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Nationalism and the lost homeland: The case of Greece

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Abstract

As evidenced by the radical changes to state organisation, legitimacy and the international order in the past couple of centuries with the development of nationalist ideology, nationalism inherently carries a spatial dimension that translates into an assertion for control of land. This way, it transforms the land to an ancestral national homeland rightfully belonging to 'the nation'. But what if that land was lost to another nation? Embarking from Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolist approach on the construction of national homelands, this article will attempt a theoretical approach on the construction of the *lost* national homelands. These are usually cases where military defeats led to mass expulsions of populations from their ancestral lands, while nationalist ideologies appropriated them as *lost* national homelands. The main argument is that the idea of the lost homelands has turned into a symbol of these nationalist ideologies and a constituent element of the respective national identities. Drawing from Greek perceptions of their lost homelands, this article will explore the mechanisms of the nationalisation of space process that elaborated the nationalisation of those homelands even after they became 'lost' for the Greek nation. This article contributes to the studies of the spatial dimensions of national identities, the

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effects of forced population transfers in identity politics and the creation of national myths and symbols.

KEYWORDS

collective memory, ethno-symbolism, Greece, lost homelands, national identity, territory

1 | THE NATIONALISATION OF SPACE PROCESS

The 'nationalisation of space' is a process by which all nationalisms seek to transform the terrain their nations occupy to an ancestral homeland and endow it with special symbolisms and meanings. This process turns the territory the nation inhabits into an historic territory, a 'homeland' and a rightful possession from one's forefathers through the generations. It is exactly through the construction of a national territory that nationalism strives to implant a sense of national solidarity and consciousness and to homogenise and mould the nation. This process of nationalisation of space is usually state-controlled, as state-sponsored practices like geography, archaeology and folklore strive to demonstrate the nation's spatial integrity through history and its historical integrity through space.

Moreover, the homeland which must be the object of veneration and every aspect of which must be recorded by writers and artists is also the internationally recognised territory of a particular community and of no other. Thus, the concept of the homeland implies a nationalist vision in which specific communities 'belong' to particular territories and states by a sort of natural right and this principle of coincidence of ethnicity and territory has become a decisive criterion of defining the relationship between population and environment. From this follows the attempt to define the homeland in the broadest possible terms, by 'harking back to golden ages when the community supposedly ruled vast areas that are now occupied and settled by others' (Williams & Smith, 1983). Another aspect is that the historic territory of nationalist dream and theory so often exceeds in scope both the contemporary administrative area designated as the homeland, as well as the actual extent of territory occupied by a majority of the community's members, as defined by, for example, linguistic or religious affiliation. Examples of this disjunction between region, culture and historic homeland are provided in the history of Croatia, Brittany, Greece, Albania and Ulster among others (Williams & Smith, 1983).

In many cases, this historic territory of nationalist dream that falls outside the borders of the nation-state has turned into a lost national homeland. Usually, in these cases, population transfers followed traumatic military defeats and led to imaginative reconstructions of the lost territories. These reconstructions bore heavily the signs of nostalgia and entered the fabric of nationalist symbolisation in the form of lost national homelands. Whether claims to the lost homelands are put forward or not, this article argues that the lost homelands turned into national symbols functioning as unique and distinguishing national elements for the group identity. Still, how are the lost homelands constructed? The ethno-symbolist theoretical approach provides a model for the construction of national homelands. This article argues that the same model may be applied for the construction also of the *lost* national homelands.

Ethno-symbolism directs attention to ideational, non-material elements in the emergence of nations—symbols, myths and shared memories and experiences. Other theoretical approaches, for example modernism, emphasise 'modern' material-technological factors in the emergence of nations such as industrialisation and print capitalism. In particular, the ethno-symbolist approach provides an analytical framework for the construction of national homelands and argues that war—and especially defeat in war—strengthens ethnic self-consciousness and ethnic imagination. As the subject of this article is a symbolic imaginative concept—the lost homelands—that is usually formed after national defeats, the ethno-symbolist approach seems as the most appropriate point of departure. However, the case studied in this article also differs, since ethno-symbolism analyses the construction of national homelands, while the article examines the construction of *lost* national homelands. This means that the concept of

lost homelands is an exclusively abstract construct, since there is no actual space to become nationalised in practice. One may inquire on the role of irredentist movements in the construction of the lost homelands, but the difference lies in the fact that irredentism sees the 'national' territories outside the nation-state as 'unredeemed' and waiting to be 'liberated' (Mayall, 1994) rather than 'lost'. Nevertheless, the loss cannot prevent the imaginative conceptualisations of the lost national homelands; what is of particular importance here is not the territory or the fact of the defeat per se, but the myths, symbols and memories about them and their deployment in the construction of concepts like the lost homelands, which in turn strengthen ethnic individuality and self-consciousness.

Ethno-symbolism might seem the most appropriate point of departure for the analysis of the lost homelands; however, one should not overlook some major points of criticism, relevant for this article. Walker Connor notes a conceptual confusion, manifested in the interchangeable use of the terms ethnicity, ethnic group and nation (Connor, 1994: chapter 4), while Konstantin Symmons-Symonolewicz argues that the confusion is partly caused by the absence of a generally accepted definition of the nation (Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1985, p. 220). Symmons-Symonolewicz further claims that Smith attributes to all ethnic groups a fully developed group consciousness and a sense of history, eliminating the differences between ethnic and national phenomena (Symmons-Symonolewicz, 1985, p. 219). He further argues that most pre-modern groups were not aware of the cultural idiosyncrasies that differentiated them from others. John Breuille further strengthens this by arguing that it is not possible to know the meaning of these sentiments for the majority of the people, as there is no data on the ideas, opinions and feelings of the masses (Breuille, 1996, p. 151). Breuille offers another criticism relevant to this article, arguing that although myths and symbols of the past are employed by nationalist intellectuals and politicians to promote a particular national identity, 'it is very difficult to correlate their degree of success with the "objective" importance of such myths and symbols' (Breuille, 1996, p. 151). In many cases, nationalists invent myths, ignoring those that do not fit their purposes, while many nationalist movements have succeeded without a rich ethno-history to draw upon (Breuille, 1996).

