An Approach to Understanding Nationalism in Modern Greek Literature

Kathryn Radford*

RÉSUMÉ

Pourquoi un peuple se raconte toujours les mêmes histoires? Le présent article cherche à répondre à cette question par le biais du nationalisme, des notions d'une 'communauté imaginaire' et du 'capitalisme de l'imprimé' telles que définies par Benedict Anderson. La perspective littéraire de l'article permet de considérer le rôle du nationalisme dans la littérature et l'inverse. Des concepts linguistiques tels une langue nationale et un dialecte de prestige s'avèrent pertinentes au cas de la Grèce moderne où on a connu le débat *katharévousa-dhimotiki* entre les puristes et les démoticistes.

ABSTRACT

Why does a group always tell itself the same story? This article seeks an answer through nationalism and Benedict Anderson's notions of imagined community and print capitalism. The literary perspective of the article enables readers to consider the role of nationalism in literature and the inverse. Various linguistic notions including a narional language and a prestige dialect prove relevant to modern Greece and the *katharévousa-dhimotiki* debate which took place between purists and demoticists.

Introduction

This study is a first step in trying to answer a simple yet revealing question: Why does an ethnic group, be it Québécois, Greek or Mayan, keep telling itself the same stories? An answer to this question will help us grasp the relationship between literature and national identity.

An educated guess type of response might suggest that collective memories, common knowledge and recurring representations appear in the popular culture, art and literature of a group. Within the proverbial big picture, humans are time travellers who chart their life course on the basis of their accumulated experience of the past, the available tools of the present, and an imaginary map of the future.

*Contractual lecturer in the translation certificate program at McGill University

As a result, they form mental images of these diachronic voyages on various factors ranging from the known to the unknown. As condensed anticipations or crystallised aspirations, these images may be possible, probable or desirable situations.

If we consider the development of nations similar to that of humans, then the stories group members tell themselves act as affirmative statements, mantras even. A word of caution: mantras may connote 'new age psychobabble'; however, any resemblance to national anthems, hymns and epics is accidental. Of course, group members recount and repeat representations of themselves either for themselves or for others.

In trying to answer our primary question about the kind(s) of story or image a group prefers, we will adopt a three-step approach. The first step provides a theoretical background to nationalism and language which enable us to discern patterns in 'national literatures'. The second step applies these theoretical concepts to Greek literature in a case study of a stellar yet lesser known example of linguistic choice, nationalist policy, and political debate. Finally, the third section explores what various thinkers have defined as the main characteristics of the Greek literary canon.

Theoretical Background

Passion, politics and pragmatism emerge in any intellectual discussion about nation and language. Similarly, wherever and whenever the issues of nationalism and language appear, they resemble Siamese twins joined at the head and heart. One of the pair may be strong; one may perish, but their shared memory and struggle for identity endures.

A "nation" may be defined as: «an imagined political community, both inherently limited and sovereign.»[1] Accordingly, "nationalism" is the aspiration of creating and promoting a nation.

These definitions show that a nation is at best sketchy and elusive and at worst an absurd and contradictory notion,[2] describing a marriage between culture and polity. This shared 'high' culture is one whose members have been trained by an educational system to formulate and understand context-free messages in a shared idiom, whose first political concern is to be members of a political unit which identifies with their idiom, ensures its perpetuation, employment and defence.[3] Moreover, as an elaborated intellectual theory, nationalism has been described as neither widely endorsed, nor high quality or historic importance, but rather like fleas and plagues.[4] Finally, Marxism also rejected nationalism as a tool of the bourgeoisie.[5]

Interestingly enough for this study, the notion of Greek nationality or rather ethnicity has been singled out as sui generis, because of its philosophical paucity which leaves it in an intellectual vacuum. Consequently, it is suggested that an easier perhaps less politicised route would be to treat nationalism on an equal footing with kinship and religion.[6] The etymology and definition of ethnicity must be omitted here. Suffice to say that ethnicity and nationality are not the same, however, they may overlap; hence the popular confusion.[7]

Modern Nationalism

Nationalism as a subject of enquiry unites anthropology, history, philology, linguistics, political science, and literature. As an emotional nineteenth century ideology, nationalism is said to develop from a feeling of belonging to an exclusive group with its own language.

Modern nationalism was initially part of a general emancipatory current begun in England and Holland during the seventeenth century. Said to have marked the Enlightenment, the people's growth to maturity and release from tutelage, nationalism was part of the democratic movement for individual liberty, e.g., France's *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789). The concept of nationhood, as a political-territorial concept, appeared more legal than philosophical, whose language was not specified.[8]

Nationalism presupposes the potential existence of a nation and is closely linked to the self-determination of a group, with the exaltation of the national language and traditions above the formerly frequent use of Latin as the *lingua franca* and Christianity as the common European religion. Major treaties and constitutions have since consecrated aspects of this rather political definition. Considered as a force, nationalism «democratized» culture and through education aspired to endow nations with a common background of a sometimes legendary past. This background provides the nation's claim to its past greatness and future mission.[9] The past and potential then become essentially more important than the actual present.

