

## NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PAST IN NINETEENTH CENTURY GREEK HISTORIOGRAPHY

Conference paper ‘*Πολιτισμικές μεταφορές και έννοιες που ταξιδεύουν.*  
*Έθνος και διανοούμενοι ανάμεσα στην Ελλάδα και την Ευρώπη κατά τον μακρό 19<sup>ο</sup> αιώνα*

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My research focuses on the relation between nationalism and representations of the past. Whereas nationalism and identity have long been primarily studied from a political, economical and sociological perspective – emphasizing structuralist explanations of the rise of modern nationalism – cultural nationalism and the role of culture in the formation of (national) identities have increasingly gained attention as well.

In what follows I will point out the theories to which I am tributary, as well as indicate their relevance for the Greek case and, *vice versa*, the potential significance of the Greek case for theory. First of all I will address the theoretical shift that caused the nation to be regarded as ‘a paradigm case of construction’, to use Peter Burke’s phrase, since it is a precondition for the kind of research I intend to undertake.<sup>1</sup> More recent reflections on ‘nationalism and the cultivation of culture’, ‘discursive acts’ like ‘appropriating’ the past or demarcating the ‘Self’ versus the ‘Other’ and the ‘rhetoric of historical narrative’ will be subsequently discussed, since they offer valuable insights with as much practical applicability as theoretical significance.

In my conference paper I will highlight some of the issues discussed below, with special reference to the transnational dimensions that might serve as a point of departure for an assessment of the value of the notions of ‘cultural transferences’ and ‘travelling concepts’ for approaching the subject at hand.

### **The constructivist approach: the nation as a social construct**

‘A list of all the historical studies published since 1980 with the words ‘invention’, ‘construction’ or ‘imagination’ in their titles would certainly be both long and various’, thus writes Peter Burke.<sup>2</sup> The rise of the idea of ‘cultural construction’ as part of a new perspective in cultural history has incited the study of subjects as diverse as (the invention of) the intellectual, the French Revolution, the monarchy, pornography, Renaissance women, and so on. Among the many fruits borne by the ‘invention of invention’, the constructivist approach to nations as well as to the past is of particular importance here. In the last few decades ‘imagined communities’, identity as a social or cultural ‘construct’, the ‘invention of tradition’ and the ‘representation’ or ‘construction’ of the past have become familiar concepts among cultural historians and theorists of nationalism alike. Any study of national identity and the representation of the past – as I intend to carry out with respect to nineteenth century historiography in Greece – therefore clearly joins in with a theoretical debate already well on its way.

An abundance of theories has been developed on the slippery concepts of ‘national identity’, ‘nationalism’ and ‘ethnicity’, largely concentrated around a number of dichotomies.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibidem, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Burke, *What is cultural history* (Cambridge 2004) 79.

<sup>3</sup> Roughly spoken, debates have revolved around four major questions, i.e. whether national identity is ‘innate’ or ‘imagined’, a *top-down* or *bottom-up* phenomenon and whether nationalism is ‘old’ or ‘new’, of durable

I will not address all debates at length here but merely concentrate on the observations I consider most valuable as a background to my own research, trying to define my understanding of the concepts and the vast phenomena they refer to in the process.

One of the strongest connotations usually attached to nationalist feelings, is that of continuity and eternity. According to the so-called ‘primordialist’ or ‘essentialist’ view each individual is born into a nation or ethnic community that exists since time immemorial. Ethnic or national identity is therefore, in this view, innate and inextricable. The awareness of belonging to a national community might be ‘dormant’ during some period, but can be ‘awakened’ in the next. National characteristics are natural qualities, comparable to bodily features like the colour of hair or eyes.

This view has been dismissed by many authors, and rightly so. The notion that nations should be conceived as social or cultural constructs rather than eternal, fixed or ‘natural’ entities has become widely accepted among scholars of nationalism since it was first launched over two decades ago. Benedict Anderson’s interpretation of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ has become broadly shared in the abundant literature on the history of modern nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Others equally renowned for their contribution to what can be dubbed the ‘constructivist’ approach to nationalism have been Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, whose concept of the ‘invention of tradition’ will be discussed in more detail later on.<sup>5</sup>

The primordial or biological conception of nationality and the associated view of the eternal nation that has remained unchanged ever since its foundation by illustrious ancestors have been effectively exposed as part of nationalist discourse itself rather than a reflection of reality. In Loring Danforth’s formulation: ‘the idea that the preexisting cultural forms from which nations are built are in fact “primordial” or “naturally given” is itself one of nationalism’s most powerful and most insidious constructions.’<sup>6</sup> The identity of – and sense of resemblance between – members of a certain group is convincingly argued to be a psychological – social and cultural – construct rather than an inborn fact. This argument is supported all the more so by the fact that identities, national or otherwise, turn out to be much more variable and heterogeneous than nationalists tend to make believe.

However justified and salutary this constructivist correction of the primordialist view is, it has been rightly stressed that the role of primordial elements should not be entirely negated, even though it should not be conceived in the traditional way described above. The political scientist Victor Le Vine has expressed it as follows: ‘ethnicity involves kinship (...) and primordiality (...) whether these are real, fictive, or (more likely) imagined’. ‘Even the members of the most ‘recent’ ethnic groups (...) will construct stories about their groups’ primordial roots. It may well be that the real age of an ethnic group – how long it has been around as a self-conscious social entity – may be largely irrelevant to (...) considerations of kinship and primordiality.’<sup>7</sup> To put it differently: *perceived* primordiality does play an essential role. National myths, constructions of identity and images of the ‘other’ may be imagined and of relative recent date, but can be only too real to the members of a certain community.

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character or already waning. Here I will confine myself to the debates concerning the innate/imagined and the old/modern character of the nation.

<sup>4</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined communities* (Ithaca/New York 1983). See also Burke (2004) 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. E. Gellner, *Nationalism* (London 1997); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth and reality* (Cambridge 1990) and E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger eds., *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge 1983).

<sup>6</sup> L. M. Danforth, ‘Ethnic nationalism: the construction of national identities and cultures’, in: Idem, *The Macedonian conflict: ethnic nationalism in a transnational world* (New Jersey 1995) 15.

<sup>7</sup> V. T. Le Vine, ‘Conceptualizing “Ethnicity” and “Ethnic Conflict”: A controversy revisited’, *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31 2 (1997) 53. Le Vine defines primordiality here as: ‘the claim to (...) a genealogical existence *ab initio*, outside of history’.

A debate closely related but different in emphasis is that concerning the issue *when* the process of construction and imagination should be dated. Whether the birth of modern nations should be exclusively attributed to developments as late as the nineteenth century or traced back to more remote times, has been subject to controversy between – again – ‘primordialists’ on the one hand and ‘modernists’ on the other. Since the primordialist view of the eternal nation has been referred to the realm of fables – at least in theory – most scholars of nationalism adhere to the modernist theory instead. Nations and nationalism, according to them, did not exist during most of human history. It was only during the past two centuries that they started to play their part. Nationalism is therefore, in the modernist view, to be considered as an essentially recent phenomenon and a typical product of modernity. Ideas such as the existence of ancient hatreds among nations and the ‘awakening’-theory have been convincingly dismissed.<sup>8</sup>

The period most commonly designated by these ‘modernists’ as the dawn of modern nationalism is the nineteenth century. Especially adherents of structural explanations of the rise of national awareness tend to see the second half of the century as the cradle of nationalist ideologies.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the nineteenth century unmistakably is characterized by a number of modernising tendencies with unprecedented implications for the lives and thought of people in Europe. In the industrializing societies larger numbers of people were incorporated in an unknown pace into groups with a common language, within one bureaucratic system, subject to one political order. Against this background, nationalism emerged as a political force and identity came to be defined in terms of the ‘nation’ more than ever before.

That these developments have been of major importance is beyond doubt. The nineteenth century can be seen as the period in which political nationalism in its modern shape first came into being. Yet the nineteenth century was as little as any period a *tabula rasa*. Anthony Smith stresses the extent to which modern nationalism draws on more ancient factors. The *modern* nation might be of recent origin, yet it is based, according to Smith, on what he calls a much older ‘ethnic substratum’ or *ethnie*. Though groups might not have been explicitly defined in terms of ethnicity or nationality before, communities with a certain amount of shared culture and memories and a common (myth of) descent did already exist. Thus the ‘new’ nationalism of the nineteenth century certainly was historically embedded, and the new movements could build on pre-existent binding elements that could be cultivated as mobilizing means. Opposite the ‘myth of the *eternal* nation’, Smith places ‘the myth of the *modern* nation’, which ‘fails to grasp the continuing relevance and power of pre-modern ethnic ties and sentiments in providing a firm basis for ethno-nationalist movements’.<sup>10</sup>

Though terms such as ‘ethnic ties’, *ethnie* or ‘ethnic substratum’ must be handled with great care to prevent biological, racial or primordial implications from sliding in through the back door, it must be acknowledged that Smith has made a valuable contribution in insisting on the importance of ‘proto-national’ cultural elements. Anderson had already put a comparable case by relating the ‘imagination of nations’ to early modern cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the ‘modernist’ and the ‘constructivist’ view are closely linked. Still, the debates distinguished here do address different aspects of ‘the nation’ and nationalism. It is hardly surprising though that the above mentioned authors Hobsbawm, Gellner and Anderson can be considered as some of the leading representatives of the modernist theory, situating the seeds of national consciousness as late as the nineteenth (Gellner and Hobsbawm) or sixteenth century (Anderson) at the very most.

