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Από χριστιανοί Ρωμιοί, Έλληνες: Κάποιες σκέψεις σχετικά με τον εθνικισμό και το μετασχηματισμό της ελληνικής ταυτότητας στη Μικρά Ασία

Giorgos Tsimouris

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Giorgos Tsimouris

FROM CHRISTIAN ROMIOI TO HELLENES:
SOME REFLECTIONS ON NATIONALISM
AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF GREEK IDENTITY IN ASIA MINOR

Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being.¹

This paper is the result of about sixteen months of fieldwork, part of my doctoral research project, from September 1989 to June 1991 in the village of Aghios Dimitrios on Lemnos, a Greek island of the Northern Aegean. My aim was to gain an understanding of the refugee identity of the inhabitants of Aghios Dimitrios in contrast to the indigenous islanders and other Greeks. I was fundamentally concerned with the profound tension between the latter's distinctive sense of identity on the one hand, and the broad, totalizing national images of the *Mikrasiates* (people originating in Asia Minor) on the other. I focused mainly on how the Ottoman and the refugee past was experienced and represented by members of this group seven decades after their expulsion from Asia Minor. In my investigations I used participant observation and oral history techniques to document a broad range of practices of daily life: narratives of the past, songs, labour, and the social life of objects of material culture. The group I focused on was older men and women originating from Reisdere,² a peasant community located in the peninsula

1. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983, p. 19.

2. Before 1922 Reisdere was a peasant community inhabited by about 5000 people of Greek origin.

of Erythrea (Western Asia Minor), who came from Asia Minor when they were children and who had a direct experience of the persecution.

The locality of the island in which the refugees from Reisdere were settled was named Lera and was inhabited by Muslims until 1924, when, according to the exchange project, they were moved to Turkey. Among the first initiatives of the newcomers was the renaming of the locality as Aghios Dimitrios, as was the name of their patron saint at Reisdere. Aghios Dimitrios is a rural community standing on the threshold of a capitalist economy, articulating together aspects of a market economy with peasant practices of subsistence.

The *Reisderianoi* (coming from Reisdere) living not only in Aghios Dimitrios but also in Ierapetra (Crete) and Chios strongly emphasised that Reisdere was a peasant community, which valued intense manual labour. 'We were productive workers in great demand ... we were renowned as far as Magnesia and beyond', they were delighted to point out again and again. Similar claims make us aware that Reisdere was a poor community since land, the most valuable resource among peasants, was in scarcity.

After their displacement, the seasonal migration to places outside Lemnos was a common survival strategy undertaken by both men and women, who were deprived of their men-folk during the Catastrophe. The women used to travel individually or in groups to Kavala, Drama, and Doxato, towns of Northern Greece, as late as in the 1960s, to work in the tobacco plantations and in other rural activities. Manual labour on a co-operative basis was the main productive force of this economy of survival, both before and after the Catastrophe. This explains why the phrase 'we were people of the hoe' was a leitmotif among the members of the first generation.

Nowadays, the majority of the inhabitants of Aghios Dimitrios have more than one occupation, and quite often two or three, in order to make a living. Apart from practices associated with the land, men work as wage labourers in the surrounding area, as builders, semi-professional musicians or agricultural workers. Some of them, men and to a certain extent women, are occupied as seasonal labourers in the growing tourist industry of the island. This *bricolage* of survival activities is a common

household practice and it is hard to find a family which does not possess its own fields, garden or vineyard for the production of vegetables and grapes for *ouzo* (a home-made alcoholic drink) and wine. 'Hard work' is perceived not simply as a commercialised asset but it is also invested with moral value and has become a point of distinction between 'us' and 'them', and, particularly, *vis-à-vis* the inhabitants of vicinal villages; this is also indicated in the assertion 'if we had had the prosperous plain of Apsiki we would have become rich people whilst if they had had our poor land they would have starved'.

Apart from 'hard work' (ἐργατικότητα) as a value and point of distinction the place of origin is also important. Elder members of this group, use mainly the terms *Reisderianoi* (coming from Reisdere) and *Romioi* (members of the Rum Millet) when they refer to their past. Similarly, by examining nation-wide sources I realised that insights gained through this case study may be valid for other groups of Mikrasiates as well. This article draws on ethnographic research conducted among other groups from Asia Minor and on texts of autobiographical literature. I am particularly interested in the terms of self-identification which the Mikrasiates used in order to designate themselves, with a special focus on the shift in terminology over time. This shift should be considered in the long run with regard to understandings of Asia Minor promoted by national institutions. It is also critical to reflect over the gap between the terminology a group uses for self-designation and the terms used by national authorities for the members of this group.

Mainstream Greek historiography, political discourse, and popular representations alike, designate the refugees of the war of 1922 between Turkey and Greece as 'Asia Minor Hellenism' (Μικρασιατικός Έλληνισμός) since time immemorial. My main aim in this article is to challenge this abstract identification and to demonstrate that it has been fabricated mainly after the Catastrophe in the context of a hegemonic nationalist discourse, associated with the nation building process in Asia Minor and the Balkans.

