beings to consider themselves children of the world'. In his novel *Henüz On Yedi Yaşında* (" Only Seventeen Years Old", 1881) we encounter what is probably the only scene in a Turkish novel where Turks and Greeks meet in a private place, namely the house of Kalyopi, the heroine of the narrative. Here Ahmet Bey helps this young girl, who has led a dishonest life due to 'poverty and bad luck'. Both Kalyopi

and her close relatives are portrayed as honest and honorable. In this novel, A. Mithat criticizes conservative people who are opposed to mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims.

In his novel *Sergüzeşt* (“Adventure”, 1889), Samipaşazade Sezai (1866-1945) exalts ancient Greece; in *Ar aba Sevdası* (“Carrıage Love”), Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem (1847-1914) presents the Greek businessman Kondorakis as a balanced, honest person, in contrast to the vagabond Bihruz Bey; in *Zavall ı Necdet* (“Poor Necdet”, 1900) by Savfet Nezihi (1871-1939) the Greeks are ‘normal’ personalities without any distinct ethnic characteristics; this is also the case with *Eylül* (“September”, 1901) by Mehmet Rauf (1875-1931), in which Beyoğlu is also a ‘normal’ district.

Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil (1866-1945) deserves special mention, since he is considered one of the greatest novelists in the Turkish language. Both in *Mai ve Siyah* (“Bl ue and Black”, 1897) and in *Aşk-ı Memnu* (“Prohibited Love”, 1900), his best novels, the Greeks of Istanbul are presented as an organic part of the Turkish families in which they work and whose children they bring up; Beyo ğlu is also described as a most pleasant place.

The transition to nationalism

In 1912, all of this came to an end and a new image of the Greeks of Istanbul appeared, almost overnight. The above-mentioned writers are known as representatives of 'Edebiyat-ı Cedide' (" New Literature") or 'Servet-i Fünun' ("Wealth of Sciences") and at that time they were criticized for not having dealt with social and national issues. This criticism was true in part, for while these writers were sensitive to social issues (such as the relationship between men and women, the language that the public and the literary elite were to use, issues of freedom and culture, improvement of state administration), they were not involved in nationalism - the word 'Turk' is almost absent from their writing.

The worldview and ideology of 'Ottoman' writers were clearly far removed from the nationalist approach of the writers that followed. However, this must not be misinterpreted. The 'Ottomans' had not transcended nationalism; this was only to be accomplished by certain Turkish writers much later, firstly in the 1950s and for the most part in the last ten years. The writers mentioned above, who did not have a negative image of the 'Other', had yet to be influenced by the rising new ideology of nationalism; they were at a pre-nationalist stage. With the appearance of the Young Turks a new era started, and the 'Ottoman' writers refrained from publishing novels after 1912, probably because they could not adapt to the new ideology.

Only one writer, Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar (1864-1944), managed to adapt to the new nationalist atmosphere which prevailed following the historical events that shocked Ottoman Muslim society, namely the Greek-Turkish war of 1879, the union of Crete with Greece despite the agreement that the island would remain semi-independent, the Balkan Wars and the subsequent wave of Muslim refugees from the Balkans. In the ten or so novels which Hüseyin Rahmi
produced up until 1912, the Rums of Istanbul were portrayed as ordinary, positive characters, as is to be expected from an Ottoman author. But after 1912, a new perception came to dominate. Some of the new tendencies were the following:

1. The appearance of a xenophobic discourse against the Western powers, who were seen as forces that wanted to deprive Turkey (the Ottoman State) of its sovereignty rights and exploit the country economically.

1. 2.The presentation of the Rums of Istanbul as part of 'Greece', of the 'Greek nation' and as an ethnic group with common and distinct characteristics, mostly negative. They were no

longer described as ‘Ottomans’ since they were not Muslims.

2. 3. Beyoğlu, the district where the Rums lived, was a place of corruption, prostitution and political intrigues. The word ‘cosmopolitan’ acquired a negative meaning. Greek women were mostly portrayed as prostitutes.

3. 4. The word ‘Turk’ was mentioned repeatedly, and Rums and Turks were shown to belong to two different political and cultural camps. The Rums and the Greeks were mentioned much more frequently.

4. 5. The Rums were considered responsible for the problems of Turkey since they helped and collaborated with the Western powers in exploiting the Turks.

5. 6. In short, the Rums were the fifth column of the Greeks and of the Western powers in general.