2 | ETHNO-SYMBOLISM AND THE HOMELAND

Regarding the construction of homeland, ethno-symbolism embarks from the proposition that through the ages, every community, whether tribal, religious, local or national, has pictured a homeland in some form or another; from this perspective, ethno-symbolism regards the homeland as a trans-historical category that dates back to pre-modern attachments of people to land. Indeed, this is how emergent nationalist ideologies in late 18th- and 19th-century Europe construed the 'motherland' (or 'fatherland'), when providential myths of the nation's pedigree and rootedness legitimated territorial claims (Williams & Smith, 1983, pp. 502–503).

Nationalism, whatever else it may be, always entails an assertion of, or struggle for, control of land, as a landless nation is a contradiction in terms (Smith, 1999, p. 149). Ethnic communities may be severed from their historic territories (like the Greek, Armenian and Jewish Diasporas) (Sheffer, 1986, pp. 1–15), but the image of their own landscape always kept on suffusing their collective consciousness by its imprint on their education, liturgy or oral traditions. However, the creation of nations calls for a land 'of their own', a special place for the nation to inhabit. This cannot be any land, but an historic, ancestral homeland that can only provide the physical and emotional security that the citizens of the nation require (Smith, 1991).

After an examination of Smith's approach on the construction of national homelands, one distinguishes four themes that stem from his analysis. According to Smith, these themes are what nation-building projects develop in order to bind a population with a specific territory and construct an 'ancestral homeland' (Smith, 1986, 1998, 1999). These are (1) the element of national continuity in time and space; (2) accounts of historical events that affected 'our' people; (3) cultivation of memories of 'our ancestors' and forebears, especially saintly and heroic; and (4) uses of space, and depictions of the landscape, sites and symbolic monuments. These four themes provide a methodological tool that help us examine and deconstruct nationalism's attachment to land. Employed from a different angle though, the same themes are used to conceptually reconstruct the lost homeland.

2.1 | Continuity

Continuity in time and over space is something that all modern nationalisms strive to instil in their followers, in order to 'prove' and 'verify' the ownership of a particular territory by an ethnic group. However, there are very few examples where a given ethnic group may actually prove direct and undisrupted continuity in a territory for a very long period in the flow of history (Smith, 1999, p. 63). One may argue that continuity is an important element of the myth of spatial origins (Smith, 1986, p. 192), since space is a necessary dimension for a self-definition framework, and assumes special importance where claims to territory are being forwarded and contested. Spatial origins legitimate control over land and assume an important role in controlling change by locating it in a distinctive area. No matter how drastic the change may be, it is always associated to a specific territory, a place that functions as a point of reference for the historical development, in a way that uprooted individuals are 'restored', if not physically at least symbolically, to 'their' homeland (Smith, 1999, p. 64). Once constructed, the homeland helps to define the nation, by delineating its boundaries and providing its 'home'.

In the case of the lost homelands, nationalist ideologies emphasise national continuity in those territories up to a certain historical point, a dramatic event that resulted in the abrupt and violent ending of national presence in the area. Nationalists strive to rediscover and link the layers of the lost homelands' 'national' history, usually by demonstrating that an eternal 'national' core had always been there, unaffected by historical flow. In cultivating this sense of 'national' continuity in the lost homelands, nationalists attempt to verify that until the event that led to the national exodus from those territories, their 'title deeds' belonged historically to the nation, primarily because of co-nationals who lived there continuously since antiquity.

2.2 | Historical accounts

Another way to attach a community to a particular land is by depicting the historical events that affected that community. The land is felt over time to have provided the unique setting for the events that shaped the community and its collective consciousness as such. The misfortunes and exploits in which they participated took place in that particular setting and the features of that setting became part of those experiences and the collective memories to which they gave rise. These historical accounts are part of what Smith terms 'ethno-history'; this is defined as 'the ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any objective and dispassionate analysis by professional historians' (Smith, 2003, p. 169). It is not history as a professional and institutionalised enquiry into those events that these accounts depict, but the selective, shared memories of successive generations of the members of the community. These historical accounts are engaged in the consolidation and transmission of the communal traditions, as well as their reinterpretation and reconstruction, while the ethnic past that they reinterpret and reconstruct is at the same time a usable and a sacred past (Smith, 2003, pp. 169–170). Usable because it represents cultural resources which may be employed for many present purposes and in different ways—for status and power, legitimation, mobilisation or as title deeds—and sacred as some of these pasts are objects of awe and reverence (Smith, 2003, p. 171).

2.3 | Saints and heroes

Heroes are generally seen as exemplars of national virtue, as representatives of 'the people' and as the instruments of national destiny. They are also regarded as 'authentic' and as such rooted in the soil of the homeland. Their message is always pertinent; they provide models of conduct, while their exploits constitute *exempla virtutis*, worthy of emulation in each new generation. Heroes, geniuses and prophets like Moses, Leonidas, Arthur, Shakespeare, Wallace and Bruce, Saladin, Rousseau, Marat and Garibaldi have come to embody the popular will, the virtues and

interests of the nation. Whether legendary or historical, popular memory 'has elevated them above everyday politics and historical flow as they disclosed in some way the inner goodness of the nation and personified its virtues and hopes' (Smith, 2003, p. 41).

However, what has actually been significant is heroism and genius, rather than any particular heroes and geniuses. What counts is the virtues and qualities they embody and the message of hope they assert rather than this or that personage. They are treated, of course, as historical figures by the authors that examine them, but no great distinction is made between objective historical fact and legend or myth. The appeal of heroes resides in their ability to stir the imagination by presenting a panorama of nobility and by inspiring an ambition to emulate their qualities. Yet their significance in their own land and community lies in their particular virtue and unique context, as this virtue is peculiar to a specific group and the context is relevant to a single community and its habitat. Heroes, like monuments or unique natural features, are not sought out for themselves, but because they symbolise an age of glory and heroism which provides a model for communal regeneration (Smith, 1986, pp. 192–193).

