

# Uses and Abuses of Culture



# Uses and Abuses of Culture:

*Greece 1974-2010*

By

Vicky Karaïskou

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To my partner, for his valuable support

“Our feet get tangled in the threads that bind our hearts”

George Seferis, *Six Nights on the Acropolis*, Susan  
Matthias transl., Attica Editions, 2007, p. 12.

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## PREFACE

The contents of this book evolved from two excerpts by George Seferis, one of Greece's most eminent poets and a Nobel laureate (1963). The epigraph comes from his novel, *Six Nights on the Acropolis*, where one of his main characters, Stratis, notes: "Our feet get tangled in the threads that bind our hearts." Although a variety of similar interpretations can apply to these words, they all meet at the same point: memory; and the ways it works either for individuals or on a collective level.

In the epilogue of the book, Lydia Koniordou, a renowned Greek classical actress, cites another work of George Seferis in her monologue performed during the 2004 Athens Olympic Games opening ceremony. This time, the lines come from the third canto of his poem *Mythistorema* [Mythical narrative], written in 1933-34:

"I woke with this marble head in my hands; it exhausts my elbows and I don't know where to put it down. It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream so our life became one and it will be very difficult for it to separate again."

A highly esteemed cultural heritage can be a blessing or a curse, depending on the ways in which people handle memory. It can be a shelter and a shell which reinforces determination and will, builds self-confidence and energizes heirs. However, the same shelter and shell may very well constrain and imprison. In this case, the memory of the past casts a heavy shadow on the present. It "exhausts [the] elbows"; it confuses the perception of reality; it determines identity and self-awareness; and produces powerful threads that bind the hearts and tangle the feet. The affective influence that cultural memory involves, dictates behaviors, choices and "readings" of reality.

Indeed, *Uses and Abuses of Culture* addresses the uses and abuses of collective memory in Greece. It highlights certain concepts that hold a predominant role in Greek society and, hence, appear as constituent elements in the background of all significant events in the public sector. Myth, heroism, pride, honor, distinction, tradition, loss and victimhood are a few but pivotal among them, and therefore have imbued Modern Greek culture. On a different level, other components, such as family and

the Orthodox creed, frame and reinforce the aforementioned concepts. Antiquity, on the other hand, is the *sacred* locus and as such it is allowed to be mystic, hazy, and distant, but powerful beyond question.

The book evolved around two artworks, too. The first is Giorgos Gyparakis' *Traveler* (1993) and the second, an iconic work of Marina Abramovic, *Shoes for Departure* (1991). I saw Gyparakis' sculpture at the "Elytron" exhibition in Venice (1995) and came across Abramovic's piece during more or less the same period. Gyparakis' *Traveler* is solely a pair of shoes, void of an occupant and carrying stones. Their contour is made of wire that resembles roots. They always reminded me of ghosts; odd traces of invisible or no longer existing bodies. Abramovic's shoes are made of big pieces of amethyst stone, not exactly the kind of footwear we would choose for a departure. While working on this book, they both symbolized – for me – the difficulty of moving despite the possible intention. They are the inertia that we all carry, the shell we feel comfortable in despite limiting our existence, the power of the rooted beliefs and familiar behaviors that hinder our feet.

Lately, a third artwork completed the meanings of the previous two: Chiharu Shiota's installation *Over the Continents* at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington D.C. A comment to memory and loss; she tied almost 400 shoes, collected from friends and strangers, with fragile red yarns that met at a single point on the wall. For good or bad, artists do not control the ways their works interact with the minds and the hearts of their viewers. Personally, I could not find a more accurate visual for Seferis' words: "Our feet get tangled in the threads that bind our hearts"; and our lives as a consequence.

Vicky Karaiskou  
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# INTRODUCTION

As this book was being written, the economic situation in Greece was deteriorating day by day. Indeed, some days were particularly bleak. The widespread, frequently violent social unrest now erupting throughout the country increasingly underscored the profound cultural contradictions in Greek society. It became more and more evident that the economic growth of the preceding decades was founded on a “self” and an “us” division. Both components of this distinction were overwhelmingly determined by the values of romantic, heroic models and the social roles distinguishing the traditional Greek family. It also became increasingly apparent that today’s Greek society must, out of necessity, critically reexamine its past and redefine its identity in the present tense, in a healthy and constructive manner.

The subject of this research is neither the politics nor the economy of Greece. The “uses and abuses” of culture focus on the era that began with the fall of the dictatorship in 1974 and coincided with the democratization of life and art in Greece through to the year 2010. *Uses and Abuses* aims to identify the pathologies of Greek society and, especially, how these impacted on the perception of culture and prompted the participation in cultural events. *Uses and Abuses* also investigates the prevailing concepts of culture in Greece in recent years, and the management of artistic production both by the state and by private enterprise.