This preoccupation with the past may explain why anyone would choose to die for one's country. Perhaps it is that nationalism stresses one's group and its rights; past over present and death over life.[10] The reinterpretation of history, through literature, seeks to improve present conditions for the nation. It is thus inward-looking and contemptuous of the present.

Linguistic nationalism evolved thanks to the press and its products. Anderson's term, 'print capitalism', describes this shift from manuscript to print societies. Although the power of print has been reduced in this age of electronic multi-media, literature traditionally preceded cinema, radio and television. Illiteracy

rates up until the middle of this century may appear to contradict the importance of literarure in nationalism before World War II. However, it should be remembered that even now, films, television and radio programs are often based on books and thus perpetuate a myth, a story, a discourse, a message.

Interestingly enough, political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau sought to restore the exclusive togetherness of the Greek city-state. Harkening back to an idealized past, Rousseau and others would transform ancient Greece during this revival of classicism. They frequently found contradictions in the notion of nationalism, especially the militaristic nature of maintaining a border, yet they pursued their ideal feverishly. Diaspora Greeks and Eurohellenists would work to see their romantic imaginary *Hellas* shimmering on the rocky edges of Western Europe. In fact, these and other contradictions would resurface regularly in Greek nationalism and literature.

The level of political organization determined much of the course of nationalism. Germany's political disunity, emphasized its *volk*, language, folkloric tradition, common descent and national spirit. These non-political criteria engendered an ethnic-linguistic nationalism, different from the territorial state-nationalism elsewhere.

The German linguists, Bopp, Grimm and Humboldt, along with the Romantics, Herder, Goethe, Schlegel and others were champions of a form of modern nationalism centred on the *volk*, whose language became the most important issue and for whom national rhymed with natural. These German romantics took up this ancestral, instinctive or spontaneous view and insisted on people's speaking the same tongue, which Fichte claimed had a metaphysical element and common ancestry. Finally, Herderian nationalism, rather mystical and almost sacred, influenced modern Greek nationalism tremendously.

The rise of European nationalism, generally placed within the nineteenth century, follows various patterns. Greek nationalism, bearing Eastern, European, Mediterranean, Balkan and Orthodox influences, provides an often ignored yet excellent example of both nation-building and language planning. The rise of Greek nationalism conveniently falls within the first quarter of that century since its War of Independence in 1821, often considered a watershed year.

The Ubiquitous "Other"

False etymology or *onomatopoesis*, the *baba* of barnyard animals and barbarians neither flatters nor pleases. Foreigners or others always speak an incomprehensible babble in strange tongues. Hypothesizing along sociobiological lines, most animals identify non-species members through smell first rather than sound; humans, on the other hand, always include linguistic markers.[11]

Focusing on this linguistic aspect, Dimitris Tziovas points out in his tropological approach to nationistic demoticism that there is a distinction between nationalism and nationism. The former —*ethnikismos*— is a liberation movement while the latter —*ethnismos* — is a system of thought operating on the basis of rarefaction and exclusion which determines the differences of the national group from others and thus establishes its 'otherness'.

Seferis' echoed Kavvafy's famous poem and asked once: What will we become if the Barbarians do not come? In fact, one of the objectives of Tziovas' nationism is to establish the distinctive characteristics of the national group. Principles of exclusion are needed by which 'otherness' must necessarily be defined because the self-definition of any group depends not only on the sameness of the elements that constitute it, but also on the 'otherness' of elements excluded.[12]

Language and Literature

Rather surprisingly, language is not mandatory to nationalism. In fact, only since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has a common tongue become almost synonymous with nationalism. Some authors specify 'linguistic nationalism', while adding that this is the most common variety today. Surprisingly, research has revealed that linguistic communities and national identities do not always fit and may even collide. Statistically, political entities that comprise a homogeneous national group are extremely rare. Equally startling is the loyalty to a little known tongue, as seen in second and third generation immigrants in North America.[13]

Not everyone participates in folk dances or traditional crafts, but everyone speaks a language; hence the importance of language as a cultural marker. In fact language plays various roles when viewed as a code in a social rather than Saussurian sense, hence the terms *communicative* versus *symbolic* language use. Even such meta- or para- linguistic acts as using one language rather than another and identifying individuals according to mother tongue serve to encode a message of secrecy, unity, or intimacy. An entire language can thus function as a *shibboleth* which includes or excludes people. Dialects, vernaculars, sacred languages (Vedic Hindi, Ancient Hebrew, Church Slavonic, Byzantine Greek) all rely upon this double-edged linguistic sword. Always timely, this fascinating sociolinguistic feature was recently rekindled by the debate between American English and Ebonics.