<sup>9</sup> Gellner underlines the importance of industrialization for the rise of nationalism. Hobsbawm puts the so-called ‘threshold-principle’ – economic liability as a guiding principle for the formation of states – at the centre of his explanation.

<sup>10</sup> A. D. Smith, *Nations and nationalism in a global era* (Cambridge 1995) 40 (my italics).

developments.<sup>11</sup> Like Danforth states: ‘to say that “nationalism invents nations where they do not exist”, as Gellner does, fails to take into account the many regional, ethnic, religious, and class identities that existed well before the age of nationalism. (...) Any successful analysis of nationalism must, therefore, balance an emphasis on the obvious modernity of nationalism as a political principle with the equally obvious pre-existence of the identities, traditions, and cultures from which it draws.’ In fact it can be said that nationalism’s strength lies in its very ability ‘to draw on these pre-existing cultural forms, to reshape them, and to fashion from them new identities, new communities, which are nonetheless perceived to be continuous with the past.’<sup>12</sup>

Joep Leerssen adheres to a similar position. As he has recently stated, it can even be considered as ‘meaningless to argue that the ethnic roots of the modern nation go back further than the emergence of the nationalist ideology. Of course they do.’ Crucial is the fact that ‘prior to the emergence of nationalism, ethnic diversity was a mangrove swamp of inchoate and competing patterns of self-identification.’ These ‘were given a fresh political instrumentalization, and were filtered, selected, realigned and reconfigured, sometimes to the point of transmutation or invention’. Some, but by no means all of the pre-existent, competing identities came to be articulated into activist movements and eventually led to the establishment of states as we presently know them. As a result, certain cultural activities can be recognized as antecedents of the national categories familiar today, but only with the knowledge of hindsight.<sup>13</sup> Thus the fact that nations and ethnic identities are constructed as organizing social categories has been increasingly recognized during the past few decades, but the necessary differentiations have been made to the radical modernist idea. The opposed positions taken by Gellner and his pupil Smith finally seem to have been reconciled in a view less directed by dichotomy and as a result more consistent with reality.

This constructivist turn initially mainly instigated scientific endeavours to demonstrate that identities and meanings often are ‘*constructs* disguised as *givens*’.<sup>14</sup> This trend towards ‘deconstruction’ has produced many an eye-opening study on as much interesting material. However valuable this kind of research has been, and continues to be, it is not what I intend to do with regard to the Greek case. The aura of actuality of what in fact at least partly are constructions or imaginations is remarkably persistent in many cases in Greece to be sure. The constructivist outlook may have spread among certain scholars, but – like in many countries – it hardly affects public consciousness. National myths that are deeply engrained as essential elements of Greek-ness and vigorously defended as actualities against whoever dares to contradict their reality are still abundant.<sup>15</sup> In this sense a lot of ‘deconstruction’ remains to be done. Yet I rather want to move on to a next stage and concentrate not on the question *what* can be proved to be constructed, but *how* certain constructions came into being, in which way they were expressed and by whom, and which motives can possibly serve as an explanation.

With these questions as a point of departure I will turn to the nineteenth century, a period as crucial for the construction of national identity in Greece as anywhere in Europe. In the

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<sup>11</sup> In his view, modern nations could be traced back to language communities that came into existence in the sixteenth century, when the spread of the art of printing, combined with the emergence of a common language, culturally united unprecedented large groups of people. See Anderson, *Imagined communities* (1983).

<sup>12</sup> Danforth (1995) 16, 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Joep Leerssen, ‘Nationalism and the cultivation of culture’, *Nations and Nationalism* 12 4 (2006) 563-564.

<sup>14</sup> Joep Leerssen, Diarmuid Ó Giolláin and Przemyslaw Urbanczyk, ‘Cultural dynamics: inheritance and identity’ (Humanities in the European Research Area – report 2006) 6.

<sup>15</sup> For instance those concerning the ‘κρυφό σχολειό’ or hidden school and the ubiquity of the practice of ‘παιδομάζωμα’ or violent recruitment of children during the Ottoman period. Though doubt has been cast on the tenability of these stories in scholarly debate, they are still widely accepted. @[quotation needed]@

Greek case several conditions can be observed which potentially explain the strong need for defining and strengthening the nation in this period.<sup>16</sup> In 1830 the Kingdom of Greece was among the first states of South-eastern Europe to be founded on the basis of the modern concept of the nation state. After the declaration of independence its existence as a nation state remained highly problematic however. Though it officially was independent, Greece was strongly dependent on the great powers (Britain, Russia and France). Moreover, the Greek Kingdom contained less than a third of what were considered as the Greek inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire. The pursuit of converging nation and state, as Gellner defined the essential aim of nationalism, was embodied in the ‘Megali Idea’ or ‘Great Idea’. These aspirations to extend the territory of the state, or to ‘liberate unredeemed lands’ as Greek nationalists called it, dominated Greek external politics during the nineteenth and a considerable part of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> But in most regions to which the newborn state directed its expansionist aspirations in the course of the nineteenth century, Greek populations were inextricably intermixed with many ‘others’ – Serbs, Bulgarians, Albanians, Turks and Vlachs. Thus the newborn state did not in any way live up to the ideal of the nation state that encompasses the *whole* nation and *only* this nation. In addition many internal problems had to be faced. The country was ravaged after ten years of fighting and internal tensions between so-called ‘autochthons’ and ‘heterochthons’ severely divided the population.<sup>18</sup> In short there was a strong need for *external* as well as *internal* unification. Shaping a unified nation that exceeded the borders of the newborn state could serve the correlating goals of overcoming internal divides, mobilizing people for the national cause and legitimating expansionist policies.

Without any doubt these specific conditions added particular urgency to the construction of a national identity in Greece and therefore need to be taken into account. They will not be at the centre of analysis in my research however. To make clear what will be, another shift in nationalism studies needs to be discussed, which could be dubbed a ‘cultural turn’ for conveniences sake. The predominance of ‘Hobsbawmian’ or ‘Gellnerian’ structural explanations of (national) identities – focusing on the role of societal transitions such as industrialisation, the rise of capitalism, centralization or globalization – has increasingly been countered, or rather complemented, by an emphasis on the importance of cultural elements and the need to distinguish political from cultural nationalism.<sup>19</sup> This approach is strongly advocated by Joep Leerssen, whose understanding of ‘cultural nationalism’ and idea of the ‘cultivation of culture’ deserve a closer look.

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<sup>16</sup> The following impression is mostly based on R. Clogg, *A concise history of Greece* (Cambridge 2002).

<sup>17</sup> @[Adjustment needed here or elsewhere in order to point out the different conceptions of this ‘Megali Idea’, which was not only or always conceived in terms of territorial expansion but also merely as a cultural/civilizing mission]@

<sup>18</sup> The ‘autochthons’ were those who came from the heartlands of the revolt against the Ottomans and claimed a share in power proportional to the part they played in the struggle for independence. The ‘heterochthons’ only moved to the Greek state after independence but took up a large part of the political functions and power by virtue of their often better education. See Clogg (2002) 47.

<sup>19</sup> For example by Montserrat Guibernau who primarily countered Gellner’s structural explanation by stressing the fact that shared cultural elements and the *perception* of belonging to a community with a common past are at least equally important. See M. Guibernau, ‘National identity and culture’, in: Idem, *Nationalisms: the nation-state and nationalism in the twentieth century* (Cambridge 1995) 72-84. This ‘cultural turn’ in studies of nationalism and identity is not to be confused with the ‘cultural (or: linguistic) turn’ of the seventies that will be addressed below, although it certainly does owe a lot to the theoretical outlook it produced.