Moreover, the graves of those glorious ancestors bear witness to the uniqueness and antiquity of particular landscapes, which are of special importance for the members of the community. Hence, the community develops an exceptional affinity with a particular historical landscape commemorated in chronicles and monuments and celebrated in epic and ballad. As the land forms the last resting place of those ancestors, their graves witness the group's survival as a cultural community and help to bring a close association between the land and the community, such that the people are felt to belong to the specific territory and the territory to that particular people.

2.4 | Uses of space

Many groups of people have endowed the specific terrain they occupy with powerful emotional connotations and cultural meanings. It is what Smith terms historic 'ethnoscapes':

an extent of land that presents a tradition of continuity and is held to constitute an ethnic unity, because the terrain invested with collective significance is felt to be integral to a particular historical community, and the community is seen as an intrinsic part of that poetic landscape. (Smith, 1999, p. 150)

Ethnoscapes emerge as the terrain in consideration is felt over time to have provided the distinctive and indispensable setting for the events that shaped the character of the community. The battles and exploits, the wanderings, misdeeds and triumphs in which 'our' people participated took place in a particular landscape and the features of that landscape have become part of those experiences and the collective memories which they create.

In analysing the fusion of community and terrain, Smith has developed the theory of the 'territorialisation of memory'. This is a two-fold process, which incorporates the historicisation of nature and the naturalisation of history. First, the historicisation of nature covers a series of processes, by which land and its natural features—mountains, lakes, rivers and the like—are treated as intrinsic elements of the history and development of the community. Second, the naturalisation of history regards history as part of nature, as an extension of the community's terrain and its natural features. This involves the provision of a natural setting for the resting places of 'our' ancestors, such that it binds the generations to the land, and the graves of these ancestors are felt to be an intrinsic part of nature. The process further involves the naturalisation of historical monuments, which for later generations are treated as part of the community's natural setting and are taken for granted (Smith, 2003, p. 136).

All kinds of buildings, sacred sites and natural features can demarcate and locate a community in a landscape. They do so by recalling dramatic events, symbolic crises or turning points in the history of the community and by endowing them with foci of creative energy. According to Smith, this is the fourth way that a community is associated with its habitat, which is gradually turned to an ancestral homeland.

3 | LOST HOMELANDS IN THE EAST

In the literature of nationalism, one comes across various typologies, none of which is exhaustive (Gellner, 1983). However, a bipolar typology is widely accepted that distinguishes nationalism in two types. The first is the 'territorial' nationalism, based on the 'Western', civic-territorial model of the nation, and the second is the 'ethnic' type, based on the 'Eastern', ethnic-genealogical model of the nation (Smith 1991, pp. 82–83).

Territorial nationalism developed in the West—in England, France, the Netherlands, the United States and Switzerland—and came after the formation of the modern state (or, as in the case of the United States, it coincided with it). In this type of nationalism, (a) ethnicity is usually less important than citizenship which is granted to all inhabitants of a territory, regardless of their ethnic background; (b) regardless of the level of ethno-cultural homogeneity of the population, it is the state that constructs national identity, through the bureaucratic incorporation of the masses into the culture of a dominant ethnicity; (c) the development of capitalism pre-exists (or at least coincides with) the development of nationalism; and (d) nationalism allows for the development of a tolerant political culture, and a strong civic society (Mavratsas, 1998, p. 40).

Ethnic nationalism developed in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe during the 19th century and gradually spread to the rest of the world. In this type, (a) citizenship is directly connected to ethnicity; (b) nationalism arose before the establishment of the modern state, although the state—once formed—assumes the construction of national identity; (c) nationalism comes before capitalism; and (d) nationalism does not allow for the development of a liberal political system and a strong civic society (Gellner, 1994; Mavratsas, 1998; Mouzelis, 1994). Critics however argue that the distinction is not absolute and elements of both types can be found in all nationalisms (Shulman, 2002).

Nationalisms outside the Western world found their first expressions in the cultural field, because of the backward state of social and political development (lack of modern institutions, capitalist development etc.). They started off as the hopes and dreams of an intelligentsia, unsupported by public opinion, since public opinion did not exist and the intelligentsia strove to create it. Instead of being a venture in policy-shaping and government, these nationalisms engaged with education and propaganda (Kohn, 1994, p. 164). Still, all rising nationalisms outside Western Europe were influenced by the West that provided for the model of development. Nonetheless, as soon as the native educated elites began to develop their own nationalisms, they strove to disassociate themselves from the Western European 'alien' example and its liberal perspective. Having established its original impulse from contact with an older/Western nationalism, every new nationalist movement made every effort to justify and differentiate itself by looking at its own past heritage and the praised and ancient depth and peculiarities of its traditions and grew at odds with the universal standards and rationality of the West. Western nationalisms developed in an effort to establish a nation in the political reality of the present, without much sentimental affection for the past. On the contrary, nationalisms outside the West often created an ideal motherland out of past myths and future dreams, closely associated with the past, lacking connection with the present (and expected sometime to become a political reality). Therefore, they took the liberty to embellish this motherland with traits that they could not achieve, but which influenced the emerging nation's aspiring self-image and sense of mission.

