A N T O N I S L I A K O S / A T H E N S

On *negative* consciousness

This paper is a commentary on four different, even heterogeneous, texts regarding *negative* consciousness, a term which penetrates cultural, political, historical and geographic relationships between Western and South Eastern Europe.

The first text is an extract from Fragkiskos Pylarinos's 1833 obituary to Adamantios Korais, who died three years after the independence of Greece. Korais was the leading national intellectual in the pre-independence period. He lived in Paris, and through his books, leaflets and letters tried to infuse Greeks with Enlightenment theories and values and to create a national consciousness inspired by the French Revolution. Pylarinos was a student of his and first Professor of Modern History at the University of Athens, which was founded in the aftermath of Greek independence. Pylarinos wrote in his obituary:

> *I know that in the realm of religion you were not a reformer like Luther or Calvin; in the realm of philosophy you were not a renovator like Bacon or Descartes; in the realm of politics you were not a theorist like Montesquieu or Rousseau. Those men lived in different times and circumstances, hence they were different personalities. Instead, you have tried to introduce into our homeland all those good things which humanity strove with its blood to acquire during the past three centuries: I mean freedom of consciousness, independence of reason and freedom of public governance.*[1]

The second text, written a century later, is an extract from the report of the Health Committee of the League of Nations on health conditions in Greece. Liberal politician Eleftherios Venizelos's second premiership from 1928 to 1932 is generally described by historians as the main period of modernization in the inter-war years. Indeed Venizelos invited experts and

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[1] Στεργιος Φασουλακης (επιμ.), *Επικήδειοι λόγοι εις Αδαμάντιον Κοραή.* Αθήνα Βιβλιοθήκη Κοραή (Χίος), 1993. For Pylarinos' obituary, see pp. 21–25.

technocrats from abroad in order to found new institutions, to reorganize older ones, and to deal with the great economic and social problems of Greece after the unification of the country and the massive influx of refugees from Anatolia in the period between 1912 and 1923. This practice of relying on foreign economic and institutional aid first emerged with the establishment of the Refugee Settlement Commission which undertook the organization of the agrarian settlement of Greek refugees from Turkey. One of the sectors that Venizelos aimed to reorganize was that of public health. He invited the Health Committee of the League of Nations, which proposed a program of reforms after extensive research on health conditions in Greece. In their report, the members of the committee wrote:

> *We are not trying to compare Greece with other European countries. Such comparison makes no sense. Even in the highlands of Brazil and in populations living under the minimum of human civilization we did not meet such an absence of sanitary services as in Greece. Greece is a dangerous country from this point of view. The Health Committee should warn the Greek government, in a not uncertain voice, of the dangers not only for Greece but for Europe in general, which the government can not ignore or pigeonhole without discrediting Greece before the other European nations.*[2]

The third citation is a story of a train and a passenger. Yannis Voulgaris, political scientist and opinion maker, has written that Greece is like a passenger running late who catches the right train to the right destination just at the last moment and in the last wagon. So Greece caught the train of the national state, of parliamentary democracy, of the Western and not the Eastern world, of the European Union, although belatedly and at the last moment. The starting point of this idea is a comparative look at Greece as part of the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, or as part of the late Ottoman Empire. Following this line of argument, Greece, despite its previous backwardness, is now part of the leading political and economic entities of the Western world. This attitude was at the core of the modernization ideology prevalent during the 1996–2004 socialist government of Costas Simitis. The idea of the passenger catching the right train is contrary to Andreas Papandreou's ideology of center and periphery, in which Greece lay on the pe-

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[2] Health Organization of the League of Nations, *Collaboration with the Greek Government in the Sanitary Reorganization of Greece*. Geneva 1929. Cited in Αντωνης Λιακος, *Εργασία και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου*. Αθήνα 1993, pp. 327–329.

riphery, which was the core of his political ideology in the 1970s and 1980s.[3]

Finally, the fourth citation does not relate to Greece. It comes from the post-Communist Balkan experience. It involves a statement made by the former president of Bulgaria, Zhelyu Zhelev, in an official speech given during his visit to Paris from 23 to 25 November 1994, during the French Presidency of the European Union. He appealed to President Francois Mitterrand to: "*Make us Europeans quickly if you don't want us to become Balkan*".[4] Although he was referring to the Yugoslav crisis and to the enormous difficulties of the post-Communist Bulgarian economy, this phrase involves a pejorative use of the term Balkan. In her book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova has explained how this term has acquired a negative meaning over the past two centuries.[5]

In this paper, I will seek to connect and comment on these texts but not in a chronological order.