### Cultural nationalism and the cultivation of culture

‘All nationalism is cultural nationalism’, thus one of Leerssen’s central tenets reads, ‘in its incipience at least’. ‘The concept at the heart of nationalism, that of the *nation*, refers to an aggregate of people whose ‘peculiar character’ is at least in part constituted by cultural factors such as language or historical awareness’. Moreover ‘separatist movements often begin in the study, (...) schoolmasters and poets who collect proverbs and folktales are the unwitting avant-garde for the social and political activists, and (...) cultural preoccupations stand at the beginning of the alphabet’.<sup>20</sup> Here Leerssen builds on a theory developed in the late 1960s by Miroslav Hroch. Cultural preoccupations according to this model do not passively ‘reflect’ or ‘follow’ social developments or political movements, but tend to anticipate them. Among the three phases Hroch discerns in nationalism, ‘phase A’ – that of ‘raising cultural consciousness’ – seems to be prerequisite for the phases ‘B’ (social demands) and ‘C’ (political activism) by making the nation thinkable as a focus of political loyalty.<sup>21</sup>

By thus placing cultural consciousness-raising at the vanguard of developing nationalist movements, Hroch has taken a significant step towards a new approach to nationalism. Still, his model clearly has some ‘inner complexities’ and ‘desiderata’ as Leerssen also states. As any model inherently is a simplified presentation of a complex reality, the danger of obscuring as much by generalization as is clarified by articulation is always on the lurk. In this case it should always be kept in mind that the precise nature of the various phases may – and is likely to – vary from country to country. And although early ‘phase A nationalism’ tends to be studied within the national categories that only later resulted from its activities, it is useful to take notice of the fact that ‘nationalism in the nineteenth century opened up many more potential perspectives than the path which eventually was taken by the historical course of events.’ To guard against anachronistic distortions it is quintessential to acknowledge that the ‘rear-view window perspective’ narrows sight to those movements that eventually led to the establishment of the national states as we know them today and tends to filter other tendencies – ‘failed nationalisms’, regional activities – away.<sup>22</sup>

Last but not least the three ‘phases’ should not be seen as necessarily successive in order: cultural concerns are not restricted to early stages of national movements, but remain on the agenda even after sovereign statehood has been achieved. ‘In contrast to what the neat succession of letters A, B and C would suggest, the cultural agenda of nationalism does not cease when subsequent, more activist phases swing into action, but continues to feed and inform these.’<sup>23</sup> Perhaps then, it would be more accurate not to speak of ‘phases’ but of different ‘kinds’ of nationalism instead to prevent the connotation of chronological order. Even then another reservation remains to be made. For hardly ever are the ‘phases’ or ‘kinds’ Hroch discerns easily discernable as separate strands, as they often coincide, intermingle or partly overlap.

All these reservations notwithstanding, I think Hroch’s model should not be dismissed as untenable in its entirety. Its great merit has been to draw attention to a long-neglected aspect of nationalism by stressing the fact that it formulates a political agenda on the basis of a *cultural* ideal. And, with the provisions mentioned above, it certainly can make a valuable contribution to the understanding of nationalism in its different dimensions.

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<sup>20</sup> Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 559-562.

<sup>21</sup> Miroslav Hroch, e.g. *Die Vorkämpfer der nationalen Bewegung bei den kleinen Völkern Europas. Eine vergleichende Analyse zur gesellschaftlichen Schichtung der patriotischen Gruppen* (Prague 1968) or *In the National Interest* (Prague 1996), as referred to by Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 562.

<sup>22</sup> Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 563.

<sup>23</sup> Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 563.

Most studies of nationalism have only marginally dealt with its cultural dimension though. Whereas modernists generally departed from societal modernisation models – explaining nationalism as an ideology in terms of socio-economic processes – anti-modernists primarily studied cultural activities as *manifestations* of the nation, rather than as *preoccupations* of nationalism. For a long time ‘all parties [tended] to locate ‘culture’ outside the nationalist ideology, as a general, external ambience which is invoked or influenced’ and is either interpreted as a ‘legitimising smokescreen’ and ‘rhetorical ammunition’ for political activists, or as a reflection of ongoing manifestations of a pre-existing fact. The contested issue has generally been whether or not the nation culturally *existed*, whereas ‘cultural rhetoric [should be conceived as] an intrinsic part of, and commitment within, the nationalist *agenda*’ instead.<sup>24</sup> Thus the ‘dynamics of cultural nationalism’ have largely remained out of sight and Leerssen therefore proposes a new approach to nationalism and identity from a cultural historical perspective.

Central to his view is the idea of the ‘cultivation of culture’ as the underlying, unifying concern of early cultural nationalism. Like all terms referring to such vast and abstract phenomena, fruitful use requires clear definition. Though addressing these definitional issues in short, as the scope of this paper requires, carries the risk of confusing things by what seems terminological *hocus-pocus*, I’d rather take it than avoid them altogether. The link between ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ is frequently referred to and has become increasingly important in political debate, but it is rarely properly defined. Hence Joep Leerssen and others call for a transnational study of what they call ‘cultural dynamics’.<sup>25</sup> Who ‘we’ are as societies and nations is defined by our cultural choices and traditions. These cultural choices and preferences are often ‘contested, multifarious and debated’, and just as much are the resulting collective identities. It is this interaction, over time, between cultural inheritance and collective identity that Leerssen, Ó Giolláin and Urbanczyk describe as the ‘dynamics of culture’. ‘Culture’ covers a bewildering variety of activities that can not be easily fit into an abstract definition, but can essentially be understood as a dynamic system, a ‘diverse and changing complex of traditions, heirlooms, memories and ongoing practices’.<sup>26</sup> Its ‘cultivation’ can be described as the process through which especially popular, vernacular culture is rediscovered and placed at the centre of attention, and more important, canonized as ‘something which represents the very identity of the nation, its specificity among other nations’.<sup>27</sup>

As Leerssen contends, it is this ‘cultivation of culture’ that ‘underpins (...) nationalists’ scholarly, creative and political-propagandist concern with language, with folktales, history, myths and legends, proverbs, ancient tribal/legal antiquity, mythology, antique heirlooms, etc.’ These are not studied as ‘picturesque “manners and costumes”’ but as ‘data for the historical track-record of the nation’; past cultural activities are ‘lifted from their context of origin, (...) recontextualised and instrumentalised for modern needs and values’ and, as a result, ‘invested with a fresh national symbolism and status’.<sup>28</sup>

Thus Leerssen complements Hroch by stating that ‘phase-A’ nationalism necessarily involves cultivation of culture. But, like he readily admits, this in itself would be ‘no more than a phraseological pirouette’. To prevent leaving the case at little revealing abstractions revolving around a concept – ‘culture’ – that is notoriously hard to define, Leerssen has developed what he tends to call a ‘pragmatic systematisation on the basis of inventory’. *In concreto* various

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 560-561 (my italics).

<sup>25</sup> Leerssen, Ó Giolláin and Urbanczyk, ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 1-2.

<sup>27</sup> Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 568.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, 568.

cultural activities are placed within a matrix with different ‘cultural fields’ – language, discourse, material and immaterial culture (or artefacts and practices) – on one axis, and different ‘types of cultivation’ – the public dynamics or intended instrumentalization by cultural-nationalist actors – on the other:<sup>29</sup>

		TYPES OF CULTIVATION		
		salvage/retrieval/ inventory	fresh cultural productivity	propagation, proclamation in the public sphere
<b>CULTURAL FIELDS</b>	<b>Language</b>	language description (dictionaries, grammars, collections of proverbs) L1	language maintenance (standardisation/dialect debates, language purism, orthography debates) L2	language activism, language planning, language education L3
	<b>Discourse</b>	text editions (of literary texts, historical documents, legal sources) D1	Translations/adaptations (Bible, classics), literature, history- writing, literary history, criticism D2	education, commemorations, events, festivals, awards, historical pageants D3
	<b>artefacts/ material culture</b>	archeography, monumental remains, symbolically invested sites A1	monument protection, musealisation, architecture, restorations, historical genre- painting A2	monuments, dedicatory investment of public space A3
	<b>practices/ performative culture</b>	folklore studies (editions of oral literature, proverbs, superstitions, pastimes, manners and customs, folk dances/music) P1	folklore revival (sports/pastimes), national music, rustic-realist literature P2	Revived or invented traditions, events/festivals/ awards (folklore, sports, music) P3

Two additional categories are defined which can be applied to all fields and pursuits in the scheme; social ambience (the public organisation of cultural pursuits, e.g. in associations, reading societies, periodicals, academies) and institutional infrastructure created by the modern state (universities, libraries, archives, state museums, state academies).