Two sentences (among dozens of others) from the work of Hüseyin Rahmi are sufficient to demonstrate the abrupt change – it came about in just a few years - in his view of the world and of the Istanbul Greeks. In
Kuyruklu Y
ıldı
z Alt
ı
nda Bir İzdivaç
(“Marriage Under the Comet”, 1912) he expresses his wish for all people, all nations to be united, almost like a socialist: ‘We always fought against each other due to our ignorance […] We could not enjoy humanism and love’. About ten years later, in
Ben Deli Miyim?
(“Am I Mad?”, 1925), he advocates a world of confrontation: ‘Armenia and Greece stepped on us with their savage armies […] You [Armenians and Greeks] lived in this country as parasites, richer than the real owners […] But this will not go on […] The owner will control his product and you will be his slaves’.

The nationalist approach

With the founding of the Turkish nation state in 1923, a centralized system of educational and state-controlled cultural programs was developed in step with a 'national' literature ('Milli Edebiyat') [3] .
In the next twenty to thirty years, i.e. approximately until the 1950s, the Turkish novel was characterized by a distinct nationalist discourse [4] . The image of the Greeks of Istanbul in the texts of authors like Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889-1974) is both politically negative (the Rums are enemies, exploiters, collaborators with the enemy, etc.) and ethically inferior (they are sneaky, cruel, indecent, most of the women are prostitutes, etc.). In *Hüküm Gecesi* ("The Night of Verdict", 1927) for example, homosexual Rum youths behave like prostitutes in Beyoğlu. Despina, who is a prostitute, says that the dream of the Greeks (the 'Megali Idea') is to capture the Turkish lands. This 'fear' of losing lands and sovereign rights has been repeatedly voiced in many novels right up to the present day, although with diminishing intensity. In *Ku şaklar* (" Generations" , 1999) by Ahmet Yorulmaz (1932-), for example, the same scene is repeated: Marigo, who is portrayed as a stereotypical member of a Greek/Rum ethnic group, says the same words to Hasan (p. 200).

The Rums who appear in the novels of Halide Edip Adıvar (1882-1964), and are mostly inhabitants of Beyoğlu, are indecent people; during these years, in fact, Rums and Greeks alike are almost invariably portrayed in a negative way. For example, the sum total of negative Greek characters in all the novels of Yakup Kadri and Halide Edip is fifty-three, whereas the positive characters number just three [5] . The negative characters kill, plunder, rape and ridicule the Turks.

The image of Istanbul Greeks who join the Greek forces and fight against the Turks is found both in the relatively recent screenplay of the movie *İşgal Altında* ("Under Occupation") written by Rauf Denkta ş and in the short story *Vurma Fatma* ("Don't Hit me Fatma"), written in 1922 by Halide Edip. In

İzmir
(“Smyrna”, 2003) by Mehmet Coral, the Rum priest is presented as an inveterate nationalist determined to recapture Constantinople from the Turks, in other words a fervent advocate of the Megali Idea, like all Greeks from 1453 onwards (p.56). It is clear then that the negative image of Rums can still be encountered in Turkish novels; and yet this is not the only image which exists (as will be shown below). Even though traditional and old-fashioned images do persist, there are writers who have attempted to portray the Rums in other ways. The ‘Anatolian’ approach is another form of nationalist image of Greeks and Rums
[6]
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‘Anatolianism’ and the ‘naively positive’ Other

The Turkish novel is almost totally political. In the Ottoman period the messages that the authors wanted to convey were related to a wish for modernization/Westernization; later the idea of nation-building was reflected in novels’ themes and in the didactic style which was adopted. Marxism then took over as the main influence. In the 1980s, the ‘Islamic novel’ propagated a new political message. In all cases the search for an identity (national, ideological, religious identity) was on the agenda. Similar efforts are encountered in historiography, which has paralleled literature in this respect: the theory of the Türk Tarih Tezi / Turkish History Thesis (1933) is one case of this search for a national identity; ‘Anatolianism’ (the term is mine) is another [7] .