Comments on the first and third citation

Regarding the Korais citation, this may be seen as a summary of what was considered as the *canon* of modernity (in the aftermath of the French Revolution) and, obviously, as the *canon* of European history.

CONTENT OF THE CANON
Reformation, Enlightenment, Empiricism, Rationalism, Freedom
Luther and Calvin, Bacon and Descartes, Montesquieu and Rousseau

What is canon? Canon is a Greek word. Its Latin equivalent is "regula" and "norma". During the Hellenistic period, the canon was the collection of works by ancient writers. In the fourth century of the Christian era, canon came to mean the collection of the "authentic" books of the New Testament. At the same time, the first synod of the Church established the "*Canon of Faith*", a short but highly normative text defining and codifying the Christian faith. Deviation from the canon was considered as heresy. In the 1980s, the term was employed metaphorically in literary criticism. The tradition of literary works, considered to embody the main aesthetic values of European high culture from the Bible and Homer to the literature of the 20th century,

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[3] ΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ ΒΟΥΛΓΑΡΗΣ, κ.α., *Η προοπτική του εκσυγχρονισμού στην Ελλάδα.* Αθήνα, Καστανιώτης, 2002, pp. 25–36.
[4] *Le Monde*, 26 November 1994.
[5] MARIA TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

was called the "canon". This canon was a collection of the literary works and a normative history deemed necessary for the education of the Western elites. An example of this canon is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1946). The literary canon was criticized for imposing a hierarchy of values and for excluding non-Western and minor literature.[6]

What is the historical canon? Since the eighteenth century, the tradition of history writing in Europe involved not only a description of the past, but also the imposition of a hierarchical view of the world, with Western Europe at the top. This hierarchical view conceptualized a linear course of civilization in time, space and values. The centre of history moved from the Middle East to Greece, and then to Rome, and then to Christian Europe. In 1846, Jules Michelet described this development as "the grand human movement from India to Greece and to Rome, and from Rome to us [the French]".[7] This historical river took its course through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, and then on to the modern state, capitalism and the supremacy of the world. This course of history, implicit or explicit in historiography, philosophy of history and social theory, identified the concept of "civilization" with the concept of "European civilization". This identification began in the epoch of the Enlightenment. As a consequence, all other civilizations were conceived of in negative terms, or as a deviation from this main course. This form of thinking universal history as a bifurcation between the main trajectory and the unfinished or deviating paths could be described as "canon".

European historians like Ranke, and, before him, philosophers of history like Hegel, developed the idea that universal history was the sequence of nations contributing to civilization. In his *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* (Paris, 1831), Michelet wrote that history in its entirety was a struggle between man and nature, the spiritual and the material, and freedom and fatalism. Man, spirit and freedom were thought of as belonging to Europe, while nature, the material and fatalism as belonging to Asia. Christian faith and morality, Greek philosophy and art, and Roman law and statecraft comprised the core of this tradition, which was enriched and extended by the Renaissance, the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, the Enlightenment, the theory of evolution and Darwinism, social theory from Marx to Weber, and the theories of modernization in post-Second World War Europe and the USA. From the point of view of this tradition, certain

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[6] HAROLD BLOOM, *The Western Canon*. London, Macmillan, 1994. See also, *Critical Inquiry*, 10 (September 1983) 1, a special issue on 'canon' in literature.