The resulting ‘grid’ or ‘template’ is practical, almost to the extent of seeming obvious, and can of course be infinitely extended and refined. It might even be ‘artificial and arbitrary as the system of meridians’ that ‘does not describe the earth as it is, but allows us to fix a position on its surface’. But it surely is a valuable devise for locating specific cultural activities within the total array of cultural concerns and mapping out the cultural components of nationalism. Without the pretension of describing or characterising cultural nationalism as such, the model is meant to serve as a tool for diversifying and specifying what has been

<sup>29</sup> The matrix inserted here combines the tables 1 and 2 presented in ‘Cultivation of culture’ on pp. 571 and 572 respectively. It has been published in a slightly different version in Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 17. I have reproduced it here since it will help specifying which cultural activities I will (and will not) take into account in my research on “Greek representations of the past” later on.

referred to in such unsatisfactory unspecific ways in nationalism studies until now, and to provide a basis for more detailed studies into ‘all that cultural stuff’.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed I believe that, by clarifying the different kinds and uses of cultural activities as well as their mutual relations, the model can certainly make an important contribution to the comprehension of cultural nationalism and its role in ‘constructing’ or ‘imagining’ national communities. Like the actors carrying cultural nationalism, who tried to grasp the taxonomy of Europe’s diversified cultural landscape – schoolmasters collecting proverbs and folksongs; scholars compiling dictionaries and grammars; publishing historical novels, patriotic verse, editions of ancient documents; establishing newspapers, university chairs, reading rooms and monuments; organizing commemorations and other events – modern scholars can now aim at charting the taxonomy of cultural nationalism guided by the heuristic compass of the model described above. The protagonists of cultural nationalism – sometimes unwittingly – provided ‘their political fellow-travellers [with] a discourse, rhetoric and mental template concerning their nation’s roots and specificity’ that in many cases has remained axiomatic until today.<sup>31</sup> We can now study their various activities and try to develop a greater understanding of the ways in which this discourse or ‘template’ underlying the imagination of national communities was gradually developed. By specifying the dynamics of cultural nationalism, we might have a closer look on *what* was constructed *out of what, how*, under *what constraints* and *by whom*.<sup>32</sup>

No single study can possibly make an in-depth analysis of all cultural pursuits and all varieties of cultivation mentioned above. As for the Greek case my research will be merely confined to the fresh cultural production in the discursive field, i.e. box D2 in the matrix. More precisely, I will focus on the textual representations of the past, that is to say on history writing, historiographical essays and historical novels in particular.

None of these activities took place in isolation however. As Leerssen underlines ‘many authors practiced both the writing of history and of historical novels; folklore collectors dealt with dialect variants, oral epic, proverbs, superstitions and music, and inspired rustic novels and choral societies; linguists were involved both in academic study of language and in language activism or the political instrumentalization of languages as a marker of nationality; the borders between literature, literary history and political history-writing were thin and vague, and many poets and scholars were important political protagonists.’<sup>33</sup> Cultural and political nationalism were often embodied in one single person.

This certainly goes just as much for scholars in Greece as elsewhere in the nineteenth century. At the time Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos published his famous work on the *History of the Greek nation*, he had already founded several periodicals and after his ascent in academia he was repeatedly called upon by the Greek state to serve national purposes in negotiations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as president of the exhibition of the relics of the War of Independence or as a founding member of the Association for the Propagation of Greek Letters. And, to name just another example, Alexandros Rizos-Rangavis not only devoted himself to Greek literary history and archaeology – he was appointed professor of Archaeology at the university in Athens in 1845 – but also published poems, dramas and a historical novel. In the meantime he was co-founder of the Archaeological Society in Athens and successively served at the ministry of education and culture, the ministry of internal as

<sup>30</sup> Leerssen, ‘Cultivation of culture’ (2006) 568-572.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 573.

<sup>32</sup> See also Burke (2004) 97-98, where Peter Burke warns against the problems of the idea of cultural construction and the danger of ‘over-reaction’. He underlines that not everything is imaginable at any time, nor can anything be constructed out of nothing; therefore potential preceding ‘materials’ and constraints on the process of construction should also be explored.

<sup>33</sup> Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 13.

well as that of external affairs, and as an ambassador to Washington, Paris and the German Empire, in which capacity he took part in the Berlin Conference of 1878.

Such being the case, it hardly needs saying that a view too strictly confined to historical texts would hamper access to interesting and valuable information. To understand and value their outlook, the main authors' other activities should not be left out of consideration. Thus the schematic representation of the cultivation of culture helps to position and delineate ones research within an abundance of fields and practices, but at the same time clearly visualizes its context. To properly situate a specific type of discursive production in its cultural context, an occasional glance at neighbouring types of cultivation (for instance its propagation) or different cultural fields is required, with the 'D2-box' serving as central point of departure and reference here.

Secondly, while culture is widely perceived to consist of separate national canons by nature, it only became 'national' as it was contextualized in the frame of the emerging nation-state from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. The process of national 'cultivation of culture' involved the emergence of romantic nationalism with its interest in cultural identity rooted in language, folklore and history. On a more institutional level it involved 'the developing infrastructure of the modern state, with the centralization of libraries and archives, the reorganization or foundation of universities and academies, the professionalization of humanities and philologies, [and] the rising sociability of an educated middle class.' This all-encompassing process, affecting all aspects of public life and all cultural fields, was hugely successful: the national tunnel vision became so deeply ingrained in public perception, that the process of national cultivation itself was lost out of sight.<sup>34</sup>

Culture should not be studied as a set of reactions within one single country however, but as an essentially mobile phenomenon. It 'proliferates international-ly', 'moving over the map like a weather system or an epidemic'. 'Movements and debates in one country may spawn copycat movements and spin-off debates elsewhere' and Europe could in this sense be conceived as a 'society', defined by Lévi-Strauss as consisting of 'individuals and groups which communicate with one another'. Likewise, the processes of cultivation of culture within different national contexts should not be seen as aspects of different developments in separate countries, but rather as variants of a phenomenon that affected the whole of Europe; as the 'national stratification and crystallization of European-wide cultural dynamics'. 'The main actors', thus writes Leerssen, 'had a European-wide influence and contact-network. Leading figures in national revivals had contacts with, and took their inspiration from, other European traditions.'<sup>35</sup>

This observation certainly is applicable to the Greek case. Though the foundation of the independent kingdom of Greece in 1830 marks the beginning of the period I will study, this does not mean I will confine my view to what happened within its brand-new national borders.<sup>36</sup> There are ample reasons to look beyond. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards an educated grecophone middle-class that stood in close contact with European ideological and cultural currents started to emerge. Merchants and intellectuals travelled through Europe or studied in cosmopolitan cultural centres such as Paris, Vienna, Munich and Odessa where they became acquainted with and influenced by Enlightened, Romantic, nationalist and other ideas. Thus many of the grecophone men of letters of the days of Walter Scott and the brothers Grimm participated in the same European-wide ideological climate as their famous contemporaries. Like them they took an interest in vernacular culture, language, folklore, philology and history, and they gradually started to

<sup>34</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 9.

<sup>35</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 12.

<sup>36</sup> @[or for that matter to the territory of Greece as we know it now]@

forge a Greek identity out of the ‘mangrove swamp’ of the European regions of the Ottoman Empire. This cultural exchange did not come to a hold at the foundation of an independent state. King Otto and his Bavarian entourage constituted a direct and physical link with the German world. Many Greek adolescents went to study in Munich and many leading historians, writers and politicians maintained contact with elites elsewhere in Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Hence, cultural tendencies in nineteenth-century Greece were strongly influenced by more general developments such as the rise of Romanticism, nationalism and historicism. To properly understand them they must be contextualized on both the national and the transnational, European level. The analysis of a specific cultural expression within a specific geographical area – in my case: the representation of the nation and the national past in Greek historical documents – is therefore not only interesting in itself, but can also serve as an example of cultural exchange and a case for the study of the relation between nationalism and culture in general. By collecting insights from a specific part of Europe it can hopefully contribute to a deeper understanding of a European-wide phenomenon.

### **Imagining the nation, appropriating the past**

That perceptions of the past are essential to the imagination of a (national) community has already been implied. By far most of the various cultural activities mapped out in Leerssen’s matrix have got at least something to do with protecting, remembering, evaluating or propagating the past. Publishing historical sources; protecting ancient monuments and erecting new ones; writing historical novels or ‘scientific’ histories; excavating the remains of older civilizations and exhibiting the findings in historical museums, often of historical architectural design; organising historical festivals, plays, and parades to celebrate past events and persons; naming streets, squares and buildings after illustrious ancestors: it all involves choosing from and referring to the past, shaping an image of history in the process. This is of course no coincidence. The sense of continuity and permanence is essential to identity. ‘Individuals and societies profile their identity (...) by their ongoing identification with what they have been (...).’<sup>38</sup> Imagining the nation is inconceivable without imagining its past.

That this national past cannot be simply ‘discovered’ or ‘revived’ but is constructed over and over again hardly needs saying among scholars of history, though it can be questioned to what extent this realization has truly reached beyond the boundaries of the professional group. Huizinga’s definition of history as ‘the mental form in which a society accounts for its past’ has become commonplace, as has Lucien Febvre’s postulation that ‘every age mentally fabricates its representation of the historical past.’<sup>39</sup> And one could quote a myriad of comparable aphorisms indicating that the writing of history involves not merely the representation of facts but rather an active moulding of the past that differs according to time and place.