Sociolinguists often speak of language appearing as a badge of identity and used only in an inner sanctum where access remains restricted to certain initiates. They believe that societies which embrace this sanctum or *iconostasion* metaphor of language project certain linguistic values.

Oddly enough, some sardonically refer to linguistic nationalism as something that cannot be fully understood, and the opposition to it even less, unless we see the vernacular language as, among other things, a vested interest of the lesser examination-passing classes. Essentially the higher the vernacular rises in esteem, usually through state/court endorsement; the more people have an opportunity to share in vested interests.

The situation of ancient tongues such as Hebrew and Greek differed from that of Latin and romance languages. The same may be said of the people who spoke those languages. The brief overview of the history of the Greek language, as seen in Figure 1, shows the struggles of dialect and domination in ancient times, the rise of New Testament *koine* for religious purposes and then the *katharéuousa* and *dhimotiki* for sociopolitical debate.

New Testament «church» Greek endures today along side a demotic or other dialectic. 'Truth' language then remains more accessible than Latin did, because 'sacred' and 'truth' languages retain a mystique different from that of demotic.[14] Hebrew is one of the most famous exceptions and few successful ancient language revivals that served specifically to build a modern national identity.

Of course unlike the ancient, modern Greek is alive and well. Like a human being, language evolves constantly but to different rhythms. The very nature of language, identity and nationalism is fluid, even mercurial, hence the many political manoeuvres used to influence all three aspects of an ethnic group.

However, the oft-quoted Renan who asked *«Qu'est que c'est qu'une nation?»* stated there was something superior to language, and that is soul (perhaps the secular term *human will* would be appropriate today). Renan was a Eurofederalist who also believed in a panhuman culture, a concert of humanity made up of individuals, not nationals.[15]

Religion and Nation

Contemporary reality may be reflected in the observation that «the nation in the modern political sense may not naturally or straightforwardly have a linguistic dimension for some, although obviously after World War II, in many parts of Europe such linguistic luxury was not permitted».[16] Yet the vestiges of linguistic groups remained vital and did serve as reasons for breaking up serveral Eastern European states.

This situation is described by L'udovit Stúr who stated in 1815 the commonly held belief that a truly national language was needed to give the people (here Slovak) a culture. Nationalism would feed and nurture the language; faith and religion, revive, retain and sanctify it. Similarly, Kollár, a later nationalist,

promoted the idea of following Bohemian brothers in language since God in his divine wisdom had guided them through good and bad in a pre-ordained unity.[17]

However, it can also be pointed out that in a multi-ethnic state, less educated people, especially in an unurbanized area, will express their affiliation and identity by their religious sect rather than their language community.[18] This observation serves as a reminder that language is only one aspect of national identity.

The Bible, as translated into Slovak, Greek and many other tongues, has been proffered as the linguistic standard of the 'national' language. The idea of a new language for a new nation appeals to some but frightens others, who fear that change will mean people can not understand their own Bible. Rarely does anyone consider the fact that the Bible, written in the popular languages of various times or places to proselytize, was translated and remains difficult to understand.

Of course besides the sanctity of the holy language, there are also other ancestral links. Without one's mother tongue, one can not return to the past. Interestingly enough, the reasons for an eternal return to the past are rarely examined deeply by these nationalists. However, the Greek case reveals a strong predilection for history.

In fact, Pynsent and Beaton suggest that almost any nationalism, is both an ideology and mythology. In fact, the nation itself is a myth and constitutes a narrative which explains the feeling of closeness to someone in one's own cultural community rather than to someone else, read an 'other'. This observation points to the major role literature can play in nationalism.

The Greek Case

The Greeks are a nation with a well-known, glorious yet equally distant past and a much too recent history of decline, occupation and rebirth. The Herderian dream of awakening a slumbering nation that rises once more applies perfectly to Greece. As Hellenic civilization was rediscovered in Western Europe, philhellenism spread among the intellectuals. Greek independence, as championed by Byron, Shelley and Beethoven, to name but a few, became the most popular intellectual cause of the nineteenth century. Only the Spanish Civil War in this century can compete with such a *cause célèbre*.

Of course, the brute reality turned into a nightmare, but was saved by an invention of the imaginary community of *Hellas*. Poor Byron, alongside other European intellectuals, struggled to arouse the Greeks to take up arms and fight

for their freedom. Once the warriors of Leonidas, many of them had come to prefer domination, numbed by *raki* and *narghile*, to independence. Korais, a francophile Chiote, summed up this widespread attitude:

«For the first time the nation surveys the hideous spectacle of its ignorance and trembles in measuring the distance separating it from its ancestors' glory. This painful discovery, however, does not precipitate the Greeks into despair: We are the descendants of Greeks, they implicitly told themselves, we must either try to become again worthy of this name, or we must not bear it.»[20]

Although written about 180 years ago, the same painful disappointment may be read today on the faces of some well-meaning foreign visitors and classical scholars squinting at ancient ruins. Renowned classicist, Bernard Knox, describes his very personal experience in contrast to the long tradition of specialists either avoiding Greece or holding their noses and keeping them in the air when visiting the land of modern Greeks.[21]

The limits of space and time make an exhaustive or comparative analysis foolhardy; nevertheless, the following pages highlight the debate over Greek language and national identity after 1821, around the two World Wars, civil war, during the Junta years (1967-1972) and even into the 1980's. In counterpoint to this traditional timeline, a few specific literary figures and works will be introduced to demonstrate how modern Greek identity, language and literature have melded into an extraordinary alloy.

