

# Inventing Greece

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## Abstract

*Nationalism acts as a bulwark against death, fate, and contingency. It replaces religion, claiming qualities for the state that clearly are not true. Indeed, nationalism is an invented fiction. In this, Greece does not differ from other European nations in which nationalism developed in the void left by the breakdown of the Christian world-view. The Neohellenic eighteenth-century Enlightenment invented a glorious past for Greece as well as a glorious future. But the distortions were so gross that they could not continue without revision during the nineteenth century. Then nationalism was reinvented still again in the twentieth century, Greece becoming a metaphor: a subjective value of infinite importance, as expressed for example in Seferis's "The King of Asine." What we need to realize in the twenty-first century is that the world has had quite enough of these inventions. Let us redevelop an all-embracing system of value that goes beyond the nation-state.*

I was once privileged to sit next to the late Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz at lunch some years ago and to talk with him at length. He had recently returned from Poland, which then was still under communist control. When we began discussing the two great economic systems competing in the cold war, I voiced my perplexity regarding the forces in our own system that make industrial CEOs feel that salaries of one million or even many millions of dollars are their due. I felt that communism, for all its faults, maintained a better relation between the compensation of those directing factories and those working in them. He agreed but then went on to surprise me by saying that, at the deepest level, there is no difference at all between capitalism and communism. His point was that both systems provide a way to cheat death. Capitalism does this by encouraging the acquisition of sufficient *individual* security to overcome contingencies of all sorts in one's own life and the future life of one's family, thus guaranteeing a sort of "immortality"; communism does the same by encouraging the acquisition of sufficient *communal* security to provide exactly the same benefits. In both cases, the complexity of life and its continued unpredictability encourage the acquisition of much

more security than is probably needed, because one always fears the loss of what one has. Thus one million dollars need to become fifteen or twenty, and one communist state needs to be surrounded on all sides by others to lessen the possibility of invasion by the capitalist enemy.

What Milosz was doing was interpreting both politics and economics via what I suppose we may call metaphysics. In this essay, I want to do the same with nationalism (should we perhaps say “nationism?”), for I believe that nationalism, too, at the deepest level, acts as a bulwark against death, fate, and contingency, providing a way to cheat those ever-present forces. In short, nationalism has replaced religion. None of this, of course, is a new discovery; on the contrary, it is almost a commonplace in the discussion of nationalism. I quote, for example, from the eloquent summary by Gregory Jusdanis (1991:165):

Why is the appeal of nationalism so seemingly universal? The answer may lie ultimately in the metaphysics of nationalism, which has transformed it into the global theology of the modern age. Nationalist discourse, with its tales of progress, self-fulfillment, and manifest destiny, allows modern individuals to deny their mortality in the face of change. . . . [N]ationalism allows [people] to forget contingency . . .

The best proof of the equation “nationalism = religion” is provided, I suppose, by how people behave. The history of religion gives ample evidence of people’s willingness to die for their faith. What else in the modern world provides similar evidence, besides nationalism? Milosz equated economic systems with religion; yet I very much doubt that people are willing to die for “capitalism” as an abstract concept, much less for Coca Cola or General Motors, or even for “communism” as distinct from The Soviet Union, say, or Vietnam, Cuba, or China. But people fight and die all the time, alas, for their nation—for Bosnia, Greece, Turkey, Iraq—and seem seldom to question the appropriateness of such martyrdom, which means that the nation has usurped the role of religion in providing the ultimate justification for existence. “Dying for one’s country, which usually one does not choose, assumes a moral grandeur that dying for the Labour Party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International can not rival, for these are all bodies one can join or leave at easy will” (Anderson 1991:144).

Clearly, the nation has taken over attributes previously assigned only to God. Stathis Gourgouris, in his book *Dream Nation*, reminds us that “no nation can imagine its death” (1996:15). Although nations do have a beginning, they seemingly have no end and thus are thought to be at least relatively immortal. They are also thought to be purely pure and perfectly perfect. When various presidents say, as they often do, that