The constitution of modern Turkey signaled a national identity based on citizenship; the Turkish History Thesis tried (and failed) to establish a ‘Turkishness’ which was based on an imagined Central Asian (and somewhat racist) heritage. Halikarnas Balıkçısı (1886-1973; his real name was Cevat Şakir Kabaağaçlı) is known in Turkey for his original ideas about the ‘roots’ of the Turks. A historian and writer himself, he started after the Second World War to propagate the idea that the Turks are the people who live in Anatolia today and who ‘inherited’ all civilizations that previously existed in this area: Hittites, Ionians (who are not conceived of as

Greeks) are therefore ‘compatriots’. Interestingly, the Byzantines are forgotten. This was an effort to establish a national identity on the basis of geography, and achieves two goals at the same time: a) the home country is moved from the remote, mythical Central Asia to within the recognized state boundaries, and b) the Turks are perceived as an indigenous people, since the continuation of the nation is legitimized in geographical terms, the present inhabitants being the continuation and heirs of all previous local (and prestigious) civilizations.

The only potential problem this theory faced was the historical narrative of a forceful conquest of Asia Minor, i.e., the capture of the Byzantine lands (Diyar-ı Rum) by the Turks – by the ‘invading’ Turks, according to the Other. The legitimization of this conquest was accomplished by Halikarnas Balıkçısı and later by Kemal Tahir (1910-1973), by constructing a new narrative about the period in question. In short, this new historical thesis states that the Turks established a fair and desirable regime in Anatolia, characterized by justice and equality for all, irrespective of differences of religion and ethnicity. Consequently there was no resistance from the local Christian people, who saw the Turks as having liberated them from the oppressive and degenerate East Roman feudal regime.

Within this context, the Rums in the novels of Kemal Tahir - who wrote historical novels about the Middle Ages - seem to be on very good terms with the Turks: they like them, welcoming them and fighting alongside them against the bad Byzantine rulers. Not only do they accept Turkish conquest and sovereignty but the best of them also convert to Islam; the women frequently fall in love with a Turk, change their religion, receive a Turkish name and live happily ever after (see for example *Devlet Ana* (“The Mother State”, 1967).

In the novels of Halikarnas Balıkçısı the dividing line between ‘us’ and the ‘Other’ passes through the Aegean Sea: those to the East of this line are good people, friends, whilst on the other side of the dividing line lives the negative Other, the Western world. The Rums (but not the Yunans) are therefore considered to belong to ‘us’: they are Anatolians and therefore Turks. Some Turkish intellectuals still talk about the ‘Turkishness’ of all people that come from Anatolia [8]
; however, this Anatolianist identity is not popular among the general public.

Within this context the Rums of Istanbul are portrayed in a positive way, as peaceful, cooperative, on good terms with ‘us’, not fanatical, etc. However, such a ‘Rum’ is not a Rum any longer: he/she has lost his/her ethnic identity and most of the characteristics that differentiate him/her. The Rums themselves cannot recognize this person as one of ‘them’; this is a positive Other who no longer *is* the Other. I coined the term ‘naively positive Other’ to express this oxymoron.

The ‘naively positive Rum’ is a very popular image of the Rums of Istanbul [9] , appearing in literary texts but also in the press. These Rums are not recognized as ‘naively positive Others’ but rather as Greeks portrayed by ‘humanist’ Turkish writers. Journalists visiting Greece very often write about what a warm welcome they received from Rums of Istanbul who moved to Greece; these Rums seem even to prefer Turks to Greeks
[10]
. The ‘naively positive Other’ also legitimized the Ottoman past by praising it and by depicting the old subjects as happy and satisfied with this historical ‘co-existence’.

The Marxist approach

The Marxist authors (as well the ‘Humanists’ discussed below) differ from the Nationalists and the Anatolianist authors in more than one important respect [11] . They do not blame the ‘Other’ for all problems concerning Greek-Turkish relations, and they do not present their side, and particularly their nation-state and nation, as historically innocent, but are critical. Based on a Marxist class analysis, they interpret historical events not in ethnic terms but in terms of a struggle between exploiters and exploited. The Marxists share some characteristics:

1. They neglect to notice some events which do not have their origins in class struggle, for example nationalist prejudices which can affect rich and poor alike.
2. This failure to ‘notice’ sometimes conceals the desire not to accept some ‘negative’ aspect of ‘our nation’. Blaming the ‘desperate’ poor masses or ‘the bourgeoisie’ instead may be a way of defending ‘our nation’.
3. Apart from these possibly unconscious defects, the Marxist writers did blame the Turkish state for the many ‘mishaps’ suffered by the Greeks of Istanbul, starting in the 1950s but more frequent after 1970; they criticized the racist capital tax of 1942, the riots of 1955, the expelling of Greeks from Istanbul in 1964, etc.
4. The Rums were not presented as negative stereotypes but as normal people. Quite often they were presented as models to be imitated because they were more advanced in terms of

class struggle.

