Experiments on Puerile Nations, or the Impossibility of Surpassing Your Father: The Case of the Anglo-Greek Dialogue

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Abstract This article is concerned with the dialogic construction of Greek national and British imperial identities. It examines the gendered language in which the Greeks and the British addressed each other in the 1860s and the 1870s. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, anthropology, studies of nationalism and post-colonial theory, it looks at the symbolic structure of Anglo-Greek cultural exchange. In this analysis, it is argued that the familial imageries both sides employed to describe themselves and/or each other were constitutive of the roles they had assumed in Anglo-Greek relations, but also part of the very process of Greek nation-building and British imperialism.

Keywords Britain; Dialogue; Evolutionism; Greece; Imperialism, Nationalism

Nation Birth in Western Discourse: The Case of Anglo-Greek Dialogue

The linguist and cultural theorist Ernest Gellner was quick to point out the nationalist’s nonsensical claim that nations are perennial entities, but at the same time they retain the magical power to be ‘born’ like any living organism in some nanoseconds of history.¹ This comment could be linked to the way the anthropologist Johannes Fabian read the notorious evolutionist project. According to Fabian, evolutionists furnished humanist epistemes with their repudiation of the chronicle time and the adoption of linear, chronological time. This implied a projection of the axis of time onto the axis of space, which enabled Enlightenment theorists to ‘map’ time and create a ‘hierarchy’ of species.²

Among the ‘species’ subjected to this enterprise, were nations. Those nations that could be modernised – that is, comply with the Western paradigm of political and social progress – were awarded, by an imaginary collective, but actually non-uniform, fictional entity called ‘the West’, a ‘bonus’. This bonus was nothing other than the successful nation’s promotion to a higher level in the hierarchy of civilisation. Inversely, those nations that presented signs of anomalous or belated development remained in the lower stages. Political disorder, social unrest and public insecurity were all signs of anomaly instead of being regarded as inherent in the process of modernisation – or, for the sake of political correctness, they were ‘the other side of modernity’.³ In this conjunction of circumstances, it was easier for the powerful and progressive powers of the West to justify their patronising attitude towards such backward nations and ethnicities.

One of the countries that did not escape the Eurocentric myth of modernisation was
Greece. A number of factors and reasons converged behind this unfortunate experience. In the diplomatic arena, the architects of the institution of modern Greece did not appear to be the Greeks themselves. Although the Greek struggle for independence, which lasted for eight years (1821–1828), made ‘Greekness’ and ‘heroism’ synonymous for European and American philhellenes, it went without saying that its successful end was due to the intervention of three of the Great Powers of Europe (Britain, France and Russia). Undoubtedly, and despite their romantic pretensions, which were embedded in the idea that modern Greece would embody ancient Hellenic civilisation, all of them had some economic interests in the region. Britain in particular was engaged in a constant struggle against Russia’s attempts to control the Dardanelles – an enterprise, which, if realised, would disturb the network of communication between Britain and her Indian colonies.

Putting British economic concerns aside for a while, one has to consider the impact of economic success on Victorian mentalité – in particular, the way the British reflected on the world and themselves. The optimism that abundance brought was coupled with a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the colonised, and gave birth to the idea of a civilising mission. The rationale of this mission was that if the British were able to produce wealth, then they could become agents in the improvement of the human condition. In the first half of the nineteenth century, when the tug of war and social revolutions threatened the very existence of other European countries, Britain remained almost intact. This was regarded as a godly sign. ‘Amidst the ruins of the old order, Britain was felt to be specially preserved by God and to have a central role in the fulfilment of purposes now hastening to their climax.”}

In Greece’s case, those ideals found their best application with the outbreak of the revolution in 1821. Even long before the war, English travellers would visit Greece to wander among the ruins of a past that came to have a special place in their own culture. It was often argued by modern historians that the classical education, which was à la mode in Britain for decades, had created philhellenism. It was also commonly held that philhellenism emanated from the feeling that those who would contribute to the improvement of the intellectual and political condition of the modern Greeks would simultaneously assist in the revival of ancient Hellenism. Often the contrast between classical ideals and present realities caused disappointment. Yet many Victorians continued to regard a trip to Greece as an adventure: it was remote enough to be exotic and close enough to be accessible. Under the spell of Byron’s Grecian poems, some Englishmen stayed in the rebel parts to fight battles and die for a dream; others were eager to spend fortunes for the Greek cause. Whether the Victorians wanted to admit it or not, the idea of ‘Greece’ was very special to them; it provided them with a mission and was vital to their prestige as agents of civilisation.