the United States is the greatest nation on earth or the greatest democracy in the world, no one blushes, any more than people do when the minister in his pulpit declares that the God who permits horrendous evil in the world is nevertheless absolutely good. It should not require much rational perception to understand that God (shorthand for the nature of being) is much more complicated: good/bad, immortal/mortal, eternal/temporal, benign/malignant, concerned/indifferent, and so forth and so on—indeed, ultimately incomprehensible. And the United States, or any other nation, is great in some ways but wanting in others. To be more specific, with only about 5% of the world's population, Americans account for 22% of global emissions of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide (McElroy 1997:35); our social services are inferior to those in Denmark and Sweden; our newspapers are intellectually inferior to some of those in Greece; our schools do not teach languages nearly as well as schools do in The Netherlands; and we are one of only six countries in the world that allow teenage criminals to be executed, the others being Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia! On the other hand, we are a marvelously productive and creative people. What I am leading to, of course, is the now common perception that nationality is a fiction rather than a truth—a very selective and distorting fiction that includes certain things and excludes or forgets others, more or less the same way that theology distorts the nature of being.

Nationalism is invented. Benedict Anderson, perhaps the most cited author of the 1990s, defines the nation as “an *imagined* political community” (1991:6; emphasis added) and cites Ernest Gellner's dictum that nationalism “is not the *awakening* of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (1991:6; Gellner 1964:169, emphasis added). Gourgouris goes further, calling nationalistic discourse “signs of idolatry” (1996:31) or the “national fantasy” (1996:37), and the institution of the nation a process “akin to what Freud called dream-work” (1996:261).

The pervasiveness of this view is evidenced in a very fine book entitled *Inventing Ireland* (1995) whose author, Declan Kiberd, insists that the first step in the creation (or re-creation) of the Irish nation was to instill in the Irish people “a *self-belief* which might in time lead to social and cultural prosperity” (1995:141; emphasis added). In Ireland, as in so many other cultures, this was accomplished largely through literature. In America, for example, it was James Fenimore Cooper who, in a series of novels and tracts published between 1823 and 1841, helped to invent the American idolatry, dream-work, or fantasy of well-ordered individual farms and grazing sheep linked in a rural idyll (Baveystock 1993:104), hiding the genocide that had made this possible (also see Anderson 1991:202). This romantic invention was inaugurated by Crèvecoeur's

*Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and extended by Emerson's 1837 Phi Beta Kappa oration "The American Scholar," by Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which appeared in increasingly large editions between 1855 and 1892, and by Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884; see Anderson 1991:203). In Finland, *Kalevala*, an epic published in 1849, caused the cultural awakening that led to the independent Finnish nation. One could investigate comparable influences in other nations. But I would like to return for a few moments to Ireland as a way of leading to the invention of Greece, because Ireland and Greece are so similar in so many ways, a fact that will help to make entirely clear that what happened in Greece was not at all unique.

In what ways are Ireland and Greece similar? In the twentieth century, Ireland and Greece, the one at the extreme western verge of Europe, the other at the extreme eastern verge, produced the most extraordinary literary renaissances in occidental culture. Both nations still had a peasant tradition at the beginning of the century. As John Millington Synge wrote in 1907 about Ireland in his famous preface to *The Playboy of the Western World* "for a few years more, we have a popular imagination that is fiery and magnificent, and tender; so that those of us who wish to write start with a chance that is not given to writers in places where the springtime of the local life has been forgotten, and the harvest is a memory only, and the straw has been turned into bricks" (1997:lii). Both Ireland and Greece had (and have) a diaspora; both were occupied for centuries by a foreign power, in both cases the occupied and the occupier being geographical neighbors who shared affinities of climate, temperament, and culture; both were dominated by a single Christian church; intellectuals in both felt very much on the fringe of things and considered Paris or London the center; both needed to deal with a "language question"; both reached back to a glorious past in order to feel distinguished yet at the same time suffered constrictions owing to ancestor worship; both exalted the "folk" as repositories of virtue and wisdom; both were mightily influenced by the American revolution and by the phenomenon of a national bard seen in Walt Whitman; both experienced grave internal discord that undermined the national purpose; both sometimes crucified their own best leaders (Parnell, Venizelos), both experienced civil wars "in which brother fought brother and men who had recently been comrades against a foreign enemy now killed and executed former friends" (Kiberd 1995:194).

Let us look now at some of the findings in Kiberd's book *Inventing Ireland*. I will cite them without comment in the hope that my readers will see in some at least, if not in all, the applicability to Greece as well.