For example, Orhan Kemal (1914-1970), in both his first novel of 1949 *Baba Evi* (“The Home of My Childhood”) and his second,
Avare Yıllar
(“Vagabond Years”, 1950) presents the Rums of Istanbul not only as good friends of his youth, but also as very positive because they know how to fight for a more just society. The Greek girls are honest and honorable. The friendship between him and the Greeks is narrated with great compassion. The same approach is seen in many other writers: Suat Derviş (1905-1972), Mehmet Kemal (1920-2002), Pınar Kür (1943-) and others.

The Marxist authors approach the ‘Other’ with empathy and compassion, which brings a new dimension to the image of the ‘Other’: he is not someone on the other side of the fence but a person like us, one of us. This new attitude signals the transcending of nationalist ‘us-Other’ stereoptypes, and in this respect the Marxist writers are a major turning point in Turkish literature with respect to the image of the Greeks.

Another important feature of these Marxist writers is that their approach to the Rums has a humanistic aspect. The heroes of their novels do not stand out in virtue of certain national characteristics; rather their basic identity comes from their ‘human’ side. For this reason it is not always easy to draw the demarcation line between a Marxist approach and a humanist one.

The humanist approach

The humanist image of the Rums of Istanbul differs substantially from the nationalist and Anatolianist stereotypes. The Greeks are portrayed as normal and/or positive individuals, Beyoğlu as a lively, cultured and (in the positive sense) cosmopolitan place. The writers belonging to this category usually not only choose to write about the 'unhappy' situations that the Rums have to cope with as a community, but also blame the Turkish 'state' for these. In this respect they are critical, like the Marxists.

So far I have refrained from evaluating the novels in aesthetic terms. In the case of the 'humanist' novels however, I shall venture to suggest that they represent the best of Turkish literature. This may be because the manner in which these authors portray their environment is not simplistic: neither the heroes nor the 'groups' of people appear as good-bad, us-them stereotypes, i.e. caricatures, and life itself is presented as a complex phenomenon, closer to the real world.

The authors that can be mentioned are numerous. The earliest is Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889-1956) who wrote about the Rums of Istanbul (but also about the Greeks in general) with sympathy, love and nostalgia. He repeatedly stressed his liking for them and also made it clear that he was conscious of the prejudices that existed against the non-Muslim minorities. It is of interest that Turkish literary historians did not 'notice' this humanist side to Reşat Nuri, who demonstrated this talent of his in an era which did not welcome this kind of understanding of the 'Other' .
His
Ateş Gecesi
(“
The Night of Fire”, 1942), which ends with a nostalgic scene featuring Greeks of Istanbul, typifies his approach.

Sait Faik Abasıyanık (1906-1954) on the other hand is famous for his short stories and novellas about the Rums of Istanbul. Probably the greatest Turkish writer ever, he wrote with exceptional empathy and affection about Rums whom he had personally met and knew. Every paragraph of his writing is a masterpiece of literary expression, and it is a pity that he is so little known among Greeks and around the world generally. His texts are not only protests against stereotypes, prejudice and xenophobia but also a realistic narration about the Rums of Istanbul. Naturally he aroused the anger of many nationalists and was periodically criticized and censored.

Authors who belong to the same category but are not as dedicated to the Rums as Sait Faik include: Haldun Taner (1915-1986), Salim Şengil (1913-), Nezihe Meriç (1925-), Bilge Karasu (1930-1995), Aziz Nesin (1915-1996), among many others. Rums have a positive image in the novels of these writers, i.e.,they are honest, polite, industrious, trustworthy, civilized and modern, yet also connected to their traditions, which are characterized by a special culture and by the Christian Orthodox religion. However, as an Istanbul Greek myself, I often feel that these writers do not really 'know' the Greeks of Istanbul. My personal impression is that even though the image of Rums in these novels is positive and a result of a well-meaning wish to be politically correct, the Rums of real life are somewhat different. At times I find it difficult to recognize my own community in the work of these writers, very often thinking, 'a Rum would not have said this, would not have done that…' The way Greeks are portrayed in these novels shows how the Turkish community perceives this category of people. The Turkish national identity – that real barrier between all nations - somehow limits and directs the Turkish perception.