In the four decades since 1974, Greece has experienced an onslaught of political, economic, social, and, inevitably, cultural advances that its society was unable to absorb efficiently – as seen in the current crisis. The chapters that follow are structured around pivotal political and social events. Each chapter provides an overview of the cultural identity particular to that period as illustrated by the occurring cultural phenomena. How these cultural events were regarded and interpreted by their respective periods enables us to deduce the causes and effects of the conflict between the components of Greek tradition and the new terms and conditions of present-day life. In the first chapter, the fundamental interpretive axes are the distortions of the heroic ideal and the lingering romantic models, and the ways in which these intertwined. Together with the role of family and the Orthodox Church, they forged a framework of ideologies, values, and behaviors that define contemporary Greek reality.

The notion of prosperity, on the other hand, and the engagement with culture as proof of participation in wellbeing are not, of course, exclusively Greek phenomena. Nevertheless, any similarities to corresponding phenomena in the West are merely superficial: there is no common ground of ideological references. The intensity and manner of the way that prosperity became a lived experience in Greece from 1980 onwards can be objectively justified by the historical and social conditions of the 1970s and 1980s. However, its particularities were intimately tied to the intrinsic characteristics of the Greek people. The coexistence of these traits became the fundamental building blocks of a complex whole and forged an irregular stratigraphy within the country. They profoundly influenced the new cultural reality and defined how society managed its European identity.

The years between 1974 and 2010 are divided into four chronological units. The first concerns the restoration of democracy on July 24, 1974 and culminates with Greece's entry into the European Economic Community in 1981. During this period, culture and artistic production were mobilized to exorcise the traumas of the preceding seven years of dictatorship. At the same time, distortions of the romantic, heroic model forged behavioral patterns that would become norms in the coming years.

The second period coincides with the first eight years of the socialist PASOK government, from 1981 to 1989, and the major social and institutional changes it brought. The actual contact between Greek society and greater Europe triggered the repositioning of behaviors and attitudes directly associated with the notion of wellbeing. In this context, participation in and perception of culture was determined as much by preexisting social mores as by the new behavioral models that were shaping Greek society. The official state policy on cultural management was crucial, since it was based on those parameters in equal proportion, with selective emphasis on their salient traits.

The media explosion in Greece defined the end of the second period and thus the beginning of the third. New standards and social identities made their appearance in magazines and on commercial television. Cultural assets were treated as commodities for consumption and had a significant impact on social awareness. The milestone of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games marked the apogee of 15 years of escalating materialistic euphoria that began in the late 1980s. It also defined the beginning of the end of a period of gradual slippage in every area of society; evidence soon disclosed the unsound foundation built by joining art and culture to the ephemeral values of social distinction.



This research endeavors to identify and connect those sometimes seemingly disconnected pieces of the puzzle called Modern Greek Culture. The picture that emerges is noteworthy, precisely because it reveals the hidden affinities among broader social and cultural phenomena and the corrosive force of their permutations. Over the course of this study, it became increasingly evident that even though the castration complex afflicting Greek society seemed to fall outside the scope of the book, it nevertheless significantly affected the overall framework by defining how cultural assets are produced and managed. The focus on the cultural landscape of Athens was a deliberate choice, not a value judgment. The city has been the epicenter and a role model for all the tendencies and behaviors branding the last 40 years of Greek culture. In addition, Athens has been the primary magnet for internal migration since the 1960s. With one third of the country's population currently concentrated there, it constitutes a very accurate sample of Greek society as a whole.

The key points of this book were formulated by applying both analytic and synthetic methodologies. The former was ideal for examining and understanding the individual parameters that constitute the broader cultural phenomena in Greece. The latter used an overview of these phenomena to provide evidence of how their individual components have affected current Greek life. The first chapter applies the analytic method to construct an anatomy of traditional Greek society, which, in its fundamental aspects, continues to survive in contemporary times. It identifies the origins and characteristics of the heroic models of folk tradition and the behaviors that crystallized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The political events of the 1970s, in particular, enabled the revival of heroic models, but the new social conditions encouraged their distortion. This chapter points out the remarkable compatibility of the heroic model with the fundamental principles of Western Romanticism. In addition, it highlights the influence of the latter on a series of ideological symbols that proved durable and particularly suited to the Greek world. The ways in which Western romantic nationalism perceived the Greek Revolution of 1821 (the Greek War of Independence) determined the configuration of collective memory and the Modern Greek national identity; thereof, it dictated the attitudes of the populace in various historical circumstances.

