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Greece: A Study in Nationalism

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This analysis seeks to emphasize the constructedness of national identity and the functional nature of nationalism through a study of the Greek case. It is less ambitious than an attempt to derive a theory of the phenomenon of nationalism from the case of the Modern Greek State. Rather, the Greek case suggests that national identity is perpetuated in the context of international or domestic constraints, so that its particular rationale will be influenced by these constraints.

In the case of Greece, this manifests itself in the construction of national identity after the formation of the state and in keeping with the myth of classical continuity, an externally directed identity which provided justification for foreign intervention in the War of Independence and legitimacy of the newly emergent Modern Greek State. Furthermore, after the formation of the new Greek nation-state, the state was supremely instrumental in consolidating national identity through expansionist doctrine while national ideology simultaneously facilitated such political aims. The state employed this same type of nationalist rhetoric continually throughout its history, so that the case of Greece suggests that weak states are more likely to revert to nationalist goals as a mobilizing technique in times of vulnerability.

Kousoulas reduces four centuries of history to a mere two sentences in his history of the Modern Greek State, ostensibly because he seeks to limit his historical scope. Kousoulas' believes Modern Greeks are the direct ancestral link to Classical Greece. For Kousoulas, the contemporary Greeks are a people whose identity is rooted in antiquity. This is, in its most simple form, the myth of classical continuity upon which Modern Greek identity was created and upon which the Modern Greek State was built. It is the conception of Greek identity that persists throughout the history of the Modern Greek State and whose vestiges influence Greek national identity to this very day, both within and outside Greece.

However, Kousoulas' treatment assumes the existence of a coherent Greek nation before the formation of a state. Kousoulas perceives nationalism as an ever-present force, waiting for some optimal moment to assert itself. The circumstances surrounding the Greek movement for independence from the Ottoman Empire, if examined in a synoptic manner, expose Kousoulas' treatment as simplistic and false.

HISTORICAL SETTING

Today, the Modern Greek State stands where Classical Greece once stood. Consequently, although this analysis in no way pretends to provide a thorough historical treatment, it is necessary to retreat to the distant past in order to gain some appreciation of the complexity of Greek identity. The Roman Empire extended its wings to include, among others, the Greek-speaking Peoples of the Balkans. The Empire was formally divided in 395 AD between the Latin-speaking western half and the Greek-speaking eastern half. Before the end of the century, a Greek patriarchate was established and based in Constantinople, with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Greek east. By 380 AD, Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Empire, indicating the culmination of a gradual religious shift

within the Empire.

The Eastern Byzantine Empire was not considered a specifically Greek state but was ecumenical, encompassing all Christian peoples within the territory. Centuries after its accession, the Greek and Roman churches of the Byzantine Empire split in 1054 the result of a long conflict between the two churches regarding the relative authority of their respective leaders. The split denotes a distinction made by the Greek-speaking people themselves, a distinction made along religious and linguistic lines, since doctrine was recorded in "two increasingly separate languages" (Woodhouse 46). Latin and Greek. Greek identity was thereafter determined by adherence to the Orthodox Christian religion, and since the Orthodox Church established Greek as its official language, identity also became somewhat language-based. The degree to which identity was linked to language was minimal, since, as Woodhouse writes, "Literature in the Greek language ceased to be associated with either territorial Greece or Greek nationality: it was the literature rather of a cosmopolitan governing class and of the Orthodox Church. The word 'Hellenic' no longer meant Greek but 'pagan'" (Woodhouse 34).

The Greek-speaking peoples of the Byzantine Empire referred to themselves as Romans, or *Romoioi*. This practice continued well after 1453, when Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks and Orthodox Greeks came under Ottoman occupation, unable to resist Turkish power. Although Greeks retained the use of their land, non-Muslim inhabitants of the empire were to pay a harsh tax to Turkish soldier-landlords. The tax provoked resistance from armed bandits, called *klephts*, as early as the fifteenth century. The response of the Ottoman Empire came in the form of *armatoloi*, irregular Greek troops recruited by the Ottoman authorities to combat *klephts*. Greeks that participated in either *klephtic* or *armatolic* associations had no particular loyalty to either group and switched back and forth depending on the relative profitability of one or the other.