How else can we interpret the fact that among the hundreds of cases of love affairs between Greeks and Turks in Turkish novels, it is always a Greek woman who falls in love with 'our' man, the Turk? The opposite (or rather the same!) applies in Greek novels: Turkish women fall in love with Greek men. A few exceptions prove the rule that prevailed until the 1990s: In *Yürümek* ("To Walk", 1970), for example, Sevgi Soysal, who is partly of German origin, tells of a Turkish girl kissing a Rum from Istanbul. The non-Muslim minority authors who have published novels in Turkish follow the same approach, portraying Turkish girls in love with non-Muslims (see: Zaven Biberyan, Kriton Dinçmen).

Recent developments

From the 1990s onwards, the humanist approach has tended to dominate *vis à vis* the Rums of Istanbul. Writers like Feride Çiçekoğlu (1951-), Orhan Pamuk (1952-), Oya Baydar (1939-), Nedim Gürsel (1951-) and Ahmet Altan (1950-) follow the humanist tradition and portray 'normal' Rums in their novels. Feride Çiçekoğlu and Oya Baydar in particular approach the Other with a special tenderness and sensitivity; their narrative is also associated with systematic criticism of the Turkish state's practices against the Rums.

In the last decade or so, the image of Istanbul Greeks in Turkish novels has generally tended to acquire a nostalgic dimension. For various reasons - a general romantic longing for the traditional past, a 'retro' approach to the city, a yearning for the lost character of the cosmopolitan city and especially of Beyoğlu, a reaction to the recent, strongly-felt migration of the rural population to Istanbul, a social acceptance of marginal ethnic groups and multiculturalism - Turkish society no longer looks upon the Rums of Istanbul as a fifth column of Greek expansionism but as a decorative feature. Sentences like 'The Greeks left and Istanbul lost its beauty' are often heard and read. The Rums seem to be turning into a romantic myth.

New writers who exemplify the humanistic approach and sympathetic attitude towards Rums are Yiğit Okur (*Hulki Bey ve Arkadaşları*, 1999), Sergun Ağar (*Aşkın Samatyası Selanik'te Kaldı*, 2001), Rıdvan Akar (*Bir Irkçının İhaneti*, 2002), Selçuk Erez (*Makriköy'e Dönüş,* 2003) [12].

Two novels, *Çayınızı Türkçe mı Alırsınız?* ("Do You Drink Your Tea in Turkish?", 1996) by Barış Balcıoğlu, and *Erguvan Kapısı* ("Purple Gate", 2004) by Oya Baydar, manage to transcend the ethnic/sexual taboo, with Greek men having affairs with Turkish women in a very 'natural' manner. In the novels of Ahmet Ümit (

Sis ve Gece
, 1996 and
Beyoğlu Rapsodisi,
2003)
Rums appear,
as in the novels of Orhan Pamuk
, very ‘naturally’, realistically portrayed as part of the city of Istanbul; their ethnic identity is not stressed, nor are they directly associated with old or recent political developments and controversies. This is a new approach, with the Rum presented as a culturally different entity but not as the (positive or negative) Other.

Another new approach finds expression in a number of new ‘historical novels’, in which Greeks/Rums appear to live with Turks and other ethnic and religious groups in peace or at least without ethnic strife. Gürsel Korat’s *Zaman Yeli* (1994) and *Güvercine Ağıt* (1999) and Bilge Umar’s *B*
örklüce
(2003)
belong to this category of novels, portraying the people of Middle Ages Anatolia as living without nationalistic identities and bias, coexisting and fighting together against Others such as the Mongols or other oppressors.

Indeed, what is common to all these recent novels of the ‘humanistic’ approach is a declared opposition to nationalism, usually from a leftist ideological standpoint. In the novel *Beyoğlu Rapsodisi*
mentioned above, for example, we read the following about the hero’s perceptions:

‘I have been taught to love all people irrespective of their race, language, religion, colour… Pera lost its spirit (after the riots against the Rums) in 7 September 1955. The attacks against the non-muslims who had been the real owners of these places … is the reason for the decay of Beyoğlu’ (p. 320-321).

In Oya Baydar's *Erguvan Kapısı* the hero also attacks nationalism:

'You think that this (negative) policy is the deed (only) of the fascist right but you are wrong. This is a country that experienced the Capital Tax and the tragedy of 6/7 September' (p. 26) [13] .