[7] JULES MICHELET, *The People*. Longman 1946, p. 240.

nations of the European periphery, other continents and non-European countries and cultures were considered as negative aspects, stagnating at previous historical stages, or as deviations from this course.[8]

These theories of exclusion from the canon informed mentalities and political cultures and fuelled national ambitions to become universal missionaries. For the excluded it was impossible to be represented in the Western framework of representation, or they were denied the capacity to represent themselves within the discipline of history.[9] The histories of the non-Europeans were forged on a master narrative, the history of Europe, but as variations of what did not belong to the master narrative, as the negative imprints of the main pattern. These negative imprints took various forms of discipline like Orientalism, Indology, Africanism, or various "area studies". Arguably the European historical canon was an ideological construction equivalent to the hierarchies of power and colonization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In thinking and writing its own history, each nation was expected to deal with the problem of exclusion or deviation from or negativity towards this Western course of history. This confrontation became the central idea of each national history.

In his obituary for his teacher, Pylarinos highlights Korais's response to the European canon. The importance of transmitting, implementing and imitating the canon has been attributed to Korais. Indeed, he invented the right word, μετακένωσις, for this cultural and institutional enterprise. He was honored by Pylarinos not for his originality of thought but for his desire and eagerness to imitate and transmit the European canon. This desire to imitate was expressed in the most solemn text of the nation; the phrase "*We desire to assimilate ourselves into the rest of the Christians of Europe*" was written in the Declaration of Greek Independence (January 15, 1822).[10] There is also a second way to comment and reflect on this citation. At a close reading, the first level is the European "there and then" and the second is the Greek "here and now". Of the two, centrality belongs to the first. As a consequence, the European past constitutes the future of the Greek present. The first level is made up of condensed history, while the second is an empty place and time. This idea of emptiness is central to this model of cultural imitation and transference.

In the story involving the train there is another metaphor. Instead of emptiness, the contrast is between the mobile and the static. The European

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[8] Klaus Müller, "Perspectives in Historical Anthropology", in Jörn Rüsen (ed.) *Western Historical Thinking, An Intercultural Debate*. Berghahn Books 2002, pp. 33–52.

[9] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?", *Representations*, 37 (1992) 5, pp. 1–26.

[10] Αρχεία Ελληνικής Παλιγγενεσίας, τ. Γ΄, 40–41

world is moving but the Greek world has to move quickly to catch the European train. The metaphor of the train has been used by Agnes Heller in her book *A Theory of Modernity*, in which she writes: "*In the modernist view, the present is like a railway station where we denizens of the modern world need to catch one of the fast trains that run through, or stop in this location for only a few moments. Those trains will carry us to the future. Settling in the railway station would have meant stagnation for them.*"[11] The image of the passenger and the train is a powerful metaphor for a conception which transforms history into a sign of the realization of the modern. Societies are placed on to the line of history according to their proximity to the ideal of progress. Through this proximity to the ideal of progress, they occupy a place in the canon of history and the canon acquires a hierarchical structure.

STRUCTURE OF THE CANON
European condensed history vs. Greek emptiness
European moving train vs. Greek standing passenger
European past = Greek future

Comments on the second and fourth citation

The Health Committee of the League of Nations was invited to Greece by Venizelos as part of his project of reforms and modernization. His initiatives may be seen as a typical realization of Korais's project a century later. What was the response of the invited however? The discourse of the Health Committee belongs to a typical colonial discourse. The comparison of Greece with the highlands of Brazil suggests that Greece was external and not-yet-civilized, an empty place and time. At the same time, this emptiness is not something that the rest of the civilized world should treat with indifference as Greece was deemed a dangerous place also. As a consequence, Greece should be forced to modernize, and discrediting the country before the world was a form of this coercion. This citation belongs to a discourse of exclusion and "disciplinarization", not unusual in the colonial discourse of enforcing modernity. For the Indian historian Dipesh Chacrabarty, part of the colonial discourse is that the subaltern should be disciplinarized before participating in democracy.[12] Both danger and discipline are aspects of this discourse.

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[11] AGNES HELLER, *A Theory of Modernity.* Oxford 1999, p. 7
[12] DIPESH CHACRABARTY, *Provincializing Europe, Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton, Princeton UP, 2000.