Yet the Greeks themselves had other plans for their nation. Once alive or resurrected, Greece should become a great empire, like that of their Byzantine predecessors. Greek irredentist plans, which were termed the ‘Great Idea’ in the second half of the nineteenth century, included the annexation of many Ottoman provinces populated by Greek-minded subjects – or populations the liberated Greeks wanted to regard as Greek. These populations were scattered across the Hellenic and the Balkan peninsulas in Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia, and the islands of the Aegean Sea. The belligerent policy of the Greeks was a nuisance for Britain, which was anxious to retain the current political order in the East, especially in the Ottoman Empire, whose presence kept Russian imperialist plans under control. In the course of the 1860s and 1870s, one of the rhetorical means Britain employed to chastise Greek irredentism was to maintain
that Greece was simply too ‘young’ to follow such serious ventures as the Great Idea. The Greeks had a different story to tell about their Great Idea. For them, this project had important pedagogical extensions. In their opinion, those Ottoman provinces that would be annexed to the Greek Kingdom would be automatically civilised under the guidance of the Greek metropolis, the revived Hellenic centre of European civilisation. Their Greece was a powerful pedagogue, destined to ‘nourish’ the Greeks of the East and the rest of the world. It is the logic of this rhetoric I want to examine as an important part of the Anglo-Greek dialogue.

**The British ‘Father’ and the Greek Infant Nation: British Disciplinary Vocabulary in (the) Anglo-Greek Relations(hip)**

British allegations that Greece was unable and unsuitable to partake in the Western civilising mission at that stage were frequent during the Cretan Insurrection of 1866–1869. Crete, which was then under Ottoman rule, rebelled against its Ottoman ‘oppressors’ and asked for unification with Greece. Although the Greek metropolis had to declare its loyalties to the European protectors of Greece who favoured neutrality, it secretly aided the rebels. Even the late British philhellenes retained ambivalent feelings toward this attitude. In 1867, when the insurrection was at a turning point, a letter signed by a ‘Philhellen’ in *The Times* analysed the situation in European Turkey. The ‘Philhellen’ began his analysis by drawing attention to the superficial gloss of Mohammedan civilisation, under which one could still find all the ancient ‘vices’ of the Turkish ‘race’: religious persecution, polygamy, domestic slavery, unequal and oppressive treatment of conquered nations. These references were coupled with comments on the ability of Greek Christianity to make the future of the East happier. The ‘Philhellen’ carried on to say that the new Kingdom of Greece needed the Greek provinces of Thessaly and Epirus, then under Ottoman rule, as much as Crete, to regain self-respect. For,

> Independence and self-respect are necessary conditions of national existence. A plaything kingdom, without resources either for internal improvement or external defence, without any feeling of responsibility, a mere spoilt child of the protecting Powers, Greece has never seriously applied herself to the work of her own regeneration.10

For the ‘Philhellen’, Greece was too ‘young’ and weak to help itself. It is important to bear in mind that the Kingdom of Greece was called an ‘experiment’. Some months after that, an anonymous journalist of *The Times* returned to the subject of Greece’s suitability for expansion, and reminded his readers that only Britain had the right to supervise, advise and ‘preach Greece’,11 since only Britain helped Greece to expand by granting her the Ionian Islands in 1864.

British vocabulary in the Anglo-Greek dialogue became progressively more patronising from the early 1870s. In April 1870, a group of upper-class Britons was kidnapped by Greek brigands in Pikermi, a location close to Athens. Despite the ongoing negotiations between the British Minister at Athens and the brigands, a series of misunderstandings, as well as Greek political intrigues, led to the murder of three of the captives. A diplomatic episode ensued and the Foreign Office considered an occupation of Greece in the Palmerstonian fashion to restore British honour.12 After the kidnapping, the British press repeatedly used the metaphor of ‘the offspring of the sympathy of Christian powers’ for the Greek Kingdom, which now ‘disgraces her creators’.13 This
comment found its counterpart in the verdict that Greece had a ‘perverse and forward childhood’.14

The fear this verdict unveiled was twofold. The first way one can consider it is relevant to Victorian psychopathologies concerning the untimely death of nations that are morally degraded – that is, downgraded on the ladder of civilisation.15 The second way one could read this comment is by relating it to Victorian perceptions of childhood. In this context, it is worth noting that the way in which Victorian middle-class society looked at children was significantly different from earlier puritan conceptions that were based on the firm belief that children were small adults fallen from God’s grace. Rousseau’s pedagogical ideas, which had a profound impact on the Victorian mind, presented children as innocent creatures who ought to be given the chance to understand the natural and social world in their own way. Due to the persistence of puritan ethics, Victorian perceptions of childhood did not evolve evenly: they disappeared in the early nineteenth century only to come back in the mid-Victorian period. This vacillation is nicely manifested in the discourse on Greece’s ‘anomaly’: its ‘childhood’ was described as ‘forward and perverse’ because it shattered this romantic Victorian image.