The constructed character of history was strikingly exemplified in the volume by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger already referred to above.<sup>40</sup> In the introductory essay to *The invention of tradition* Hobsbawm put forward the argument that traditions ‘which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.’ Though his remarks now seem almost conservative – warning that ‘the strength and adaptability of genuine tradition should not be confused with invention’ – his view was rather controversial at the

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<sup>37</sup> @[to be complemented by a reference to the Ionian context]@

<sup>38</sup> See also Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 14.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Geschiedenis is de geestelijke vorm waarin een cultuur zich rekenschap geeft van haar verleden.’ J. Huizinga, ‘Over een definitie van het begrip geschiedenis’ (On a definition of the concept of history) (1926), in: *De taak der cultuurgeschiedenis* (The task of Cultural History) (Groningen 1995) 66.

<sup>40</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). See Burke (2004) 83-84.

time it was published. The volume was so much successful that its title grew into a concept that is now commonly known and acknowledged to be of special relevance to nations and nationalisms, as Hobsbawm already noted himself.<sup>41</sup>

At their very birth, nations are adorned with an age-old history by the revival of the memory of ‘lost’ traditions, the re-invocation of ‘national heritage’, and the search for past precedents. A common history is forged and articulated in foundational myths and stories of the fortunes of the nation during its existence ever since. The chaotic mishmash of the innumerable events, incidents, facts and developments that make up the past is filtered, selected, interpreted, organised and moulded into a story with the nation as its main protagonist. Thus nations become rooted in their members’ consciousness as ancient or even eternal realities.

This process involves as much remembrance as amnesia. As Ernest Renan already remarked in his *Qu’est-ce que c’est une nation?* ‘to forget, and I would even say misunderstand history, is essential to the formation of a nation.’<sup>42</sup> Whereas some parts of ‘history’ are elevated to the status of ‘key-moments’ in the nation’s evolution, others are – consciously or not – left out of the ‘grand narrative’. Thus each community in every age renders a specific account of its past. This is so much fundamental to the way communities define their identity that it seems to occur unconsciously and spontaneously. The retroactive manipulation of (versions of) the past can however just as well be – and often is – part of political strategies.<sup>43</sup>

Though tradition is widely acknowledged to be a cultural construction in theory, some slightly modifying remarks have been made. It has been stressed that it would ‘surely [be] a mistake to see it as a process of creation *ex nihilo*.’ Rather, the transmission of tradition (or ‘cultural reproduction’ in the words of Bourdieu) should be seen as a process of ‘continuous creation’. The process of passing a culture on to a new generation, adapting old ideas to new circumstances and wrapping new ideas in traditional forms, involves reconstruction or *bricolage*, as Claude Lévi-Strauss named it, and ‘re-employment’ in the formulation of Michel de Certeau.<sup>44</sup> National tradition, or the national past, is forged and constructed but does not emerge ‘out of nothing’. It heavily draws on historical (pre-national) elements, however meticulously selected they may be.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it might be more fruitful not to use the term ‘invention’ or ‘construction’ but ‘appropriation’ instead, or rather, in addition. Michel de Certeau already used this term in his work on everyday life in France in the 1970s, which was published in 1980. Though he used it in a different context, to analyse a different subject, its message can be quite easily applied to the issues concerned here. Certeau, in Burke’s explanation, ‘was thinking in terms of ordinary people making selections from a repertory, making new combinations between what they select and, not least, placing what they had appropriated in new contexts.’<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> It is therefore surprising that he hardly refers to it in his later work on ‘nations and nationalism since 1780’ (1990) at all. Maybe this can be explained by his self-declared emphasis on Hroch’s ‘phase C’- nationalism. i.e. on (early-twentieth-century) nationalism as a political mass-movement, and by his predominantly structuralist approach.

<sup>42</sup> ‘L’oubli et je dirai même l’erreur historique, sont un facteur essentiel de la formation d’une nation (...)’ Ernest Renan, *Qu’est ce que c’est une nation?* (What is a nation?) (1882) 7-8, cited in Hobsbawm (1990) (my translation).

<sup>43</sup> Burke (2004) 65-66; Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 4.

<sup>44</sup> See Burke (2004) 98-99. See also Idem, ‘Unity and variety in cultural history’, in: *Varieties of Cultural History* (1997) 195.

<sup>45</sup> According to Willem Frijhoff it is exactly this dual character of tradition that can serve as an explanation of the transience of identity. ‘Although its constituents are embedded in traditions (...), giving meaning [to them] (...) belongs to the order of the existent imagination and pragmatic interpretation.’ W. Frijhoff, ‘Toeëigening: van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving’ (Appropriation: from possessiveness to interpretation), *Trajecta* 6 2 (1997) 113 (my translation).

<sup>46</sup> Burke (2004) 77; Burke here refers to Certeau’s *The practice of everyday life* (1980).

There is much more to say about this concept, which has been the subject of many a debate in social and cultural theory. To prevent getting bogged down in semantic hairsplitting I will leave it at some defining words.<sup>47</sup> ‘Appropriation’ is not to be understood here in its literal sense of ‘taking possession of something’, but as ‘mentally acquiring’ something in a cultural sense. In this second denotation the term has been increasingly used in cultural and social sciences to direct attention to the ways in which ideas, texts, objects and practices can be invested with new meanings, within a specific sphere of use and with particular purposes. It is primarily this implication of active adaptation that discerns the concept from older terms such as the ‘reception’ or ‘consumption’ of culture. ‘Appropriation’ implies the active absorption of culture and its reading by the recipient. Culture is conceived as an open, dynamic system, which is essentially flexible in meaning and shape, and which is not just *reproduced* or passively *consumed*. Rather the recipient *produces* culture himself by investing transmitted cultural elements with a new meaning. Existing cultural forms are often changed and moulded into new ones by means of selection, adaptation, borrowing, inversion and transmutation. Thus, in the process of appropriation, each specific group articulates a specific culture or ‘symbolic system’ with a specific meaning.

Though the concept of appropriation is often used to define the process of cultural exchange or encounter among coexisting cultures, societies or groups, its value for the relation between a culture or community and its past is obvious as well. The idea of appropriation as an active form of reception – conscious or unconscious selection from and adaptation of the cultural supply according to the needs of a specific group at a specific moment – can then serve as an analytical perspective on attitudes towards the past. It can be used alongside other concepts slightly different in content, such as construction or representation, and help to clarify their exact meaning. Like these, the notion of appropriation can be employed to direct attention to constructions of the past, not by disposing of them because they are ‘no more’ than constructions, but by putting their origin and genesis at the centre of analysis.

All this is of course closely related to the cultivation of culture as described above. The concept of ‘appropriation’ can be applied to all types of cultivation in the matrix (salvage, productivity and propagation). The cultural investment of public spaces, the restoration or protection of buildings and landmarks, linguistic standardisation, literary and national history; it all involves a complex process of selection, adaptation and appropriation. After all, both concepts – the cultivation and appropriation of culture – stem from, or are essential components of, the constructivist conception of culture. Since ‘cultural canonicity has come to be studied, not just as the power of a certain text (or painting, or musical composition, [or historical person, deed or event]) to maintain its prestige over time, but rather as its capacity to translate itself to new audiences, new media, new meanings (...)’, the study of culture ‘takes account not only of the conditions of cultural production, but also of cultural dissemination and appropriation.’ Due to the ‘functionalist revolution in the approach to culture’, it is now recognized that ‘culture obtains its meaning (or indeed its various meanings) in the *function* it has for its audiences and participants. And one of the most dominant functions of culture in post-Napoleonic Europe happened to be the articulation and affirmation of a collective – and usually national – identity. Within this context popular culture came to be cultivated, appropriated and canonized in national terms all over Europe.

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<sup>47</sup> For a detailed discussion of the term, its genealogy (from Elias and Bourdieu to Lévi-Strauss, Certeau and others) and its position vis-à-vis comparable but slightly different concepts in the field (reception, acculturation, assimilation, transculturation etc.) see Frijhoff (1997) 99-118. This paragraph is primarily based on pp. 100-115.

This involved fixing fluid, shifting practices into a static, unchanging canon that was in accordance with the perceived eternity and permanence of the nation.<sup>48</sup>

Of course this was not accomplished without striking a blow. As Willem Frijhoff notes, the term ‘appropriation’ is essentially polemic. Unambiguous appropriation is hampered by a complex reality and only too often several parties claim the same heritage, each appropriating it in a different way. Meanwhile, appropriating an image, practice or historical event as a constituting element of one’s own identity comes down to claiming a monopoly and denying the other the right to regard it as such as well. The imaginative process of identification is therefore dynamic, continuously debated and often polemic, and the continual redefinition of ever-changing identities is accompanied by unremitting fresh appropriation of tradition and culture.<sup>49</sup>

The national-identitarian function of culture has been increasingly inventoried over the last few decades. Growing attention has been paid to the way in which various aspects of the cultural domain have been implicated in the articulation, construction and invention of identities. The humanities have turned their view inwards and tried to establish to which extent they have themselves, as scientific endeavours, been part of a national-identitarian agenda.<sup>50</sup> This question is particularly fascinating in the case of the writing of history in its broadest sense, from official historiography to historical novels and historicizing poems or plays. It is this background against which my research into Greek historiography is to be seen. What picture did nineteenth-century Greek men of letters develop of their past? How did they configure Greece’s national history, and in which way did they thereby simultaneously shape the Greek nation?