[C]ultural revival preceded and in many ways enabled the political revolution that followed. (1995:4)

The Irish resolved . . . to instill in their people a self-belief which might in time lead to social and cultural prosperity. (1995:141)

In theory, two kinds of freedom were available to the Irish: the return to a past, pre-colonial Gaelic identity . . . or the reconstruction of a national identity, beginning from first principles all over again. . . . Inevitably, neither model was sufficient unto itself: even its stoutest defenders were compelled . . . to “borrow” some elements of the alternative version. (1995:286)

In other words, the Irish wished to be modern and counter-modern in one and the same gesture. (1995:330)

[P]eople are lulled by their leaders to “become drunk on remembrance,” to recover the past as fetish rather than to live in the flow of actual history. (1995:294)

James Connolly’s sad prediction came true: the worship of the past really was a way of reconciling people to the mediocrity of the present. (1995:247)

The question . . . was: how to build a future on the past without returning to it? (1995:292)

[T]he choice was one between nationality or cosmopolitanism. . . . Were the Irish a hybrid people . . . ? Or were they a pure, unitary race, dedicated to defending a romantic notion of integrity? (1995:7)

. . . a nation has a *plurality* of identities, constantly remaking themselves in perpetual renewals. . . . [N]ationalist politicians, instead, . . . said: there is an essential Ireland to be served, and a definitive all-Ireland mind to be described. (1995:298)

The way was open for a literary movement to fill the political vacuum. Its writers would take Standish O’Grady’s versions of the Cuchulain legend, and interpret the hero not as an exemplar for the Anglo-Irish overlords but as a model for those who were about to displace them. (1995:25)

The Irish writer has always been confronted with a choice. This is the dilemma of whether to write for the native audience . . . or to produce texts for consumption in Britain and North America. (1995:136)

The mistake of the [Irish] revivalists would be repeated in Africa and India in later decades: too often an “African” or an “Indian” culture would simply be one which could be easily translated into forms comprehensible to European imperial minds. . . . Since “Ireland” in such a construction was largely an English invention, those who took upon themselves the burden of having an idea of Ireland were often the most Anglicized of the natives. (1995:335–337)

Standard Irish sought to erase dialectal differences. . . . Generations of children came to see it not as a gift but as a threat. . . . The whole burden of language revival was placed on hard-pressed schoolteachers, in the innocent belief that the substitution of Irish for English in the youthful mind would be enough to deanglicize Ireland. (1995:265)

[James Joyce] knew that his national culture, in which a centuries-old oral tradition was challenged by the onset of print, must take due account of both processes. (1995:355)

The . . . poems [of Whitman and Yeats] are founded on a necessary contradiction: they celebrate a nation's soul, while at the same time insisting that it has yet to be made. (1995:128)

[A]t root the English and Irish are rather similar peoples, who have nonetheless decided to perform versions of Englishness and Irishness to one another. . . . Each group projects onto the other many attributes which it has denied in itself. (1995:54)

The aim of recent Irish historians [is] to replace the old morality-tale of Holy Ireland versus Perfidious Albion with a less sentimental and simplified account. (1995:642)

Preening themselves on some occasions for being "like no other people on earth," arraigning themselves on others, [the Irish] often failed to regard Irish experience as representative of human experience. . . . (1995:641)

One could, I believe, take each of the above assertions and, changing the references from Ireland to Greece, and from England to Turkey or the Ottoman Empire, apply them more or less to the Greek situation. Not that the two situations are identical—of course they are not. Nevertheless, my point is that "inventing Greece" was and is largely a phenomenon characteristic of the nationalistic inventions of other nations.

Another way of saying this, I suppose, is that "Greek exceptionalism" is a position that really should be mistrusted. It is often asserted, for example, that Greece differs fundamentally from the West because it never had a Renaissance or Reformation. Yet certain fundamental changes occurring for example in England as a result of the Western Renaissance and Reformation are clearly found in Greece as well. I intend to examine them, as before, using a metaphysical rather than an economic approach because I continue to believe that, at the deepest level, the phenomenon of Western nationalism has a religious character that fills the void left by the breakdown of the Christian world-view. But let us use certain literary changes as an entrée to this subject.