The role that the national ideology played in shaping the figurative and narrative models in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek and European artistic production is briefly mentioned. The affiliation between ideology and art has had direct repercussions on the steadfast ways in which Greeks comprehended and treated culture from that period until the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The official cultural policy, arguing for the return of the Parthenon Marbles,

the opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games, and the recurring incidents of censorship since 1974 all occupy a common ground. On the other hand, there is the crucial impact of romantic nationalism on the creation of oral heroic narratives that coincided with those of the Orthodox Church. The conjunction of ethnic and Orthodox identity in the past has proved decisive in the management of Greece's national and European identity in the present. The protective role of the Church towards the Orthodox Greek-speaking communities prior to the formation of the Modern Greek State has sparked heated debates over the adversative construct of "us" versus "them" (namely the West) in contemporary Greek reality.

The first chapter also explores the role and characteristics of the traditional Greek family and their influence on the notion of citizenship among Greeks in recent decades. In addition, it highlights the ways in which the phenomenon of internal migration has affected the comprehension and dissemination of the new living standards that have become increasingly global in nature since 1974. What is evident in the end is that the inward-looking nature of the Greek national identity of the past has continued to shape the inward-looking behaviors and attitudes throughout the past 40 years. This character has hindered Greek society's smooth transition to its new role as a participant in a kindred European culture.

The synthetic method is applied in the next four chapters, in which cultural phenomena are identified as sets and their components as subsets. The political art of the 1970s and the efforts to engage the populace in artistic production aimed to preserve the national consciousness. In the same way, France orchestrated cultural spectacles immediately after the Revolution. Modernism, on the other hand, was seen, at that time, exclusively within the narrow framework of a political ideology in opposition to the ideological and aesthetic positions of the regime. In the 1980s, the institution of "Athens, Cultural Capital of Europe" drew on all the symbolic constructs of national identity and collective memory. Thereby, it counterbalanced the insecurities of an emerging European identity accompanying the country's recent acceptance in the European Community. Twenty years later, the opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games endeavored to do the same. Cultural consumption, especially after the early 1990s, satisfied the need for distinction that once characterized the Greek family. Hence, it was seen widely as participation in the key features of wellbeing. The phenomena of the censorship of artistic creation throughout this 40-year period demonstrates the superficial relation with the arts, the power of clientelism and the

consequences of the constant, close bond between Church and State. These incidents equally underscore the way in which the distortion of romantic ideological constructs produced a protracted state of confusion in Greek society.

The impetus for this study came from the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. It was in these spectacles that the dense sequence of imagery and discourse from the country's cultural past confronted the void of recent decades. As a rule, the emphasis on the past when coupled with a lack of current achievements automatically implies either the devaluation or absence of the latter. The psychology of inadequacy typically generated by such qualitative unequal comparisons is manifested either as castration, comparable to the infantile complex caused by a parental figure, or as complacency in the ongoing acceptance of a privileged uniqueness, which is seen as vested and intrinsic. In any case, it tends to preclude descendants from critically evaluating, analyzing, or comprehending the deeds of their ancestors. More important, it prevents them from undertaking a dynamic, creative approach to their own lives.

My concern regarding the official version of contemporary Greek culture, especially as presented at the closing ceremony of the Games, impelled me to examine the *whys* of current Greek reality. The way the Greek State officially chose to proclaim the country's cultural and national identity in the 2004 Olympic Games eloquently reveals the cultural divide that Greeks experience as a nation in the present. It also reflects the distance that separates *us* from all those who do not share our identity, and finally the inertia and isolation that comes as a consequence of this constant fixation on, and nostalgia for, the past.

## CHAPTER ONE

### PATHOLOGIES OF GREEK SOCIETY

Two factors – the heroic model and the family – act as communicating vessels to produce a potent infusion of attitudes and tendencies that lie at the cornerstone of Greek society. They are connected and regulated by the fixed locus of Orthodox Christianity and the coincidental presence of Romanticism – both of which decisively informed the shaping of Greek collective memory and identity. The constructs that emerged, especially under Romanticism's protracted influence, extensively and variously distorted the initial values and visions of the Romantic Movement. How these constructs affected one another over time has directly impacted all Greek social and cultural phenomena since 1974.

#### **Heroic Models and Romantic Narrations**

According to Carl G. Jung (1964, 110-128), the myth of the hero symbolically depicts the consolidation of the ego that needs assistance to reach maturity, reasoned action, and individuation. The hero's dark and wondrous birth, his superhuman abilities evident even in infancy, his triumph in every confrontation with the forces of evil or terrible beasts, and his premature fall by betrayal or sacrifice represent the individual stages in this process. In other versions, the hero symbolizes the two aspects of personhood, particularly the selfish side that must be subjugated through separation, reunification, fall, and redemption, to enable the reconciliation and union of the "whole" (Cooper 2001, 82). Still other approaches regard hero syndrome as the product of identification with an ideal "self," the result of denial or concealment of low self-esteem stemming from real or imaginary causes (Eliade 1992, 44). Additionally, the hero's adventures indirectly establish the safe radius of the action of ordinary mortals (Campbell 2008, 64). Having been literally or figuratively explored, the familiar world is equated with a legitimate territory that is controlled, defined and secured by a society's rules of behavior, roles, and moral values. These social structures keep their

dependents *safe*, while the unknown and hence dangerous territory, where the heroic transcendence stretches, exists beyond their authority.