This standpoint urges us to move beyond the binary opposition of minority/non-minority in the studies of cultural identity. Introducing subaltern temporality to our enquiry, we acknowledge the tense co-

existence and antagonism between pre-Hellenic Ottoman embodiments and Hellenic images of nationhood. Understanding issues surrounding the Mikrasiates implies the consideration of the broader political climate in which their integration took place.

Greeks, but other Greeks

*Every human problem must be considered
from the standpoint of time.*³

Ninety years after the Catastrophe of 1922, issues surrounding the identities of the Mikrasiates are still controversial. The controversy arises from rifts between two discursively interwoven yet differently positioned and differently animated narratives: on the one hand the narrative of nationalism, intentionally activated and politically informed, and on the other the first-hand narratives, the embodied recollections of the ordinary Mikrasiates. Although these two discourses temporarily meet, cross cut or reinforce each other, in the long run they appear irreconcilably opposed. What makes this partiality so deep 'is not only the disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past is actually a past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps'.⁴ Indeed, current disputes between Turkey and Greece revitalise issues concerning the interpretation of their recent national histories, state policies regarding the treatment of Turkey's Greeks and Greece's Turks, and the implementation of the Lausanne Treaty that followed the disastrous war.

In the case of the Greeks from Asia Minor the presence of the living Anatolian past does not fit with the contemporary West-oriented political priorities of the Greek intellectual elites. From the perspective of the nation-state, unlike popular memory, the recent Ottoman past is 'marked by one salient characteristic: rejection'.⁵ The official images of

3. F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto, 1986, p. 14.

4. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993, p. 1.

5. J. Petropoulos, 'The modern Greek State and the Greek Past', in S. Vryonis (ed.), *The 'Past' in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, Malibu: Undena, 1978, p. 163. See

the nation manifest a constant prioritising of the remote, dead past at the expense of the living, recent past.

The overarching ideology shared by both nationalist historians and folklorists was the principle of 'continuity' from the Classical Era through the Byzantine period: this has been termed *the Hellenic thesis*. In its extreme and most unrealistic expressions this view held that the national goal ought to be to make Constantinople (Istanbul) the capital of an expanded *Great Hellas*. Whilst being dominant these ideas were not uncontested; the opposite argument is the so-called 'Romeic thesis'. Herzfeld, for example, representing the R. M. Dawkins thesis, discusses that:

... the self-designation of the Greeks had long been that of *Romii*, a name which echoes *the Byzantine (East Roman) Empire* (my emphasis) and hence also the Orthodox Christian tradition to which the overwhelming majority of Greeks still adhered; the Greeks ordinarily called their spoken language 'romeika', "Romeic", a usage which was even adopted by some of the travellers who visited their country while it was still under Turkish rule. A form of the Romeic name had been applied to all Greeks, and in *Asia Minor to virtually all non-Moslems by the Turks* (my emphasis).⁶

The *Romeic* identification and the religious bond with Byzantium is the *sine qua non* for locating and understanding Asia Minor *otherness* in its social and historical contexts. The Ottoman Empire was the field of coexistence and interaction of discrete religious and, in this sense, ethnic groups. In terms of administration all these 'diverse groups were grouped by religious affiliation ... in the *millet* system'.⁷ In this sense it was religious affiliation rather than the West European institutional patterns of the modern nation state which constituted the hegemonic framework of identity and difference.

also M. Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of the Modern Greece*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

6. Herzfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

7. R. Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 10. See also, more generally, A. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, Part 1 and 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957; B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford University Press, 1968; D. Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact Upon Greece*, Paris and Hague: Mouton and Co, 1962.

My ethnographic evidence⁸ concerning the people in question strongly endorses these suggestions.⁹ Both in narratives and in various mnemonic formulae, such as songs, couplets, and proverbs, Reisderianoi represent themselves alternatively as *Hristianoï* (Christians), *Reisderianoi* or *Romioi*, but quite rarely as *Hellenes*, a term conferred predominantly upon mainland Greeks. Vermeulen's point that 'until the beginning of the 19th century ... a peasant felt himself first of all as a member of a family, a village community, and maybe a small culturally distinguishable unit, and secondly, Rum'¹⁰ appears to be true in the case of the Reisderianoi and was probably valid more generally. However, it is interesting to see how the Greek nation-state faced the Romeic habits and practices of the Mikrasiates.

Greek officials regarded the Romeic orientation of the Mikrasiates as an impediment to their nation-building project. Thus, since 1836 the newly born Greek state began to progressively establish schools in Asia Minor modelled upon the principle of mainland Greece.¹¹ One of the

8. G. Tsimouris, 'Anatolian embodiments in a Hellenic context: the case of Reisderiani Mikrasiates refugees', unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Sussex, Brighton, 1998; and 'Τραγούδια μνήμης, διαμαρτυρίας και κοινωνικής ταυτότητας: Η περίπτωση των "Ρεϊσντεριανών" Μικρασιατών προσφύγων' ['Songs of memory, contest and social identity: The case of Reisderianoi Mikrasiates refugees'], in Th. Paradellis and R. Benveniste (eds), *Διαδρομές και τόποι μνήμης. Ιστορικές και ανθρωπολογικές προσεγγίσεις* [Routes and Places of Memory. Historical and Anthropological Approaches], Athens: Alexandria, 1999, p. 211-238.

