Insurrection and Resurrection. The struggle for Greek independence

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Abstracts

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Opening remarks

In one of these whimsical winks of Fortune, it so happens that our conference on the struggle for Greek Independence falls but a few days after we celebrated Israel’s 57th Independence Day, with all the tribute it implies to its own strife for freedom. Indeed, both nations, linked –mutatis mutandis- by so many similarities, if only to mention the Diaspora phenomenon, the sometime same subjection, sharing even the same colors, have also in common a bitter history of struggle from within as well as from without until they could achieve sovereignty and assert their national identity. It is not my intention to work out comparisons and analogies at the moment, though I assume they cannot but inevitably come to mind as we proceed with the communications. Experience demonstrates that such ventures of insurrection,
liberation from foreign yoke, naturally generate noble myths of heroism and unrestricted consensus, piously transmitted from generation to generation, and intimately intertwined with properly historical data. They are vital to the ethos of a nation. It is the task of historiography to screen out the wheat from the chaff and determine the historical and sociological conditions, the mental transformations which eventually enabled the creation of a Greek national identity within a stable sovereign state, while the claim for liberty or death was definitely no fiction. Alongside the political activism, the war effort, particularly the naval warfare, the intellectuals’ contribution in the insurrectional and regenerative stream is by all means to be taken into account. Obviously, the 18th century Enlightenment movement, the ideals spread by the French Revolution paved the way for patriotic ideas abroad; in the Greek Diaspora and within secrete societies… How tangible their weight on the diverse heterogeneous national groups involved in the revolutionary process in Greece itself, on local churches, peasants, city dwellers, remains a debate of longue durée. Ideals, Real politics, Religion and Church however confronted in vehement controversies on what are or should be Hellenism, patriotism and what pertains to Greek identity, within the Turkish state or at its expense and in what boundaries? Is the old Roman Christian Empire to be revived, consistent with the “Megali Idea” (Great Idea), including thereby the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire or on a more modest and realistic scale, a Greek national state in Greece only? And to begin with, what is involved in the idea of Revolution? The impact of the liberation spirit did spread however. The Cypriot case illustrates both the consistency of the Greek identity on a soil that witnessed a singular diversity of conquests and the complexity of rival ethnic coexistence.

In the Greek case, as in the Jewish one, Faith, if not necessarily Church, had proved the main custodian, warranting the continuity of the sense of Greek national
identity through the four centuries of Turkish rule. Language at any rate played a major role in the preservation of the Greek heritage and in the diffusion of the new ideas. Education and principally the Greek language had come to be regarded as the key to the national regeneration and the emancipation of the nation at a time when it was of paramount significance to demonstrate to European skeptics the continuity of the nation through time, let alone the idea of the «civilizing» mission of Greek culture and language over the Christian populations in the Balkans. Actually, as we will hear, the controversial language question was to dominate Greek intellectual life throughout the 19th century.

These topics are about to lead the debates. I wish us all an inspiring, fertile and rewarding day.
Padelis Lekkas, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

The Greek war of Independence from the perspective of Historical Sociology

The Keynote Address attempts to place the Greek War of Independence in the wider context of the clash between Tradition and Modernity in the European periphery. It focuses on the role of the ideology and the movement of nationalism - a phenomenon springing up in modernity and bringing forward the concept of the nation as the proper unit of state organization. Being the undisputed offspring of nationalism (viewed here as both the product and the vehicle of modernization), the Greek War of Independence is discussed not solely in its political dimensions but also in terms of its contribution to a much broader societal transformation. It is in this sense that the Greek struggle for independence may be interpreted as the specifically ‘Greek exit’ from tradition – as an undoubtedly unique event of momentous importance per se, yet, on the other hand, as one more instance in a prolonged and very intricate process of structural and mental changes.
Andronikos Falangas, Democritus University of Thrace

Emergence of the Greek struggle of independence and imperial idea. A critical analysis

The official commemoration of the Greek Revolution places its emergence in Peloponnese on 25th March 1821. Meanwhile, the real start of the Greeks’ struggle of independence was marked one month later in Moldavia by the movement of the prince Alexander Ypsilanti, leader of the Hetaeria and descendant of rulers of Walachia and Moldavia. The Greeks’ uprising for freedom in a Rumanian land should not be considered as an historical paradox, if we consider that Walachia and Moldavia had become, under their Phanariote princes, the theater of action of Rhigas Pheraios and many other “enlightened” Greeks who spread the political and social ideals that inspired the fighters of the Greek liberty. Meanwhile, following a recent opinion, Ypsilanti’s revolutionary visions were essentially conditioned, due to his ancestry, by the same imperial ambitions that characterized, after the fall of Constantinople, the political ideology of many Rumanian rulers, like Michael the Brave, prince of Walachia, Transylvania and Moldavia (1593-1601), champion of the anti-ottoman resistance and Balkan legendary hero. The present paper attempts the critical analysis of the above thesis.
Kyrillos Nikolaou, Ambassy of Cyprus, Bruxelles

The Greek Case of Nationalism and Nationality. Hellenism, Helladism and the National Idea

In this paper, I will try to give an outline of the development of the national idea of the Greeks in the 19th century.

