

“History is the Mirror of Our Character”

National Character in Greek Teachers’ Speeches on National Day Commemorations

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The paper analyses some aspects of the speeches that Greek teachers give at school on national days. A view of the nation as a “natural unit” becomes the basis for the alleged “national character.” The nation’s past struggles are presented as the natural consequence of national character. In this way national character becomes destiny. At the same time, though, heroic behaviour may influence fate and succeed in altering that destiny, when it is felt as unjust. Speeches given on national day commemorations (a) confirm and consecrate a model of the world as consisting of discrete nations, each with a distinctive set of moral qualities constituting its national essence, and (b) urge each individual member to make themselves the embodiment of national character.

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Introduction

Images of the nation and national character are produced, reproduced and propagated in social interaction, both in everyday life and on “special days” such as national days. After discussing the romantic model of the nation and the concept of national character, the paper proceeds to a description and analysis of some aspects of the rhetoric of speeches that teachers give at school on national days, drawing specifically on examples from Greece. A view of the nation as a “natural unit” becomes the basis for the alleged “national character.” This in turn leads to a particular reading of history where the concept of destiny has a major part. At the same time, though, heroic behaviour may succeed in altering that destiny, when it is felt as unjust.

Conceptual Framework

The Romantic Model of the Nation

Developed after the French revolution, the Romantic movement dominated European

culture, especially in Germany, Britain and France, roughly until the revolutions of 1848. By the middle of the 19th century the ideas of German romantic nationalism had become widespread all over Europe. In what is considered the typical Romantic view, humankind consists of nations—natural solidarities, corresponding each to one people and one culture. Each of these concepts – nation, people and culture – refers to a whole in which the single individuals are not important in themselves but rather as instruments of the national destiny. The Romantic view of history revolves around the concept of nation (in Greek, *ethnos*).¹ For Herder history is the interplay of nations – rather than individuals – each of which represents an unchanging category of people and a unique side of humankind (Breuilly 1994; Dumont 1983/ 1988; Eleftheriadis 1999; Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978).

Unlike the collectivities of liberal theory, which individuals join and leave according to wish and rational choice, membership in the

organic being of nation is not chosen. One belongs to a nation as one belongs to a family, “by nature” (Herzfeld 1992; Hutchinson 1994; Smith 1995: 31). Nature, or what is viewed as such, is set as the highest moral order: whatever contributes to the preservation of that order is “good.” Conquest is always disruption of natural development and, accordingly, resistance to conquest always marks the highest points in the “life” of a nation (Breuilly 1994). Each nation is endowed with a mission and a destiny. It is a teleological view of history not unlike the one that appears, though within different frames of reference, in Christian thinking, the Enlightenment and Marxist philosophy (Ferro 1981/2001). Teleology consists of “reading the appropriate trend into events” (Breuilly 1994, p. 109). It consists of attaching *meaning* to events. Depending on the standpoint one takes, one and the same event may have different meanings attached to it.

Metaphors of the Nation

Metaphors translate something indefinite into something more comprehensible, and the body, the self and the family are the most immediate signs available as vehicles for metaphor. The nation is often metaphorically represented as an organism, with a body, a heart and a soul (Thalassis 1993). Offering images that seem natural, these metaphors provide the foundation for claiming that the nation is a natural subdivision of humankind (Herzfeld 1992: 75–76).

Unlike membership in a state or a socioeconomic class, membership in a nation, when perceived as grounded in common kinship and common ancestry, sustains the idea of continuity, i.e. sameness through time. The family metaphor has been very common and fairly productive, as testified e.g. in English by terms such as *fatherland*, *motherland* and *homeland*. If the discourse of the nation conflates biological and cultural essentialism, this is largely due to the family metaphor, inasmuch as, through the idea of race and common blood, culture comes to be seen as biological inheritance. Human beings frequently define kin groups in biological terms, and then attach “cultural” attributions to these biologically defined relationships; by extension, when the nation is defined using kinship

metaphors, aspects of national character are phrased in terms of “natural” and “innate” attributes (Herzfeld 1992).

National Character

Acting within history, nations manifest their national spirit (*Volksgeist*). The concept of *Volks* and the related notions of national spirit and national character (Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978), were first elaborated by the German humanists, and further developed by Herder and the German romanticists (Breuilly 1994). In this tradition nations, peoples and cultures tend to be viewed as organic beings endowed with certain qualities immanent in the group – physical qualities that are charged with a moral value (Herzfeld 1992). It is the view of the nation as an organism that makes the construct of national character “thinkable”: like individuals, nations, as well as peoples and cultures, have a character – a unique character, an essence – that is as old as the nation itself and that remains unchanged through time. In this view, national character is not seen as the product of common life in the same place and common experiences. Rather, it is innate, given from above, “natural” to the individual or group (Dumont 1983/1988; Eleftheriadis 1999; Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978).

Deviations from the original order of nature, e.g. from the natural character, are unnatural and therefore bad. They require return to the “natural” situation and to the “spirit of that past” (Breuilly 1994: 108). Character is said to be inherited, and therefore predictable. It is clear however that “inheritance” stands here for “retrospective reconstruction” (Herzfeld 1992: 137–139). The view of the nation as an organism with its own character brings with it the concept of national destiny. The set of characteristics traditionally attributed to the nation marks the boundaries of a moral community, becoming “the basis for action, or at least of after the fact justifications” (ibid.: 78).

Within the view of the nation as meaning it would be superfluous to ask whether national character really exists or not. Inasmuch as the idea of national character exists for people and affects their behaviour, then it is real as a social category.²

Production and Propagation of Ideas about National Character

National stereotypes present and oversimplify national character as something fixed and unambiguous. Whether or not people really conform to these stereotypical images in their private life, they make rhetorical use of the stereotypes and they “expend considerable effort in reproducing them” (Herzfeld 1992: 72). Ideas about national character are socially produced and socially propagated. Science has constituted an important channel of such production and propagation. In fact, intellectuals from disciplines as varied as philology, biology, ethnology, history, linguistics and anthropology have all contributed to “prove” that nations are “obvious and natural divisions of the human race” (Kedourie 1994: 53). Billig shows how discourse about national character and national stereotypes is produced, reproduced and propagated in everyday interaction (Billig 1995). Formal education makes its own contribution to this process, both through the teaching and learning activities of the official curriculum and through the informal learning situations of school rituals and celebrations.