The commentator’s aversion to unauthorised Greek irredentist pursuits is also related to the power structure of the Victorian middle-class family, in which the father was the unquestionable head and breadwinner and therefore the one who had ‘the last word’. We can read this relationship of analogy between corrupt childhood and irredentism through the Greek visual counterpart of the British commentary: a cartoon published by an anonymous Greek in the 1870s. This cartoon depicts a boy who is engaged in a graffiti entreprise: the ‘design’ of a ‘Great Idea’ of Turkish–Greek battles on the wall of a house. In semiotic terms, this signified ‘untimely’ Greek aspirations; perhaps, pushed a little bit further, the way Greece functioned as a pest and disturbance for her neighbours (symbolised by the wall, the foreign property that the cartoon boy damages).

Even more suggestive was the language of another Dilessi journalist, who was speculating on the abuse of constitutional principles, when the Greek Government denied granting an amnesty to the brigands of Dilessi and thus blocked any further negotiations with the captors. According to the journalist,

This is a lamentable state of things to find in a country, which has been petted and Protected by almost all the great Powers of Europe for the last forty years. Perhaps the fault of the failure has lain all along with the Protectors themselves, who said ‘Let Greece arise; let us create a kingdom “after our likeness”’ in a land which, however patriotic in guerrilla warfare against the Turks, did not possess even the first elements of a municipality. It was very much as though three rich uncles were to say ‘Here is our nephew, a child only five years old, it is true, but for all that, we will make him a man, and he shall be a man at once.’ ... It was worth trying the experiment, perhaps, just to prove that a Constitution cannot be fitted to a country like a coat to a man’s back!17

The concept of protection appears twice in relation to the abuse of constitutional principles by Greeks, and it is accompanied by the religious phrase ‘after our likeness’. The religious vocabulary already represented Britain as a benevolent creator, and Greece as a sinner who tasted all the forbidden fruits of freedom. The tale of the uncle and his nephew, who never became ‘a man’, was narrated throughout the 1860s and
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1870s in many different versions\textsuperscript{18} and is the secularised counterpart of the language of patronage. Interestingly, this story contradicts Victorian perceptions of childhood: here the ‘nephew’ is asked to grow fast. This ‘forced passage’ from innocence to adulthood is described in an austere language that is haunted by earlier puritan attitudes. Britain is not a benevolent Father here, but a severe pedagogue. Again this implicit reference to pedagogy is not surprising. Compulsory schooling was introduced in the 1870s within the framework of the sacralisation of childhood in Victorian England.\textsuperscript{19} The narrative provides us with insight into two readings of childhood and two histories of Victorian mores.

The idea of Greek regeneration or degeneration haunted the Greeks too. One of the Greeks, who drew on British discourses of childhood, was the author of a theatrical play published in Cephalonia after the Dilessi Murders. In the play, there is a scene in which the British captives discuss Greece’s progress the day before the kidnapping. In this scene, Greek culture is called ‘an infant’ that has to ‘be taken care of’ by the Great Powers. Nevertheless, the author, Iatridis, was convinced that the poor Greek nation that ‘only yesterday was liberated from the barbarous four-century [Ottoman] bonds … will eventually present signs of progress analogous to those of ancient European nations’.\textsuperscript{20} Obviously, the image of Greece as a child had a double meaning in Greek culture. On the one hand, it was the allegory of historical discontinuity in Greek culture – a discontinuity introduced into Greek history after the conquest of Byzantium by the Ottomans. On the other hand, it implied that Greeks accepted the idea of a collaborative European control in Greece.