The fourth citation, the Bulgarian president's appeal to the French president, is an example of how the discourse of exclusion and discipline has been internalized by the subaltern. The Balkan is not a complementary identity to the European identity. The Balkan and the European are mutually exclusive, if not something more. Balkan is a metaphor for disease. European countries could be infected by the Balkans if they do not compel Balkan societies to become European.

What we see in these four citations is the making of *negative consciousness*. The difference between Europe and the subaltern is expressed as desire and coercion, as condesended-ness and emptiness, as movement and delay, as danger and discipline. Negative consciousness is the internalization of this difference, the inversion of the discourse of exclusion and discipline. This consciousness is "negative" because it is not defined by what the subject is, but by what the subject is not. It is a consciousness of absences, failures and self-exclusion. Negative consciousness is a central category for the history of South Eastern Europe. The convergence and divergence between Balkan and "civilized" Europe has been transformed into an epistemological category that defined the modern and the traditional, progress and backwardness, the moving and the static. Greek society was described as "*what it is not*", or as "not yet being", and this analysis presupposed a comparison with an ideal type implied by a universalistic modernization theory appropriate to Western societies. Consequently the search concerned the divergences and the differences between Western and Greek society.

From a theoretical point of view, self-exclusion emerges from what is considered as a deviation from the canon of modernity (as conceived by Korais and Venizelos). Modernity creates a world of images, values and standards through which all the rest conceive their position, their future and their past. The subject *not being yet in canon* has to invent a way of being included in the canon, or defending its self-exclusion from it. The conceptualization of negative consciousness implies several dichotomies, or dichotomies and dilemmas: the civilized versus the uncivilized, the metropolis versus the colonial, the center versus the periphery, the Western versus the non-Western, universalism versus native-ness, and the global versus the local. In the Greek case, *φιλότιμο* (instead of integrity) and *ντροπή* (instead of shame) were the keywords used by social anthropology to describe Greek society in the second half of the twentieth century.[13]

As we have already seen, the very conceptualization of these dichotomies places the subject on the dark side. Through this conceptualization the sub-

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[13] Εφη Αβδελα, *Δια λόγους τιμής*. Αθήνα, Νεφέλη, 2002, pp. 212–223.

altern subject realizes what he is missing, the incompleteness of his self-identity, his own negative aspect. This realization implies a dislocation to the periphery of the natural center of observing the world, and means the decentralization of its subjectivity. Freud has written that: "*In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.*"[14] This displacement concerns a discursive practice where subjects, political procedures and institutions are constructed and located in a subordinate or subaltern position in relation to the center. In the Greek context, this dislocation was conceptualized by Zissimos Lorentzatos, a literature theorist, as the "**lost center**". According to him, modern Greek culture was fragmentary and without cohesion because it remained without an inner center.[15]

Conclusion

In contextualizing Greek or Balkan history we should not compare Greece or the Balkans with Europe as separate entities, or to search for similarities and differences. What we should do is to view this experience with the wider trends of modernization and colonization of the world. The metaphor of the pendulum is useful in understanding this movement from the inside to the outside and vice versa, the desire to be modern and the coercion to conform with the canon, the discourse of Korais's *metakenosis* and the Health Committee's colonialist discourse, the jumping onto the train and self-victimization. In this paper I have tried to connect the two different discourses. The first is the discourse of modernization, involving a set of well-defined theories. The second involves post-colonial theories. Both approaches are useful in the context of the pendulum, where modernization could be seen as desire and, at the same time, coercion. This paper was delivered to a conference marking the tenth anniversary of the death of Gunnar Hering, who never conceded to unilateral approaches to Greek History. His understanding of history swung in tempo with the double movement of the pendulum.

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[14] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", in *Standard Edition*, vol. 14 (1914–1916). Toronto 1962, pp. 243–258 (249).

[15] Zissimos Lorentzatos, *The Lost Center and Other Essays in Greek Poetry*, transl. Kay Cicellis. Princeton, Princeton UP, 1980.