The inhabitants of the empire were effectively isolated from Europe to a rather extensive degree. All Orthodox Christians in the Empire constituted what was called the *Rum millet* or Greek *millet*, and were regarded as a separate and religiously autonomous entity. The *millet* encompassed Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians and Vlachs in addition to Greeks, but was called the Greek *millet* because the Church remained under Greek control. The *millet* system is significant in this analysis because it allowed Greeks to retain the focal point of their identity: religion. The Ottoman Empire administrative system served to institutionalize, to some degree, the identification of Greeks with Orthodox Christianity. The principal criterion for determining Greek identity was the Orthodox faith. To be an Orthodox Christian was to be a Greek.

The creeping decline of the Ottoman Empire began as early as the seventeenth century, with the withdrawal of the sultans from direct control of government affairs and the subsequent rise in corruption and administrative decay. The weakening of the Ottoman Empire forced the sultans to negotiate more extensively with Western powers, and in their dealings with the West, the Ottoman administration was forced to rely on educated Greek interpreters. During this time, an elite group of Greeks, the *Phanariotes*, began its progression towards a privileged position within the Ottoman government and were continually and permanently granted posts in high places. A large Greek mercantile class developed simultaneously, spurring thousands of Greek traders to migrate towards Central Europe and as far as the Black Sea. These highly successful traders of the Greek Diaspora were able, through provision of funds to the mainland, to contribute towards education and cultural development of Greeks under Ottoman occupation.

Revolt against Ottoman rule was not motivated by intellectuals, landowners, the merchant class, or the Church. These groups did not associate themselves with the movement until after hostilities began and popular support for the movement was evident. Moreover, the initial outbreak of violence, was not, in fact, a national movement for independence at all. Kitromilides notes that, "The Greeks of 1821 had a sense of common religion, language and customs" (Kitromilides 16). Chirot and Barkey assert that "...the Greek uprising took a direction quite different from other similar drives for local autonomy because of the outside Greek nationalists who joined the fight to pursue their own ideals" (39). Despite the external disapproval of Ottoman occupation and the intellectual bastardization of the Greek people (as it has been called), no consensus about whether the renaissance should take the form of a national independence movement existed. The crucial question is whether this collective identity constituted a set of "national aspirations."

Additional obstacles to the development of an independence movement on a national basis included the Church. The Church had doctrinal authority over Slavs, Rumanians and Greeks under Turkish rule. Greek independence on a national basis would mean the loss of their authority, so the Church discouraged revolutionary ideas and encouraged passive submission to Ottoman rule in teachings such as the work entitled Paternal Teaching (1789). Phanariotes also had very little incentive to resort to violence, since their administrative positions within the Ottoman Empire were sufficiently high that it was only a matter of time before they were essentially running the whole of the Ottoman Empire.

There were alternative visions of an independent state which competed, although ultimately ineffectively, with the national movement for independence. These visions were founded on ideas of a Greek-led state encompassing all Christian peoples in the region. Woodhouse writes, "Rhigas Pheraios wanted a multi-national Balkan State in which Greek would be the language of administration and the Church—a replica in miniature of the Byzantine Empire. That such dreams were shared by many potential leaders of the several peoples should not be forgotten, even though Rationalism prevailed" (Woodhouse 131).

Here we must retreat backwards and re-examine the importation of Western liberal ideas regarding nationalism and the proper character of the state. The prevalent ideas include self-determination as a road to cultural progress. Travelers to Greece most certainly saw the need for progress in the "fallen" Greek state, so that the concept of self-determination, and with it distinctions along ethnic lines, took hold.

Leading Greek Enlightenment scholars such as Adamantios Korais developed arguments that placed supreme importance on education as the key to development. Kitromilides claims, "The literature produced in Greek under the impact of the ideas of the Enlightenment introduced for the first time the concepts of distinct ethnic identities in the Balkan society" (151). This literature, produced in the Greek language, and influenced by Enlightenment ideas, introduced the concept of distinct ethnic identities in the Balkans, a society culturally homogenized by the Orthodox Church. The proponents of these Western ideas were initially the Greek Diaspora, the initiators (by way of the *Philiki Etairia*) of the national movement for independence.