As one would expect, ideas of lost national homelands did not develop in Western, territorial nations, as these usually arose after the formation of the state, through the bureaucratic incorporation of the population into the nation.¹ In addition, in most of these cases, history and geography coexist harmoniously and merge into one identity. The so-called 'new nations' are an illustrative example, as they were constructed almost entirely on the basis of geographical traits and considered history irrelevant. An example is the development of American national identity in the 19th century that was centred on the perceived wilderness and endless frontier of American geography and an explicit desire to leave the past behind (Hooson, 1994, p. 5). However, in the Eastern ethnic nationalisms that over-emphasised history in order to back up and legitimise political and territorial claims, ideas of lost national homelands frequently flourish, as there seems to be unfinished business with the past. In many Eastern nationalisms, national identity has become disengaged from place or territorial considerations and claims to land are more of a historical

rather than of geographical nature (Mavratsas, 2010, p. 149). An example is Serbian nationalism, for which Kosovo is Serbian because of its history and despite its geography—because it is considered as the cradle of Serbian culture and despite the fact that its inhabitants are overwhelmingly Albanian. In Western civic nations, the homeland is seen as a material resource defined by the boundaries of the state, while in Eastern ethnic nations, the homeland tends to be seen as an emotive, cultural entity—a geographical extension of ‘the people’ (Penrose, 2002, p. 291). The Greek case is illustrative.

4 | ASPECTS OF GREEK NATIONALISM

Since its early formulations, Greek national identity has been characterised by its self-perceived ambivalent position at the crossroads between East and West. This ambivalence has been mirrored in both Greek cultural identity (Tsoukalas, 1994) and the country's foreign policy (Heraclides, 1995). On the one hand, Greek identity has looked to the East and the Greek Orthodox and Byzantine heritage, envisaging the restoration of the Byzantine empire under Greek control. On the other, Greek identity has looked to the West that provided for nationalist inspiration and actual support for the 19th-century young Greek state, as well as a reference point for the country's political and cultural orientation in the 20th century. This latter view claimed a continuing spiritual affinity of the modern Western ideals with those of classical Athens and emphasised the cultural heritage of classical antiquity of the modern Greeks. Although Greek nationalist narrative succeeded in establishing a continuous national past by linking ancient classical Greece to Byzantium, the internal clash between East and West persists as a distinctive element of contemporary Greek identity (Heraclides, 1995).

Despite the fact that the Enlightenment and its liberal values stimulated late 18th-century Greek nationalism (Kitromilides, 1990, pp. 25–33; Veremis, 1983, pp. 59–60), since the foundation of the independent Greek state the nation was defined primarily in reference to common ancestry, language, culture and religion (Kitromilides, 1990, p. 30). Throughout the 19th century, Greek national identity and consciousness was formed around the irredentist ‘Great Idea’ (Megali lthea). This was a political, cultural and eventually military project of integrating into an enlarged Greek state territories populated by Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians who lived outside the state borders. This irredentist project epitomised the political expression of the ethnically, religiously and culturally linguistically defined Greek nation (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002, p. 193). The ‘Great Idea’ further promoted the unification of a traditional and internally divided society, transforming it into a nation-state. So Greece became the national centre, the political and cultural base for all Greek populations living in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans (Kitromilides, 1983).

Historical sources indicate that the term ‘Great Idea’ was first used by Ioannis Kolettis in 1844, in his fervent support for the expansion of Greek civilisation to the East:

The Greek kingdom is not the whole of Greece, but only a part, the smallest and poorest part. A Greek is not only someone who lives within this Kingdom, but also one who lives in Ioannina, in Thessaly, in Serres, in Adrianople, in Constantinople, in Trebizond, in Crete, in Samos and in any land associated with Greek history or the Greek race (quoted in Clogg, 2013)

In the first half of the 19th century, there were two cultural centres of Hellenism: Athens was the capital of the Kingdom and Constantinople, the great capital of the medieval Byzantine Empire, the ‘dream and hope of all Greeks’ (Leonti, 1995). Constantinople was perceived as the centre of Hellenism, while Athens as just the temporary administrative centre of the Greek state. Athens represented the link with the glorious—but distant—ancient classical Greek past, favoured by the West and the attempts to establish a modern national identity. Constantinople, on the other hand, represented the link with Orthodox Christianity and the more recent medieval Byzantine past—not so popular in the West—and the attempts to resurrect a multinational medieval Empire. During this period, Constantinople was

the symbol of an imagined, Pan-Hellenic union on the grounds of the Greek language and Orthodox—in contrast with the western, Latin Christianity (Leonti, 1995). The ‘Great Idea’ dictated the territorial expansion of the Greek state to encompass the territories of the former Byzantine Empire and Constantinople fell naturally at the centre of this vision (Peckham, 2001). This ambivalence between East and West ended officially with the abandonment of the ‘Great Idea’ policies and the re-evaluation of ‘Greekness’ that followed the Asia Minor disaster in 1922.

Thus, Athens, with its privileged and undisputed relationship with the classical Greek past and capital of the nation state surfaced as the sole national centre, as well as the centre of all nation-building policies. A refashioned and idealised Athenian culture and linguistic idiom surfaced as exemplars for the entire nation and were imposed through the Athenian-controlled state institutions on the whole country, in an attempt to ostracise local dialects, allegiances and traditions that deviated from an Athenian-established national norm (Fragkoudaki, 2001).² The homogenisation process of the nation-building was fierce, and it managed to eradicate the local dialects of the different peripheries and populations and establish a strong and unified national culture (Fragkoudaki, 2001; Mackridge, 2009).

5 | THE LOST HOMELANDS OF HELLENISM

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Greek populations residing outside the Kingdom's boundaries were included in the imagined community of the Greek nation, and as a result, the lands they occupied were viewed as part of the nation's ancestral homeland (Exertzoglou, 2016). Borders at the time were still fluid, and many areas were claimed as Greek by virtue of these populations (i.e., Eastern Rumelia, Thrace and the western coast of Asia Minor). A distinction at this point is necessary, between the Greek imagined ‘homeland’—that is the territorial claims of the 19th-century irredentist ‘Great Idea’—and the ‘lost homelands’, as not all territories claimed by the 19th-century ‘Great Idea’ turned to ‘lost homelands’ in the 20th. The term ‘lost homelands’ refers to those areas the Greek Orthodox populations of which fled to the Greek state after the military defeat of 1922 or were expelled according to the Lausanne Convention (Greek Foreign Ministry, 1923); these are Eastern Thrace and Constantinople, Asia Minor, Pontus and Cappadocia.