Discourses about national character “are simultaneously descriptive and normative” (Neiburg & Goldman 1998: 69). Bourdieu’s (1986/1991, 1992) concept of rite of institution³ may be used to illustrate the normative aspect. The process of institution consists of a naturalization of properties of a *social* nature. The rite of institution contributes to this process inasmuch as it creates discontinuities out of the social continuum and “consecrates the difference,” thereby legitimating an “arbitrary boundary.” Due to the “social magic” brought about by the rite, social, economic and cultural boundaries come to be experienced as natural boundaries by the people involved (Bourdieu 1986/1991, 1992). We can view public ceremonies about the nation (or any instance of use of a national stereotype) as rites of institution in that they create (or re-create) discontinuities out of the continuum of humankind, “consecrate the difference” across human groups and legitimate the arbitrary boundaries between them. By taking part in rites of the nation, young group members are consistently exposed to the view

that nations are the building blocks of humankind.

Behind every rite of institution the message is “Become what you are.” The constraints that the rite imposes on the individual (Bourdieu 1992) are part of its normative character: “Behave like a Greek.” Rituals of the nation discourage individual members from courses of action that do not correspond to the “national character” that is believed to be peculiar to their national group. On the other hand rituals encourage individuals to realize their own “nature” as members of the nation. Since behaving according to nature is “good,” it would be morally condemnable for a Greek, for example, to fail to behave “like a Greek.”

Romantic Nationalism in Greece

The idea of national identity, which had been cultivated by Greek intellectuals throughout the Ottoman period, was systematized and politicized during Greek Enlightenment, between the second half of the 17th century and the start of the revolution. The Romantic conception of history and national character was thus “*un herdérisme avant la lettre*,” expression of an “indigenous Romanticism” that developed independently of European Romantic nationalism (Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978). Widespread among the intellectuals, even the most progressive and radical promoters of Enlightenment ideas, this conception coexisted with views such as freedom from arbitrary power, anticlericalism, equality and in general with the liberal principles that had inspired the Greek revolution of 1821 and the first constitutions of the new state (Kitromilides 1990; Kokkonas 2000; Pizaniias 2000).

Since then, and in spite of the postwar shift towards issues of social justice, political romanticism has been a feature of Greek political thought, both within the “traditional Right” and within the “populist Left” (Eleftheriadis 1999: 47). According to Dimaras, “Greece [is] one of the nations that ... may be characterized as Romantic *par excellence*” (Dimaras 1985: 473). The organic conception of the nation as a “transcendent holistic entity” that served the creation of the Greek state in the 19th century has fossilized, and Greek society remains

attached to it, in spite of the fact that both society and historical knowledge have changed (Liakos 2001a, 2001b). Greek social scientists, politicians and people in the street alike describe the Greeks in terms of eternal and unchanging “characteristics of the race/ nation” (Paparizos 2000)⁴.

The National Day Commemorations

In Greek schools there are two main national celebrations. One of them commemorates the start of the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, conventionally dated 25 March 1821, which eventually led to the founding of the Greek nation-state. This is also the date of celebration of a major Christian religious festival – the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary. The other major celebration relates to Mussolini’s attempt in 1940 to occupy Greece as part of the expansionist campaign of the Axis Powers. At that time the Prime Minister of Greece was Ioannis Metaxas. On the night of 28 October 1940 the Italian ambassador delivered to Metaxas an ultimatum: as a guarantee that the Greek territory would not be used by foreign powers as the basis of war activities against Italy, the Greek government was asked to allow Italian troops to occupy strategic positions in Greece. The Greek government refused, and the people threw itself with enthusiasm in the struggle. This event and the battles which followed between Greek and Italian troops on the Albanian border, known in Greece as the “Albanian epos” (*Alvaniko epos*⁵), are commemorated every year on 28 October, a date and celebration known as “the No” (*to Okhi*). Some speakers, though not all, combine this occasion with remarks about the German-Italian occupation that followed in 1941, and with a celebration of the movement of National Resistance.

An acquaintance pointed out for me that there might appear to be problems for speakers on *Okhi* Day, which are not faced by speakers on 25 March. The War of Independence had a successful outcome inasmuch as it led to the foundation of an independent Greek state. But after October 1940, and the struggle of Greek troops, under appalling conditions in the winter of 1940/41, to force back the Italian troops,

Germany invaded Greece in April 1941. Even if one wanted to ignore the long term result of the Greek Civil War, the 1940 campaign, in which the Greeks could not eventually prevent their land being occupied, would seem more a failure than a success. An outsider might conclude that there is not much to celebrate. Yet the celebration does make sense.

First, the speakers place emphasis on the short-term victories on the Albanian front and on the Greek soldiers’ heroism in a struggle that from the very beginning showed so “unequal” (in most speakers’ words). Furthermore, as Greek scholar Koulouri (2003) explains, “the decision of Greece to resist Italian and German fascism goes far beyond the defence of national independence and is associated with the defence of universal values, such as freedom and democracy” (Koulouri 2003: 78). According to two non-Greek scholars “the Greek victories had a wider significance than their modest military results. At a time when England alone faced Germany and Europe was prostrate, the Albanian campaign was the first defeat suffered by the Axis. The sympathy and admiration of the free world was consequently unstinted” (Campbell & Sherrard 1968: 171). These views are emphatically expressed in the speeches too.

Methodological Approach

The Research Questions

How are the celebrated events (revolution and resistance respectively) presented in the speeches? Why and how, according to the speakers, did the Greeks struggle? What for? And how, according to the narrator, did they manage to reach the results that are the object of the commemoration?

The Sample

The paper is based on a corpus of speeches that were not written for the purpose of contributing to this study. In this sense, I can claim that I adopt a nonreactive method (Brewer & Hunter 1989) inasmuch as I had no part in the production of the speeches, and the speechmakers were “unaware of being parties to research” (ibid.: 128).