Established in 1814, by 1821, the *Philiki Etairia* was still "composed chiefly by members of the Greek Diaspora living outside what eventually became Greece" (Woodhouse 56). Chirot and Barkey write, "The Greek independence society *Philiki Etairia* was quite close to being a modern nationalist movement except that its goals

were still far broader than mere creation of an ethnic Greek state" (Chirot and Barkey 38). The *Phanariotes* saw themselves as "the new Princely class of a revived Christian Empire" (Chirot and Barkley 39).

Whatever the motivation of the participating agents, the 1821 invasion of the Romanian Principalities, led by Greeks and organized by the *Philiki Etairia*, aimed at the establishment of the multi-ethnic Balkan state but failed. Chirot and Barkey note that "In the same year a revolt also broke out in Greece proper, and representatives of the Greek *Phanariot* elite in Constantinople and in Romania went to Greece to coordinate it and fit it to a nationalist goal" (Chirot and Barkley 39). The mere fact that an outside force, specifically the Greek Diaspora, initiated the national independence movement is indicative of the lack of a nationalist motivation on the part of the people within what now constitutes the modern Greek state.

Suffering commercial interests and support of the Greek effort by a European intellectual elite finally motivated foreign intervention, so that the three world powers, Britain, France, and Russia, began to rival each other in support of the Greek movement for independence so that they could guarantee influence in the area once the war was concluded. The three powers played a crucial role in securing final Ottoman acquiescence, as is readily demonstrated by the fact that the resolution of the revolution came in the form of a treaty between the three powers and the Ottoman Empire, not by the Greeks and the empire. Ultimately, the three powers formally recognized the independence of the Greek State in 1831 and declared Greece a monarchy under their joint protection.

MYTH OF CLASSICAL CONTINUITY

Here we encounter a problematic issue in the nationalist movement in Greece. Neither Kedourie's argument, nor Kitromilides' argument, can explain why Greek national ideology was constructed around the myth of classical continuity. In fact, the construction of a national identity based on Classical ideals and the establishment of a direct link to Classical Greece is wholly illogical if Greek society at the time of the independence movement identified itself in linguistic and religious terms. Even if we take as given that Greeks began to define themselves in linguistic terms as a result of imported nationalist ideology and we accept Kitromilides' contention, we must ask why the nationalist movement eventually shaped a national discourse based upon the establishment of an ancestral link to Classical Greece.

In the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth centuries, Western European intellectuals revived an interest in Classical Greece, the seat of Europe's earliest civilization. Classical Greeks were the inventors of democracy. As Greeks in the Diaspora made it possible for academies to operate within Greece, education became more widespread. The educators of these academies were themselves educated in Western Europe and they therefore imported Western thought. An incredible reverence for Classical history and philosophy was a necessary component in their teaching, so that it filtered education in Greek academies.

Although the Church maintained great influence among the majority of Greeks, a small degree of secularization opened the door for admittance of Western ideas, which were thoroughly saturated with Classicism. Greek intellectuals, somewhat surprised that their "history," at least according to Western thought, was considered the basis of Western civilization, began to become obsessed with Greece's glorious past.

Their interest gradually converged with the nationalist movement and the

discourse inevitably established itself and the national ideology on the idea of Hellenism. Hellenism was not derived from the "Hellenes" themselves, where "Hellenes" refers to the term applied to Greeks under Ottoman rule. The fundamental reason for this was that the myth of classical continuity provided the theoretical justification for creating the nation-state and therefore clearly became extensively politicized. The myth provided justification and motivation for action on the part of the Great Powers so that Greek scholars and the Greek State constructed and shaped national identity according to the myth of classical continuity.

THE STATE AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE GREEK NATIONAL IDENTITY

As Herzfeld points out, the rural population had no recollection of their classical past, a national identity based on the myth of classical continuity had a long road ahead of it if it was going to establish itself as the dominant national ideology. In the case of Greece, those with exposure to Western ideology regarding the nation-state were the Greek Diaspora nationalists. Outside of Greece, many of them had little influence at the beginning of the independence movement. The state therefore developed in the image of those with Western education. "Since the Greeks were obliged to build their nation-state under the watchful eye of more powerful countries, circumstances clearly favored the externally directed model over the introspective self-view" (Herzfeld 23). For Herzfeld, the introspective view contains Romeic elements, such as the Romeic language and Orthodox Christianity, while the externally directed model conforms to Western imposed ideals and is deliberately perpetuated, to a large degree, after the Modern Greek State emerges.