What happened in England in the seventeenth century was the development of a new genre, the so-called realistic novel. But it is wrong

to say that older texts were not realistic. We must instead speak of two different concepts of what is real. For older texts, the real resides in universals; for the novel, it resides in particulars. The novel is atomistic. It reflects, in the formulation of Ian Watt in his classic study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957:31), “that vast transformation of Western civilization since the Renaissance which has replaced the unified world picture of the Middle Ages with another very different one—one which presents us, essentially, with a developing but unplanned aggregate of particular individuals having particular experiences at particular times and at particular places.” Watt goes on to describe the specific effects of this atomistic world-view on plot and characterization. “‘Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers in [English] literature who did not take their plots from mythology, . . . legend or previous literature’ since they, unlike older writers, rejected the ‘premise . . . that, since Nature is essentially complete and unchanging, its records . . . constitute a definite repertoire of human experience.’ Plots are now ‘acted out by particular people in particular circumstances, rather than . . . by general human types. Time in novels resists anachronism. Furthermore, in the new genre ‘a causal connection operating through time replaces the reliance of earlier narratives on disguises and coincidences.’ Place, instead of being vague or general, as in Shakespeare’s plays, takes on the specificity of a guidebook” (Bien 1994:388, citing Watt 1957:14, 15, 22).

All this is a sea change, a fundamental alteration in metaphysical understanding manifested in English literature probably a century or more after the cultural change actually began to take place. “Of course, the older conception—the unified world view of the Middle Ages—did not capitulate entirely to the atomistic view, but continued in various forms . . . —for example, the organicist model of evolution promulgated in the eighteenth century by . . . Herder, in which individual entities are seen ‘as components of processes which aggregate into wholes greater than . . . the sum of their parts’ (Bien 1994:376, citing White 1973:15, cited in Tziovas 1986:61).

What we see in Greece is that its invented nationalism/nationism is initially based upon the atomistic model described above, and could never have occurred without that prior development, but that later phases of this same invention conform to the organicist model. Note that both phases respond, although in different ways, to the breakdown of Christian metaphysics, and also that both phases conform to what was also happening in Western Europe. Thus they lead us once again to mistrust any claims for Greek exceptionalism. What happened in Greece, as elsewhere (Ireland, for example), was the invention of a myth of nationality that provided, at the deepest level, what religion had previously provided—namely, a metaphysical rationale for life and

death: a meaning for what would otherwise be our futile, meaningless existence. No matter if the myth took various forms, for any myth is always the sum of its many variations.

With all this as prelude, let me now concentrate specifically, and in more detail, on “inventing Greece.”

We have heard that Greece did not have a Renaissance or a Reformation. But its intellectuals outside of Greece did have an Enlightenment, and this was the force that transferred to Greece many of the changes that had occurred earlier in the West, changes ironically stimulated by the rediscovery of ancient Greek humanism. It is true that Gourgouris in *Dream Nation*, which examines the role of the Enlightenment in inventing Greece, warns that it is “rather misguided to perceive the Neohellenic Enlightenment merely as the vehicle for the Westernization or the modernization of Greece. . . . It hardly consists,” he argues, “in a simple Western imposition of ideas.” Nevertheless, he agrees with earlier scholars, in particular Dimaras, that it “does involve the transposition of the *currency* of [European] ideas prevalent during the late eighteenth century” (1996:75). It creates, he continues, “a new tradition, it institutes a new image of what Neohellenic culture is . . .” (1996:81). What the Enlightenment created, he claims, was a new identity involving “a social homogeneity, a linguistic tradition, and a geographical continuity: in other words, a *native past*” (1996:73), all juxtaposed to Ottoman “barbarism.” The great figure, of course, was Adamantios Korais, who amalgamated European Philhellenism’s adulation of pagan Greece with enthusiasm for the French revolution and an utter revulsion against what he considered the superstitions of the Orthodox Church. Born in Smyrna in 1748, he became friendly with a Dutch clergyman who despised the “Turk” and emphasized how much Europeans venerated the ancient Greeks. Korais went to Holland in 1772 and stayed for six years. Returning to Smyrna, he found Greek life disgusting. In 1782 he left for France, eventually moving to Paris, which he considered a new Athens, and witnessing there the French revolution at first hand (see Kedourie 1970:38–40). Gourgouris describes Korais’s contribution as “a visionary . . . conception of a culture that does not yet exist and thus literally has to be made” (1996:118). “Nationalism . . . rests on the assumption that a nation must have a past. [But it] also rests on another assumption, no less fundamental, namely, that a nation must have a future . . . a variant of the idea of progress which has been the dominant strand in modern European culture” (Kedourie 1970:47). Korais invented both a past and a future for Greece as a way of providing a new identity. He fulfilled these needs most famously in his “Report on the Present State of Civilization in Greece,” delivered as a lecture in Paris in 1803, in which we see “eloquently expressed the customary



appeal to a glorious past, earnest of a still more glorious future, and warrant for the subversion of present and existing institutions" (Kedourie 1970:42). I offer here a few quotes from the lecture in order to convey a sense of his project:

What then was to be seen in that unhappy Greece, birthplace of the sciences and the arts? What in fact may be seen among almost all enslaved peoples: a superstitious and ignorant clergy, leading as they liked an even more ignorant people. . . . (Koraïs 1970:156)

[W]ho is better able than you [Greek merchants] to appreciate our ancestors' values, virtues, and learning? Gaining honor from the Greek name, it is in turn your duty to bring it honor, by calling forth once against in the midst of degraded Greece, its ancient exaltation and splendor. (Koraïs 1970:171)

Elie Kedourie's comments are instructive. "Koraïs," he says, "saw the modern Greeks through the golden haze of Western Hellenism in the eighteenth century. His writings are a reflection, an echo, of European sentiments and prejudices. . . . European scholars and writers of the eighteenth century looked upon Periclean Athens as a peak of human achievement and all that followed thereafter in Greek history as lamentable decline and decadence; and Koraïs followed suit, as is shown by his violent diatribes against the Orthodox Church of his day and its Byzantine matrix" (1970:47).

A significant part of Koraïs's project, of course, was his invention of *katharévousa*, for which unfortunately he acquired a bad name—he is satirized mercilessly, for example, in Solomos's *Dialogos*. But Koraïs was following the conviction of his time that language is the essence of nationality. As his great opponent, Psicharis, said a century later, "Language and fatherland are the same" (1926:34). I once spent a considerable time studying Koraïs's career, especially the linguistic element, and reached the conclusion that this man was truly admirable in his attempt to reach a compromise between the demotic of the day and the extreme Atticism recommended by Panayotis Soutsos and others. It is to his credit, "and a measure of his extraordinary energy, that compromise tended to be viewed by him not as a concession, but instead as the appropriate and proper linguistic solution for his people. He argued generally from strength, not weakness" (Bien 1972:42). But his basic premises—namely, (a) that "the Hellenic language" automatically "refines the habits of the young, making them more elegant and wise," not to mention "peaceful, freedom-loving, and virtuous" (cited in Sherrard 1959:183), and (b) that if Greeks rediscovered the classics they, too, like Western Europeans, would undergo a Renaissance—are questionable. What he did contribute was the atomistic world-view I spoke of

earlier: a particularistic rather than universal conception of what is real, a diachronic rather than synchronic view of history, a belief in progress rather than in a steady state. "In short," as Philip Sherrard concludes with his customary acerbity, "what Koraïs envisaged was the 'emancipation' of Greece in terms of the secular liberalism and humanist enlightenment of the contemporary West" (1959:180). It is important to add that this conception, as well as later ones, had two axes, a vertical and a horizontal. The vertical is the one I have been describing, reaching back to a past that is idealized and mythicized (after all, there is nothing about slavery in Koraïs's evocation of ancient Greece, or indeed about homosexuality, or internal discord, or the brevity of Periclean democracy), and reaching forward to a utopian future. This vertical axis was meant to convey to the barbarized Greeks of the Ottoman Empire a "sense of continuity in time and unity in space" (Tsaousis 1983:19). The horizontal axis is the one extending from contemporary Greece out to contemporary Europe. The ancient Greece evoked by Koraïs was essentially the invention of Western philhellenes. Even *katharévoussa*, although ostensibly meant to refine those who spoke and wrote "the Hellenic language," making them more elegant, wise, freedom-loving, and virtuous (although not necessarily peaceful) by eliminating from their vocabulary the barbarity of Turkish words that kept them chained to their degeneracy—even *katharévoussa* was produced not just for the Ottomanized Greeks, but also for Western philhellenes, as Koraïs reveals when he confesses that his notes, "written in our common tongue, were ready for the printers when some friends of mine—philhellenes expert in our ancient but not our modern language—eventually persuaded me to Hellenize [my notes] so that they might be understood . . . by the scholars of Europe, who are ignorant of Modern Greek" (Bien 1972:51, citing Koraïs 1833:41).