The speeches examined in this paper, thirty-

eight in number, have been collected in secondary schools in a provincial town in northern Greece between 1998 and 2003. I collected part of them at the end of the relevant school celebrations that I attended either as an outsider or as a teacher, by simply asking the speaker for a copy of the speech. Since commemorations are held at the same time in all schools, for each commemoration I could attend the relevant celebration in one school only. Therefore I asked acquaintances in the teaching profession to hand me their own speech after the celebration. This means that the data consists of written texts, or, better, of texts that were written for the purpose of being delivered in public.

Having attended these celebrations for several years, I have the impression that usually these speeches, rather than strictly individual creations, are individual enactments of a widely shared social memory—widely shared, in some general lines, at least for the purpose of celebrations. Though each speech has its own style and emphasis, whole (groups of) sentences can be met, in exactly the same form, in more than one speech. As to the status of these speeches, though they are materially written and delivered by individuals, only to some extent can they be considered individual products. Teachers often write their speeches with the help of history school textbooks. Alternatively, they may consult one or more of the several books of speeches commercially available. Moreover, teachers often borrow speeches from one another, sometimes adopting them as they are, more often cutting something and/or adding something else, or combining different speeches in various proportions. To some extent, individual preferences do come into the picture, and this is why most times each speech has a high degree of coherence. At the same time, though, because of what I said above, each speech may better be viewed as a collective creation.

It follows that details such as the gender of the speechmaker or the type of school a certain speech was delivered at are not relevant. Moreover, being interested in the language used rather than the people generating the language, I do not repute important to specify how schools or teachers were selected. It might be important,

though, to mention the political situation at the time the speech was delivered. Actually, around 1974 there was an important shift in the way of dealing with the October commemoration (Koulouri 2000), but this issue, which has important implications for a particular aspect of the October speeches, is not within the scope of this paper. The socialist party was in power almost uninterruptedly from 1981 until May 2004 (with the exception of a four-year period between 1989 and 1993), and the political climate has not changed so as to lead us to expect a change in the type of speeches delivered in school.

The Analysis

I first grouped answers to the research questions in two categories that I called *in-order-to* and *because-of*. These terms were originally used by Schutz in the context of a theory about the motives for people's actions. Whereas *because-of* motives lie in past experience, *in-order-to* motives point to a future state of affairs that the actor wishes to bring about (Schutz 1971). In this paper, by the terms “*because-of* motives” and “*in-order-to* motives” I mean explanations/justifications of actions, respectively (a) in terms of cultural features, feelings or beliefs, that, according to the speaker, made those actions necessary and possible, and (b) in terms of something the action was directed to bring about, i.e. goals and objectives.

Why these categories and not others? Because, after repeatedly reading the speeches, the two categories seemed to emerge from the material and produce an interesting reading key. After sorting the instances in the two categories above and re-reading the speeches, I noticed repeated terms, concepts and statements that suggested that the two categories could and should be combined again, and I found that this made sense from the standpoint of the Romantic paradigm.

More or less this is the way I dealt with the rest of the analysis. I read and re-read the speeches many times in a kind of continuous dialogue with the material. The categories of fate and destiny, for example, stood out at once. When I came across words/ phrases/ points of view that differed from the mainstream ap-

proach, I took note of them. These instances helped me see what the mainstream speeches did *not* say. In fact, absence is not less meaningful than presence (Bateson 1972).

A Few Words about Myself

Born in Italy, I moved to Greece in 1979 when I got married to a Greek citizen. I worked as a teacher in state schools in Greece from 1987 to 1992 and again from 1998 to 2000. Until then I had attended national day commemoration with some special interest, and sometimes I even felt moved to tears, but without planning to write any paper about that interesting aspect of school life yet. Since 2000 I have been a lecturer at a Greek university and I have started developing an academic interest in teachers' speeches.

The National Day Commemorations at School

On the two national days, shops and public services are closed. Commemorations are held in all schools, following the procedure stated in the relevant presidential decrees and circulars of the Ministry of Interior. In towns, celebrations in schools are held on the day before, whereas on the day of the commemoration school staff and students gather at a church in the school neighbourhood. There, during the liturgy, a teacher delivers a speech. After that, the army and the pupils parade in the centre of the town. Each school contributes to the parade with a group of students. The top student from each school parades carrying the national flag. Parades attract a great number of inhabitants – not just the parents of the pupils parading – who stand at the sides of the street, watch and applaud every now and then. From a platform set up for the occasion, representatives of the local political, military and religious authorities attend too, together with a delegate sent by the government.

At schools, commemorations are held in the celebration hall, when there is one, or just in the school hall, which usually is large enough to host the public. It is mostly pupils and teachers who attend, but sometimes parents attend too, especially at primary schools and especially on *Okhi* Day, when the commemoration includes

the awarding of prizes to the pupils who had achieved the best grades at the end of the previous school year. A commemoration always starts with a speech, usually delivered by a teacher who reads out of a written copy. Usually the speechmaker is one of the teachers who teach Greek (ancient and modern) and history (*filologi*). One reason is that these teachers are expected to have, by definition, the necessary historical knowledge for writing a speech as well as for choosing the relevant poems and songs. Another reason is that these teachers are perceived as generally more skilled at writing. Sometimes, especially in upper-secondary schools, the speechmaker is an elder student, though even then the speech may have been written by (or with the help of) a teacher. A commemoration also includes songs, poems, readings from school anthologies or other texts. At the March commemoration one may also see one or more sketches that dramatize events related to the theme of the celebration. A commemoration always ends with the participants standing and singing the national anthem. A detailed description of these celebrations is provided by Bonidis (2004).

The Context

People who attend a school commemoration are aware that other people in other schools sing the same anthem on the same day, at more or less the same time, using the same language (Anderson 1991), and that this happens within the boundaries of that portion of the world called Greece. Moreover, the people gathered at a celebration may be aware that for decades in the same school, and in the very same ceremony hall, past generations of pupils and teachers have met for the same purpose, recalling the same events and concluding the rite with the same anthem.