In contrast then, to Kousoulas' conception of a Greece as a dormant nation, [this analysis views the sequence as follows: state first, nation second. Herzfeld writes, "Before the establishment of the Greek nation-state, the existence of Greek nationhood was an intellectual and political article of faith; the process of ethnological justification, [however, was really set in motion only after that event" (Herzfeld 11). Kitromilides argues more generally that the nineteenth century saw the construction of nations by states rather than states by nations. Kitromilides focuses his attention on the modern Greek nation-state, in the hopes that similar studies will take place to enlighten all Balkan "imagined communities" (Kitromilides 159).
The Resolution of Contradiction in the Greek Identity

The establishment of the cultural continuity identity was not without its problems. One of the problems obviously the disparity in language between the common, everyday vernacular and Classical Greek, which was not spoken by the masses of the newly formed Greek state. Classical Greece was a pagan culture while Modern Greece was thoroughly Christian. Herzfeld writes that the "self-designation of the Greeks had long been that of *Romii*, a name which echoes the Byzantine (East Roman) Empire and hence also the Orthodox Christian tradition to which the overwhelming majority of Greeks still adhered" (Herzfeld 20).

Religion and language, the defining attributes of the Greek (or Christian) *millet*, had now come under attack by the invading preoccupation with establishing a Hellenic identity. One can distinguish two efforts to overcome the disparity between paganism and Christianity on the one hand and Romeic and Classical on the other. One effort is scholarly in character, and actually attempts to reconcile the paradox by disparity by proving, in a somewhat systematic manner, continuity between Greeks of the nineteenth century and those of antiquity. The other is an effort made by the state.

The state actively attempted to fuse a national ideology rather than to prove continuity. Interestingly, as Kitromilides argues, it is the state that ultimately succeeds creating a cohesive national consciousness.

With no documented history linking the Modern Greeks to their classical roots, folklore set itself a task: to negotiate the contradiction between the modern image of Greece and the Hellenic idealization by constructing cultural continuity between Modern and Classical Greece. Folklorists therefore organized their studies around the concept of cultural continuity in an attempt to establish traces to the ancient past and therefore historically clear the way for European support for the emerging nation-state.

The externally directed classical continuity ideology manifested itself in one particularly symbolic form: the development of *katharevousa*, a constructed language which, by incorporating ancient linguistic elements, presents the nation in a light that conforms to Western European expectations and is identified with the image of classical continuity. The symbolic paradox of *katharevousa* is that it is constructed to establish the natural link between Modern Greeks and their ancient heritage, but its very constructedness reveals the national identity of Modern Greece as a construction. It is a supremely appropriate metaphor for the Greek national identity. Folklore thereby became heavily politicized and contributed to the definition of national culture, operating on the premise of cultural continuity. The contradictory perceptions of the national history persist.

The state played the most significant and ultimately successful role in the cultivation of a national consciousness. Kitromilides offers an analysis of the use of statecraft in Greece to shape national identity and create a national consciousness. He essentially argues that forging a collective identity was a necessary prerequisite for cementing a cohesive nation-state and that, in Greece, the state "mobilized cultural resources and policies" in order to nationally integrate the newly independent state (Kitromilides 160). However, sectional interests that had frustrated revolutionary efforts in Greece were now threatening to undermine the nation-state in its formative phase.

In order to combat such factionalism and mend social cleavages, the state initiated an effort to create nationally unifying forces, so that Kitromilides rightfully asserts that nationalism arose "as a specifically political force closely linked to the creation of the modern state-phenomena that did not as a rule coincide with industrialization" (Kitromilides 160). Kitromilides does analyze the role of the Orthodox Church in forging national identity, but he contends that religion "did not become a functional element in national definition until the nation-states had nationalized their churches" (Kitromilides 184). The Orthodox Church, in his view, was a supporting nationally unifying force only after the state had created the nation and the church was nationalized.