Such, more or less, was the first form of invented Greek nationality—the initial version, if you will, of the myth that, displacing the Christian world-view, provided at the deepest level a metaphysical rationale for life and death: a meaning for what would otherwise be a futile, meaningless existence. No matter that it was a double distortion: a distortion of ancient Greek reality, and a distortion as well of modern Greek reality. It provided (and to some degree still provides) a sense of connection to something apparently admirable, something that matters, and something even "eternal," for, as I mentioned earlier, no nation can imagine its own death. As for its beginning, ancient Greek culture lay far enough back in hazy antiquity to seem never to have not been there. In sum, Greek nationality, imagined in this way as the inheritor of ancient glory, took on religious force as a way to cheat contingency and fate by giving existence a kind of supernal meaning.

Regarding the distortion of modern Greece, one may object that, no matter what happened in Western Europe concerning the gradual eclipse of religion there, Christianity continued strong in Greece. Yes, the Orthodox Church did continue strong in Greece, just as the Roman Catholic Church continued strong in Ireland. But I am not so sure that Christianity did. Invented nationalism is expert not only at distorting but also at forgetting—indeed, forgetting is probably its prime mechanism for distorting. In effect, nationalism requires amnesia. And one of the major areas of amnesia in Greece concerns the role of the Orthodox Church in the period leading up to the revolution—specifically the role of Patriarch Gregory V. Quite appropriately remembering Saint Paul's assertion in Romans 10:12, "There is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him," or again in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus," the Church opposed the radical republicanism of Rhigas Velestinlis in 1798 in its tract *Paternal Instruction*, "probably written by Gregory V himself, which . . . warned against the pernicious consequences of revolutionary plans for the souls of the faithful" (Kitromilides 1989:179–180). It opposed the outbreak of the Greek revolution in 1821. The great innovation brought by Christianity was, after all, its rejection of the concept of a "chosen people," a fact recognized by the Orthodox Church when a major synod in 1872 stated, "[I]n the Christian Church, which is a spiritual communion, predestined by its Leader and Founder to contain all nations in one brotherhood in Christ, (φυλετισμός) [which here, according to Kitromilides (1989:181), means nationalism] is alien and quite unthinkable." Ironically, the multiculturalism and multiethnicity of the Islamic Ottoman Empire was closer to Christianity's original vision at least in this respect than was the new atomization of nationalistic self-definition preached by the Neohellenic Enlightenment—thus Gregory's opposition to the Greek nationalistic rebellion, not to mention his Encyclical issued in 1819 against precisely the sort of learning that had been stimulated in the West by the rediscovery of ancient Greece (quoted in Henderson [1970:199] and Gourgouris [1996:79]). As Kitromilides has written (1989:159), "The Church objected precisely to the ethnic parochialism of secular nationalism, which threatened, and eventually did destroy, the ecumenicity of transcendental values which held Balkan society together within the fold of Orthodoxy during the centuries of captivity." When, by an extraordinary quirk of history, the patriarch was executed in 1821 as primarily responsible for the Greek insurrection, he became a national martyr; anyone who visits the Patriarchate in Istanbul today is shown with reverence the gate from which he was hanged. But none of

this means that Christianity (as opposed to the Church) continued strong in nationalistic Greece. Indeed, once the independent Greek state was established, the first of the “explicitly ideological initiatives whereby [it] attempted . . . to cement its national identity [was] the creation [in 1833] of an autocephalous national church” (Kitromilides 1989:165). “When the Church of Greece was declared independent from the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarch . . . and was brought firmly under state control, it became all the more associated with the nation. Instead of adopting Korais’s dim view of the clergy, the state incorporated the Church and its martyrs into the pantheon of Greek heroes and made them integral parts of the national myth. Thus the Church became an accomplice of the state in its mission to spread the cohesive nationalist creed . . .” (Veremis 1989:136). What happened was a transvaluation whereby secular values came to control spiritual ones instead of the other way round. I find it very difficult to accept that true Christianity, with its claims of transcendental, supreme value, can exist as a subordinate instrument of the state. Interestingly, the current patriarch, Bartholomew, was quoted in *To Víma* a few years ago as declaring “. . . ο Πατριάρχης είναι ανώτερος και από τον βασιλιά” (Theodorakis 2000:79; the reference being to Bartholomew’s rival, Archbishop Christodoulos, the supposed “king”).