Another example of a Rum-related novel where nationalism - on the part of both Greeks and Turks - is condemned is Kemal Anadol's *Büyük Ayrılık,* (2003), which is about the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922. The author describes the atrocities committed by both sides and at one point the hero exclaims:

'Nationalism is a dangerous weapon. It automatically creates its counter forces…The historian who will write about nationalism will say that it was more harmful than tuberculosis, than plague, than cholera… Because nationalism is a contiguous sickness and a dangerous killer' (p. 547).

This anti-nationalistic perspective is not limited to novels associated with the Other and/or the Greeks. There seems to be a new ideological problematic which involves a search for suppressed marginal identities. This new wave is connected with religious Muslim groups who were not allowed to express themselves freely and practice their religious rituals. In novels of this type, nationalism is again opposed, sometimes from an ecumenical humanist rather than a 'leftist' standpoint. For example, in *Bir Balkan Şarkısı, Saranda* (2003) by Zeliha Midilli, which tells of the life of Bektaşi Turks

in Albania at the beginning of the 20th century, the heroes of the novel oppose the idea of national states and favour the peaceful coexistence of all religious groups. Greeks and Turk (and others) all live together.

‘Human beings, irrespective of their religion, or group, as soon as they enter the ‘tekke’ they enter in a world of liberty and love, and they embrace as brothers’ (Midilli 2003: 160).

The hero of the novel condemns the idea of a ‘national state’, making it clear that he finds the idea of ‘vatan’ (patria) disturbing and prefers the notion of ‘memleket’ (country):

‘There is one ‘vatan’ for human beings, and that is the whole globe, the world is the country of each human being’ (p. 282).

The novel *Rumeli Benimdi* (2003) by Ayten Aygen is also a narrative about the difficulties faced by the Bektaşi during the Ottoman period and also in modern Turkey. In Ali Ezger Özyürek’s *Muhacirler* (2003) and Özsoy İskender’s *İki Vatan Yorgunları*

(2003), which are about
the Population Exchange of 1923-1925, the anti-nationalist discourse recurs. These books clearly give voice to a search for – and declaration of - an identity which is anti-nationalistic. This problematic, taken in conjunction with the anti-nationalistic novels associated with the Rums of Istanbul, may be interpreted as a new development in Turkey.

Conclusion

The image of the Greeks of Istanbul in Turkish literature, like all ethnic images in any literature, could never be monolithic [14] ; societies, unlike stereotypes about them, are not characterized by uniformity. As a consequence of this, the Turkish novel displays the various tendencies discussed above.

However, some aspects of the Turkish novel may be more unusual. The ‘Turkish’ novel appeared in Ottoman society before national identity became the dominant ideology in that society. The first consequence of this incongruity between nationalism and the novel becomes apparent in the way the ‘Other’ is portrayed in the Ottoman novel - he is first and foremost a citizen, who happens to have certain characteristics (of language and religion). A corresponding phenomenon does not appear in, for instance, Greek literature [15] .

A second characteristic of the Turkish novel with respect to the image of the ‘Other’ is the excessive variety with which the latter is portrayed. Since the image of the ‘Other’ is one of the manifestations of self-identification and of social consensus, this richness of imagery may be interpreted as an indication of an unsettled process: ethnogenesis seems still to be going on [16] .

Finally we should not overlook the fact that, even though all the various images mentioned above do at present coexist, and nationalism is still expressed *vis à vis* the Rums of Istanbul in some novels, nevertheless the nationalistic approach is tending to lose ground (in the sense that this kind of literature is not appreciated as much as it used to be) while humanitarian novels are becoming more popular and widely read. This tendency is supplemented by the newly-emerged trend to proclaim marginalized and suppressed identities. The fact that the Rums of Istanbul have left the city for other countries in the last decades makes this process easier, since it relieves the wider community of some of its nationalist insecurities and phobias.

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[1] In Turkish, various words are used which correspond to the single Greek word 'Hellen': Rum, Yunan, Helen, Grek, Bizanslı. Grekofon, İyonyalı (Ionian) etc. See Millas 2002: 27-29.

[2] For all cases without references, the reader is referred to Millas 2000 (in Turkish) and 2001 (in Greek).

[3] A development can be given various names: national, ethnic, 'Greek' or 'Turkish', regional, patriotic, chauvinistic, racist, etc. Here the terms 'national' and 'nationalistic' do not carry a pejorative meaning but refer to an identity where a specific relationship of 'us'-'Other' is dominant.