For centuries the majority of Greeks, had been located in the whole of the coasts of Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and not in the territories today called “Greece”. The Greeks of Asia Minor, the Balkans, the Caucasus, like the other Greeks of the East Mediterranean, until recently intermingled, with their non-Greek ethnic neighbors. So the Hellenism still as a diaspora nation in the 19th century, known that the Greeks were living in autonomous commercials communities close to the sea and they had as centre of its activity the sea.

Until 1830, the Greeks hadn’t a national state. The formation of the Greek state, signed a new era in the history of the Hellenism and different tendencies began to be developed with a disagreement turning round to the priority of the plan of the national policy.
Angelikki Koumanoudi, University of Haifa

Language as a transcendental identity of Modern Greece

The self-determination of the national identity of any given society relies, among others, on the geography, the history, the myths, the religion, the physical characteristics but also on the language transmitted by the ancestors to the younger generations.

Greek has assuredly been used without interruption for more than 3500 years, but yet, the Greek language of Homer, of the New Testament or of Kazantzaki is not exactly the same. The question of which one of all the forms of Greek should prevail, known as the 'Glossiko zitima' (the language question), appearing with the establishment of the Modern Greek state, is closely related to the definition of the national identity of its people. In the 19th century, the use of the archaic Greek by the educated people was seen as a way to return to the origins in order to bring back to life the glory of the past. Behind this attitude was the urge to orientate the newborn state closer to the Enlightened European societies, some of which doubted the "greekness" of its inhabitants. Later on, the "katharevousa" worked also as a mechanism to reach national and later social unity, instilling in the language moral values such as resistance and wisdom.

Therefore, the language question, that shook Modern Greece until almost the end of the 20th century, is very much related to the ideals of the ruling classes and of the intelligentsia. Nevertheless, a brief review of the history of the Greek language is required, since the dilemmas concerning the choice of the "best" language is an issue deeply rooted in the past.
This paper focuses on the naval history of Greece in the 1820s, the period when the capabilities of its navy proved decisive for the success of the Greek War of Independence. It argues that the numerical strength of the redundant Greek merchantmen facilitated the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 and,

In a way, presaged the similar naval capabilities and economic conditions of Greece that led to the Greek-Turkish War of 1897 and the First Balkan War in 1912-1913. It also explains the way in which Greek innovation and seamanship and the generally indecisive nature of most sea fights in the age of sail protracted the Greek War of Independence for six years, a recurrent phenomenon in wars between land and naval powers, thus requiring intervention from the Great Powers to restore peace.

In discussing Greek naval history in the 1820s the naval programme, tactics and organisation of the Greek revolutionaries are tackled; the extent to which these served as models for the naval policy of the Trikoupis and Venizelos Administrations is also explored. Ultimately, Greek naval policy and strategy, 1821-1829 is an examination of the role of sea power in denying the domination of peninsular areas by land powers.
Ariadni Moutafidou, University of Vienna

Revolution and Revolutionaries after the Establishment of the Greek State (1843-1866)

What are the changes and the development of the concept of revolution after the establishment of the Greek state in a period of transition and great crises (1843-1866)? This development was related with 1) social and political changes in the domestic politics and 2) changes in the international environment, since the philhellenic movement was in retreat, Europe seemed to be highly unfriendly and the European support was now shared with other nationalities.

The term revolution, as struggle for liberation, which led to the establishment of an independent Greek state, retained a great value in Greek society and politics. Since the Greek irredenta (the liberation and the unification of all Greek populations outside the limits of the state) was officially or unofficially the final goal of the Greek national state, the term revolution and revolt were still of great importance for the Greek social and political discourse. On the other hand the term revolution was used for repeated revolts against an absolutist political system, frequent changes of regime and government. The call for the establishment and finally the return to a good functioning constitutional system meant at the same time the realization of the principles and the goals of the Greek Revolution of 1821.
Areti Demosthenous, Director of the Institute of Historical Research for Peace, Nicosia

The Revival of the Greek Identity in Cyprus

This paper examines the revival of the Greek identity in Cyprus illustrating the path towards the formation of the two Cypriot ethnic communities on the island. During centuries Muslim and Christians formed a mixed population all over the island. It is of importance that national censuses conducted under British rule spoke of Mohammedan or Moslem inhabitants or Christian inhabitants of Cyprus, and not of "Turkish- or Greek-Cypriots". When the underground struggle for independence began, 1955, and the partisan movement was organised by General Grivas some Greek-Cypriots tried to achieve «Enosis» (unification) with Greece. That time Turkish-Cypriots demanded «Taksim» (division) of the island and started organising a national movement. Later on, 1963, the attempt of Archbishop Makarios III, to modify the Constitution led to clashes. Turkish-Cypriots were asked to move from mixed villages to Turkish villages and to live isolated away from the Greeks. The first separation of the population according to their «national» adherence took then place. In 1974, a Greek junta sponsored attempt to seize the government was met by military intervention from Turkey, which soon controlled almost 40% of the island. While for the Greek-Cypriots this was an invasion, for the Turkish-Cypriots it was an «operation towards peace» (baris müdahalesi).