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**Role of Image
in Greek-Turkish Relations**



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What's in a Name? Reflections on Greek Perceptions of the 'Turk'

Abstract: This paper is concerned with the Greeks' unfavorable perceptions of the 'Turk' among and suggests that they are part of a psychological barrier which constitutes one of the major factors underlining Greek-Turkish relations. It examines how these perceptions have been set by Greek historiography and complemented by popular to this day works of literature from a previous period. It maintains that despite the rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, they cannot be expected to sharply change because they are part of the deeply ingrained in the Greek psyche national schema. However, in the light of findings of empirical research, it also argues that the picture is more complicated because a less-stereotypical image of the Turk has been accepted by more Greeks than in the recent past.

Introduction

It has been said that frequently international conflict is not between states but rather between distorted images of states.² The considerable scholarly discussion that has developed over how human cognition and emotions are inter-connected with reason in decision-making, including the process of foreign policy making (among others, Jervis, 1976; Axelrod, 1976; Lebow, 1981, 101-119; Simon, 1985; Rosati, 2000; Hanoach, 2002; Mercer, 2005, Lobel & Loewenstein, 2005), calls for a more nuanced perspective on the bounded by cognitive constraints and emotions rationality of foreign policy decision makers both in Greece and Turkey. As 'citizens as well as its decision makers use the same culturally predominant schemata to understand and respond to international relations' (Hirshberg, 1993: 18) it is essential for scholars and policy makers to acquaint themselves with the psychological and cultural issues - (alongside historical, political, economic and systemic factors) that have been affecting both sides in order to better understand foreign policy decisions of the other state but also of theirs.

There can be no doubt that there has been a psychological barrier in Greek-Turkish relations, specifically the selective reading of each other's history and the ignorance of one another's society and sensitivities as well as prejudices,

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2 Quincy Wright quoted in Holsti (1962: 244).

stereotyped interpretations of dramatic historical events and fears.³ To my mind this barrier has been one of the major – albeit understudied – parameters that has shaped bilateral relations and continues to underline the more recent phase of *rapprochement* between the two countries that began in 1999.

By and large the Greeks' perceptions of the Turks are unfavourable and constitute an extension of the Greek national schema. In brief, they have been primarily shaped by the dominant Greek national narrative but also supported by literature images and further sustained by the psychology of adversity and conflict that dominated the bilateral relationship in the second half of the 20th century, while at the same time they have been organically interwoven with more recent political developments and realities.

I feel that I need to underline the above point from the start in order to emphasise that at this juncture even though good relations between Turkey and Greece overall prevail, one should not expect policy-makers, or the average citizen, to experience a sharp break with sets of beliefs which have been part of the Greek collective sense of its past, present and future standing in the world. Cognitive change is an extremely slow process and established beliefs and images tend to maintain their force and to be defended even long after they have lost their utility (Jarvis, 1976: 17–42; Lebow, 1981, 105–6; Hirshberg, 1993: 3). Furthermore, the Greek-Turkish *rapprochement* constitutes a foreign policy change rather than a foreign policy restructuring (Holsti, 2016: 104),⁴ which might have forced large different segments of society to reconsider and perhaps change their former conceptions in the light of the new political reality (Holsti, 2016; Hermann and Yuchtman-Yaar, 1998: 62).

1. A Powerful National Ideology

It has been long established by psychologists and sociologists that most groups have a need for an external enemy. Such an external enemy we are also told, is demonized, in other words all bad qualities are projected onto him so that the

3 Paradoxically, considering the longstanding Greek-Turkish adversity over a number of issues, the serious study of Turkey's history has not been a point of interest for Greek society. Turkish studies concern only a very, very small group while the public at large lacks often basic information about contemporary Turkey. A similar state of affairs can be observed in Turkey.