As to the school context in which these speeches are embedded, recent studies show that textbooks, produced by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, teach the pupils to think in rigid representations and national characteristics. On the whole Greek education has a strong ethnocentric character. The history taught at school, revolving around the idea of the nation as an eternal and natural essence, is

to a large extent mythology. The basic categories of the discourse about the nation are continuity, preservation, resistance, homogeneity and superiority. Teaching is heavily based on the textbooks and little margin is left for teacher initiative (see individual chapters in Dragona & Frangoudaki 1996; see also Avdela, 1996a; Avdela 1998; Frangoudaki 2001). Interviews with teachers serving in primary schools with a high percentage of pupils from a non-Greek, non-Orthodox background show that those teachers believe that a fundamental part of their task is to preserve Greek heritage and shape the pupils' national consciousness (Inglissi 1996).

In-order-to ...

What did the Greeks struggle for? They struggled for preserving honour and dignity, for defending their "holy land," their glorious historical past and the ideals of the fatherland, which grant the nation's survival. They struggled for the liberation of the *ethnos*, for freedom, democracy, independence and peace. They fought against obscurantism, violence and subjugation. A few speeches, though not the majority, take into account – to a lower or higher degree – a social dimension to the struggle. Thus some speeches mention a "struggle with a social content against any oppression," though without further developing the analysis, while in one case a class approach constitutes the very backbone of the speech. To the above goals, most March speeches add the struggle for the "holy faith of Christ" and the attempt to "urge upon the whole of Europe the righteousness of our [the Greeks'] claims."

Attributing a universalistic dimension to the revolution, some speakers say that the struggle took place for "pure ideals and the basic values of the civilized world" that "were being threatened by crude and open violence." This theme is overwhelming in the October speeches.

Because-of ...

Why did the Greeks struggle? And why/how did they win? They struggled because they have a high sense of honour and deep love of the fatherland; because they have patriotism; because the flame of freedom has never quenched

within the Greek struggle; because for the Greeks the struggle for freedom and democracy is a way of life. In addition to "the free Being of the Greeks" and their "hate for the enemy," March speeches place stronger emphasis on freedom, something – they state – that Greeks have never given up fighting for. They struggled and won because for the Greeks "freedom is a way of life"; because they have "struggleness"⁶, because "Jesus Christ and Greece were vibrating – within the Greek soul and they did not let it accept the idea of subjugation." Next to the Greeks' "faith in God," which urged them to revolt, there sometimes appears another kind of faith that adds a universalistic dimension to the struggle. It is the faith in the "noblest human ideals," the "eternal moral values," and the "universal, panhuman claims for freedom, peace and dignity."

"History is the Mirror of our Character"

In both the March and the October speeches it is claimed that each people has a distinctive attitude towards life: "The history of a people is substantially the history of a few moments in which it confirms its will to either live actively, autonomously, and in accordance with its peculiar attitude to life or to die."

The struggle is explained by the "essence" that the Greeks "had carried within them for centuries." Their "noble deeds" are a demonstration of that essence, which consists of a number of distinctive marks. Also referred to as "gifts" and "virtues," these distinguishing features consist of "our values as a nation" and the "imperishable ideals of our race" (see Note 1 for the term "race"), but also include the "perennial bad sides of the race." In fact, in this model nations have not only innate gifts but also innate bad sides⁷. A speaker states: "History is the mirror of *our* character"⁸ (Emphasis added). The following quote summarizes most of these values and ideals:

"With the struggle of 1940 all those distinctive values that define our Nation were brought out – the adoration and the infinite love of the Greeks for freedom – a freedom that, in Kazantzakis' words, is not "fall, pie, so that I can eat you." It's a fortress, and you conquer it with

your sword." (...). The sense of dignity, the national and individual sense of honour (*filotimo*), the sense of good and the strength of imagination are additional distinctive marks – jewels – of the Greek race."

Further "distinctive features" of the "race" are determination, courage, audacity, an indomitable soul, endurance, a strong sense of duty towards the fatherland, greatness, strength and "struggleness." One of the most quoted "national virtues" is "love of freedom," which is described as "created by the Greek race" (or "naturally Greek"; in the original, "*yennima thremma tis Ellinikis filis*"). The Greek nation "proves to be unique among all the peoples on the earth." Those unique characteristics, the "virtues of the race" constitute the nation's "compass" in her navigation through history. These moral qualities are "distinctive marks (...) of the Greek race, (...), of national and personal conscience." Thus when the Greeks carry out their duty as Greeks they feel proud: "And we are proud because we had been born Greeks and we had fought like Greeks." This unique set of characteristics is glossed as "our Being" or "Greek soul," "indomitable and proud," "perennial and imperishable," "created to live free and independent."

The continuity stressed in the speeches is not only material and biological, but cultural as well: "Not only did the Greek people manage not to die out and disappear, but kept its national consciousness unpolluted." The continuity is further stressed by suitable time words: the fatherland "never" surrenders, the Greek people's desire for freedom is an "everlasting yearning," their ideals are "eternal," and their "passions inspired by God" date back to the "very beginning" (the beginning of what is not specified), just as the Greek soul and Greece itself are immortal. Similarly, the word "our Being," which in Greek is expressed with the infinitive form of the verb (*to ine mas*), places the nation out of time. This Being, this soul, seems to contain its future in itself: "The Greek soul cannot possibly ever live in slavery. Greek blood is destined to flow in the veins of free human beings." In a school, a poster in the central corridor read: "Greek child, don't forget

that you're a Greek, and within you shines indomitable the soul of the *Yenos*" (see Note 1 for the term *Yenos*).

Though one speech notes how during "centuries of slavery" the people gradually *developed* national consciousness, most speakers seem to subscribe to the theory of national awakening: after four centuries during which the *ethnos* was in "coercive hibernation," the "Teachers of the *Yenos* [early supporters of Greek independence, N.O.A.] managed to awaken and activate the latent national consciousness." The categories *nation*, *race* and *people* are not used with the same frequency in the two groups of speeches. In the October speeches the term *people* (Gr. *laos*) is the most common to refer to the in-group (almost seventy per cent of the occurrences). In a very few occurrences it is used in the sense of "the ones who do not have power in society." In all the others it means "Greek national body." The categories *nation* (Gr. *ethnos*) and *race* (Gr. *filii*) occur much more seldom but with roughly equal frequency (about fifteen per cent each). However, the particular context in which each term is embedded is often (though not always) different, as showed by the following examples: "And the struggle of our people (Gr. *laos*) against fascism started" vs. "the bowels of the *nation* quake."