By contextualizing Greek nationalism, we may better understand the social structures and figureheads of modern Greek literature. The highly political choice inherent to the linguistic act of writing fiction or essays will be considered within this national context, as well as the institutionalization of this particular literature.

As Korais reported in the early nineteenth century, Greek intellectuals who were often publishing abroad in Budapest or Vienna, found an early clientele for Greek nationalism at home.

«In those towns which were less poor, which had some well-to-do inhabitants and a few schools, and therefore a few individuals who could at least read and understand the ancient writers, the revolution began earlier and could make more rapid and more comforting progress. In some of these towns, schools are already being enlarged and the study of foreign languages and even of thos sciences which are taught in Europe is [sic] being introduced into them. The wealthy sponsor the printing of books translated from Italian, French, German and English; they send to Europe at their expense young men eager to learn."[22]

The Demotic Debate

The literary history of modern Greece may be understood as a debate between the purists and the demoticists. This debate is important because it offers the most striking examples of Greek nationalism, in particular, and nationalist linguistic fervour, in general.

From a linguistic and literary viewpoint, the dhimotiki issue reveals the enduring power of words and of those who pen or legislate them. Although limited time and space prevent an indepth, balanced look at this war of wit and word, key 'debators' include the oldest and most famous purist, Korais, on one side, and the demotic writers, Psiharis, Embiricos, Seferis, Dragoumis, Theotokas, Triandafilides and, last but not least, Katzanzkis, on the other.

Disparate even cacophonous, these names may be situated at the core of the katharévousa-dimotiki debate, although not all together at the same time! Each one either stated his belief and/or acted upon it, collectively or independently. Sometimes the educational or literary associations, salons or generations agreed amongst themselves; sometimes other political or artistic issues divided them.

Theotokas of the 'Generation of the Thirties' wrote passionately yet clearly on style and language. His *Eleuthero pneuma* (*Free Spirit*) comprises several personal essays that reveal his preference for modern Greek language and literature with room to grow and spirit to renew, rather than stagnate. Quixotically, Dragoumis, known for his demoticism, referred directly to reality and imagination when he said «I deny the reality of the Greek state as the centre of Hellenism, as I deny every reality. Reality is my imagination.»[23]

Francophile Adamantios Korais, an early purist, lexicologist and fervent nationalist, cast a long shadow. He regularly cited the examples of France, Italy, and Germany as countries that had freed themselves of barbarism by creating a national language. Language-building and nation-building were inseparable for Korais, as well as his intellectual peers and four generations of followers in both France and Greece.

For a long time, Greek intellectuals and writers debated the merits of a purist versus populist language. Some famous authors, like Papadiamantis, opted for a purified idiom. His works were read out loud in village coffee houses (*kafenia*), so the illiterate men had heard this literary language. Unfortunately today many young Greeks neither read ancient nor katharévousa with ease or pleasure; as a result, works may eventually be translated from katharévousa to dhimotiki in order to appeal to the masses.

Of course neither camp hesitated in heaping on quotes from the great ancient philosophers. Psiharis, an early demoticist whose translation of parts of the Bibles led to riots in Athens, mocked the memory of Korais with the famous hromide:

«Just imagine Demosthenes speaking in katharévousa!» (The idea was that he would have lost his pebbles or his marbles!) Psiharis reminded his contemporary fellow citizens that neither Plato, Homer, nor Menander spoke the same Greek.

Obviously the diachronic nature of language change escaped and still escapes the grasp of the greater public. Language change, when the language happens to be one's mother tongue, remains a delicate matter. Yet the strength of Greek has always been its capacity to change, yet also sustain tremendous continuity. Indeed, the evolution from Latin to Italian was far greater overall than changes in Greek. The arguments of both sides did actually converge because each sought to preserve a rich cultural heritage, as well as create a democratic country. Beyond that goal, however, their perspectives, definitions and means differed widely.

The Linguistic Politics of Kazantzakis

Throughout this century, nationalism has lurked behind reforms to the Greek language and education system. Although the focus of this study is language within culture, education must also be mentioned because it has served as a tool or pretext in the broader debate. Education suited the Demoticists' purpose perfectly, as can be seen in the 1906 Athens «Demotic Language Association", joined in 1915 by the «Educational Society», and in Kazantzakis' writing textbooks and translating Homer into demotic Greek for schoolchildren.