With regard to the concept of appropriation the Greek case shows some striking elements at first glance. It can in a way be said that in Greece the past had to be appropriated in twofold. The classical heritage had to a large extent passed into oblivion for centuries and the ‘awareness’ of being the heirs of the glorious civilization of Greek antiquity largely started to develop when the classical past had already been ‘discovered’ and appropriated by Western Europe as the cradle of its civilization. When late-eighteenth century grecophone intellectuals turned their attention to the classical past in line with and due to the renewed interest that was part of Enlightenment thought, they were not only dealing with a faraway past that had to be appropriated according to modern needs but with a European heritage that had to be nationalized as well. Like all nations, nineteenth-century Greece was in search of a common history providing and strengthening collective identity and rendering the nation a stable presence amidst historical change. It was only obvious to turn to the classical past, which was given a firm presence in the here and now in many ways.

But the search for continuity was not accomplished at that. When the descent of the modern Greeks was called into question by the Tyrolean historian Fallmerayer – to name the best known example – and their heirship to the classical past ceased to be taken for granted, the intervening centuries had to be satisfactorily filled in. The confusion and agony Fallmerayer’s ‘attack’ caused was finally overcome by the discovery and incorporation of the Byzantine Empire as a constitutive part of the Greek national narrative, as will be clarified elsewhere. Thus the construction of the Greek national past shows a phased appropriation of different cultures and civilisations. It was extended step by step to include more phases and regions of the classical period (from Athens in the Periclean age to the Macedonia of Philip II and Alexander the Great) and Byzantium. In this way Greek identity was

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<sup>48</sup> Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 5-6, 9, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Frijhoff (1997) 109, 116-117.

<sup>50</sup> Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 6.

diachronically defined and a continuous national canon was established that in many respects still stands today.

### Demarcating the ‘self’ and the ‘other’

The single period that was never really incorporated in Greek national history was that of Ottoman reign. Until quite recently the ‘Tourkokratia’ did not receive much attention in Greek historiography in itself, but was merely referred to as the dark age of occupation, bondage and slavery of the nation.<sup>51</sup> Only the orthodox *millet*, which actually encompassed several ethnicities that shared their religion but by no means always their language and customs, was appropriated as ‘Greek’ and equated with the subjected nation suffering from Ottoman tyranny until its rise and victory in the War of Independence. The war itself provided a virtually inexhaustible source of national heroes, or persons that could easily be appropriated as such. And so did the preceding decades in which resistance against the ‘Turkish yoke’ rose among grecophone intellectuals under the influence of enlightened republican ideas.<sup>52</sup>

With this we arrive at yet another identitarian construction, i.e. that of ‘the other’. This second constitutive element of national identity is equally important and practically inseparable from the first, the sense of historicity. It is the sense of being essentially distinct from others. Having an identity essentially means not being alike or interchangeable with others, and hence defining it necessarily involves distinguishing a certain group, individual or society from others. While nationalism can be characterized as a strongly uniting ideology, it constitutes one of the most potent exclusive forces at the same time. The ‘Other’, the one beyond the borders of ‘our’ community, is a *sine qua non* of every nation. In our case the animosity between Greeks and Turks has become almost legendary and has strongly influenced their respective national histories on various occasions.<sup>53</sup>

Representations of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ have not been left untouched by constructivist theory. Whereas the – often implicit – stereotypes of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are generally perceived as facts by the members of a certain community, they have increasingly been studied as ever more examples of the social imagination and continuous recreation of identities. The idea of ‘ancient hatreds’ that separate communities with fixed identities, has been replaced by the notion of a dynamic relation between a constructed ‘Self’ and ditto ‘Others’. Like Burke writes, the articulation of differentiating characteristics as an affirmation of separateness and otherness is one of the means by which communities are symbolically constructed. Every nation is, in Anderson’s words, imagined as an inherently limited community and inevitably borders on other nations. These are not just perceived as different, but mostly as negative, rival and hostile at that. In the ‘search for distinction’, as Bourdieu denoted it, ‘precisely the minor differences in people who are otherwise alike (...) form the basis of feelings of estrangement or hostility between them’.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See a.o. H. Millas, ‘Tourkokratia. History and the image of Turks in Greek literature’, *Working papers European Studies Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 2006) 10.

<sup>52</sup> The appropriation of the Patriarch of Constantinople is one of the most striking examples in the first case. In spite of the fact that he had been severely opposed to the insurrection and actually condemned the revolutionaries of 1821, he was transformed into one of the main ‘martyrs of the Greek nation’ after the struggle for independence had been brought to an end. As to the period before the war Rigas Velestinlis is a well-known example. His intellectual legacy and legendary life have been appropriated by nineteenth-century Greek (and also Rumanian and Bulgarian) nationalists as well as by ideologists of all varieties later on.

<sup>53</sup> Here the Ottoman or Turkish ‘Other’ is addressed to illustrate the idea of the differentiation between ‘Self’ and ‘Other. However, the demarcation of the Greek nation and national history involved positioning towards various ‘Others’, such as ‘the Romans’, ‘the West’, Catholicism, and finally other Balkan peoples as well.

<sup>54</sup> Millas (2006) 15 and Idem, ‘History writing among Greeks and Turks: Imagining the Self and Other’ (2<sup>nd</sup> draft May 2005, NHIST München) paragraph 8.2; Burke (2004) 84-85.

Nations rarely seem to be too eager to register the ways in which they resemble their neighbours or their inner differentiations, but usually tend to highlight exactly those aspects in which they differ from other nations at the one hand, as well as their internal unity at the other. Shared cultural patterns affirm a sense of belonging together, especially if they are considered to be *exclusively* characteristic of the nation concerned. Cultural differences are accordingly highlighted in order to stress and rationalize a sense of separateness from other groups or societies. Thus culture constitutes a sense of collective identity not only by providing a tradition that binds generations together into a persistent community over time, but also by marking off a cultural community from its non-members.<sup>55</sup>

In this context Hercules Millas' analysis of the representation of the 'Self' and 'Other' in Greek and Turkish literature serves as a valuable source of inspiration. In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary texts Millas studied, Turks often appear in Greek literature as negative, abstract personalities, crude caricatures of an imaginary ethnic group and a danger to 'the Greek self'.<sup>56</sup> Potentially harmless or positive Turks, such as women, children and elderly people, are remarkably absent. And the same can be said the other way around. Differentiating characteristics or ethnic stereotypes are often developed and reproduced in pairs: the images on both sides of the divide separating 'Us' from the 'Others' are mutually interdependent, the one being defined relative to or against the other.<sup>57</sup> This certainly goes for the Greek case. As Millas observes, the images were to a large extent reciprocal. Greeks and Turks had fought their wars of liberation against each other and established their national state as a consequence of the victory. Both sides therefore had 'all the qualifications to become the 'Other' *par excellence* of each other.'<sup>58</sup>

The genres that primarily concern us here, scientific or semi-scientific historical texts, play a similar and equally important role in establishing such images. Like Millas rightly states historiography and the writing of novels can not even be clearly distinguished in this respect. When it comes to their treatment of the Ottoman period and the Ottoman or later Turkish people, the demarcation line becomes blurred whereas both kinds of texts are practically devoid of positive or even neutral attributes and show sentimental involvement with past generations of 'Greeks' and negative feelings against 'the Turks', who are perceived and represented as the source of all mishaps to the Greek nation.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, though the sense of alterity has been primarily characterised as synchronic, it can more often than not be extended into the future and with more certainty into the past.<sup>60</sup> The image of the *present* 'Self' and 'Other' is inextricably linked with the image of the *past* 'Self' and 'Other' and the perception of present relations among the two is strongly connected with the way their past relations are perceived. The distinctness of the nation *vis-à-vis* others is thus not only synchronically but also diachronically established. It is reinforced in a national history that narrates the story of the nation and its struggles against, that goes without saying, its 'Others'.

To clarify abstraction with an example we can again turn to the Greek case. The stereotypes Millas discerns in the novels he studied 'reflect a past of diachronic significance, a

<sup>55</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 14.