In the March speeches the cultural category *ethnos* is the most common. The cultural category *Yenos* is used too, but mostly, together with *race*, in those March speeches where the religious element is given prominence. The term is often capitalized and used without any qualifier, as in e.g. "the resurrection of the *Yenos*" (See note 1 for the capital initial of *Yenos*). *Race*, though, appears also in October speeches. *Hellenism* is occasionally used in both groups of speeches. There are individual variations across speeches as well. For example, some of them place greater emphasis on the concept of race. A few speeches refer to the categories that make up the nation e.g. town-dwellers, farmers, and so on, but usually only to stress the universal participation in the struggle, e.g. "all classes gave their blood and soul." In most speeches unity is simply taken for granted in the categories of *ethnos*, *Yenos* and *race*. Some speeches explicitly stress it: "The creator of the 1821 Revolution is the

whole *ethnos*.”¹⁰

The emphasis on unity is consistent with the metaphor of the nation as a living organism, either a tree/plant with “roots” and a “national trunk” or a body: the “nation-wide alert” makes “the bowels of the nation quake.” Accordingly, nations are made the grammatical subject of verbs that are literally used for organisms: they “go into hibernation,” and eventually “awaken”; they may die and resurrect, or be born again; finally, they may manifest their own “will”. What is the place of each individual in the organism? One speaker states that “all of us constitute particles of a whole, and all of us are indispensable to the task of achieving the prosperity of this country.”

The *ethnos*/Greece (*Elladha*, feminine in Greek) takes sometimes the shape of a female body or of the most female part of a female body: a “uterus where the seed of freedom [has grown for centuries].” The boundaries of the territory of the nation are the boundaries of a female body: “A whole empire would rape our national boundaries in the most cruel way.” The family metaphor (mother, children, brothers) and the blood metaphor are used, though not to a large extent.

Fate and Destiny

Especially in the March celebrations, speeches often mention fate and the “destiny”¹¹ of the race.” Through the centuries, the race has been “on a march along the road of its destiny,” “as the fate of the race dictates.” Fate has set out a written plan for all the peoples, and for each people separately: “And the peoples try to devoutly fall into line with their history and traditions as if out of a biological, organic need. For the Greeks this need is not only biological but national as well.” Poems and songs, chosen by teachers and read by pupils during celebrations, reiterate these views. Sometimes complaints are voiced because Greece has got from fate less than she deserved: “The unjust fate of centuries (...) condemned the Greece of philosophy and democracy to endlessly embroil herself in wars and fights.” According to one speaker, many times fate, jealous of Greece, opposes her plans.

The concepts of fate and destiny give one

more answer to the question of why the Greeks struggled: “It’s the destiny of the Greeks that their bones should crush and be blessed in struggles and sacrifices in which the only rewards are immortality and glory.” The revolution is described as “the *fatal* outcome of the clash between just and unjust, between national pride and oppression and domination” (Emphasis added). The idea of destiny is echoed in phrases such as “the blessed time had come, the time of the proclamation of the revolution.” The Greeks had lost neither courage nor hope, and “*in the fullness of time* their anger broke out” (Emphasis added).

The term “will” and related verbs are mentioned several times in relation to the Greek people. In the March speeches, the Greeks’ “iron will” becomes “unbridled like the lion’s will” because it is sustained by their love of freedom. The strong will of the Greek people, together with self-confidence and “struggleness,” yearning for freedom, courage and strength “created in the Greeks the feeling that sooner or later their destiny must be changed.” It is possible for a people to “change its historical course” and “escape from its unwanted destiny.” Eventually the Greeks’ struggle, conducted against all odds, does not leave fate indifferent:

“And the fate of Greece, which had kept her enslaved, regretted her own behaviour. And she [fate] ran to Mount Olympus and to Parnasus, to the Pindus and the Agrafta, to Mani and Souli and to other mountain tops, and suckled with her milk the heroes who fed the tree of freedom and brought about the resurrection of the fatherland”.

The concepts of fate and destiny are used only in a few of the October speeches, usually to explain why the Greeks struggled: it is the destiny of the Greeks to have to face enemies, push back conquerors and always be present in great events.

Discussion

Circular Causality

How do the speakers explain action? How do they explain the start and conduct of the war of

liberation on the one hand, and the *No* and the “epos of Albania” on the other hand? The *why*, *how* and *what for* questions about the struggles can be answered with a double series of motives/ explanations: (a) the Greeks acted *in order to* achieve, among other things, freedom and independence; (b) they did so *because* they have always had a deep love of the fatherland, yearning for freedom and hate for tyranny. The *because-of* category includes several traits that are presented as unique features of Greek national character. An individual is born Greek, and from this simple biological reality springs behaviour. Culture is a consequence of biology: “We had been born Greeks and we had fought like Greeks.” “Greekness” is an unchanging essence, the timelessness of which is stressed through the use of suitably chosen time words: “never,” “always,” “from the beginning” and “perennial” reinforce the stress on the continuity of the nation. That is, (a) the Greeks acted like that *in order to* achieve certain objectives, and (b) the Greeks acted like that *because* they are Greeks. Action is explained as both politics and meaning.

However, they had set those goals because they were/ are Greeks and so it was in their *nature* to set such goals. The actions performed by this people/ nation are the product of its national character, its essence and its nature: they fought *in order to* obtain freedom *because* it was in their nature to yearn for freedom. Ultimately, action as politics is reabsorbed into action as meaning. The example that best shows the circularity of the argument is maybe the statement that the Greeks fought, died, sacrificed themselves etc. because they have “struggleness”; that is, they struggled *because of* their “struggleness.” Action is explained resorting to something contained in the performing organism rather than to a property of the interactive system of which the organism is part. This is not too dissimilar from what people do when they attribute e.g. an individual’s act of aggression to their “aggressiveness.”

An October speech states that “the *No* of that day was an act commensurate to all the noble deeds that witness to the unity and continuity of our race.” First, who “we” are is used to explain what “we,” i.e. our ancestors, did; second,

our behaviour is judged consistent with the ancestors’ behaviour and brought as a proof of the continuity of the race through what can be called a self-sustaining argument. Like all stereotypes, statements about national character are self-sustaining inasmuch as they resist regardless of disconfirming experiences. According to Daniel Goleman (1995), a self-sustaining way of thinking is one of the features of the emotional mind.