The heroic model in Modern Greek folk tradition finds its references in the oral narrative folk poems of the Byzantine era, which recount the real or fantastic pursuits of gallant warriors (Alexiou 2008, 19-20). The *acritic* songs (border ballads) and their heroes, the *Akritai*, constitute a unique category in vernacular literature.<sup>1</sup> During the last centuries of Byzantium rule, the heroes of *acritic* ballads exorcized the fears and uncertainties of the Orthodox Greek-speaking populations situated on the eastern borders of the empire. A typical example was Digenes Akrites, the hero of the eponymous narrative epic verse (11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c.), who, to this day, evokes memories of Byzantium's lost glory and synthesizes those traits considered fundamental components of Greek identity – or *ellinikótita* (Hellenicness).

Digenes possessed superhuman powers even from birth and performed extraordinary feats. He was celebrated, as well, for his supernatural size. His very identity and adventures extol the power of Orthodoxy (his Arab father was baptized Christian). His unparalleled courage overcomes all obstacles. He is granted the right to violate written and unwritten laws when the purpose is sacred (he abducts the woman he loves to marry her), or when conditions permit. The pardoning of the offense, again when conditions justify it (parental permission for his marriage is given only retroactively), is manifested as a natural social reaction. Digenes' defense of the family's honor and integrity (much of the narrative involves his defending his wife from a lion, a dragon, and the Amazon Maximu), and his familial devotion constitute the eminent behavior in the myth's narrative. The assertion of male authority over female (Digenes defeats Maximu in a duel and has sex with her), and the tangible proof of the unconditional love, faith, and devotion expected of a wife (who dies of grief for him) are seen as a natural consequence. In other words, the woman's existence outside and beyond the presence and power of a man is nullified. Despite all the adaptations and revisions of the original text in the selective and creative process of recitation, folk tradition has preserved Digenes' history. Centuries later, *acritic* ballads lent their subject matter and style to the cycle of *klephtic* ballads extolling the adventures of the *Klephts*, Greek fighters living as outlaws in the mountains during the Greek Revolution. The Digenes epic has parallels, in style and narrative motifs, in Byzantine scriptural texts and, according to Beaton, can be viewed as a type of "secular hagiography" (Elizbarashvili 2010, 440).

Of interest here is how the value system and ideas inherent in the Digenes narrative have been manipulated, consciously or unconsciously, since 1974. Over the centuries, various and varied social conditions in

Greece inevitably influenced successive distortions, adaptations, and deteriorations of the heroic model. Nevertheless, the canonized version of the hero has remained intact in the memory of modern Greeks. On the one hand, there is Digenes' victory over the dragon which, beyond any other semantic interpretations, links him directly in popular memory to Saints George and Dimitrios. On the other hand, his choice to live in solitude on the eastern border of the empire corresponds to the lives of the ascetics, who battled danger and temptation. Isolation, therefore, indirectly acquired a quality of specialness, apartness – a desired distinction from all human norms. The Digenes prototype as the “young warrior saint” also encapsulated the concept of death as the only force capable of defeating him, thus confirming the hero's glory while upholding the pact of eternal youth (Elizbarashvili 2010, 454). Indeed, the version of his wrongful death, which often comes about through treachery and deceit, has always exerted a particular charm and influence on Modern Greek society. It exalts even further the hero's invincible nature while simultaneously invoking the power and supremacy of the Divine Will. As subsequent chapters will show, the Digenes prototype imprinted on the psychology of modern Greeks and, in addition, informed the concepts of victimhood and loss. He created a durable benchmark in contemporary culture and a prism through which Greeks could interpret the past, project the future, and encounter reality in the present.

The heroic archetype always retained the characteristics of excess, transcendence, and daring – hence extraordinary – behavior despite the permutations it has undergone over time. During the Turkish occupation, the myths of mountain heroes remained alive in the minds of the plains folk through their awe and admiration of the formers' free and independent way of life. That freedom was due to their geographical inaccessibility which made it difficult to subjugate them to any law.<sup>2</sup> For inhabitants of the plains, however, the heroic element, in practice, sprang from a different source. The Turkish authority exerted arbitrary force on a fearful Greek population living in constant hardship and peril. To survive, they developed a particular defense system through which “heroic” models reemerged. The security that the new models provided counterbalanced the legendary feats offered by untamed mountain life. Here, heroic distinction was based on respectable landholdings that ensured comparable income – and social status as well (McNeill 1978, 13). The possession of wealth was accompanied by its requisite display of accumulated material goods and a distinctive lifestyle; the primary indicator of which was the social connections cultivated with influential persons in the local community or further afield. Proximity to people of power with its ensuing influence and