<sup>56</sup> This is the case whenever Turks enter the stage as symbols, representatives of the Ottoman authority or historical figures within the framework of the confrontation between Turks and Greeks and their respective nations. Millas observes a striking discrepancy between these negatively portrayed abstract figures in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary texts and the more human characters of Turks that sometimes appear as concrete personalities with even positive attributes in the memoirs of the authors. The positive, balanced image tends to be overruled by the more abstract discourse of 'the Other' however. See Millas (2006) 4-6, 13, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Burke (2004) 81-82; Millas (2006) 3-4.

<sup>58</sup> Millas (2005), see paragraph 4.1 and 8, 'an assessment'.

<sup>59</sup> Millas (2006), 10.

<sup>60</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 14.

past that gives meaning to the present', i.e. to "our' Greek present'. Along with the Greek nation, the Turks obtain permanence as well and past relations between them are consequently defined as the continuous encounter between their respective eternal nations; an encounter that caused the 'Greeks' to suffer from the 'Turkish yoke' for several centuries. As Millas states this 'only make[s] sense if one is prepared to see the Ottoman as Turks, and the Byzantines as Greeks.'<sup>61</sup> It was exactly this image that was established in nineteenth-century Greek historiography. The continuum fabricated in the history of the nation proved to include the 'Other' as well.

This negative past, presented as the result of a problematic relation with the 'Other', serves several purposes. It justifies the revolt against the 'Others', the existence of the resulting sovereign Greek state and the sacrifices made for the nation in the past. Conversely, the images of heroic revolt help to nurture national identity: 'The hero suffered bravely', Nikolaos Voutiras writes in his novel of 1861 and 'by his bravery [he proved] that all those who doubt the authenticity of the Greek nation, and who do not accept that the modern Greeks are the grandsons of Leonidas, are wrong'.<sup>62</sup> Remembering the wounds inflicted by the 'Other' was therefore of utmost importance and the need to reproduce the 'old sufferings' of the nation was voiced in many novels as Millas has shown. For example by the novelist Ilias Venezis in 1974: 'We are a nation of memories. This is the source of our sorrow and of our pride [...]. If you expect us to forget our history, our martyrs, we cannot do that.' 'Forgetting' was felt to be synonymous with excusing the Turks who had done so many 'terrible things' to the Greeks. 'Hatred is a matter of ethics. Not to forget is a need. If I forget it is as if I betray my country, my parents'.<sup>63</sup>

What Venezis *did* forget however – and he was by no means the only one – were the many evidences that past social reality was by no means characterized by the existence of clearly defined nations, but by a hybrid culture and a myriad of local communities, overlapping identities and social stratifications instead. Christians worshipping at Muslim shrines, Muslims frequenting Christian ones in turn, Turkophone Orthodox Christians and Grecophone Muslim communities; they could all be found on the Balkan peninsula of early-modern times. But since they did not fit into the simplified images of subsequent opposing national narratives, they were consciously silenced or became prey to national 'lack of memory' or amnesia.<sup>64</sup> Along with the nationalisation of the past such segments of population became stripped from the 'inconsistent' nuances that defied unambiguous definition and moulded to fit within the borders of subsequent national communities. Here the concept of appropriation once again comes to mind.

Forging complex reality into a meaningful story with head and tale inevitably involves simplification and the establishment of a particular narrative. The demarcation of the 'Self' and the 'Other', whether in the present or past, can be defined as a discursive act accordingly. As Leerssen remarks, self-images and images of the 'Other' are generally expressed in and constructed by means of a differentiating discourse of collective characters that was gradually developed during the past few centuries and still underlies many current stereotypes

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<sup>61</sup> Millas (2006) 7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Millas (2006) 8-9, 13 and 15. Venezis remarkably enough was one of the authors that presented a balanced approach by staging human Turks in his novels. But, when he turns to narrating the history of older generations under *Tourkokratia* he uncritically switches to the official discourse of the cruel Turk in which the Other is stereotyped and demonised.

<sup>64</sup> Millas (2005), assessment; Burke (2004) 118. For an impression of the diversity of the population of the Balkans 'before the nation state' see also Mark Mazower, *The Balkans. A short history* (London 2000).

concerning a nation's character, soul or psychological identity.<sup>65</sup> With this we arrive at the next and final point of consideration of the present paper.

### **Re-presenting the past: historical narration as discourse**

The interpretation of social categories as not only socially or culturally but also *discursively* constructed phenomena is the utmost consequence of the constructivist view. From the late 1960s onwards, more and more attention has been paid to the discursive construction of social reality. Michel Foucault, one of the well-known protagonists of the 'linguistic turn', dedicated much of his work to the study of 'discourses', which he defined as practices that 'systematically construct (*forment*) the objects of which they speak'.<sup>66</sup> The phrase has become much more common ever since and has inspired many studies, among which those addressing identity and history are of special significance here.

That identity, or the demarcation of the 'Self' from the 'Other', involves the creation of a certain discourse defining the community and discerning 'us' and 'them' has already been demonstrated through Millas's studies of literary images of Greeks and Turks. Social and political studies of identity have increasingly paid attention to its discursive quality as well. Thus Salman Sayyid and Lilian Zac have stressed the importance of perceptions in the ways communities construct their borders and their relation with 'the Other' by means of the narrative production of a collective past and shared projections on the future.<sup>67</sup> And in Vivienne Jabri's theory on identities and conflict the concept of 'discourse' is again a key notion. In her words: every individual 'is born into discursive continuities which define and bind particular societies.' Narrative constructions of reality, stories and perceptions of the surrounding world constitute the basis of individual and group- identities: it is by identifying with particular discursive continuities that the individual acquires its identity and that perceptions of an *in-* and *out-group* are shaped.<sup>68</sup>

As for the discursive character of history writing, pioneering works by Hayden White, Northrop Freye and others have been 'waking the sleeping dog (or beauty) of historical discourse after a century of positivist neglect'.<sup>69</sup> In the wake of the growing awareness that historical texts do not give an unfractured reflection of past reality but rather construct or 'produce' it by means of re-presentation and signification, the role of historians as interpreters and producers of texts and the means by which they construct their objects of study has been turned into a major object of study itself.<sup>70</sup>

Of these Ann Rigney's analysis of *The rhetoric of historical representation* provides a fascinating example. Rigney stresses the fact that historical works are not only documentary sources of information about the past, but also 'verbal artifacts' or 'signifying constructs'. The medium influences the message. Through the 'specifically literary work of narration the historian actually re-presents past events for his contemporaries and makes manifest what is presumed to be their inherent, organic structure. Only through narration the historian can find "the law

<sup>65</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 8, 10; also J.T. Leerssen, 'Nationalisme als discours' (Nationalism as discourse), in: T. Zwaan ed., *Het Europees labyrint: nationalisme en natievorming in Europa* (The European labyrinth: nationalism and nation building in Europe) (Meppel 1991) 191-203.

<sup>66</sup> Burke (2004) 75-76, 80; Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

<sup>67</sup> B. Sayyid and L. Zac, 'Political analysis in a world without foundations', in: E. Scarbrough and E. Tannenbaum eds., *Research strategies in the social sciences: a guide to new approaches* (Oxford 1998) 249-267.

<sup>68</sup> V. Jabri, *Discourses on violence: conflict analysis reconsidered* (Manchester/New York 1996) 130-131.

<sup>69</sup> A. Rigney, *The rhetoric of historical representation. Three narrative histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge 1990) ix-xii.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, ix-xii; Burke (2004) 75-76, 97.

of cause and effect (...)” and give to past events “their significance (...)”<sup>71</sup> ‘It is through the literary medium of prose narrative that the collective events of the past are represented and invested with a new significance for a latter-day public. (...) In being presented through a finite, linear discourse, ‘what happened’ becomes constituted as one sort of event, or set of events, rather than another.’<sup>72</sup>

Rigney illustrates these general observations with an in-depth analysis of the histories of the French Revolution by Thierry, Blanc and Michelet. Her study excellently brings into relief the discursive and narrative strategies these authors deploy to make their different points, without neglecting the existing constraints to invention and imagination in historical discourse. To define the task of history-writers as merely representing historical events is thereby clearly shown to be an oversimplification. Far from neutrally representing events, the writing of history involves re-presenting, in the sense of presenting *anew*, defining the collective subject involved in the events, choosing actorial figures which are to embody this collective subject – as well as certain ‘transhistorical’ values held by the narrator and presumed shared by his public – and investing events with a particular significance. In the revolutionary histories that are at the centre of Rigney’s analysis, the historian’s political agenda is clearly shown to break through his re-presentation of past events: some are clearly made more vividly present than others, and certain actors are established as centres of attention and sympathy. In this way, the narrative subject and its program or aspirations are ‘identified as the locus of norm, and, hence, as the representative in the past of the collective history with which the reader is to identify, and which he is presumed to have in common with his own contemporaries at large.’ Thus historical discourse in these cases does not only describe relations between past actors and events, but also implicitly constitutes a representation of the contemporary ‘general life’ to which the reader is presumed to belong.<sup>73</sup>