9. The terms *Romioi* and *Hristianoï* are repetitively used in the oral accounts of Mikrasiates coming from the West coast of Asia Minor. These interviews were conducted predominantly in the Sixties and the Seventies. P. Kitromilides and G. Mourellos (eds), *Η Έξοδος* [Exodus], vol. II, Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1982 (reprinted 2004).

10. H. Vermeulen, 'Greek cultural dominance among the Orthodox population of Macedonia during the last period of the Ottoman rule', in A. Blok and H. Driessen (eds), *Cultural Dominance in the Mediterranean Area*, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1984, p. 231. See also V. Roudometof, 'From Rum millet to Greek nation', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 16 (1998), p. 19; G. Arnakis, 'The role of Religion in the development of Balkan nationalism', in C. and B. Jelavich (eds), *The Balkans in Transition*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963, p. 131.

11. *Η Εφημερίς της Κυβερνήσεως του Βασιλείου της Ελλάδος*, n. 46, 10 Sept. 1836, quoted in P. Kitromilides, 'Imagined communities and the origins of the national question in the Balkans', *European History Quarterly* 19 (1989), p. 170.

main objectives of the educational policy of the Greek state in Asia Minor was the dissemination of the Greek language, civilisation and, most importantly, the forging of a Hellenic national consciousness according to the ideals of the Enlightenment. This educational process was carried out in a complementary way, either under the direct guidance of the Greek state, or 'by cadres trained in Athens'¹² under the aegis of local Orthodox Christian authorities. Other institutions such as the '*Hellenic Literary Society of Constantinople* (founded in 1861), the *Association for the Propagation of Greek Letters ...* and the militantly nationalist *Anatoli* based in Athens'¹³ were among the major propagators of Greek nationalist ideals outside the nation state. In spite of their vigour, the nation-building crusades encountered serious practical, historical and ideological problems.

For example, foreign scholars and observers of urban Asia Minor of the 1850s and 1860s are disappointed to note that 'the last spark of patriotism became extinct among the Greeks of Turkey' and that they are 'hardly aware of the existence of a Greek Kingdom ... [and] never speak of Miltiades and Themistocles'.¹⁴ Furthermore, as we learn from the French archaeologist G. Perrot¹⁵ recounting in the 1860s the contempt of a banker from Constantinople against the 'bureaucratic tyranny' and the 'nationalist illusion' of the Greek Kingdom, 'the Ottoman Greeks had absolutely no desire to see *the Hellenes, as the Greeks of the Kingdom were called by Greeks still under the Ottoman rule, in Constantinople*'.¹⁶ Offering a different interpretation regarding the prominent Greeks of Constantinople of the same period, Kofos notes, 'they were deeply attached to their religion and to their nation [sic], but their interests were so bound up with those of the Empire that they were generally

12. Kitromilides, *op. cit.*, p. 170 and 172. See also H. Exertzoglou, *Εθνική ταυτότητα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη του 19ου αιώνα* [*National Identity in the 19th Century Constantinople*], Athens: Nefeli, 1996.

13. Kitromilides, *op. cit.*

14. The first statement belongs to a French observer, M. A. Ubicini, *Letters on Turkey*, London 1856, and the second to a French archaeologist, G. Perrot, *Souvenirs d'un voyage en Asie Mineur*, Paris 1864, both quoted in Kitromilides, *op. cit.*

15. Perrot in Kitromilides, *op. cit.*

16. Kitromilides, *op. cit.*

averse to movements aiming at the violent overthrow of the existing order'.¹⁷ My point, as I shall discuss later in more detail, is that for the period discussed the claim of a 'deep attachment' to nation, religion, and the Ottoman authorities expresses an anachronistic reading of history that conflates Orthodox religious identification with Greek nationhood.

It is important to note that these Romeic sentiments occur among educated Ottoman Greeks of the metropolitan urban centres of Asia Minor during the second part of the 19th century. Indeed, the rural landscape of Asia Minor was likely to be even less *Hellenic* than that of the educated merchants of Constantinople and Smyrna. Taking also into account the poor condition of communications of relatively autonomous, self-administrated communities of a disorganised Empire at the turn of the century, the conditions for creating a sense of nationhood were hardly promising.¹⁸ Interestingly enough, the first attempt of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs to obtain statistical data on the Ottoman Greek population was carried out only in 1910. This census was orchestrated 'as discreetly as possible'¹⁹ by consular employees in close co-operation with clerics of the Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities, assisted by Ottoman Greeks who had served the Ottoman administration. Ironically enough, the questionnaire used to test the 'Hellenicity' of the Ottoman Greeks focused exclusively on their religious affiliation and their attachment to Greek educational policies. There is also strong evidence that this colossal enterprise was confronted with many difficulties, ranging from the unwillingness of the notables of the villages to collaborate with the consular authorities to the plain indifference of the clergy to provide their services.²⁰

At the level of social institutions, the complex interplay and antagonism between the Hellenic and the Christian or Romeic identification of the

17. E. Kofos, *Greece and the Eastern Crisis 1875-1878*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, no. 148, 1975, p. 32.