A Meaning in the Nation’s History

Greece is perceived as having lost a great part of her past greatness. This constitutes a deviation from the natural order of things and must be corrected. It is “written” that Greece will recover her past glory and become great again if she recovers her past. When a teacher says that “the peoples who remember their history repeat it at higher levels, in superior spheres,” he points to a process that consists at the same time of repetitions and progress. In this conception of progress the future depends on the past. The journey of the nation may be described as going back to the past in order to be able to go ahead into the future. It is like looking ahead to the past, or looking back to the future. It is said that “the peoples try to devoutly fall into line with their history and traditions (...),” as if a nation’s history and tradition had an existence independent from the existence of the nation itself. It is as if a nation’s history existed on a higher level of abstraction. This is reminiscent of Kroeber’s conception of culture as “existing” in the area of the “super-organic,” at an autonomous level of reality, independent from individual action and control (Cuche 1996/ 2001). The nation’s “life” seems to be perceived as the attempt by each generation to imitate a super-organic model of the nation itself: “Let the destiny of the nation be our goal.”

The march of the nation through time takes on a teleological character. In a teleological reading of events the past takes on meaning according to the way it is approached in the present and according to the kind of future that is perceived as desirable. It is as if the future influences the past and the present, producing a backward reading of events: it is the “magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny”

(Anderson 1991: 10), or “to recast the contingent as the eternal and inevitable” (Herzfeld 1987: 84). Marxist philosophy and Christian thinking have viewed history as directed towards a goal that had been set as its end (Fr. *fin*, Gr. *telos*) and its completion. Both have seen a *meaning* in history: in the former case the meaning (Fr. *fin*) of the process is in the perfection of this world, in the latter case the meaning is somewhere outside this world (Le Goff 1986/1998: 173). From the standpoint of this nation, the meaning of history seems to be in the attainment of glories comparable to her past glories – that is, the re-establishment of the “natural” order. In one speech the final solution of the war of liberation is defined as the “the *fatal* outcome of the clash between just and unjust, between national pride and oppression and domination.” This seems to point to a cosmology where not only everything is “written” from beforehand, but where Good always wins. History is the progressive realization/ triumph of Good. Since the nation is the incarnation of everything positive, Good is identified with the national group.

The Nation is an Organic Whole

The nation as a collective individual is the protagonist of history. Individuals are “particles in the whole,” all of them “indispensable” for the “prosperity of this country” – a functionalist explanation in character with the organic metaphor. In most speeches the nation (*ethnos*) is a unit with a biological continuity, expressed in the concepts of *race* and *genos*, and a cultural continuity consisting of national consciousness, values, ideals, and so on. Like an organism, the nation has within it from the “very beginning” all the information that will allow it to become what it is destined to become, though the question of the “beginning” is usually left in the mist. In fact, if one allows for the existence of some beginning of the nation, at the same time one recognizes its historicity, thus denying its necessity and its being part of the nature of things. This kind of cultural DNA reveals itself within the course of history. It is as if the future of a nation had *always* already been present (already written) within the nation itself.

In this view, talking about the future requires

resorting to the notions of fate and destiny. Just as in the concept of race, biology is destiny, so in the concept of fate, culture is destiny (Herzfeld 1987; 1992). The concepts of fate and destiny are closely interwoven with the notion of national character as well. National character becomes destiny. Ritual is there to remind individuals of who they are and to confirm the classification that culture has imposed on the social world: “Greek child, don’t forget that you’re a Greek (...)” To what extent do the speeches really legitimate images of national character? The reply to this question is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some of the views about national character expressed in the speeches may be heard in everyday conversation. More than once, during informal conversations with young Greek people (mostly students), I have been told that the Greeks have certain characteristic features among which they usually mentioned love of freedom first. As to my remark that probably all peoples love freedom, usually they did not seem to see my point. It was as if they heard something out of their universe of meaning. Certainly *these* rites are likely to have the effect of confirming a certain social and moral order. At the same time, though, one should have in mind that (a) besides these commemorations and related speeches, other institutions act in the same direction, and (b) in the social sciences causality is not linear as in the natural sciences but rather circular (Bateson 1972): to the extent to which such rites really confirm and reproduce a certain social and moral order, they are also the *product* of such order.

“Fate Regretted Her Own Behaviour”: The Nation Shapes its Own Destiny

In the statement “the peoples try to devoutly fall into line with their history and traditions (...)” it is as if peoples acted on the scene of the world as actors in a theatre, enacting a *script* that had been *written* long before they started acting and to the *writing* of which they have not contributed. The image of a *writing* fate is a feature of everyday discourse in Greece (Herzfeld 1992). However, the speaker states that the peoples “try to fall into line,” implying that their “falling into line” is not automatic. Far from being puppets, individuals or peoples do have at

least some degree of agency. This is most evident in two speeches in which the role of fate becomes surprising: “The fate (*mira*) of Greece, which had kept her enslaved, regretted her own behaviour,” eventually taking the side of the Greeks and helping them in their struggle. Initially hostile to Greece, fate feels compelled to change her mind because of the Greeks’ heroic behaviour. This image does not match the image of the fatalist Greeks (or in general the fatalist Mediterraneans) that one can encounter in several ethnographies of the past. Fatalism, which means a “passive and total resignation to future events,” has been attributed to Greeks by nations that have dominated them. Rather than being an indicator of fatalism, the invocation of fate – both in the speeches and in everyday speech in Greece – serves to rationalize damage *after* it has happened. Herzfeld (1992) points out the similarity between the resignation to fate usually attributed to oriental peoples and (Western) Calvinist notions of predestination. The “West” seems not to be able to perceive the “other within the self.”

Against charges of fatalism, several ethnographies of Greek villages show that struggle is a moral obligation and a leading concept in everyday life:

“anyone who does not do his best in this sense is unintelligent and deserves to lose the battle. Those who try may still fail, and then the villagers turn to fate or to God’s will as an explanation. But an appeal to fate or to God is never an excuse for neglecting actions which are humanly possible” (Friedl 1962: 75).