The term ‘lost homelands’ was invented in the 1960s as a metaphor for Asia Minor and its constituent parts (Liakos, 2011). This term refers to a memory culture accommodating both nostalgia for the ‘lost homelands’ and the revisiting of the trauma of exodus by later generations of refugees (Exertzoglou, 2016, p. 346). The fact that the term was invented in the 1960s is not a mere coincidence. During the period from the disaster of 1922 to its 40th anniversary in 1962, other significant events occurred—the Greek-Italian war, the Axis occupation, the civil war—that often overshadowed official rhetoric and public awareness. However, the idea of lost homelands was also being conceptualised in this period and reached the zenith of its expression in the 40th anniversary of the disaster in 1962, through various publications, ceremonies, special commemoration services and social events in almost all refugee quarters and settlements, all over the country. Important publications of that year include Dido Sotiriou's *Farewell Anatolia* and Kosmas Politis' *Stou Hadjifragkou* (Kitroeff, 2012). The many events that were organised by different local societies to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the disaster took place throughout that year and in different parts of Greece: in Patras on 21 January, organised by the Achaean Society where minister Solomonides talked on ‘Smyrna the unforgettable Greek City’; in Thessaloniki on 4 March, organised by the Ionian Hearth, titled ‘The Unforgettable Greek Smyrna’; in Thessaloniki on 9 April, again organised by the Ionian Hearth on the ‘need of an Asia Minor Arc’; on 2 September, a commemoration service in Athens was held by the Archbishop of Greece on ‘Ethno-martyr’ Chrysostomos of Smyrna and the victims of the disaster; in Thebes on 2 December, an event was organised by the Union of Refugees of Thebes on the ‘Memory of Smyrna’; and so on (check *Mikrasiatika Chronika* reference is correct: *Mikrasiatika Chronika* in Smyrneon, 1964).³

The years between 1922 and 1962 allowed for a period of latency during which the trauma of the disaster was being processed, re-formed and worked through cognitively, physically and emotionally. Traumas recall a moment of

violent intrusion or a collapse of meaning that the collective consciousness was unable to comprehend or to grasp its full importance when it occurred. After a period of latency, they can be remembered, worked through and expressed. Similarly, triumphs are moments of effervescence and exhilaration. The event recalled as triumphant may have not been experienced as such at the time it occurred; however, collective memory exalts it and imagines it retrospectively as a moment of paramount intensity. This initial lack of significance has to be overcome with ritual re-enactments of the event in annual celebrations and through narration and mythologisation (Giesen, 2000, p. 229).

Smyrna is seen as the very encapsulation of the lost homelands—the symbol of this concept. If we were to employ strict ethno-symbolist terms, Smyrna would be the symbol of the national myth of the lost homelands. It is a myth in the sense of constructed memory and oblivion and in the sense that we cannot lose something that was never institutionally ‘ours’. Since the Asia Minor territories briefly occupied by Greece during the 1919–1922 Asia Minor campaign were never officially annexed to the Greek state and thus never underwent the nation-building consolidation practices, while the Greek element residing there was a minority, those territories were never really ‘Greek’ in the modern national and institutional sense of the term. Hence, their ‘loss’ is a bit problematic, as they were never really ‘ours’. The Anatolian Greeks might consider them their individual homelands, but they were not an institutionalised collective homeland of the whole nation. Thus, the lost homelands are seen as a constructed imaginative concept, a myth. With the population exchange and the gradual incorporation of the refugees in the Greek society, the refugees underwent the institutionalised nation-building practices of the state and were integrated in the Greek national corpus. At the same time, their distinctive culture (i.e., ‘Rebetiko’ music, cuisine, etc.) fused with the national one and the refugee particular cultural elements became integral parts of the general national culture. One of these particular elements was the refugees’ lost homelands, which, with the refugees’ fusion into the Greek institutionalised nation, turned into lost homelands of the nation (Koulos, 2016).

An example of the symbolisation of Smyrna as the epitome of the lost homelands in Greek historical culture may be seen in the clash over the history textbook of the sixth elementary grade in 2006–2007. The book, published in 2006 by a team led by the leftist historian Maria Repousi, was met with fierce resistance and extreme reactions from teachers, the Church, right-wing politicians and Members of Parliament, refugee associations and various organisations of civil society (such as parents’ associations), on the charge that it ‘deconstructed Greek history and national identity’ because (a) it neither sufficiently praised national heroes nor adequately highlighted glorious moments of the national past, (b) it downplayed national traumas and (c) it overlooked the contribution of the Church in national awakening (Athanasziades, 2014).⁴ As the report of the Athens Academy underlined, the book ‘neither forges national memory, nor heightens Greek self-awareness’, arguing that the judgement about the book ‘needs to be premised on the constitutional imperative—the development by means of education of the national consciousness of the Greeks’ (Academia Athinon, 2007). Repousi defended the book by arguing that it strove to overcome national stereotypes about the Greek nation itself and national others. Interestingly—for this article—the point in the book that caused most reactions 2006 about the Asia Minor disaster and the mention that after the defeat of the Greek army, ‘Greek refugees crowded at the harbour of Smyrna’ (Repousi, 2006). The reactions to the use of the verb ‘crowded’ were so intense that the Ministry of Education finally withdrew the book in 2007. This case is an illustrative example of the power the symbol of Smyrna and of the lost homelands have come to possess and their meaning for contemporary Greek national identity. The book itself and the use of the verb ‘crowded’ in particular were felt to be disrespectful to the part of Greek national identity that responds to the bond with the lost homelands, as it challenged the constructed memories of what happened at the harbour of Smyrna in 1922. A few days after the defeat of the Greek Army and the entrance of the Turkish Army in Smyrna in August 1922, the city was set on fire and a considerable part of the Christian population that had sought refuge and means to escape at the waterfront was slaughtered. The burning of Smyrna constitutes the backbone of the collective refugee memory that is stamped in dull images, harrowing engravings, sorrow songs and bloodied novels (Athanasziades, 2014). These memories point to such a tragic and dramatic situation of the Greek refugees after the entrance of the Turkish army into the city that the word ‘crowded’ was felt to be too diminishing and offending for this historical ‘injustice’. The reactions were

fierce, and their power enough to ostracise the book from Greek schools, as the book was felt to challenge Greek national 'sentiment'.