4 Normal foreign policy change is 'usually slow, incremental and typified by low linkages between sectors', while foreign policy restructuring 'usually takes place more quickly, expresses and intent for fundamental change, is non-incremental and usually involves the conscious linking of different sectors' (Holsti, 2016: 104).

group feels itself to be good, reasonable, even pure while it is only the enemy who is cruel, unreasonable, often barbaric and always untrustworthy. Once such an enemy becomes an established fact not only the individual within the group or society becomes more certain about his own self but also different sub-groups in the society will have better relations with each other. So, by and large the existence of the enemy makes it easier to become unified (Freud, 1994: 42; Simmel, 1964, 99; Kecmanovic, 1996: 35–7), a realisation which has led to the use of the external enemy perception within society as well as in international relations since ancient times. (Hall, 1989; Kennan, G. F. 1982: xxii; Harle, 2000). Within the context of the grand Greek national narrative the role of the external enemy *par excellence* has been performed by the 'Turk'.

The central point of this narrative which was elaborated by Greek scholars in the latter part of the 19th century and found 'its more mature and convincing formulation' in the five-volume *History of the Greek Nation* by Konstantinos Pappas (Papargopoulos) (Kitromilides, 1979: 150–51) is the idea of 3000 years of continuous Greek national history. According to Papargopoulos, the Greek nation could trace itself back to the uninterrupted succession of different eras starting in ancient Greece and Modern Hellenism emerged in the early 13th century following the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders. Therefore, the Greeks, aka Byzantines, met and repeatedly fought against the 'uncivilized' Turks from the 11th century up until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and again during the glorious 1821 Greek Revolution (Kitromilides, 1979: 153–4).⁵

The basic contours of the Greek national narrative that merged Ancient Greece and Byzantine Christianity was an 'extremely powerful cultural national ideology' (Nairn, 1979: 32) which has been proved to be very resilient against the passage of time, perhaps, because of 'its mythoepic quality' (Worsley, 1979: 4). As a matter of fact it has been perpetuated in Greek school text-books and been accepted by the majority of contemporary Greeks regardless of their social, economic or educational background.

Alexis Heraclides illustrates well how the basic Papargopoulos approach was incorporated up to the second half of the 20th century into the writings of prominent Greek historians whose books on national history were taught at Greek universities and have been widely read and referred to by educated Greeks. Consequently 'from Papargopoulos onwards, Greek national history presents the Greeks

5 Within this new conceptual framework traditional anti-Turkish symbolism that had been reinforced during the 1821 Greek Revolution against the Ottomans would later be linked to the political programme of the Great Idea (Μεγάλη Ιδέα) (Kitromilides, 1979: 154; Nairn, 1979: 32).

(*Hellenes*) as a noble nation that [...] repeatedly saved Europe from recurring invasions from the East'. Furthermore, the Greek nation survived the destruction of the Byzantine state following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks and preserved its identity despite the tyrannical, 'Turkish yoke' that lasted for four hundred years (Millas, 2006: 52–3; Ηρακλείδης, 2007: 23–9; Heraclides, 2010: 7–8).

Despite some important differences – mainly on the question of the unbroken continuity of the Greek nation – between the Papanikolaou approach and those of the historians of the following generations who were influenced by his thought there is agreement on a number of important points: The Greeks have a very long history. The modern Greeks are descendants of classical Greeks. The Turks are the traditional enemy. When they conquered the Byzantines they were uncivilized and barbaric. The 'Turkish yoke' cut off the Greeks for four hundred years from Europe which was their natural environment and caused them to miss out on all major European scientific and cultural developments. (Ηρακλείδης, 2007, 27; Heraclides, 2010: 9).

There are many transmutations of historical reality in the Greek national narrative, some of which have been pointed out by a number of scholars but their discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, one of them which has significantly affected the image of the 'Turk', should be considered here. The Greek national narrative does not distinguish between Ottoman rulers and Turkish people and obscures the fact that the Ottoman Empire was not the empire of the Turks – like the empire of the Habsburgs was not the empire of the Austrians.⁶ Thus the Greek Revolution is not viewed as a major struggle against an *ancien régime* but against the 'yoke' imposed by another ethnic and religious group, the Turks. Consequently antipathy, antagonism, suspicion and fear towards the 'Turk' against whom the Greeks fought in the early 19th century to gain independence, has also been embodied in the Greek national identity alongside the general conception of the long battle of Hellenism against the 'Turk' in the East.⁷

6 It should be noted here that equating the Ottomans with the 'Turk' was typified in Western Europe during the 19th century.