potential benefits functioned as a safety net for the family. The heroization of wealth through the process of its acquisition – hard physical labor, clever choices, exploited opportunities, and family hardships that imply sacrifice and the transcendence of the ordinary – constituted the sole measure of the individual's capability and worth. Since dominance over one's fellow villagers was an accepted manifestation of the heroic model, it automatically lost its connotation of arbitrary violation in everyday life and was considered rightful. Thereof, not only was this dominance accepted by the villagers, but their deference, in the form of a sought-after dependency, was considered incumbent. It became an integral part of a jointly contracted collective ritual, the non-enactment of which raised suspicions (Gellner 1992, 184; issues of handling power issues in rural communities are addressed here). Predictably, the moral order that this agreement embodied created a vicious cycle; the families had to maintain at all costs those material goods that were the credentials of the individual's worth and security. Even when unexpected events threatened their security, keeping up appearances in the community was requisite and a matter of pride and honor. A customary practice of this vision of heroism is the excesses of the famous "Greek hospitality." For the sake of the guest, the host was obliged to consume large quantities of the family stores or make grandiose gestures, thus symbolically extending upon the guest the role of provider and protector as prescribed for the members of the patriarchal family.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Armatoloi* and the *Klepts* of the Peloponnesian mountains, the protagonists of the Greek Revolution, inherited the social values of the Digenes epic, and became moral agents that determined the male as the role of hero. The Revolution morally legitimized the bandit, who placed himself outside the law in order to resist oppressive authority and defend his compatriots for the wrongdoings committed against them (Hobsbawm 2005, 205). However, the national symbol of the newly established Greek State continued to be Digenes Akrites. The folklorist Linos Politis advanced him as emblematic of the conflict between Christianity and Islam (Kehayoglou 1986, 98). Two of the leading Greek poets of the late-19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries did the same: Kostis Palamas and Angelos Sikelianos. Palamas sees Digenes as a symbol of the Greek spirit throughout its long journey from antiquity to the modern age<sup>3</sup> and an example of pure folk consciousness in the face of corrupt centralized power.<sup>4</sup> Sikelianos, on the other hand, presents him as both a protector of the underdog and a rebel.<sup>5</sup> Digenes Akrites' physical traits were appropriated much later by Nikos Engonopoulos' hero Bolivar, in his eponymous poem of the early 1940s.<sup>6</sup>

The concurrence of Romanticism enhanced the influence of both the Digenes Akrites heroic archetype and the directly informed ideological constructs of the Greek Revolution. With the combined effects of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century German *Sturm und Drang* movement and the subsequent French and Industrial Revolutions, Romanticism was destined to exert considerable influence on Western political ideologies (Greenfeld 1992, 322). Reacting against the rationalism of 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, Romanticism revived the charm of the past. It sought authenticity in tradition and the pure, unpretentious life of simple country folk, credited with honesty and moral integrity. Romanticism extolled the pride of mountain folk whose uninhibited way of life was dictated solely by their moral values (Greenfeld 1992, 332-333; Kohn 1950, 464; 1967, 188). Generally speaking, for Romantics, the ideal society was one that refused to accept the limitations of reality (Kohn 1950, 445), and whose members found their identity through direct contact with their roots. Thus “the people,” as the vehicles and guardians of tradition,<sup>7</sup> were idealized and then equated with rebellious tendencies, instinct, and spontaneity. The Romantic Movement vigorously opposed rationalism, arguing instead in favor of imagination, subjectivity, and the expression of emotional hyperbole. More importantly, it advanced the self, believing the expression of inner personal truth to be evidence of sensitivity, and individuality to be a certificate of authenticity. Romanticism, particularly when it involved artistic creation, objected to all principles, canons, regulations, and authority. It invented the attribute of “genius,” and demanded total freedom for the artist (Greenfeld 1992, 334-339; Hauser 1984, 195; Hobsbawm 2005, 362-370).

The rebirth of folk culture, advocated by Romanticism, produced the concepts of “national tradition,” nationalism, and the nation as being equal to the state (Gellner 1992, 109; Hobsbawm 1994, 34, 147-148). K.W. Schlegel maintained that a prerequisite for the creation of a real nation was the common ancestry of all its members and that the “indisputable testimony” of this common origin was a common language (Kohn 1950, 460). The antiquity of the common root also ensured that the preservation of tradition, which, along with the particularities of a people, was considered sacred (459-460). This “people” as the vehicle of national identity, was also seen as the vehicle of sovereignty. That association nullified the earlier correlation of the term with the underclasses and the pejorative connotation of “mob.” The equation of the terms “nationalism” and “democracy” came as a natural consequence of this conceptual shift, since nationalism transfers power to the people – to every member of this entity – and recognizes their reciprocal equality (Greenfeld 1992, 3-13).