As Kazantzakis' translator-biographer Peter Bien points out, the famous writer saw himself as an imprisoned Luís de León and an exiled Dante of sorts. Unlike Dante in his *Vulgari eloquentia* (*circa* 1302), the empassioned Kazantzakis had a very populist vision stemming from his political affiliations (Communism, Marxism), so he fought the often illogical, usually awkward etymologies and élitist approaches of katharévousa.

Heraklion's famous son, Kazantzakis, was accused of employing too many neologistic, esoteric, and Cretan terms. He may have overindulged his love of dialectology, but his usual riposte referred to Dante's use of certain Tuscan terms unknown in other Italian regions. Most revealing about Greece, Greeks and dhimotiki is the anecdote about Kazantzakis' being pelted with shoe lasts by Chanian cobblers who berated him for publishing texts in the demotic. He was accused by peasants of making people speak like peasants and, even worse, of teaching this modern «barbaric» language to the youth of the country.

It seems that his demotic translation of the sacrosanct Homer struck a chord among many Greeks, be they intellectual urbanites or uneducated fishermen. Even the barely literate would claim to prefer katharévousa, seen as a prestige dialect of power and wealth, rather than the dhimotiki which was spoken by the poor and low classes. This maintenance of a power language by the

unempowered is described by well-known sociolinguists Brown and Levinson who suggest that many linguistic communities hold dear a self-image of greatness and decorum which is expressed through language. This public perception persists among Greeks, inside and outside the country. The good old days of a language that remains frozen, organized, logical and now gilded by time, are often evoked, therefore, with a sneer of contempt for the current speech of young urban Greeks.

The Decline of Katharévousa

Purifying/purging/cleaning, however translated, katharévousa sought to remove Turkish, Slavic or any other foreign words from Greek and thus reproduce a language of the glorious Golden Age, fabricated according to a quirky, painstakingly elaborated set of principles that surpassed common sense or linguistic convention. For that reason, katharévousa fell victim to the vicissitudes of time and recent politics.

The 1967 dictatorship, reinforced and enshrined katharévousa as the language of education and administration, thus remaking it a highly artificial, prestige dialect. Once again this 'High Greek' was fabricated according to the rules of a miniscule élite, not all of whom had the best intentions in acting as guardians of the language. Despite, or perhaps because of these maladroit, high-handed attempts, the demotic recouped after the fall of the Junta. Even during the Colonel's short tenure, many intellectuals had deliberately written in demotic to protest or dissociate themselves from its reactionary policies.

It seems that the repression of the dictatorship lent a *coup de grâce* to a waning katharévousa. The election of Papandreou and his socialist PASOK party in 1981, led to sweeping reforms in law, education, economics and, as could be expected, language legislation. Simplified demotic, without aspiration marks or polytonic accentuation, became the official language of schools and universities, economics and politics. Today, some 'katharévousized' traces remain, but they sound stilted and old fashioned.

The Literary Canon and Consciousness

Contemporary Greek literary theorists or critics, namely Lambropoulos, Tziovas and Jusdanis, underscore the importance of a national literary canon in Greece's development as a Western European nation-state by discussing the structures and processes which enabled literature to favour nationalism.

Lambropoulos reminds us that literature does not inhere in texts but is produced by the application and intervention of established reading techniques. He sees literary criticism as a romantic bourgeois institution in favour of inventions and rhetorical uses of texts. Hence he sees criticism as one 'interpretive community' whose reading and writing habits constitute a discursive practice and whose authority canonizes a text and shapes a shared imaginary spirit. This interpretive community may be seen as a body of systematic knowledge and shared assumptions which Lambropoulos likens to Foucault's discourse.[24] Lambropoulos outlines the following basic assumptions:

1) Transparency of language;

2) Full presence of text (high artistic quality, readable, integral);

3) Genius of author (ultimate source, a master)

4) Authority of critic (a writer writes; a critic authorizes);

5) Irrelevance of gender (although assumed to be a man's world);

6) Supremacy of canon (new works read against this repository).

The example of Seferis' reviving the *Memoirs* of Makriyannis (a semi-literate guerrilla's remembrances of the revolution), remains the best example. Therein, the heroic figures of a guerrilla revolutionary (*kleftes*), a rustic uneducated man (*horiates*), a brave young man (*palikari*) and a patriot (*partiotes*) reappear to set the tone of authenticity and transparency, which makes this work a canonic prose of Greekness. Lambropoulos outlines the following qualities which mark the *Memoirs* as a national literary ouvre:

1) Common, lively, language of the people;

2) Unique, authentic style and local colour;

3) Significant moments of human experience;

4) Expression of Greekness and transhistorical ethos.