7 In the last fifteen years there has been a conscious effort to refer to the 'Ottomans' or 'Ottoman Turks' rather than to 'Turks' in school history text-books. Nonetheless, the terms 'Ottoman' and 'Turk' are used interchangeably while no attempt has been made to explain that the Ottomans were a dynasty or that the Ottoman empire one of the important players in the European system of power. It should also be noted that the terms *τουρκοκρατία*, *τουρκικός ζυγός* (Turkish rule, Turkish yoke) are entrenched in the teaching vocabulary of the vast majority of secondary and high school teachers.

Today the reading of the four centuries under Ottoman rule as an unequivocally black period during which the Greeks suffered under the tyrannical and brutish yoke of the Turks – who, as it is wrongly maintained, did not even allow the Greeks to have their own schools – still widely exists in Greece mirroring the impact of a long tradition of nationalistic historiography that was altering or obscuring reality and was taught in Greek universities until 25 years ago. Another notion that still echoes is that the legacy of the 'Turkish yoke' which, caused *το γένος* (the nation) to miss out on major European scientific and cultural developments, has primarily been responsible for many condemnable pre-modern characteristics of the contemporary Greek state and society.

It should be noted that in the last thirty years the grand national narrative has been challenged on many of its aspects by a number of prominent Greek intellectuals, including historians as well as political and social scientists. However, their thinking has not penetrated very deeply throughout the general public. The Greek national schema is rooted in the Greek psyche and while it may not be impervious to change it is very resistant to it.⁸ Furthermore, in the last four decades the grand national narrative and its off-shoots has been supported by neo-orthodoxy, another narrative which has gained many adherents across the political spectrum and has caught public attention at large through significant media exposure. Thus, even though it is clear that different socio-political segments of Greek society have adopted different approaches on the issue of Greek identity with consequent modification of their image of the 'Turk', the majority of the Greek public have not re-considered, let alone re-defined long established conceptions of relations between Greeks and Turks.

2. The Importance of Literature

Greek historiographers did not provide a colorful palette of what were considered to be the basic characteristics of the 19th and early 20th century Turk. But Greek historical novels as well as novels depicting representations of Greek society in the Ottoman Empire which were written in the years between the literary generation of the 1880s and up until the early 1960s successfully filled the gap.

8 The spectacular opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games that presented Greek cultural history as a continuous chain from the period of the Aegean civilizations circa 3000 B.C. until modern times is a case in point. The telling exception in this linear progression was that the long 'symbiosis of Greek and Turkish cultures was conspicuously underplayed.' (Theodossopoulos, 2006: 14).

Literature, like any other expression of culture, is an integral part of the society in which it is created. Therefore it reflects sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, ways of thinking and values that exist in that society. The authors of the above mentioned categories have been offering glimpses into the modes of thought of a bygone era. However, the chain of reception of many of these books from generation to generation up to current times, brings into the fore the question of the complex interactions and often symbiotic relationship between past and present within the individual and the society. I follow here Hans Robert Jauss' argument about the literary reception as a dialogue through history. In other words the reception enjoyed by these books – as with any past work of art – presupposes a dialogue between the readers and the work which is based on the logic of questions and answers. Thus, past meanings should be seen as part of the prehistory of present experiencing. (Rush, 1997: 100–103).

It should be noted that several qualifications should be taken into consideration. To start with the text, Jauss tells us, cannot provide answers to all sets of questions. (Rush, 1997: 103). Secondly it is essential to remember that one's understanding is always moving and changing according to experience. Furthermore, literature is only one component shaping perceptions. Therefore it is almost impossible to measure the influence that these books have had on Greek readers. Nonetheless, what is suggested here is that the character and personality of the Turk as has been crafted by their authors has left a memorable image in the collective consciousness.