Each of these features, of Romanticism and nationalism alike, found fertile ground in the fledgling 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek State. Its citizens recognized in these concepts the familiar blend of those experiences, hopes, fears, needs, and behaviors created by the circumstances of their lives up to that point. These accumulated, repressed emotions assimilated the new values to the benefit of preexisting local standards and attitudes. Transfused from European Philhellenes and Diaspora-Greek intellectuals – from Western culture, that is – the romantic ideals acquired the hue of authority. For the new state endeavoring to find its identity through validated models, these acted as a powerful psychological defense (Hobsbawm 2005, 204). The Romantics' appreciation of the mountain folk's freedom and code of honor proved highly compatible with existing Greek heroic models. Equally compatible was their objection to all power, rules, and authority. Herder's adage – "Everyone's actions should arise utterly from the self, according to its innermost character [...] to be true to oneself; this is the whole of morality" – found a variety of applications and was seen as an expression of the authentic Greek spirit (Greenfeld 1992, 331). Respect for the life of simple country folk was of personal concern to every Greek, who had no experience beyond rural life. Tradition, on the other hand, was seen in the narrow context of family bonds, as an almost sacred ancestral legacy that determined the individual's consciousness. The narrative manner by which tradition was passed from generation to generation articulated the social structures and the predefined roles that its members were expected to assume. This practice consigned knowledge – whose fundamental tenet is, Lyotard (2008, 69) notes, "do not forget" – entailed the repetition of and the adherence to patterns, and the preclusion of doubt. Romanticism's intrinsic excesses and prettifying aspects served as an antidote to the insecurity that people felt in the new, still unstable Greek political environment. The inevitable embellishment of reality with its attendant idealization brought reassurances and enabled the mythifying of the ancient Greek lineage. Steadily and inescapably, over the decades, all these factors cultivated the attitudes and symbols, compounding them into the building blocks of Modern Greek society.

Romanticism, with its antagonism for the classical ideals espoused by the rationalist approach to reality, found its champion in the eschatological, metaphysical tenets of the Orthodox Christian faith. Blind obedience to the capricious will of God and the believer's unquestioning trust thereof, precluded, *de facto*, all analytical thought and doubt. The equation of an ideal and unified Christianity with a nation state that enjoyed the devotion and admiration of its citizens (Hobsbawm 2005, 372-373; Kohn 1950, 450, 465) found familiar models in the patriarchal Greek

family that provides for and protects its members. At the same time, this further justified the position of the Orthodox Church, in the minds of Modern Greeks, as the guardian of tradition – that is, of the Greek language and religion. The early German Romantic philosopher and writer Novalis saw the State as a divine work of art. Mourning the lost heroic patriotism of his fatherland, he claimed:

“The more spiritual the state is [...], the more joyfully will every citizen out of love for the beautiful great individual limit his demand and be ready to make the necessary sacrifices” (448).

Carl von Clausewitz, who espoused Romantic beliefs about war, referred to the “fatherland” as an “earthly deity” (Greenfeld 1992, 361). Schlegel viewed the structure of the medieval monarchy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy as the guarantors of the peaceful survival of the modern nation state that asked “all its members [to] form as [if] it were but one individual” (Kohn 1950, 459). In another case, he proclaimed:

“The revolutionary desire to realize the Kingdom of God on earth is [...] the beginning of modern history. Whatever has no relation to the Kingdom of God is of strictly secondary importance in it” (Greenfeld 1992, 351-352).

For the Romantics, unremitting emotional intensity was so important that absolute devotion to whatever engendered this emotion was treated as a religious experience. This conceptual shift elevated faith – in the broad, abstract sense of anything providing security, inspiration, and spiritual satisfaction – to the level of religion. A type of secular religion was thus created, in which the experience of excessive emotion was so legitimized that it claimed Divine roots (329-330).

The advancement and defense of the concept of the self in Western Romantic thought were highly compatible with the behaviors and existence of Greek inhabitants in geographically remote regions. It also concurred with the qualities of distinction and differentiation inherent in the heroic model. Moreover, it notably coincided with the perception of particularity and uniqueness as the privilege bestowed upon the descendants of classical Greece (8). European Romantics and philhellenes made a key contribution here, by regarding Modern Greeks as the guardians and bona fide followers of their ancient ancestors. Novalis, reminiscing about the German past, noted “We have been alienated from our ancestors, while the later Greeks encountered the memory of their Homeric heroes” (Kohn 1950, 447). Schlegel, for whom the Greeks were

exemplary in their determination to create a nation, asked rhetorically, “had their great works not borne the stamp of their national character?” (457). The Jacobins and especially Robespierre cherished their unreserved admiration for ancient Sparta and the social and political institutions of the Greek city states (Kohn 1967, 87). *Katharévousa*, the purist language constructed by the scholarly advocates of Greek nationalism, was itself a project designed to link the Greeks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to their ancient heritage (Hobsbawm 1994, 111).