18. Hirschon, *op. cit.*, p. 11; see also Pentzopoulos, *op. cit.*

19. P. Kitromilides and A. Alexandris, 'Ethnic survival, nationalism and forced migration: The historical demography of the Greek community of Asia Minor at the close of the Ottoman era', *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* [*Centre for Asia Minor Studies Bulletin*] 5 (1984-1985), p. 23-24.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Mikrasiates is exemplified in the straightforward opposition of the Patriarchate to the nationalist plans regarding the Romioi of the Ottoman Empire. While the Church contributed significantly to the formation of Romioi in Asia Minor as a collectivity, this identification was a religious (though also drawing on secular understandings of Orthodoxy) rather than a national one. This point is typically reversed in the milieu of conventional Balkan historiography of the 20th century. Kitromilides, for example, convincingly argues that 'one of the greatest anachronisms of Balkan ... historiography has been the injection of national content into that traditional religious distinction'.²¹ Although the conflict between Orthodoxy and nationalism took many forms throughout the second part of the 19th century it was crystallised in the Pan-Orthodox Synod of 1872, where 'the Ecumenical Patriarch, along with the other Orthodox Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and the Archbishop of Cyprus ... issued a condemnation of 'phyletism', by which was essentially meant nationalism'.²² Kitromilides goes further arguing that 'loyalty to the Sublime Porte was the key to the survival of both the Church and its flock in the Empire and the guarantee of the Patriarchate's traditional privileges'²³ a standpoint held as late as 1912 by the Ecumenical Patriarch Joachim III (1878-1884 and 1901-1912).²⁴

The controversy, which arose among scholars and folklorists in the early 20th century over the real version of the last couplet of the prominent lament, 'ours once more', illustrates also the tension between the nationalist desires and Christendom. Following Herzfeld I contend that the drastic alteration of this prominent lament highlights a conviction about 'the Hellenes' place in the world, of their identity as a people, and of the territorial implications of the Great Idea'²⁵—that is the expansion of the new-born nation in the place of the Byzantine Empire—in the course of the first decades of the 20th century. Whilst what is disputable is the closing statement of the famous lament dealing with 'the Fall of the City', its implications are more than textual. As Herzfeld

21. Kitromilides, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Herzfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

argued, 'Nikolaos Politis saw the promise of redemption as addressed to the Hellenic Ethnos, rather than to Christendom'.²⁶

Despite the spread of nationalist ideas among intellectuals and public administrators before 1922, the cultural landscape of Asia Minor remained largely Romeic among ordinary people given that religious and regional affiliations prevailed over the generic, Hellenic one. This point, disregarded among mainstream intellectuals, is well illustrated by the examination of primary sources such as the extensive number of interviews conducted by researchers of the Centre for Asia Minor Studies. Some of these interviews were conducted in the Turkish language, since this was the only language in which the narrators could communicate.²⁷ Looking at some key aspects of the content of these interviews, such as the language used, the terminology of identification and attitudes towards Turkish people and mainland Greeks respectively, one may conclude that the Romeic identification and attachment to a particular locality were stronger elements rather than the sense of affiliation with the Greek nation-state. The good relation among Turks and Greeks before 1922 is a point usually stressed in these accounts. These insights become far more compelling in view of the fact that these interviews were conducted in a 'Hellenic' environment about forty years after the Exodus of 1922. Thus, the inculcation of a Hellenic consciousness was for most of the 19th century an uphill struggle, only partially achieved. However, the rise of nationalism in the Balkans and the movement of Young Turks pursuing the goals of Turkish nationalism, by persecuting and exterminating all the non Turkish minorities²⁸ before and during the First World War, were among the main factors that paved the way, not towards the *awakening* but, rather, the *emergence* and the *building* of a Hellenic consciousness among the Christian populations of Asia Minor.

In the domain of culture, philhellenes and local intellectuals alike, such as folklorists and philologists, were mobilised throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to supply their good services to the newborn nation

26. Ibid.

27. G. Tenekides in F. D. Apostolopoulos (ed.), *Ἡ Ἐξοδός*, vol. I, Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1980, p. λ'.

28. The persecution of the Armenians in 1915 was the result of this process.

and to support its political project.²⁹ Their representation of 'Asia Minor Hellenism' as a homogeneous social entity is both the consequence and the prerequisite of the nationalist rhetoric dealing with the Christian population of Asia Minor as an integral part of the Hellenic race.

In brief, while the Greeks from Asia Minor are, regardless of temporal reference, typically depicted in national media and in many domestic intellectual milieus as Hellenes from ancient times, sharing the same language, culture, and religion with other Greeks, ethnographic reports make us aware that specific refugee communities distinguish themselves and are distinguished by other Greeks as different in all these domains. Likewise, these groups place particular emphasis on the specific site of origin, e.g. *Smyrnioti*, *Konstantinopolites*, *Aivaliotes* (coming from Smyrna, Constantinople, Ayvalik correspondingly).³⁰ As second-generation Mikrasiates born in Aghios Dimitrios identify themselves as *Reisderianoi*, my study strongly endorses this point. In addition, the terms *Hristianoi* and *Romioi* that the Mikrasiates of first generation primarily use to identify themselves are not identical with the term *Hellenes*. This long-term 'Hellenisation' process may be also traced in the 'indigenous' literature, a matter that I take up in what follows.