In this section I shall describe and discuss some of these characteristics as they are reflected in a number of books belonging to the two categories mentioned earlier. I chose these books because their authors are established names in the pantheon of Greek literature, because almost all the books are considered in Greece as mini-classics but above all, because every single one of them has been very popular among Greek readers of all ages to this day.⁹

Within the context of this discussion three important elements should be emphasized from the beginning. First of all, the authors of the books lived and worked within the ideological framework of an era when the patriotic zeal for the country was extremely high. Thus, as it has been noted elsewhere, 'historiography

9 Κονδυλάκης, Ι. (2012 [1892]) Ο Πατούχας [Ο Patouhas], Αθήνα: Πεζογραφία; Βενέζης, Η. (2004 [1931]) Το Νούμερο 31328 [Number 31328]. Αθήνα: Εστία; Βενέζης, Η. (2006 [1943]) Αιολική Γη [Aeolian Earth]. Αθήνα: Εστία; Καζαντζάκης, Ν. ((2010 [1953]) Ο Καπετάν Μιχάλης [Captain Mihalís]. Αθήνα. Εκδόσεις Καζαντζάκη; Σωτηρίου, Δ. (2008 [1962]), Ματωμένα Χώματα [Bloodstained Earth]. Αθήνα: Κέδρος; Ιορδανίδου, Μ. (2010 [1963]) Λωξάντρα [Loxandra]. Αθήνα: Εστία.

and literary approaches seem to merge and supplement each other'. (Millas, 2006: 53). Secondly it must be added that most of these writings mirror empirical reality as most of the authors met and interacted with Turks in every day circumstances and were acquainted with their way of life.¹⁰ Thirdly it is essential to be borne in mind that the authors were influenced by the living memory – or personal experience – of political events which pitted Greeks and Turks against each other and were crowned by extreme violence. These were the bloody events and massacres that took place in Crete from 1841 to 1897 (the Ottoman rule ended 1898) in connection with a series of uprisings on the island, the forced exodus of the Greeks from Asia Minor after the Balkan Wars and finally the Greek-Turkish war of 1919–1922.

It should be added here that when Kazantzakis extolls the Cretan epic hero who fights the Turks, apparently is also stirred by the 1940–1941 Greek fighting against Italian and later German forces, by the bitter German occupation of Greece and also by the battle of Crete (1941). The Cretan Kazantzakis desired to capture the mythic, in his eyes, fighting spirit of the Cretans but also to make a loud declaration about the repeated through the centuries fight of the island and of Greece for freedom. (Το ΕΘΝΟΣ, 2010). Also he was moved by the Greek-Cypriots' struggle for independence which was unfolding in the early 1950s when his book was published, as he writes in the prologue to *Kapitan Michalis*.

When talking about the image of the Turk in works of literature two basic questions should be asked: Are there certain tendencies in the portrayal of the individual Turk in the different books? How are the relations between the Greeks and the Turks depicted?

Before addressing these questions though, two elements need to be underlined. Firstly in the books under consideration, the reader cannot detect any hatred, open or latent, against the Turk. Even when in the stories Greeks and Turks encounter each other in terms of tension or war the Turk is treated as an adversary and not

10 Two of the authors, Κονδυλάκης and Καζαντζάκης were born on the island of Crete while it was still under Ottoman control. It is considered that most of the Turks who lived on the island until the exchange of populations stipulated by the Lausanne Treaty (1923), were not originally ethnic Turks, but had different ethnic backgrounds. Among them a large number were the descendants of Christian inhabitants of the island who converted to Islam on a large scale in the 17th century (Adıyeke, 2005). Christian Cretans called Muslim Cretan 'Turks' as a synonym with Muslim, however, it should also be noted that as Greek Christians gradually began to identify themselves with the Greek national ideology the Muslims identified themselves more with the Ottoman state and the Turkish identity (Tsitselikis, 2012: 45).