Metaphors

Metaphors often point to a type of relationship among members of the nation that is natural and necessary. The metaphor of the body, for example, portrays the nation as an organism: “The body of Hellenism.” The total sum of its members is often referred to as “the Greek” in the speeches. For certain purposes the body of the nation is a female body, for example in memories of past dangers or visions of possible future ones where conquest by foreigners is equated to rape¹². Both the family metaphor and the body metaphor in some way convey the

idea of continuity, which is a key idea in the textbooks, too. Any organism changes through time though remaining the same organism. As concerns the family, the idea of continuity is contained in the family name and, in some cultures, in the custom of naming children after their grandparents – a custom widespread in Greece. When infants are named after deceased relatives, new members come to replace the dead and this allows the family to take on a kind of immortality (Campbell 1964; Esposito 1989: 92–94).

Summary

A specific conception of the nation and history is propagated more or less consciously by secondary school teachers in Greece. The two national celebrations keep alive the memory of two important struggles in which the nation opposed foreign conquest. Since conquest is always disruption of natural development, resistance to conquest always marks the highest points in the “life” of a nation (Breuilly 1994). The struggles that are focus of the celebrations are presented as the natural result of a double series of motives: in-order-to motives and because-of motives. The in-order-to motives refer to goals that the members of the nation wanted to achieve, e.g. national freedom. The because-of motives refer to a set of distinctive traits immanent in the national group and as old as the group itself, that constituted the “natural resources” that made the celebrated action both necessary and possible. Given those national features, faced with the subjugation to the Ottoman Empire and Mussolini’s invasion, the Greeks could only act as they acted: they revolted, fought and struggled because they are Greeks. Culture is used as an explanatory concept. The set of features, among which an immense love of freedom and a willingness to struggle are the most outstanding, amount to what within German Romantic thought is known as “national character.” History, as one speaker states, “is the mirror of our character.” The in-order-to motives are eventually re-absorbed into the because-of motives that constitute national character.

Given these presuppositions, history could

not have developed but the way it did develop. In a way, events were written from beforehand, and actually this idea is conveyed through the concepts of fate and destiny, repeatedly mentioned to explain the how and why of the main events. Fate is jealous of Greece and that is why she sometimes erects obstacles on the nation's path. However, on the basis of these speeches it is not possible to charge the Greeks of fatalism. This is apparent especially in two speeches where, faced with the courage displayed by the Greeks in their struggle and with their determination against all odds, fate regrets her behaviour and takes the side of the Greeks. That is, the Greeks *win* fate to their cause. Therefore, (national) destiny can be affected by behaviour.

Concluding Remarks

Speeches may be viewed as social texts: they do not simply reflect the social and natural world, but actively construct a version of the social and natural world. In this sense they have social and political implications. Through teachers' speeches, school rituals on national celebrations contribute to the production, reproduction and propagation of ideas about national character. Rites of the nation create discontinuities out of the continuum of nature and "consecrate" the resulting classifications imposed on the world. They "consecrate differences" and legitimate the "arbitrary boundary" (Bourdieu 1986/1991: 118) that divides the nation from other nations, thus confirming a model of the world according to which the continuum of humankind is composed of discrete, bounded and homogeneous nations.

Once the "arbitrary boundaries" around each nation are consecrated, the socially constructed order comes to be experienced as natural by the individual. Within this scheme nature (i.e. what is thought to be nature) is perceived as the highest moral order. The normative dimension of ritual is a consequence of the fact that the nation is felt to be part of the natural order. Like acts of institution, rituals of the nation invite each of the participants to become aware of the nature that they, as members of the national group, share with the other members, and to

make their individual life the embodiment of national character.

Most of the speeches analysed in this paper present a model of the world as consisting of nations, with emphasis on the unity and homogeneity within each nation. Such an account proves problematic both as a model *of* and a model *for* society (Geertz 1973). As a model *of* society, like the models presented in textbooks, it gives an inexact picture of Greek society: besides concealing the existence of social differences and inequalities, it does not take into account the fact that people with a non-Greek, non-Orthodox background keep migrating to Greece. For the same reasons, as a model *for* society, the cultivation of the "nationalist mythology of the 19th century" (Frangoudaki 2001: R07) does not offer viable prospects for the integration of all these people who live within the boundaries of the Greek state and intend to stay. At school, celebrations that propagate such models *of* for the world are not easily conciliated with democratic demands for the integration of immigrants' children in Greek schools, which is a necessary step for their future integration as adults in Greek society. Maybe it is time to invent alternative ways of cultivating memory.

Notes

1. The historical knowledge produced today in the Greek academic and public discourse is based on the concepts of "nation" (*ethnos*) and "race" (*filii*) (Karakasidou 1994). *Ethnos* conveys both the concept of *ethnic group* and *nation* (Karakasidou 1993, in Triandafyllidou 1997, paragr. 4.2), *ethnicity* and *nation* (Herzfeld 1997: 78). Also, according to Tsatsos (as cited in Christopoulos & Tsitselikis 2003), in the Greek Constitution (art 1, par. 3) the term *ethnos* ("nation") seems to be related to the concept of *yenos*, in the sense of "race." *Fili* is used in the sense of "race" and also "people" (in a cultural sense). According to Herzfeld (1982: 133), it is a synonym for *ethnos*. The term *yenos*, which could be rendered as "lineage," is widely used by Church representatives in public speech. Vasiliou & Stamatakis (1992) define *yenos* as a blood-related group or the whole of individuals descending from the same first ancestor (*yenarchis*), forefather, and who constitute a group on the basis of particular social and religious rules. Zakythinos (1976) glosses *yenos* as "race," and Herzfeld (1992) defines

it as single, enormous kin group. It seems that there is some overlapping in the way these terms are used. As pointed out by Herzfeld (1987), the terms *ethnos*, *fili* and *yenos* all imply common descent.