In the aftermath of the First World War, and with the treaty of Sevres, Greece was given permission by the Allied forces to occupy the city of Smyrna and its mainland on the west coast of Asia Minor, where a sizeable Greek population resided. This was seen as a national triumph since Greece would liberate more territories that were perceived to be 'unredeemed'. Thus, the Greek forces launched a campaign—the Asia Minor campaign—with the mission to overcome Turkish resistance and permanently annex western Asia Minor to an enlarged Greek state (Gallant, 2016). For the next 3 years, they pursued the Turkish nationalist troops advancing deep in the Asia Minor peninsula. However, in August 1922, they were defeated outside Ankara and what could be salvaged of the Greek army retreated to the coast and from there to the nearby islands. The disaster was completed with the entrance of the Turkish army in the metropolis of Smyrna, the atrocities against its Christian Orthodox population and the city's final burning (Clogg, 2013; Hirschon, 1998). The defeat was concluded with the 1923 Lausanne Convention and the mandatory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. As a result, about 1.5 million Greek Orthodox Christians from Asia Minor and eastern Thrace were exchanged with 500,000 Muslims of Greece (Kontogiorgi, 2006; Yildirim, 2006a, 2006b). The 'Asia Minor disaster'—as it is known in Greek historiography—marked the end of the centuries' long Greek presence in Asia Minor and eastern Thrace and the failure of the nationalist dream of the 'Great Idea'. Ever since, the lost homelands have been a point of reference in Greek historical culture, as the disaster changed the worldview and character of the Greek nation-state (Hirschon, 1998; Liakos, 2007).

The role of the 1922 refugees was substantial to all subsequent developments in Greece. Constituting about 20% of the country's population (Kitroeff, 2012), they strongly influenced its political, economic and social life over the next decades (Hirschon, 2003; Vakalopoulos, 2001).⁵ However, the narrowing of geographical horizons was followed by a deep identity crisis, as the values of Greekness that had rested on irredentism and the 'Great Idea' were perceived now to be bankrupt. Smyrna came to encapsulate the disaster and was seen as the theatre of the last Greek tragedy in Asia Minor, while the burning of the city symbolised the definite and violent end of Greek presence in the East.

After the first few years of the disaster and with the passage of time healing the wounds, the nightmare of the refugee flight lost its lifelike quality and the horror of the campaign was blurred. Subsequently, the identity crisis was followed by a deep nostalgia reflecting the expatriates' affection for their place of birth. Having been forced to emigrate, the transferred people constantly considered themselves uprooted. Instead of adapting themselves to, and accepting the new environment, they longed to return to their birthplaces and carry on their interrupted way of life, which acquired an aura of mystery, an overtone of melancholy that made it more appealing and made its absence much more painful. Their lost homeland became an eternal, idyllic and mysterious 'East', characterised by gentleness, cosmopolitanism, material wealth, open spaces and fertile soils (Mackridge, 1986). An example may be found in Stratis Myrivilis' novel *The Mermaid Madonna*: 'in this Promised Land the mountains are so high that the snow never melts [...]; there are golden seas of wheat that feed the poor throughout the winter, the great rivers flow with rose-sugar and milk, and the bunches of grapes hanging from the vines are as big as babies' (Myrivilis, 1985, p. 26).

As a result, Asia Minor was idolised in their collective memories, and particularly, Smyrna turned out to symbolise a 'lost Paradise'. This was primarily expressed through the post-1922 Greek literature that made Smyrna the symbol of this national turmoil (Mackridge, 1986, 1992),⁶ a symbol to remind of the end of an era of irredentism and excessive national expectations, which were rooted in the religious beliefs for the 'resurrection' of the Byzantine Empire. It became a symbol of the rebirth of Neo-Hellenism after a re-examination of national values and ideals, a symbol to remind the Greeks who they were, who they are and what is their destiny. It turned into a mechanism for the reproduction of national identity, based on the memory of the common suffering for the loss of relatives, social groups but mostly the loss of 'Paradise'. Smyrna gradually acquired the status of 'Paradise' and symbolised in Christian terms the fall of Adam and Eve and the definite exile of humanity from 'Eden'. Disassociated from the geographical location of modern-day Izmir, Smyrna entered the sphere of national imagination, reflecting what Paradise looked like. An example is Kosmas Politis' novel *Stou Hadzifrangou*, where the main character is the city of Smyrna,

whose name is so sacred that it is not pronounced anywhere in the book, even though specific locations and streets of the city are named (Mackridge, 2003): Moreover, the lost homelands provided a symbolic framework to unite and integrate into Greek society the quite diverse refugee groups and to give them a sense of belonging, identity, autonomy and authenticity. Bestowed with social magnetism and psychological charge and promoted by literature, personal witness stories and collective commemorative practices, this symbol became a strong element of the basis of Greek national heritage. The flames that burned the city were meant to haunt the consciousness of future Greek generations and to always remind what 'they' did to 'us'—to distinguish the enemy from the nation, explaining 'who we are' to ourselves and to others, thus constructing a powerful and durable national barrier (Koulos, 2016).