[4] Reşat Nuri Güntekin is one of the few exceptions. I refer to him below, in the section entitled 'The Humanistic Approach'.

[5] The case of the 'memoirs' of these same nationalist writers is a complex issue and cannot be addressed here. Let me just note that the real and concrete 'Rums' of the memoirs are almost always positive figures, whereas the constructed heroes of the novels are almost always negative. For example, if we consider the totality of their published works, the three writers Ö. Seyfettin, H. Edip and Yakup Kadri portrayed 17 very positive Greeks in their memoirs, as against just 3 negative ones, whereas in their novels they portrayed a total of 69 very negative Greeks as opposed to just 3 positive ones (see Millas 1996).

[6] The authors who can be classified under the general heading of 'nationalism' are many. Some of the novelists in this category are the following: Aka Gündüz, Mithat Cemal Kuntay, Sadri Ekrem, Samim Kocagöz, Atilla İlhan, Nihal Atsız, Tarık Buğra, Ercüment Ekrem Talu, Turhan Tan, Abdullah Ziya Kozanoğlu, Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi (See Millas 2000: passim).

[7] There have been other efforts, for example the 'Türk-İslam Sentezi' / 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis', a relatively recent effort to establish an identity based on the belief that the Turkish nation was formed after the Turks accepted Islam and occupied Asia Minor (Anatolia).

[8] In *Sekene, Türkleşmiş Rumlar/Dönmeler* (1995) by Ertuğrul Aladağ, İstanbul: Belge/Marenostrum, 1977, a Greek lady from Greece is shown coming to Turkey and declaring: 'I am a Turk, yes I am a Turk, because my ancestors, that is to say my grandfathers, were from these lands' (p. 100).

[9] In fact, the Anatolianists do not attempt to differentiate clearly between the Rums of Anatolia and those of Istanbul: both are seen as Rums of Turkey.

[10] This is the main theme of Fikret Otyam (*Pavli Kardeş*, 1985) and of Yılmaz Karakoyunlu (*S alkım Hanımın Taneleri,* 1990, and

Güz Sancısı
, 1992).

[11] Indeed, these categories (Nationalists, Marxists, etc) are formed on the basis of the authors' attitude *vis à vis* the Other: they are classified into different groups because they perceive the Other differently.

[12] A passage from Yiğit Okur's novel *Hulki Bey ve Arkadaşları* (1999) shows the extent of the sense of a 'lost paradise': a simile likens
post-Greek Istanbul to the decayed corpse of a deformed,
stinking
street dog with flies feeding on its rotting wounds: '…
yanaklarında jilet yaraları, bir gözüne kezzap dökülmüş, öbürü bakarkör, burun kemiği çökmüş, yapılı omuzları düşmüş, İsa'nınkine benzeyen ince, solgun, narin ayakları nasırlı, cerahat kokan, hiçbir pabuca sığmayacak kadar kocaman, parmak araları egzamalı, iltihaplı, tırnakları düşmüş, kuyuda unutulmuş, üstünde mavimtırak sineklerin üşüşüp cümbüş ettiği bir köpek leşi gibi, tarihin ayak uçlarında kalacaktı' (p. 211).

[13] 'Capital Tax' and '6/7 September' are examples of discrimination against the non-muslims of Istanbul, the first being a heavy tax and the second the riots of 1955.

[14] The idea of such a monolithic literature, in which the 'Other' is invariably presented as a fixed stereotype, may create the perception that 'literature' is a source of stereotypes.

[15] In the first Greek novels, which appeared in 1834, the 'Turks' are presented as (meaning they are *perceived* as) a nation with common negative characteristics, as the historical enemy, as a source of problems and as a threat. And yet just forty years earlier, the image of the 'Turk' in grecophone literature had not been negative, as can readily be gathered from the politically-oriented poems (and other writings) of Rigas Velestinlis and other Greek intellectuals
(Millas 1994: 87-122, 257-294)
. After 1834, literary authors such as
I. Pitsipios, Gr. Palaiologos, St. Ksenos, D. Vikelas, A. Papadiamantis present a negative Turk who is in confrontation with 'us', a tendency which persists to this day.

[16] An important ideological tendency, that of Islamist identity, has not been included here because the Rums of Istanbul are not a predominant topic in the Islamist novel.