The original distortion of Korais and the European philhellenes whereby a new Greece in the image of Periclean Athens was invented—a fiction excluding the Church, not to mention the Byzantine heritage, folk songs, and the *Tourkokratia*—was so gross that it could not continue without revision. What happened next is too well known to require extensive discussion here, especially since I want to reach, in the space still at my disposal, the aestheticization that took place in the twentieth century. Briefly: In 1835 Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer, in a lecture before the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, contended “that all ancient Greek traces . . . had become extinct by virtue of the Slavic invasions of mainland Greece, and especially the Attic peninsula, during the fifth century A.D.” (Gourgouris 1996:141). Henceforth, Fallmerayer, considered a diabolical Slavophile, became—and still is—public enemy no. 1 in Greece. The almost hysterical resistance that greeted his contention is the best evidence, I believe, for the degree to which Korais’s philhellenic phase no. 1 of invented Greece had become the nation’s deepest *raison d’être*: Fallmerayer was robbing the Greeks of all that enabled them to forget contingency and deny their mortality in the face of change. Interestingly, poor Fallmerayer was not even motivated by hatred of the Greeks but rather, as Gourgouris explains (1996:142), by “the concern of Western European powers over the apparent dissolution of the Ottoman State and the expansionist visions of czarist Russia . . .

Fallmerayer's contention that Greece was in effect a *de-Hellenized* culture was meant to thwart the ideology of those European politicians who, as a result of their Philhellenism, actively promoted the dismantling of Ottoman control over the Balkans. He argued vehemently that only a strong Ottoman State could prevent Russian expansion into Western Europe."

In any case, Fallmerayer's contention set in motion a basic shift in the myth or dream of Greek nationality, a shift brought about by the disciplines of history, archaeology, and folklore. The famous historian Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos began his career with a treatise rebutting Fallmerayer's view that "the Byzantine colonization of Athens in the tenth century [was] a reHellenization of an already Slavified population," and seeing it instead as "the intractable dominance of Hellenic culture" and implicitly as a guarantee of racial integrity (Gourgouris 1996:144–145). His six-volume *History of the Hellenic Nation*, which appeared from 1860 to 1872, countered the Enlightenment view that genuine Hellenic civilization had died at the beginning of the Christian era and had passed to Rome. Instead, his *History* presented "a synthetic view, stressing the continuity from ancient times and the significance of Byzantium and the Turkish period for modern Greece. This revised attitude [in turn] helped . . . to intensify the search for proof that Greece's imaginative powers had not lain dormant. . . . As more and more evidence of poetic activity came to light, [Koraïs's and the philhellenes'] . . . view of a dark age was . . . qualified. . . . In addition, the folklorists made Greece susceptible to the romantic German adulation of the *Volk* (Bien 1972:94). "Folklore's object of study is the . . . coherence of customary culture, conceived as a kind of naturally preserved, but contemporary, expression of myth. . . . Folk songs . . . may reflect the spirit of, say, the Greek people in themselves, but they are actually studied for (and as) *inscriptions* of the development of this spirit through the ages. . . . Thus, unlike archaeology, folklore [derives its importance] . . . not merely from the discovery of the past as relic but from the evidence of the past as present" (Gourgouris 1996:148). This clearly begins to take us out of the diachronic, atomistic world-view characterizing the nationalistic dream's first stage, out of a particularistic conception of what is real, out of an emphasis on progress. It begins to return us to the steady state, the organic, synchronic view of history, and the universal view of what is real, all characteristic of the Christian world-view that nationalism had originally displaced.

This, in turn, leads to the final phase of imagined Greece: the aestheticization of nationalism that took place in the twentieth century.

I argued at the very start, when citing Milosz's comments about communism and capitalism, that nationalism may best be understood in

metaphysical terms. But it is important to remember that metaphysical change is often occasioned by political development. Thus Greece was first imagined during the eighteenth-century ferment occasioned by the French Revolution and Greece's own pre-revolutionary chagrin. It was then re-imagined after the failure in the nineteenth century of the Enlightenment's project of a new Periclean democracy. Finally, it was re-imagined yet again after the Asia Minor disaster of 1922, the Axis occupation of 1941–1944, and Civil War that followed. Perhaps one can say that political vicissitude serves to open up anew, each time, the chasm of contingency, futility, and meaninglessness that must be filled by an ever-renewed, ever-redefined nationalism, the modern world's primary religion. This is certainly what happened in Greece in the twentieth century—not once but twice.