Most important, it is the idealistic and romantic creation of a talented, uneducated genius.[25]

Along with the *Memoirs*, the need to confirm a national poet led to the posthumous publication of Solomos' fragmented works with a biography; i.e., a *künstlerroman* for modern Greek literature which provides a form of idealism using Greece as Mother and Muse, (*Manna mou Hellas*).

The so-called *Memoirs* and Solomos' biography plus epic poetry are cornerstones supporting the modern Greek literary canon in the sense of linguistic norm, words and ideas source, genre model and authority. Obviously

history and ethnicity serves as the foundation of this canon. Jusdanis describes how the canon not only represents national identity but also contributes in its production by projecting its values. *Hellas* is seen as a chronological continuity that helps members of the entity overcome present shortcomings and future uncertainties.[26]

The notion that systems of thought are subject to a certain style of representation, in the same way as literary works, leads Tziovas to say that the works follow to some extent the rules imposed by a literary genre. Accordingly, nationists tend to structure their narratives organically and try to depict the consolidation of an integrated entity out of a field of dispersed events. The entity is the nation which is greater than any of the individual elements described in the narrative.[27]

This organic perspective presents a specific position with regard to the way events are related to the larger 'chronicle'. Organicism favours the notion of continuity and totality which were constant preoccupations to Greek historians and intellectuals. A goal-oriented process, the end for nationists is the unity of the *ethnos* as a biological organism.

Although Lambropoulos adopts a rather conspiratorial tone, other writers agree that «dissenting voices are suppressed on the grounds of national, psychological and moral health.»[28] The canon, the interpretive community, instead of the state, can censure or sanctify.

National Literature

Of course, Lambropoulos maintains that with little exception all literature is national; all criticism, ethnocentric. The vague notion of 'Greekness' (not Hellenicity) in literature is central to Lambropoulos. This notion relates to literature as a construal, construct and constructor of *Hellas*. Greekness affects the aesthetic reception of a text. Difficult to define, this elusive quality is «an epiphany of the national spirit, an integral part of the aesthetic desires nurtured by the reading public... a major source and measure of quality». This powerful concept of Greekness presupposes a transparent signifier pointing to a signified essence and ascribes aesthetic quality or status, thus preventing Greek literature from developing any awareness of its own institution.[29]

Lambropoulos adds that literature must play a missionary role in cultivating and distilling the national psyche and reading expectations. He fleshes out previous definitions of Greekness with the remark that like any other notion of identity, it is an idea of fixed boundaries and closure. It excludes what is not authentic and true, the non-Greek, and portrays the original, the eternal Hellenic, as an autotelic unity, thus making it authentic, exclusive, sealed off, and closed.

In sum, Greekness must correspond to the reader and his or her vision. The demand for a well-rounded 'literary', 'conservative' and 'traditional' work, "ends in a fulfilling way to supply missing information, answer all questions and solve problems.» Lambropoulos describes an obsessive inquisition into the ethnic origins of the literary sign as a quest for purity and autonomy. Greekness is deemed the arbitrator of literature.

Tziovas also applies an organic approach in his definition of Greekness which is based on the presuppositions of continuity and totality. Demoticists, according to Tziovas, had to favour this notion of 'total history' to acquire national credentials and confront the purists. In this pursuit of continuity, literature and literary criticism played a pivotal role since certain texts were deemed to be the expression of 'national soul' or 'Greek spirit'. Demoticists therefore conceived of literary history as an evolutionary model, including demotic songs as a basic source. Tziovas thus stresses that language as a form of organic expression or representation cannot be concieved as a transparent means of expression.[30]

Hellas and Romeosyni

Gregory Jusdanis, on the other hand, approaches Greekness from the perspective of disjuncture and contradiction. Although a simplification, this is the schizophrenic contrast of classic Hellas and Modern Greece,[31] somewhat like Femor's interesting yet overly long Romeios-Hellenas dichotomy. According to Jusdanis, Greek national literature seeks and struggles to negotiate the gap between the two perceptions. Whether gap or chasm, the difference has been internalized by Greeks and observed by foreigners whose reaction appears through national literature in an ongoing, looping process.

In many respects Romeosyni (< Romeio), corresponds to the popular traits shared by Greece's Balkan neighbours, as described by Robert Kaplan, the journalist-author of *Balkan Ghosts* . Although quite unscientific, Kaplan's travelogue reveals the rumour mills of the Balkans, where urban and ancient legends point fingers at various 'others', e.g., Serbs, gypsies, and diverse 'infidels'. The Greeks share versions of the same rumours, legends or tales.[32]

In their literature, distrust of others may be represented in the foreign element, such as a Trojan horse of minorities living within the body politic. This geophysical threat to Hellas, along with the historical Turkish geopolitical threat, has usually been couched in religious terms with evocations of Constantinople (never Istanbul) and *Romeiosyni,* who experienced the *Katastrophe* and later exchange of populations in the early 1920s. Finally, from a higher perspective, Jusdanis suggests the ill-suited or belated modernization or Europeanization as an 'Other'.[33]