Paintings by European artists and travelers depicted the architectural ruins of Greek antiquity as inhabited, equally, by the ordinary protagonists of bucolic scenes and the heroes of the Greek Revolution. Subjects associated with events during and immediately after the Revolution were an additional source of inspiration for Karl Krazeisen, Peter von Hess, Konrad von Langue, and Eugène Delacroix. Intentionally or not, they all greatly advanced the philhellenic idea (Lydakís 1976a, 67-77, 86, 91-94; Spiteris 1979, vol. 1, 180-203). In the eyes of the Romantics, this society existed for its ancient glory and its ideal rural quotidian. Images of this world were substantiated in drawings and engravings by Carl Rottmann, Raffaello Ceccoli, and Vincenzo and Stefano Lanza. These artists depicted the heroic element intertwined with the ideals and essence of Romanticism: sometimes passive, as resignation and heroic sacrifice in the name of an ideal (*Idéa*), such as Liberty (Eugène Delacroix’s *Massacre at Chios*, 1824); other times as reckless excess (*Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi*, 1824) by the same artist. In both cases, Delacroix created iconic motifs that are encountered in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek paintings as well. The belief in antiquity’s continuity in the present provided Greece with the necessary argument for its acceptance by the West, a claim coveted on a practical and psychological level. At the same time, it alleviated the sense of inferiority caused by its abstention from its own cultural evolution. For the Western Romantics, the Greek Revolution reaffirmed their ideals of self-determination, national consciousness, and national unity. For the Greeks, though, the successful outcome of this historical conjuncture was seen additionally as rewarding a distinct particularity, owed to what they considered to be their given, indisputable hereditary superiority (Greenfeld 1992, 12). The Greek press is rife with such references in the 19<sup>th</sup> and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In concert with the aesthetics and subject matter of the period’s visual art production – sculpture, mainly – they were widely disseminated and embraced by the Greek populace (Karaiskou 2011, 19-42).

In Europe and Greece alike, Romanticism and nationalism used the arts to give visible form to their collective symbols and ideologies. After

the French Revolution, the festival, as a form of spectacle where many arts converge to create excitement, took on a nationalistic role in its quest to establish patriotism as the collective French “religion” (Kohn 1950, 444). In 1791, the French politician and diplomat Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord called for the founding of national festivals and theatres that drew their inspiration from the ancient Greeks and Romans, who extolled the “love of the fatherland, that almost unique morality of the free peoples of antiquity” (Kohn 1967, 83). Marie-Joseph Chénier, in a November 1793 speech, noted:

“[L]iberty will be the soul of our public festivals; they will exist only for it and through it. We must sow great memories throughout the year and make all our civic festivals an annual and commemorative history of the French Revolution” (83).

In late November 1793, citing the ancient Greek Olympic Games, Georges Jacques Danton, a leading figure early in the Revolution, proposed that “the cradle of liberty be the center of the national festivals,” so as to nurture “the sacred love of liberty” and fortify “national energy” (84). Public political gatherings and outdoor celebrations used music extensively; its deliberately rousing style was calculated to rally thousands. In addition, the plays put on in Parisian theatres in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century presented simple folk as heroes and defenders of the fatherland, elevating them to paragons of virtue. The Jacobins rigorously controlled and censored the theatrical stage, allowing playwrights and actors only

“[to speak] the language of liberty, to throw flowers on the tombs of its martyrs, to sing of heroism and of virtue, and to teach a love [...] of the fatherland” (87).

According to A. Wilhelm, the poet was the “preserver of folk sagas” and the “beloved teacher of his nation” (Kohn 1950, 447), for he recounts its great moments. Schlegel, as well, viewed literature, poetry, the visual arts, and music as “national” (462) – their sole purpose being to prettify memory and myth, to constantly evoke the glory of the past and the heroic epics, and to morally uplift the people.<sup>8</sup>