In the context of Greek nation-building before 1922, Asia Minor had been unequivocally projected as Greek. This process of nationalisation/Hellenisation of space was designed to back up national territorial claims through the 'Great Idea' nationalist project. A speech of Venizelos in 1914 with regard to the pogroms of the Ottomans against the Asia Minor Greek Orthodox is illustrative: 'the Greek government feels that if the pogroms against our Asia Minor brothers do not immediately end, the Greek State will not remain passive for long'.⁷ This polemic rhetoric of Venizelos utilised the 1914 ordeal of the Asia Minor Greeks to justify action against the Ottomans that would finally take place with the 1919 campaign. In the post-disaster era, this process continued unabated, albeit this time around seeking to articulate an image of a Greek Asia Minor through time immemorial by building 'lost homelands' (Koulos, 2016). Reconstructing the 'Greekness' of the allegedly 'lost' territories on an imaginary level, the nation-building process reinforced an image and corresponding perceptions of them as ancestral Greek homelands.

The idea of the lost homelands was constructed through the themes of the continuity of Hellenism in those areas, various historical events with Anatolian Greeks at their centre, memories of local saints and prominent national figures associated with the region and descriptions of the landscape, sites and symbolic monuments of Asia Minor. Continuity was established by demonstrating that an eternal Greek core had continuously lived there from antiquity until 1922, 'verifying' that until 1922 the 'title deeds' of those areas belonged historically to the Greeks. Examples of this include, among others, the reference to the 'dramatic end of the centuries-long Greek presence in the region' in the sixth primary school grade history textbook,⁸ as well as the novel *Stou Hatzifragkou* of Kosmas Politis. In Politis' novel, when the characters refer to the ancient past of Smyrna, they mention 'their compatriot Homer himself' (Politis, 1988). Historical events that had involved Anatolian Greeks were reconstructed in various ways. For example, the Asia Minor disaster will always be associated with the harbour of Smyrna and the drama that unfolded there. Examples of historical reconstructions of these events may be found in the standard history textbooks of Greek school where the Asia Minor 'disaster' is always included,⁹ as well as the 1914 pogroms against the Asia Minor Greeks.¹⁰ Memories of saintly and heroic Greek ancestors were systematically assigned to the lost territories in an attempt to re-affirm their 'Greekness'. An illustrative example is the metropolitan Chrysostomos of Smyrna, who found a tragic death in the hands of a Turkish mob after the entrance of the Turkish army in Smyrna. His tragic story is reproduced—among others—in the history textbook taught in the last year of secondary education (Triti Lykeiou): 'Nureddin came out on the balcony and shouted at the mob that Chrysostomos was theirs to judge and do as they please [...] they grabbed the metropolitan and dragged him to a barber [...] then knives came out and the mob fell on him. Before he died, Chrysostomos was horrifically mutilated'.¹¹ Lastly, natural features and significant sites and landmarks of the lost territories are described in works of literature and history textbooks that also include photographs of those sites. An example of literary reconstruction of the legendary belltower of St. Fotini Church of Smyrna may be found in Dido Sotirious' *Farewell Anatolia*:

And then I was just staring at the belltower. Twenty meters high and four marble floors. And a sculpted Christ sitting by a well talking to the Samaritan. And the fancy and sweet-sounding bells that were a gift of the Russian Dukes, and on top of the dome a golden cross shining in the sun, providing comfort and pride to the Rayias, as it was standing higher than the crescent of the Isar mosque. (Sotiriou, 1962, p. 45)

Regarding history textbooks, we find a photo of the harbour of Smyrna and St. Fotini Church in the standard history textbook of the last year of secondary education (Triti Lykeiou); the quay of Smyrna is depicted in the standard textbook of the last year of primary school (Ekti Dimotikou); the Greek school of Trabzon is depicted in the standard textbooks taught throughout secondary education (Triti Gymnasiou, Triti Lykeiou), while photographs showing Smyrna in flames and the harbour packed with fleeing refugees are found in the textbooks of both primary and secondary education (Ekti Dimotikou, Triti Lykeiou).¹²

The idea of the lost homelands is ideologically charged, as it was constructed retrospectively and through the 'prism' of the trauma of the defeat and the ensuing population exchange. This process allowed for a mythic mode of perception to develop the lost homelands as a national myth—in the sense of constructed memory and oblivion. The memories that were (re)constructed were of the Greek life of the lost homelands and were oblivious to alternative realities. The case of the Greek lost homelands is one of latent irredentism. Although no actual claims are put forward towards a re-conquest or re-settlement of Asia Minor by current Greek nationalist ideology, the very perception of those territories as lost homelands perpetuates their 'Greekness' in the national imagination, largely by virtue of the Greek populations who lived there until 1922 (Koulos, 2016, p. 145).

Nonetheless, this idea of the lost homelands is not particular to Greek nationalism, as there are other examples where mass displacement of an ethnic group from its homeland has given rise to similar ideas about lost homelands. The German case of the lost homelands (Heimat) of the eastern Reich that were lost mostly to Poland after the Second World War is illustrative (Rock & Wolff, 2002; Wolff, 2002). Another example is Palestine which has been the lost homeland of both Jews and Palestinian Arabs and forms the core of an ongoing conflict. The case of Armenia is also important, since the idea of the Armenian lost homelands—now part of Turkey—has been systematically employed in Armenian national identity construction, imagination and mythology (Smith, 1999).

6 | CONCLUSION

This article has attempted to draw attention to the relationship between nationalism and the lost homeland. It has argued that the same way nationalism constructs the national homeland, the same way it also constructs the *lost* national homeland. The difference is that the (re)construction of the *lost* national homeland is purely conceptual and imaginary and thus easier to shape it to an ideal national place. The lost homeland becomes a national symbol and a constituent element of national identity, inducing sentiments of national belonging.