In that context, some mention should be made about the Greek diaspora. The limited population of Greece makes its diaspora vital to economic and national policy. Those *exo*, but not *xenoi*, nor foreign or 'others,' must feel proud and contribute to the nationalist efforts, especially the international perception of *Hellas*. The diaspora Greeks of today, like the European intellectuals of yesteryear, still play a key role abroad. As an integral part of Greek nationalism, *apodemous* Greeks pressure foreign governments to help their homeland; for example, the powerful Greek-American lobby in Washington. These Greek emigrants, much like their Italian counterparts, feel their origins in their bones, even if they are second- or third-generation and unable to function in Greek. In these cases, language becomes a trace descriptor expressed through accent, intonation, or vocabulary.

Conclusion

Inquiring into the reasons for (re)telling similar stories within a group, be it Greek, Italian or Serbian, requires knowledge of language, history, literature, and more importantly, of the culture of a community. Although many question and quotation marks surround nationalism, linguistic discourse, national literature and cultural production, defined in tandem with Lambropoulos' checklist or marketing approach, they provide a silhouette against which literary works may eventually be profiled as part of a much more developed theoretical effort at understanding imaginary communities. Any commonality would confirm in a codified, even quantified, way the views presented here.

As this article has attempted to show, especially in the first section, linguistic, historical and literary factors are inter-related to such an extent that great caution must be exercised in ascribing them to nationalism. Our sources show some bias, yet recognize that such mind-set, categorization, institutionalization, and power must be taken into account in any study. In the second section, Greek literature served as a live subject whose political and linguistic history provided examples of the theoretical concepts already presented. The third and final section detailed the nationalist nature of modern Greek literature by relying on specialists such as Lambropoulos, Jusdanis and Tsiovas. We now confidently attempt to answer our naïve question about the stories people tell.

Once the question is broken down and examined using nationalism, discourse, imagined communities and the institutionalized cultural production process, the answer initially appears deceptively obvious. As a rule, people (re)tell the stories which are valued by their peers, teachers, and community at large. They do not need to invent much and may thus apply formulae to new situations. The narrative learned, such as «we are descendants of Alexander the Great» or «we are

shunned by the rest of Europe, who are Turk lovers» helps people interpret the world. The stories also provide a sense of sharing (even imagined) experiences with other group members. Their sense of belonging is reinforced by approval and recognition from the group which thus nurtures hope because if it had a glorious past then it deserves a bright future.

Greek literature as narratives or discourses derives from the need to make people living in a territory conceive and confirm through their behaviour, the nation-state of *Hellas*. This imagined community must become more modern and Western; in other words, more organized according to the principles of the overarching political structure of the EU. When all is well, the modern European face of Greece is celebrated and promoted. But when the government of fifty million Turks rattles its saber, the ancient glorification or modern victimization of the Greek republic of ten million is evoked. This 'glory *versus* long-suffering' dichotomy thrives in the Greek media and literary establishment. Inferiority internalized by Greeks decades ago when confronted with their 'belatedness,' as Jusdanis puts it, rises quickly to the surface in external affairs.

In short, a group tells the same stories to keep up appearances and morale, identity and empathy. Another way of putting it, nationalism and its literature seek to derive unifying and energizing power from widely held images of the past in order to overcome a modern kind of fragmentation and a loss of identity. As such, nationalism and national literature may be a positive force, particularly in the lives of those who have felt threatened by larger or more influential neighbours.[33] Here Jusdanis' idea of negotiating contradiction proves useful in analyzing nationalist discourses.

Yet we are tempted to answer this question with another question: Do people really believe, need or want such stories or are these narratives ritualized beyond recognition? Do people recognize or believe the imagined community that the stories proffer? Whatever the ultimate answer, nationalism may be condemned or abstracted but never ignored.

ENDNOTES

1. Benedict ANDERSON, **Imagined Communities**, (New York: Verso,1983), p. 6.

2. Robert B. PYNSENT, **The Literature of Nationalism**, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), p. 3.

3. **Ibid.**

4. **Ibid**, p. 5.

5. John EDWARDS, **Language, Society and Identity**, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell in association with André Deutsch, 1985), p. 5.

6. Benedict ANDERSON. **Imagined Communities**, (New York: Verso,1983), p. 5.

7. David CRYSTAL, **The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 360.

8. **Dictionary of the History of Ideas.** Vol. III. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, Publishers, 1973), p. 326.

9. **Ibid.**, p. 324.

10. John EDWARDS, **op.cit.**, p. 39.

11. Mary MAXWELL, **Morality among Nations An Evolutionary View**, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), Note 4, p. 95.