All the ideological constructs and iconological elements recruited by Germany and France to defend and promote Romantic nationalism showed up in Modern Greek art on the heels of the founding of the Modern Greek State, in 1830. The liberation of the Greek Nation was met with the anticipated hyperbole by Greeks. Its meticulously painted images recounted the subject matter in exhaustive detail; the dark areas were

obliterated, and the bright spots idealized. In these paintings, the warriors of the Greek Revolution are always in command of the battlefield. The ecclesiastical iconostases are unscathed, and the formal attire of the captains and their families remains crisp, while their solemn stature and gaze exude the calm assurance that guarantees rightful victory. Narrative titles denote actual events and protagonists with symbolic and emotionally-charged language. Paintings by Theodoros Vryzakis, which teem with historical themes, as well as those by Nikiforos Lytras, Giorgos Margaritis, and Ioannis Doukas, among others, are typical of the romantic and idealized sensibility imbuing the memory of the recent Revolution (Lydakís 1975, 64-99; 1976a, 126-136; Spiteris 1979, vol. 1, 272-275). The writings of General Makriyannis and the events he recounted, as painted by Panagiotis Zografos, are a striking example of the romantic gaze conflated with the symbols of the Greek Nation, and the aspirations – along with the interpretations – of the fledgling state (Lydakís 1975, 14-61; 1976a, 383-389; Spiteris 1979, vol. 1, 152-163).

The heroic aura diffused throughout the Greek countryside inhabited by “glorious ruins” is a motif encountered in 19<sup>th</sup> century painting (Lydakís 1976a, 351) as well as in emblematic works of 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry. In contrast to the plains, the metaphor of the mountain recurs in narratives nurturing and protecting the warrior-heroes to whom the Nation owed its liberation. In such instances, the Romantic model is visualized in idyllic landscapes that emerge out of an almost ethereal spiritual light. The iconic poems, *Áxion Esti* (Worthy It Is) by Odysseus Elytis – written in 1949 and set to music by Mikis Theodorakis in 1964 – and *Romioissini* (Greekness), from 1966, by Yannis Ritsos, testify to the diachronic equation of the landscape, which hosts the “marble”<sup>9</sup> and “the statues of the rocks,”<sup>10</sup> with the ethos of its warrior-inhabitants. In nearly every verse, the narrative shifts between the two, interweaving features and lives, respectively. The concept of equating nature with the heroic element is cultivated in Nikos Engonopoulos’ *Bolívar* (1944), but in reverse fashion. Here, it is nature itself that is born of and nurtured by the body of the hero Bolívar:

“The Amazon and Orinoco rivers spring from your eyes.  
The high mountains are rooted in your breast,  
The Andes range is your backbone.  
On the crown of your head, brave palikar [lad], run unbroken stallions  
and wild cattle,  
The wealth of Argentina.  
On your belly sprawl vast coffee plantations.  
When you speak, terrible earthquakes spread devastation”  
(excerpt of the poem. Translated by David Connolly).

The Romantics' unmitigated disdain for reason and their exaltation of excessive, irrational emotion was expressed as the rejection of a society that did not meet their expectations. Furthermore, their pursuit of emotional intensity, which saw pain and death as its natural conclusion, vindicated and exalted the motifs of heroic death and lamentation in the Greek cultural context. In Greek society, death and lamentation encountered the additional psychology of the victim – a people believing they were being deprived of all that was rightfully theirs – with its inherent spectrum of everlasting grief and resignation. Postwar poetry, visual arts, and oral tradition ardently promoted the romantic figure of the suffering hero. As Gavriilidis notes (2006, 133-135), the content of Elytis' and Ritsos' verses, set to music by Theodorakis, more often evoke elements of misery and pain than those of joy, strength, and positive action. The warrior-hero's ultimate sacrifice to save his compatriots or sympathizers, an image engraved in the collective memory as the sacrifice of the "innocent victim," was directly linked to religious symbolism. The visualization of the rebirth of the Nation through the Passion of Christ and His Resurrection and the equation of national identity with Orthodox Christian identity naturally evolved from the role of the Orthodox Church in preserving language and faith during Turkish rule. The passion born of the commitment to the sacred mission of the *Idéa* was thus manifested as a supreme spiritual state. Elytis' *Áxion Esti*, which chronicles the Greco-Italian War of 1940-41 at the dawn of World War II, is perhaps the best-known expression of this equation. Opening with "In the beginning, light and the first hour..." it directly references the first three verses of *Genesis*, the first book of the Old Testament, which begins and ends: "In the beginning ... let there be light." Also, the repetition, in all three parts of *Áxion Esti* – "The Genesis," "The Passion," and "The Gloria" – of the phrase "Áxion Esti" (Worthy It Is), the salutation "Hail," and the alternation of poetry/psalm and prose reading (*anágnoσμα*) are unmistakably sourced from the Orthodox Good Friday Procession and Liturgy.

These widespread associations between the heroic models and the Church that justify the identity of the hero-saint and martyr – who renounces material possessions, is released from passion and fear, and becomes invincible (Campbell 2008, 304) – are apparent in Ritsos' *Apohairetismós* (Farewell).<sup>11</sup> The poem is dedicated "To the Hero and Saint Grigoris Afxentios." The hero's transcendence of his mortal nature is verified by his indifference to death, his victory over which is implied (306). The hero-saint correlation was a direct consequence of the concept of "genius" cultivated by the Romantics (Greenfeld 1992, 334-339).