Shifting images of being Mikrasiatis in autobiographical literature

*When the Greek Administration (Ελληνική Άρμοστεια)
was established in Smyrna ... we locals felt that
we were under foreign—I don't say: 'hostile'—occupation.*³¹

Considering the national order as a 'system of cultural signification'³² allows us to understand the process of the *nationalisation* of the Ottoman order of things, a system that preceded the nation 'out of which—as well

29. A. Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland*, London: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 19; Herzfeld, *op. cit.*

30. For a similar situation see L. Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria and the American Firewalking Movement*, Princeton University Press, 1989. See also Herzfeld, *op. cit.* and Hirschon, *op. cit.*

31. K. Politis, *Στου Χαιτηφράγκου: Τὰ σαραντάχρονα μιᾶς χαμένης πολιτείας* [At Hatzifrangou: The Forty Years after the Loss of a City], Athens: Ipsilon Vivlia, 1963 (epigraph).

32. H. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 1.

as against which—it came into being'.³³ In this regard, a comparative examination of the writings of some outstanding authors from Asia Minor, written during 'remote' periods of their lifetime, is especially revealing. For although such texts show concerns with homogeneity, purism and attachment to the remote past, they also contain 'disturbing' elements not wholly filtered out by the 'survivalist' version of national history. This evidence drawn from texts and novels of Mikrasiates who, inspired by the Exodus and their expulsion from Asia Minor, vehemently repudiated the official policies that led them away from homeland and convincingly show what I consider as the *in-between* location of Mikrasiates. This interstitial location—not compatible with the homogeneous nationalist reconstruction of the past—is revealed not only by the descriptive language of these records but also by the evocative actualisation of proper names and toponyms of the homeland; recollections belonging to a past temporal order are represented by the use of terms of that order. By using the exact terminology of that earlier period and the Turkish expressions used then, these actors tried to bestow authenticity upon their narration.

One can note the tendency that as time distance increases from 1922 the more the texts of literature on Asia Minor are Hellenised. This can be shown with reference to one of the most influential autobiographical novels of this generation, *The number 31328*, written by Ilias Venezis,³⁴ a young survivor, just after he had taken refuge in Greece. In this book the author narrates his odyssey as a prisoner of war in the hinterland of Asia Minor and his survival through unbearable ordeals in the fourteen months of his captivity. Venezis is explicitly concerned to keep an equal distance from the Turks, the mainland Greeks and the various groups of Romioi. Interestingly, he uses the term *Hellenes* exclusively for the Greek officials, the Greek soldiers and the mainland Greeks in general but *never* for the Mikrasiates. The following quotation clarifies this point and at the same time demonstrates the powerful distinctions between the diverse groups of Romioi. Referring to a new group of prisoners of war he points out:

33. Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

34. I. Venezis, *Ὁ ἀριθμὸς 31328* [*The number 31328*], Athens: Estia, 1931.

They are Romioi from the places of Sivas, close to Trapezounta. They started working in the battalions of forced labour three or four years before us. 'The Hellene' had not yet reached their places. So the 'Turk' gathered all these people and sent them to crack gravel. One can easily distinguish them because of their peculiar clothes ... Most of them bear the names Amvrosios or Pigassios.

What is even funnier about them is their way of speaking their Romeic language (τὰ Ρωμεϊκά τους). They cannot cut off the last 'n', they always put the verb last as it occurs in the Turkish language, they maintain a huge number of erroneous Greek expressions (ἐλληνοκοῦρες), they also add Turkish words, they put an 'ion' and they 'serve': [here follows a Greek-Turkish sentence with very unusual syntax].³⁵

The number 31 328, Venezis' number as a prisoner of war, was written initially in 1924 as a result of the very 'recent' and direct experience of the author. It can be taken as an incontestable source of evidence. Written with vivid echoes of the Catastrophe, this novel challenges the nationalist standpoint and most remarkably the author's later views. At this point, we should bear in mind that suffering is a powerful component for the formation of 'we-ness'. From the foreword of his book we learn that:

This book is written with blood ... it is usually believed that moral pain is the most devastating pain. This is what wise men and books say. However, if you go around asking the martyrs, those whose bodies have been tortured to the point of death—this is an easy task since in present times there are plenty of them in the world—you will learn that there is absolutely nothing more profoundly sacred than the body that is tortured. This book is a tribute to this kind of pain.³⁶

From these lines and other parts of the book we understand that Venezis takes a very critical stance towards the romanticism of the 'educated culture' which prioritises an abstract morality and national arbitrariness at the expense of the concrete, suffering human body, regardless of the ethnic or other affiliation of its bearer. Moreover, the author, along with his many compatriots, draws our attention to the way that 'suffering together' creates a strong condition of 'we-ness'. As noted by the literary critic

35. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Thomas Doulis in 1978, this condition is seen to explain the solidarity which developed between the detained and 'the enemy' soldiers:

After Ilias [Venezis] and the other slaves arrive at the Anatolian interior and begin working to rebuild what was destroyed during the war, they find that there exists a common bond between them and the Turkish guards, a bond that excludes anyone with power. Both are oppressed by their own people: the soldiers by their officers, the prisoners by the Greek [Hellenes in the original] overseers *tsaousides*. But oppression does not stop at the borders of Anatolia. The slaves transcend the exclusiveness of their own torment and identify with the black miners of the Transvaal and those other blacks who were shipped to the New World. It is this extension of moral awareness to a universal brotherhood of the downtrodden that makes the vision of Ilias Venezis so impressive.³⁷

Doulis goes on to argue:

Stripped of sentimentality, of nationalistic rhetoric and of explicit ideas, *The Number 31328* is, ironically, one of the most philosophical Greek novels ... Man is petty, comfort loving and fearful of death. Over these truths are spread the 'ideas' that, when untested, degenerate into no more than hollow sentiments about man, society, the nation religion and culture. It is these sentiments that the experience of slavery sweeps aside at once. Those who survive the ordeal emerge into the self-awareness of the tried and are inoculated against all the 'great ideas.' 'If we ever get out of the slave labour battalions alive', Ilias thinks, 'I hope we'll be the most critical minds in the world'.³⁸

Nevertheless, fiction about the Catastrophe has not wholly escaped nationalist premises promoted by folklorists and political activists. Such premises were very early on manifested in the *Narrative of a Prisoner* (*Η ιστορία ενός αιχμαλώτου*), written by Stratis Doukas in 1932. This novel is based on the story of a refugee who managed to survive as a prisoner by pretending to be a Turk and settled in mainland Greece. According to Doulis, Doukas' protagonist is 'a Turkophone' (Τουρκόφωνος), though the story he tells Doukas, who knew very little Turkish, is narrated in a kind of Greek heavy with Turkish syntax and vocabulary. Doukas took notes, which he constantly reworked, to produce the first

37. Th. Doulis, 'The Asia Minor Disaster in Greek fiction', in Speros Vryonis (ed.), *The 'Past' in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture*, Malibu: Undena, 1978, p. 181.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

of five editions, ‘each edition revised for the purpose of “purifying the language of the Turkish diction and syntax” he thought necessary.’³⁹ The fact that the prisoner was a Turkophone, but also that he was represented through a purifying process, makes me feel unsure of the *Hellenicity* (Ελληνικότητα) of the prisoner which Doukas took for granted. It is certain, however, that this prisoner is one of the many thousands who were forced to assert a national affiliation as the only way to survive amid nationalist violence and terror. The continuous purification of the primary narrative material may be seen as a part of what I phrased as the Hellenisation enterprise that developed gradually over time.

Another influential author from Asia Minor is Dido Sotiriou. *Farewell Anatolia* (Ματωμένα χώματα, literally: *Bloody Soil*) remains one of the best-known novels about the Catastrophe. Written in 1962 this book is based on the recollections of Manolis Axiotis, an eyewitness Mikrasiatis. From the foreword of the author in the first edition we learn that:

Behind Manolis Axiotis, the central narrator of the book, is the Asia Minor peasant who lived through the experience of *amele tabouria* (battalions of forced labour) from 14 to 18, and was later dressed in the uniform of the Greek soldier, lived through the Catastrophe and was detained as a prisoner of war, and has been fed with bitter bread as a refugee being a docker and a trade-union fighter of our National Resistance for forty years. He came to meet me and handed me over his notebook with his memories.⁴⁰

Indeed, one of the great virtues of the book is the fact that it draws on the concrete memories of its main protagonist. In this novel the term *Romios* is constantly used for the inhabitants of Asia Minor while the terms *old Hellenes* (Παλιοελλαδίτες) or simply *Hellenes* are reserved for the inhabitants of mainland Greece. Following her protagonist, Sotiriou sought to reveal the catastrophic manipulations of the Greek politicians who facilitated the dominance of the Great Powers and served the pursuit of the imperialist interests in the area. Yet the fact that this book was written some forty years later than *The Number 31 328* may tell us something about the association of the Catastrophe with the National Resistance and some other national preoccupations of the author.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

40. D. Sotiriou, *Ματωμένα χώματα* [*Bloody Soil*], Athens: Kedros, 1962, p. 7. In English: *Farewell Anatolia*, transl. by F. Reed, Athens: Kedros, 1991.

Sotiriou uses the same language of description in her second book that deals with the Catastrophe, *The Dead Await* (*Οί νεκροί περιμένουν*).⁴¹ In this novel she describes the social life of a bourgeois family of Romioi from Aydin. She starts her narrative in the period just before the Catastrophe, proceeds with the settlement of her protagonists as refugees in Greece and ends with the announcement of the Second World War. From this book we can see how nationalist ideas were generated and disseminated among the wealthy, educated circles of the Romioi from this small town. We see that members of these social strata occasionally express a negative attitude towards the Turkish people and desire their liberation from the enemy by the Greek army.