Though until the fall of Constantinople reference had been made to the “*yenos* of the Greeks” and “our *yenos*,” at some point in time the term started appearing without any qualifier, alone—the *yenos par excellence*. This has been interpreted as a sign that the idea of *yenos* had taken such proportions in “Greek consciousness” that adding any qualifier would only weaken its meaning: it was not any longer the *yenos* of the Greeks or “our *yenos*”: it had become the *Yenos*, with a capital initial, and it came to be attached a strong moral content (Dimaras 1989; Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1978). Something comparable holds for the term *fili*, which in official Greek rhetoric is used without qualifiers to refer to the Greek people (*i fili*, or even *i Fili*, “the Race,” with capital initial). As pointed out by Herzfeld, this usage testifies to the “absolute finitude” with which such ideas are articulated (1987: 214; 1997: 40).

2. For example, national frontiers, socially produced, “generate effects by acting on the self-perceptions of the communities they divide, and cause the formation, as time passes, of ways of being and feeling, ways of life and moral patterns” (Neiburg & Goldman 1998: 66).
3. Bourdieu (1992) proposes the term “rite of institution” as a substitute for “rite of transition.” In this context, *institution* means *establishing in a position or office, investing*.
4. The following quotation is taken from the work of non-Greek scholars: “The legacy of Greece’s unexpected resistance to the Italians was the confirmation of the personal and national virtues which some, especially foreigners, had begun to doubt any longer existed” (Campbell & Sherrard 1968: 173).
5. The transliteration of Greek terms and phrases (based on Herzfeld 1982, 1987) follows a modified phonemic system (real pronunciation).
6. Struggleness: In the original, *aghnistikotita*, from the word *aghnas*, which means “struggle”. “Struggle” is a key word in the speeches, especially in the March ones. The war of liberation, which is the object of memory on March 25, is often referred to as simply “the Struggle,” with a capital initial – like “the *Yenos*” and “the Race” (see Note 1). Therefore, I chose to make up a word such as “struggleness” rather than using e.g. “combative-ness.” Also “a love for struggle” seemed too weak, maybe because consisting of several words. Gregory Bateson narrates how the word “ethos”, which he was using in fieldwork in New Guinea, revealed rather troublesome to work with, due to the fact that it is “too short.” Thus, he tended to forget that he was dealing with an abstraction, and was handling the word as if it referred to something concrete and “causally active” in shaping native behaviour (Bateson 1972: 82). For similar (and at the same time opposite) reasons a phrase like “a love for struggle” would have been too weak in the context of this paper: I needed to express this emic term in *one* word only, so that it would sound as “causally active” as possible.
7. In the speeches the most quoted Greek bad side is discord (*dichonia*), which the textbooks condemn as harmful for the nation. The idealized image of homogeneity that emerges from the textbooks does not make pupils used to the idea that society hosts conflicting interests. Thus, instead of being presented as the normal condition, political struggle is morally condemned (Frangoudaki 1996a).
8. “*Our character*”: The use of the pronoun “we” (us, our), meant to include all the Greeks of all times, can be called the “historically expanded we” (De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak 1999).
9. Next to the adjective *ethnikos* (national), which refers to the political boundary (Cowan 1998), in the 1980s the adjective *ethnotikos* (ethnic) has come into use to refer to the cultural boundary (Angelopoulos 1997). The two adjectives derive from *ethnos* that conveys both the concepts of nation and ethnic group (see Note 1). A third adjective, the Greek *ethnik*, has lately appeared in phrases such as “ethnic music,” “ethnic food” and “ethnic accessories,” the last one used in the field of fashion.
10. Recent studies show that the textbooks used in Greek schools do not train pupils to distinguish between peoples and governments, or between citizens and political representatives (Frangoudaki 1996b, 2001). No reference is made to ethnic, cultural and religious differentiation within the national body, nor to social differences and conflicts (Avdela 1996b, 1998). As national homogeneity is a highest value and a necessary condition for group preservation, the image of homogeneity must be maintained. For the purpose of inclusion in history textbooks, the selection is operated so as to leave out events that could raise doubts about the image of unity and patriotism (Askouni 1996).
11. *Fate and destiny*: In the speeches three different words are used for concepts that belong to the semantic field of fate and destiny: *mira*, *pepromeno* and *imarmeni*. *Mira* refers to “the hypothetical and unexplainable force that is considered responsible for what happens to each human being.” More specifically, it refers to (a) the personification of fate and (b) what fate has established for each human being. *Imarmeni*, which comes from the same root, means “the superior force that directs and influences the whole world, as well as the fortune of each human being.” *Pepromeno* is the fate of each person. The

plural, *ta pepromena*, means “the mission and aspirations of a human group, as they have been shaped within the framework of historical development” (Idhrima 1998). In English the terms *fate* and *destiny* are often used as synonyms, but it is possible to draw a distinction between them. In this paper, following McArthur (1981), I use *fate* for “the (imaginary) cause beyond human control that decides events,” and *destiny* in the sense of “that which must or has to happen.” However, McArthur also suggests *fate* as a synonym of *destiny*. Due to the partial overlapping of the two terms in both languages, I have translated each occurrence with the English term that seemed in each case more suitable to the context, without trying to establish a fixed correspondence between a Greek and an English term. I do not refer to fate using the neuter form of the pronoun because fate is clearly personified in the speeches. I use a *feminine* pronoun because, since “fate” (*mira*) is feminine in Greek, this choice allows me to keep closer to the original, including the case in which fate is portrayed as suckling the heroes of the revolution.

12. In a comparative study of Greek and Turkish novels, the selected sample provided around 200 cases of inter-group romances or love stories between individuals belonging to the two communities. In almost all the cases the man is always “ours” (that is, Greek in Greek novels and Turk in Turkish novels) whereas the woman always belongs to the “other” category. According to the author, this is because women have traditionally been spoils of war: from a semiological standpoint, the husband is the winner in a strife (Millas 2001). I suggest considering the hypothesis that within the discourse of the nation, even when, like in love stories, the relationship between the partners is not antagonistic, the idea of boundary remains crucial. The boundaries of the territory of the nation are the boundaries of a female body. The woman’s body is vulnerable, by nature exposed to “invasion”: its boundaries are never safe. Though the love relationship does not take place within a conflict framework, in an inter-community love story each author probably unconsciously “chooses” to identify their group with the male partner, which may be taken as a sign that she or he is still on the defensive, in spite of all.

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