Here we touch upon the subject of identifying the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ once more. As Ann Rigney states: ‘Historians use their narrative and rhetorical strategies to establish certain figures [as] the subject of their narrative, and hence as representatives of the collective history (...) and the vehicle for its ‘tradition’ to later generations.’ And ‘they use similar procedures to establish certain other figures as deviant, non-representative: “men *unlike* ourselves”’. ‘Representing events goes together with giving a figurative representation of the subject of “our” history’ where “‘what happened’ becomes invested with a particular significance as the fulfilment or frustration of the narrative subject’s hopes or desires. That these aspirations are thwarted is due to the role of the antagonist “marginal” figures (...) [who] are “marginal” since they are in effect marginalised by the representation itself.’ Since ‘the activities of these actors do not accord with, and in many cases work against, the aims of the collective subject, their experiences and projects (...) do not belong to the mainstream of history, to ‘our’ history.’<sup>74</sup>

Of course it would be nonsense to uncritically paste Rigney’s observations concerning nineteenth-century French histories onto contemporary Greek representations of the past, losing probable differences out of sight. Nevertheless her study shows an example of how fruitful the application of theories of discourse can be for the analysis of the rhetoric of historical narrative. It can serve as a valuable source of inspiration for a possible approach to the sources. By studying the texts of historians in the particular historical context in which they were produced and by paying attention to narrative strategies – the order in which events are represented, the choice of cutting points, the use of quotations and metaphors, the

<sup>71</sup> Rigney (1990) 3, quoting Thierry (1851).

<sup>72</sup> Rigney (1990) 11-12.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, 77, 100, 136, 170, 172.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, 135-136, 172-173. See also Leerssen a.o., ‘Cultural dynamics’ (2006) 8, 10.

references made to rival accounts and the arguments used to refute these – more insight can be gained into the ways in which historical discourse gives shape and meaning to historical ‘reality’.

### Concluding remarks

National identity, to sum up, is not a natural phenomenon or innate quality, but a social and cultural construct instead. Its primordial and biological conception has been exposed as one of the most powerful constructions of nationalist discourse itself. That *perceived* primordiality plays a role that is not to be underestimated, does not alter the fact that modern nations did not exist during most of human history and actually are imagined communities of relative recent origin. Nevertheless, this should not be mistaken to imply that nationalism invents nations out of the blue. It could even be said that its ‘historical embeddedness’ accounts for modern nationalism’s very strength. Whereas nationalism in its modern shape only came into being in the nineteenth century, it could build on many pre-existing regional, ethnic, religious and class identities, cultures and traditions. Pre-existing cultural forms and competing patterns of identification were reshaped and instigated with a fresh political instrumentalization to form new communities that were nonetheless perceived to be continuous with the past.

In the wake of the rise of this ‘constructivist’ conception of nationalism and identity numerous national traditions and myths have been deconstructed and debunked. Despite its proven fruitfulness the question *what* can be proved to be constructed deserves to be extended to include *how* certain constructions came into being, in which way they were expressed and by whom, and what can serve as an explanation for the apparent need from which they sprang. In addressing these questions with regard to Greek national history I will not so much concentrate on potential structural explanations but rather depart from a cultural approach. This holds the notion that cultural preoccupations do not passively reflect or follow but often anticipate and actively shape social and political developments as a central tenet. Nationalism formulates a political agenda on the basis of a cultural ideal, and cultural activities are among its main preoccupations. Instead of considering culture as a mere manifestation of the existence of a nation, as it usually is perceived, its cultivation should be acknowledged as an intrinsic part of the nationalist agenda. Still, structural and cultural explanations should not be treated as exclusive categories but as complementary frameworks of interpretation and structural circumstances will therefore not be entirely left out of sight.

What specifically concerns us here is the cultivation and appropriation of the past. Imagining a nation is inconceivable without constructing its past along with its present and future. Drawing the mental template of the nation’s roots and specificity involves the search for past precedents, the revival of ‘lost’ traditions and re-invocation of ‘national heritage’. This research will focus on the writing of history as a specific endeavour within the dynamics of cultural nationalism. If consciousness can only be related to experience ‘through the interposition of a particular language which organizes the understanding of experience’, to quote Gareth Stedman Jones, then historical narrative can be said to be the language that organizes the understanding of past experience, shaping national identity in the process.<sup>75</sup>

While studying the textual representations of the national past within the particular context in which they were produced, attention will be paid to their internal narrative strategies. For historical texts do not give an unfractured reflection of past reality, however meticulously their authors try to live up to scientific standards, methods and constraints. Rather, they can be typified as signifying constructs presenting a multi-faceted past through a

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<sup>75</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class* (Cambridge 1983) 101, quoted in Burke (2004) 81.

finite, linear narrative. Though the national past heavily draws on historical, pre-national elements, it is only through the selection, appropriation and exclusion of certain periods, persons and events that the complex amalgam of past developments can be moulded into a clear-cut national narrative, adorning the nation, as its main protagonist, with an age-old history and at the same time diachronically establishing its distinctness from others. It is through national discourse that differentiating characteristics and ethnic stereotypes are articulated and reproduced and the sense of continuity, distinctiveness and uniqueness are constructed. In the establishment of such a specific discourse, history writing can – and in many cases does – play a major role.

Yet in all this the danger of uncritically pressing theory on the subject at hand is not to be overseen. The awareness of the theoretical perspectives described above provides valuable support in suggesting possible approaches to the material concerned, but to prevent forcing reality into a confined mould studying the sources and judging them on their own merits remains the major concern. Theories should remain just what they are – a tool for observing reality and a source of inspiration for ways of handling the sources – and not be allowed to develop into blinkers obstructing sight on contradicting elements. Surprising findings questioning theory and bringing the multiformity of the past to light can of course only be welcomed and should be actively pursued.

Furthermore some questions remain unsolved and require further consideration. What, for example, can be said about the reach of the cultivation of culture in national public space? It seems obvious to assume that public space was primarily shaped in cities, where bookstores, libraries, reading societies, archaeological associations, historical architecture etcetera took their part in the cultivation of culture. But too strict a focus on cultural activities in the capital might be likely to obscure developments in more peripheral regions that might be equally interesting. Meanwhile, any effort to encompass activities all over the country, in urban and rural areas, will certainly fail for obvious practical reasons. Again departing from and trying to extract the main actors and their location from the material itself seems to be the most sensible approach.

Secondly, certain implications of intentionality tend to slip into many discussions of theory. Unlike what might seem to be implicated above, it should be kept in mind that the ‘protagonists of cultural nationalism’ did not always develop their cultural activities with the conscious goal of supporting and shaping the ‘mental template of the nation’. Many men of letters simply indulged in their cultural, historical and linguistic activities out of intellectual interest. And their contribution to the formation of a national narrative – if any – can therefore often only be recognized with the knowledge of hindsight. Thus the construction of the nation was not always consciously aspired, and neither was it suddenly achieved. Rather than an abrupt change it was a gradual and many-sided shift.

Despite what all this theoretical ‘hairsplitting’ and abstract considerations might seem to suggest, the research I intend to undertake does have its feet on the ground. Analysing how the historical track record of a nation is drawn, helps to understand what inspired latter-day national consciousness and political nationalism, and how. Whereas the European cultural landscape was marked by exchange and cross-fertilization and past social reality was characterized by a hybrid culture of overlapping identities and social stratification rather than clearly defined national communities, the national tunnel vision has become so deeply ingrained that this complex reality has been largely lost out of sight, as has the process of the nationalisation of culture itself. Putting this process at the centre of analysis can shake nationalist axioms and shed more light on the shades of meaning, slight distinctions and gradations underneath.

Though my research focuses on a specific cultural expression (written accounts of the past) in a specific region (Greece), it is situated within the much broader theme of the dynamics between nationalism and culture. Whereas Gellner, Renan, Anderson and many others directing thought to national identity and nationalism have been primarily focused on Western Europe, case studies concentrating on less well-known cultural area's can offer a valuable contribution to the understanding of a European-wide phenomenon that makes its influence felt until today. Though the idea of construction has denounced the simplified essentialist view of cultures, social groups and periods as homogeneous and clearly divided, it still proves to be highly persistent. The national cultivation of culture is directly linked to the way people have been taught to view their traditions and cultural identity, and a proper understanding of the process therefore has a clear civic dimension as has been rightly stated.<sup>76</sup> This certainly also goes for Greece, where national sensitivities are abundant and any attempt to adjust, nuance or differentiate certain views on the past or even present presence of the Greek nation is more likely to be met with hot-tempered resistance than nuanced detachment. The violent reaction against the – as yet – unsuccessful effort to objectify the image of the national past taught in secondary education by simply neutralizing the vocabulary of the schoolbook in use is only the latest example.

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<sup>76</sup> Leerssen a.o., 'Cultural dynamics' (2006) 9.

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