Unlike Sotiriou's characters in *The Dead Await*, Kosmas Politis, another powerful author from Smyrna, vehemently condemns the Greek military campaign in Asia Minor. The epigraph of one of his books, *Af Hatzifrangou* (*Στου Χατζηφράγκου*), says enough with no need for further comments: 'They [the Greeks] managed to make me feel like a slave in my own homeland' (*Καταφέρανε νά 'χω στην πατρίδα μου τὸ αἰσθημα τοῦ ραγιᾶ*).⁴² It is interesting to see how he explains this statement in an interview, which was included in the foreword to the edition of his novel:

G. Savidis: I would like to comment on the epigraph of your new book, 'They made me feel like a slave in my own homeland'. Do you believe that many refugees share this feeling?

K. Politis: Regarding the freedom that we had when we lived in Smyrna: at least until 1914 we had no troubles with the Turks; we also had a feeling of well-being, of affluence based on the *status quo* of capitulations. In the interior of Asia Minor there was, in general, a condition of harmony among the Greeks and the Turks. Regarding Smyrna I would say that we lived ignoring the existence of the Turkish people. On the contrary, when the *Hellenic Administration* (*Ἑλληνικὴ Ἀρμοστεία*) was established in Smyrna, there were certain moments in which we locals felt that we were under foreign—I don't say: hostile—occupation [emphasis added].⁴³

41. D. Sotiriou, *Οί νεκροί περιμένουν* [*The Dead Await*], Athens: Kedros, 1959.

42. Politis, *op. cit.*

43. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Venezis' *Farewell Asia Minor* (*Μικρά Ασία, Χαΐρε*),⁴⁴ published in 1974, contrasts sharply with his first novel, *The Number 31328*, in relation to both the content and the language used to present his views and recollections. In the later novel the main actor is the Metropolitan of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, who during the Catastrophe lived the last days of this town (Smyrna), the 'cradle of Hellenism', and was burned at the stake, becoming one of the most renowned victims of Turkish violence. 'He was the leader, the ethnarch (ἔθναρχης), the soul of Hellenic Asia Minor'.⁴⁵ From another part of the book we learn that:

The Metropolitan of Smyrna, Chrysostomos, arrived in Asia Minor on the 10th of May, in 1910. Hellenism (ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς) was very strong there: the people had not been assimilated with their conquerors, they did not change their faith, they did not negate their past. The Hellenes had never dreamt so much, their imagination was never so fertile as in the years of slavery ... [the bishop] knew that the principal aim of the Church of the unredeemed Nation (ἀλύτρωτου Ἐθνους) was to serve social purposes.⁴⁶

Furthermore, he points out that Chrysostomos 'grew up with the dreams of the Greek race (γένος), with the Great Idea, with the two-headed eagles [the emblem of Byzantium], with Byzantium, and he listened to the secret voice saying that the time had come [meaning to recover the unredeemed lands]'.⁴⁷

In this text one can hardly recognise the adolescent Venezis of the 1920s who drew on his own ordeal in order to protest against the inhuman violence of both the Greek and the Turkish nation-states; both states had exterminated and displaced a large number of innocent people during and after the disastrous war on account of their religious faith or because they happened to be 'there' rather than somewhere else. Moreover, while in his early texts he was very keen on drawing the line between the 'old-Greeks' and the Romioi of Asia Minor, in *Farewell Asia Minor*, by contrast, common past and dreams of a generic, irredentist Hellenism are seen as the overarching framework of both old-Greeks and Mikrasiates. In the same vein the 'disturbing' term *Romioi*, used

44. I. Venezis, *Μικρά Ασία, Χαΐρε* [*Farewell Asia Minor*], Athens: Estia, 1974.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

extensively not only in this novel but also in his older texts, is replaced by the more legitimated expression of the national present, 'the Hellenism of Asia Minor' (ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας). It would be wrong to explain such a spectacular shift in terms of the psychological traits or the personality of this talented author. Rather, some seventy years of national life have reworked both his language and his views, probably without he himself being entirely conscious of this transformation. The naturalisation of the national 'order of things' had a considerable impact upon this outstanding Mikrasiatis writer's perception of the past. The case of Venezis is a telling example of analogous shifts that have occurred in the language of his numerous, and ultimately, less gifted compatriots.

Yet, even in his later novel *Farewell Asia Minor* there are certain 'disturbing' moments, which indicate the strong tension between the government of Athens and the local authorities of Asia Minor before and during the Catastrophe. This is strikingly revealed in the open conflict between Stergiadis, the High Commissioner of Greece in Asia Minor, and the Metropolitan Chrysostomos. As Stergiadis was opposed to the activities of the Metropolitan and the heads of the villages (προεστοί), who devised secret plans in their attempt to ensure their survival in case they would be abandoned during the withdrawal of the Greek army, 'he tortured the bishops and beat the heads of the villages because he had his own plan: if the Turkish soldiers would arrive as far as the coastal side of Asia Minor—and he knew they would—they must find there all the Mikrasiates Greeks and slaughter them. Their destiny was the following: to be slaughtered and not to become a burden to the defeated Greece'.⁴⁸