12. Dimitris TZIOVAS, "The Organic Discourse of Nationistic Demoticism: A Tropological Approach" in Ed. ALEXIOU, Margaret and Vassilis LAMBROPOULOS. **The Text and Its Margins, Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature**, (New York: Pella Publishing Co., 1985), p. 273.

13. John EDWARDS, op. cit., p. 93.

14. Benedict. ANDERSON, **op. cit.**, p. 14.

15. John EDWARDS, **op. cit.**, p. 57.

16. Robert B. PYNSENT, **The Literature of Nationalism**, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), p. 38.

17. **Ibid.**, pp. 42-46

18. **Ibid.**, p. 5 .

19. Roderick BEATON, **Folk Poetry of Modern Greece**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 127.

20. Benedict ANDERSON, **op. cit.**, p. 72.

21. **Ibid.**, p. 79.

22. Dimitris TZIOVAS, **op. cit.**, p. 261.

23. Vassilis LAMBROPOULOS, **Literature as National Institution : Studies in the Politics of Greek Literary Criticism**. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 47.

24. **Ibid.**, p. 57.

25. Gregory JUSDANIS, **Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture, Inventing National Literature**, Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 81. (Minneapolis: University of Minneasota Press, 1987), p. 48.

26. Dimitris TZIOVAS, op. cit., p. 260.

27. LAMBROPOULOS, Vassilis. Literature as National Institution : Studies in the Politics of Greek Literary Criticism, op. cit., p. 18.

28. Ibid., p. 21.

29. Ibid., p. 100.

30. Dimitris TZIOVAS, op. cit., p. 267.

31. Gregory JUSDANIS, op. cit., p. 104.

32. Robert D. KAPLAN, Balkan Ghosts, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 236.

33. John EDWARDS, op. cit., p. 93.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ADAMOS, T. I Logotechniki Klironomia mas. Athens: Ekdosis Kastantioti, 1979.

Ed. ALEXIOU, Margaret and Vassilis LAMBROPOULOS. The Text and Its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature. New York: Pella Publishing Co., 1985.

ANDERSON, Benedict. Imagined Communities. New York: Verso, 1983.

ARNOPOULOS, Paris. Sociophysics. Commack, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 1993.

BEATON, Roderick. Folk Poetry of Modern Greece. Cambridge U. P., 1980.

BIEN, Peter. Kazantzakis and the Linguistic Revolution in Greek Literature. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972.

BODMER, Frederick. The Loom of Language. New York: Norton & Company, 1944.

BROWN, Penelope and Stephen C. LEVINSON. Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

CRYSTAL, David. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language. Cambridge U. P., 1987.

Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Vol. III. N. Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973.

EDWARDS, John. Language, Society and Identity. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.

FARMAKIDES, Anne. A **Manual of Modern Greek.** New Haven: Yale U. P., 1983.

FERMOR, Patrick L. **Roumeli, Travels in Northern Greece.** N. Y: Harper-Row, 1962.

FRANGOUDAKI, Anna. **Glossa kai Ideologia, Koinoniologiki Prosengisi tis Ellinikis Glossas.** Athens: Ekdosis Odysseas, 1987.

FREUD, Sigmund. **Le malaise dans la culture.** Paris: Quadrige, PUF, 1995.

GAGE, Nicholas. **HELLAS, A Portrait of Greece.** London: Collins Harvil, 1987.

HALLIDAY, M.A.K. **Language as Social Semiotic.** London: Edward Arnold, 1978.

HICKMAN, W. Harry , Jean-Pierre MENTHA and Gérald MOREAU. **Le Québec, Tradition et évolution II.** Toronto: W.J. Gage Limited, 1967.

IMBRIOTIS, Yannis. **I Koiniki Simasia tis Ideologias tou Dhimotikismou.** Athens: Kentrou Marxistikon Erevnon, Ekdosis Synchroni Epohi, 1976.

JUSDANIS, Gregory. **Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature.** Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 81. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

KAPLAN, Robert D. **Balkan Ghosts.** New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.

KNOX, Bernard. **The Oldest Dead White European Males.** N. Y.: Norton, 1993.

KOHLER, Denis. **La littérature grecque moderne.** Paris: Que sais-je? PUF,1985.

LAMBROPOULOS, Vassilis. **Literature as National Institution: Studies in the Politics of Greek Literary Criticism.** New Jersey: Princeton U. P., 1986.

MAXWELL, Mary. **Morality among Nations.** Albany: SUNY Press,1990.

PALMER, Leonard R. **The Greek Language.** Cambridge: Faber and Faber, 1980.

THEOTAKÁS,Yiorgos. **Elefthero Pneuma.** Athens: Nea Elleniki Bibliothiki, 1973.

TZIOVAS, Dimitris. «The Organic Discourse of Nationistic Demoticism: A Tropological Approach» in **The Text and Its Margins, Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature.** Ed. Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lamhropoulos. New York: Pella Puhlishing Co., 1985.