It is equally important to remember that the various versions of the myth of imagined Greek nationalism have all been connected with movements in Western Europe. I referred earlier to two axes, the vertical and horizontal, the vertical reaching back to an imagined Greek past and ahead to an imagined Greek future, the horizontal extending from contemporary Greece to contemporary Western Europe. Stage 1 of the myth was influenced along this horizontal axis by the European Enlightenment and by philhellenism, as we have seen. Stage 2 was influenced by German romanticism, especially the adulation of the *Volk*. Stage 3 was influenced by European modernism, itself the product of the cataclysm of the First World War.

Modernism presents one more way to look at the real. Before the Renaissance and Reformation, the real resided in universals; afterwards, it resided in particulars. The universals in which the real resided in the Middle Ages were considered true; so were the particulars in which the real resided in the post-Renaissance period. In modernism, neither the particulars nor the universals are true in the same way. The particulars have value only as symbols of something else, something universal. But this something universal, instead of truly existing, is *imagined*. In a word, ultimate value is aestheticized. The concrete world of particulars is now valued because it provides an entrée to “something coherent, continuous, and logical beneath or beyond: something subjective that is connected . . . most broadly with an entire culture. Cultural norms discerned indirectly through symbolism replace the older world-view's ‘objective’ life—whether particular or universal—that supposedly exists apart from the act of perception” (adapted from Bien 1997:263–264).

The aestheticization of invented Greek nationalism is the main subject of Gregory Jusdanis's important book, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*. He says there, for instance, that the development in question came after the Asia Minor disaster as

a “cure for failed irredentist aspirations and [for the] wrecked hopes for a modern, democratic, and liberal state. The indispensable tool in [this] aestheticization,” he continues, “. . . was the notion of Greekness (*Ellinikótita*)” (1991:79), which is aesthetic “because its promised unification of differences occurs in [an] imaginary space” (1991:94), permitting Greeks “to be both Hellenic and Romeic, to christen their children Pericles as well as Maria” (1991:114), and so forth. Gourgouris carries this line of reasoning up to the next political crisis when he says that “after the Second World War, and even more so after the Civil War, Greece . . . becomes . . . a metaphor” (1996:221).

Obviously, each phase of invented Greek nationalism was expressed not only by polemicists like Koraïs or historians like Paparrhigopoulos but also by poets and novelists. To treat them at all adequately would require probably three more essays, but let me just note here that a good example for phase 1, in which Enlightenment was the goal, might be Pavlos Kalligas’s novel *Thanos Vlekas*, published in 1855. It exhibits the atomistic specificity of characterization, time, and place demanded by the post-Renaissance world-view, and pleads for a responsible judiciary, so needed if the nationalist dream of the Enlightenment and the philhellenic envisioning of Greece were to be realized (see Kitromilides 1989:163). A good example for phase 2 might be Kostis Palamas’s *The King’s Flute*, which the critic Papanoutsos has called “the epic par excellence of Greek continuity” (1971:94), fulfilling the project of Paparrhigopoulos. For phase 3, I would nominate Angelos Sikelianos’s poem “Pan” and George Seferis’s “The King of Asine,” both of which combine specifics of the present and the past to evoke an organic, synthetic, *metaphoric* value of infinite importance—in other words a “saving” value still wholly nationalistic, hence capable of cheating the ever-present forces of death, fate, and contingency.

A fourth phase—a postmodernist re-invention of Greek nationalism—is presumably in process at the moment.

In closing these thoughts on inventing Greece, I feel impelled to note my belief that the world has now had quite enough of nationalism. In its two hundred years of existence among Greeks and other Europeans, this force has accomplished much, to be sure, but I fear that its creative potential is exhausted and that it has become primarily a force for stagnation and evil. We need to develop a dream/myth/fantasy/idolatry beyond *amerikanikótita*, *irlandikótita*, *germanikótita*, *ellinikótita*. Nationalism is not an inevitable human phenomenon. It did not exist before the modern era and there is no reason why it should continue to exist in the postmodern era. Indeed, given the vast changes that have occurred recently—the European Union, space travel, instantaneous communication by fax and e-mail, globalization of the world’s economies—there are



ever-increasing indications that we may be headed toward a post-nationalistic time in which the earth as a whole, and mankind as a whole, become primary, replacing or displacing nationalism just as nationalism replaced or displaced Christianity as our primary source of meaning. But let us not forget Christianity entirely; let us remember Saint Paul's "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in"— . . . in? . . . —well, perhaps not in Jesus Christ, but in *anthropótita*.

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