Local affiliations against national desires

Strong attachment to the specific places of origin and an awareness of sharp distinctions among the refugees on this basis⁴⁹ and the desire for people of the same place to live together as integral groups after their

48. Ibid., p. 38.

49. Ibid.; Danforth, *op. cit.* See also Hirschon, *op. cit.* and S. Salamone, *In the Shadow of the Holy Mountain: The Genesis of a Rural Greek Community and its Refugee Heritage*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

arrival in Greece⁵⁰ reminds us that the Mikrasiates have never existed as a homogeneous group. Whatever homogeneity exists is the consequence of nationalist inspirations supported by shared conditions of existence since 1922, creating the space for the diverse groups of Romioi or Christians of Asia Minor to *become* Mikrasiates Hellenes (Μικρασιάτες Έλληνες), rather than *being* Hellenes from 'time immemorial'. This supplementary identification, used mainly in official milieus, has not, in fact, effaced ancestral, Romeic identifications, and these older, 'disturbing' yet highly intimate attachments, often emerge and are interpolated into their national present.

The nationalist principle may also be pinpointed in practices of naming. These acts occurred within the ideological framework of the Hellenisation of names, a process that began in Asia Minor among the elites, especially regarding personal names 'after the establishment of the modern Greek state'⁵¹ (and was intensified after the Catastrophe of 1922). In the same framework we can also understand why all Turkish place-names as well as any other reminders of the Ottoman past were vehemently repudiated by the official mechanisms of the Greek state. Mikrasiates were compelled to assert continuity with their recent past exclusively through Christian religious symbolism that was officially tolerated and accepted after their arrival in Greece. At the same time, they were forced to minimise the use of those symbols, which, explicitly or implicitly, were rejected by the Greek state as signs of a 'contaminated' origin. This explains the extensive usage of religious symbols activated in renaming strategies and the complete absence of any Turkish place-names in spite of the fact that a large number among the refugees had inhabited villages bearing Turkish names. This consensus should be regarded as the result of a hegemonic national purification rather than a free-choice decision.

The communities established by Asia Minor refugees in Greece after the Great Catastrophe were named using the adjective 'Nea' (New)

50. See Pentzopoulos, *op. cit.*

51. I. Petropoulou, 'Noms inspirés du monde antique dans la Cappadoce du XIX^{ème} siècle', *Δελτίο Κέντρου Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών* [Centre for Asia Minor Studies Bulletin] 9 (1988-1989), p. 370.

followed by the name of the locale of Asia Minor from which each particular group came. However, this principle was applied only in the case that the name of the locale was a Greek one, e.g. Nea Smyrni (New Smyrna), Nea Ionia (New Ionia), Nea Makri (New Makri). If the toponym of origin was a Turkish one, the new locale of settlement was usually renamed after the name of the main Orthodox church of the place of origin; such was the case of the village Aghios Dimitrios on the island of Lemnos, established by refugees from Reisdere of Asia Minor. Considering that this nation-wide canon applied to some hundreds of urban and rural communities, despite the fact that at that time the Ottoman recollections of Mikrasiates were very recent and vivid, it reflects the limits of tolerance of Greek society rather than the priorities of Mikrasiates themselves. This general renaming principle seems to have been violated only when decisions were taken in less official, local settings. For example, while 'Reisdere' was not used as a name for a whole community, the Reisdarianoi who settled at Ierapetra as a minority group (in relation to the indigenous Cretans of the small town) attached the name of their natal village to a road. However, this was a decision taken by the local municipal council of Ierapetra in which Reisdarianoi and other Mikrasiates were actively involved. Similarly, Reisdarianoi who settled in Varvassi, Chios, attributed the name 'Reisdere' to a road of the small town.

In short, the Hellenic consciousness of the Greeks of Asia Minor, as it was taken for granted by the educators, and Greece's political and military officials and encouraged by the Western allies for their own purposes, was shared only to a limited extent among the Mikrasiates themselves. The more the Mikrasiates were, before 1922, isolated from the channels of the national control and aspirations, the less their consciousness was Hellenic, a condition that is relevant for a massive number among them. Nevertheless, they became more inclined to embrace the national ideals after their brutal expulsion from their ancestral lands. Having suffered together from the 'common enemy', i.e. the Turkish state, they paved the way for a Hellenic, i.e. a national, affiliation without, however, leaving aside pre-national recollections and a revived and reconfigured Romeicism. This process is clearly reflected in

the shift of terms over time. Even though the term *Romios* is widespread in modern Greek contexts it has been deprived of its not necessarily Hellenic pre-national wider connotations and is seen to represent the flawed aspects of the Hellenic character.⁵² In other words, the cultural identity of diverse Mikrasiates was never fixed and homogeneous but is rather 'subject to the continuous play of [national] history, culture and power ... [identities] are the names [or the terms of identification] we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past'.⁵³ While renaming and change may be taken as a general framework when discussing social identity, it becomes particularly relevant for communities of migrants, refugees and other uprooted groups. In any case it is important to trace historically the principles and the limitations of the 'new' names and identities, which these groups assume over time.

52. Herzfeld, *op. cit.*

53. S. Hall, 'Cultural identity and cinematic representation', *Framework* 36 (1989), p. 70.