There were essentially two types of state initiated processes which shaped the Greek self-conception. The first focused on domestic means towards achieving some national cohesion, while the other focused on external means and "...involved the orientation of the Greek state toward Greek-inhabited territories of the Ottoman Empire which were considered as integral parts of the historical patrimony of Hellenism" (Kitromilides 161). Together, the initiatives would create a nationalist rhetoric or "unifying code" around which the new state could be consolidated.

Kitromilides examines two specific integration efforts within Greece: the integration of the national army and the expansion of the education system. The state aimed at the creation of an educational system that would span Greek territory. The expansion of education achieved, moreover, the linguistic homogenization of Greek

society, even its most remote areas. It Hellenized its recruits linguistically (since not all recruits spoke Greek) and provided a shared identity and a common social experience (Kitromilides 160). Most importantly, Kitromilides points to the magnetism of the national Greek army liberating Greeks living beyond its territorial borders in Ottoman-ruled lands.

The short hand term for Greek irredentism was the *Megali Idea*. The *Megali Idea* pitted Greece as the national center, or "the focus of a larger national community defined by certain supposedly shared cultural characteristics" (Kitromilides 168). Coulobinis, Petropoulos, and Psomiades argue that the *Megali Idea* was only a unifying factor in Greece in the case where gains were achieved toward the end, territorial aggrandizement (Coulobinis 22). This conception of the *Megali Idea* blatantly ignores the cohesive effect of an internalized and shared national goal. In Kitromilides' assessment, the *Megali Idea* represents the external initiative of the Greek state towards national cohesion.

Greek nationalism, as expressed in the irredentist project, was ultimately motivated by a concern for the cohesion of the state on both social and ideological planes. Nationalist rhetoric promoted the idea of national unity as necessary to achieve the external goal of congruence between the national and territorial borders. Of course, other national movements were fermenting in the region after Greece gained its independence, so that Greek territorial claims were rivaled by these movements, which were also laying claim to territories of the declining Ottoman Empire. Competing claims by other 'imagined communities' created the need for a unified Greek nation, so that the *Megali Idea* itself became a force for national cohesion. Ultimately, the nationalist rhetoric was continually employed by the state to legitimize the centralization of government so that, through the mechanisms of national integration, both internal and external, the state was able to centralize its power and thus achieve the unity necessary to meet its political aspirations.

The ultimate contention of this analysis is that where nationalism is constructed (as it was in the Greek State) and used as a tool to promote the "gelling" of the nation, nationalism takes its place in the toolbox of the state and is reverted to at times of perceived crisis or semi-crisis. The Greek State found itself on weak and unstable ground, threatened by factionalism, and consequently embarked on an irredentist project in its effort to achieve national integration. Ultimately, if we take the Greek case as an indicator, a weak state is more likely to revert to nationalist goals and provoke international conflict when vulnerable.

That consolidation of democracy may point to a decreased role for nationalism is a somewhat viable interpretation of the Greek case, although it may very well be the case that a series of veritable failures to see through any national-territorial aim (of which Cyprus is the most recent) may have simply convinced the Greek nation and the Greek State to "stay home" and worry about maintaining its current position. Continually frustrated attempts at realizing congruity may have neutralized nationalism sufficiently to arrest nationalist expansionist goals.

CONCLUSION

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to determine whether decreased nationalism is indeed a condition for democracy since such a project would require a larger sample than merely the Greek State. Most generally, this discussion sought to see nationalism as a functional phenomenon rather than as "naturally" occurring and

therefore "justified" event. The case of Greece reveals a nation built by a state rather than a state by a nation, indicating that identities and nations are constructions, so that ethnic conflict is not altogether unavoidable if processes of nation constructions are reversed or somewhat mitigated.

The case of Greece merely serves as a potentially profitable study within such a framework. It demonstrates the constructedness of identity by exposing the myth of classical continuity as a functional and rationally perpetuated national ideology whose purpose was the attainment of legitimacy in the international context. Furthermore, it demonstrates the ability of states to use nationalism as a binding force and points to a tendency of weak states to revert to nationalist rhetoric and goals as a method of survival. In doing so, the case of Greece implies that there may be a role for the international community in avoiding nationalist conflict by mitigating vulnerability of states.

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