Embarking from the ethno-symbolist approach, the article argues that the four themes outlined by Anthony Smith on the construction of national homeland may be employed to analyse the construction also of the *lost* national homeland. These are (a) national continuity, (b) historical accounts, (c) national heroes and (d) uses of space. Drawing from traumatic group experiences and utilising nostalgic sentiments, nationalism develops a bond to the lost homeland that results to the imaginary reconstructions and the mythologisation of it in group consciousness. The institutionalisation of memory of the lost homeland is important, as exile of the group from the homeland tends to reinforce its bond with it and leads to an endless search for roots discovered only through displacement (Leonti, 1995, p. 14). Ideas of lost homelands seem to be a characteristic of Eastern/ethnic nationalisms that have a more complex relationship with history and claims to land are often of a historical rather than of geographical nature.

The article further focused on aspects of Greek nationalism and the construction of the Greek lost homelands—territories in Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace where Greek Orthodox populations lived and were expelled after the 1922 defeat and the 1923 exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. Before 1922, Greek nation-building had projected these territories as Greek in order to back up territorial claims. After the defeat, this process continued articulating an image of those territories as Greek by building 'lost homelands'. The lost homelands turned thus to a symbol of Greek nationalism, based on the trauma of 1922.

National traumas do not merely reflect actual events or individual suffering, as they are symbolic representations that reconstruct and imagine such events in a somewhat independent way. This is the work of intellectuals—that is,

novelists, poets, directors, journalists, politicians and academics—who create cultural scripts that address the trauma. The truth of these narratives derives from the power of their enactment and not their descriptive accuracy, and they are performed ‘in the theaters of everyday collective life’ (Giesen, 2000, p. xxvii). National traumas generally have a cohesive impact and provide a self-definition framework for the nation. They symbolically reconstruct the nations as communities of suffering, reinforcing thus an idea of the national self. In this sense often, national traumas, like defeats in war, persecutions, ethnic cleansing, deportations and even genocide practices, have a tremendous unifying power, sometimes more than national victories and triumphs. Group suffering in the name of the nation constitutes an authentication mechanism of communal existence and verifies the right to exist as such a collectivity.

National traumas further bind the nation to its historic homeland in two ways: first, by strengthening the idea of the nation itself, the nation that has a particular homeland; and second, by locating the traumatic experiences to the particular setting, the specific territory where they occurred. The landscape that provided the setting for the events that shaped the national community becomes an intrinsic element of this experience. The ‘nationalisation’ of the traumatic experience package includes the territory where this occurred, which is gradually felt to belong to the group.

The Asia Minor disaster, with the burning of Smyrna and the population exchange has been one of the most traumatic events for the Greek nation. Its appropriation by Greek nationalist ideology has been important in the construction of the lost homelands, since it built upon the loss, the loss of the war, the loss of the social fabric, the loss of community, the loss of lives and, most importantly, the loss of the homeland. The traumatic experience evolved around the expulsion and the loss of Smyrna and the Asia Minor homelands for the Greek nation, as they provided for the setting for the trauma. This is clear also from how this is referred to—as the ‘Asia Minor disaster’ or ‘the disaster of Smyrna’, locating the ‘disaster’ into a specific place, a locus of traumatic energy, instead of being just the ‘1922 war’. This way, this particular trauma provides nationalist ideology with valuable material—of collective memories, histories and myths—upon which to draw for the imaginative construction of the lost homelands (Koulos, 2016).

It seems that the bond that attached the Greeks to Anatolia was drawn much tighter by the traumatic experience of losing it. After all, being Greek and having undergone the institutionalised nation-building processes after 1922, one identifies himself with all those elements constituting a ‘Greek’; and one of these elements has been the concept of the lost homelands. As a prominent Smyrniot refugee stated in a speech in 1962, paraphrasing the psalm: ‘if we forget you o Jerusalem ... if we forget you o Smyrna, let our right hand forget her cunning’ (Solomonides, 1964, p. 177). Thus, exploring the meanings of ancestral homelands—and of *lost* homelands—is of particular importance ‘if we are to understand the foundations of modern national identities and the roots of some of the most bitter and protracted ethnic enmities and conflicts’ (Smith, 1999, p. 157).

ENDNOTES

¹ An exemption to this is the case of Ireland and Irish nationalism. See Hutchinson (2012).

² On the ‘language issue’, see Mpampiniotis (2011).

³ For a detailed account of all literary, newspaper and journal publications and all the commemoration events of 1962, see *Mikrasiatika Chronika* (1964), pp. 227–245.

⁴ See documentary <http://folders.skai.gr/main/theme?locale=el%20id=17>.

⁵ As a thorough analysis of the impact of the refugees on the social, political and economic developments in Greece after 1922 falls out of the scope of this article, see Pentzopoulos (1962), Vakalopoulos (2001) and Hirschon (2003).

⁶ Works of the ‘Literature of the Disaster’ include among others George Theotokas’ ‘Λεωνής’, (*Leonis*), 1940, Ilias Venezis’ ‘Το Νούμερο 31328’ (*Number 31328*), 1931 and ‘Αιολική Γή’ (*Aeolian Earth*), 1943, Kosmas Politis’ ‘Στον Χατζηφράγκο’ (*At Hatzifragos*), 1963 and Dido Sotiriou’s ‘Ματομένα Χώματα’ (*Farewell Anatolia*), 1962.

⁷ <http://www.haniotika-nea.gr/o-venizelos-i-smyrni-kai-i-arxi-tou-kakoy/> (accessed 25/09/2020).

⁸ Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, *Ιστορία ΣΤ'* Δημοτικού: chapter 5.

⁹ Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, *Ιστορία ΣΤ'* Δημοτικού: chapter 5. *Ιστορία Γ'* Γυμνασίου: chapter 38. *Ιστορία Γ'* Λυκείου: chapter 3B.

¹⁰ Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, *Θέματα Ελληνικής Ιστορίας Γ'* Λυκείου: chapter 3.

- ¹¹ Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, *Ιστορία Γ' Λυκείου*: chapter 3B.
- ¹² Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, *Ιστορία ΣΤ' Δημοτικού*: chapter 5. *Ιστορία Γ' Γυμνασίου*: chapter 38. *Ιστορία Γ' Λυκείου*: chapter 3B.

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