Moreover, on some occasions, the Greeks employed unwisely the British masculine self-image. Aristarchos Bey, a Greek appointed by the Ottoman government as a brigadier and an ardent supporter of the Great Idea, produced a massive collection of speeches, articles, Church edicts and parliamentary debates concerning the Bulgarian Question, which he published in the 1870s. In 1876, when he finished the fourth volume of his work, the revolution in Bosnia and Herzegovina raged, the Serbians had declared war against the Ottoman Empire and the Bulgarians were organising an anti-Greek campaign in the Balkans. In this climate of general instability, Britain still tried to secure her passage to India via Suez. Among the numerous speeches in Aristarchos’ collection there were two by Lord Salisbury and Lord Derby on British policy on Suez. Aristarchos adopted an enthusiastic attitude towards this ‘anti-Turkish’ British policy, which he expressed in the following way: ‘I congratulate wholeheartedly and respectfully the late Cabinet of Great Britain for the masculine roads it opened and I hope that it will not change its course.’\textsuperscript{21}

The enduring tradition of depicting the British Empire as male played a significant role in the building of such imageries, in which the ‘colonised’ is seen as effeminate, degenerate or childish. This is nothing other than the rhetoric of colonisation. The victory of the coloniser would often be hedged with the rhetoric of protection, in which the threat of distrust or violence remained inherent, but was covered up by the mellow language of the restoration of a harmonious order; ‘not that of aboriginal conservatism, but of a more benign one, at once natural and civilised’,\textsuperscript{22} like the love between father and child. And, if we consider that the image of a British benevolent mother, which was popular in Britain over the same period (the famous ‘Britannia’), was not used in Anglo-Greek political commentary, then the intersection of gendered language and colonialism becomes more apparent.\textsuperscript{23} In fact, the use of the family trope in Anglo-Greek reflections was not unique. The British administrators and colonisers used it also to describe their relationship with India; anglicised Indian subjects also mobilised the
family vocabulary to describe their country’s relationship with a ‘benevolent’ Britain.24
In a series of articles published in the Revue des Deux Mondes between 1846 and 1852,
French authors used similar patriarchal or feminine imageries to describe their relation-
ship with the Oriental Algeria.25 Inevitably, one begins to suspect that the language was
symptomatic of a particular kind of political relationship. Although Greece was not a
British colony, the language employed mainly by Britons unveils a British fantasy in
which the Greek Kingdom is already colonised.

Truly in the Anglo-Greek dialogue the immediate substitute of this rhetoric was the
ruthless language of patronage.26 Usually, the scientific vocabulary of ‘experimentation’
would accompany British preaching. This vocabulary, which introduces us to the
evolutionist world from the back door, was in fact quite common in British dealings
with the Turks as well. The following extract from a speech on the Eastern Question
and the imminent collapse of the Ottoman Empire provides a good example:

The Sick Man is assuredly dying; and our duty towards Turkey is a double
one – to endeavour to act the part of the family physician and of the family
solicitor. We are bound by treaty to do all that we can to preserve a health
which is daily sinking; but failing that, we should take such means as are in our
power to secure the Sick Man’s rich inheritance to his natural heirs, the
Christian populations subject to his rule.27

In this passage, Grant Duff, a colonial administrator himself, expresses the aspiration
to become the fair arbitrator of someone else’s property, but he glorifies his intentions
with a vocabulary that describes the British task as a ‘family duty’.

Even more provocative is the fact that the very same language was utilized by some
Greeks. A very striking case is that of a diatribe on Bulgarian nationalism of the 1870s
and the increasing interest of the Great Powers in supporting Bulgarian claims in the
Balkans. After accusing some of the Greeks of Constantinople of high treason because
they did not actively oppose the foundation of the Bulgarian Exarchate in 1870, the
author proceeded to explore why the Greek nation was so weak at such a crucial
moment. At that point, he claimed that nations are like children that need guidance by
a good pedagogue. However, the pedagogues of the Greek nation, the Great Powers,
tried to poison Greece, because ‘against the laws of nature, gave to the child indigestible
and poisoned food’.

That is why, as long there is time left, let us try to fight against the causes of
weakness and degeneration of our society. And those are, except for the
inclination we might have had, the lack of scientific light and warmth: spiritual
progress and the moulding of a strong soul. Finally, let us adopt a healthier
life-style, so that we will not relapse into the same illness.28

Clinical language could be seen as an insidious sign of subjection to a harsh Western
omniscient that cares nevertheless for the patient, like a good parent. Its counterpart in
Greek popular culture can be found in the story of the ignorant peasants who thought
that their new ‘Frankish’ dentist’s collection of dentures consisted of teeth abstracted
from the dead to be magically fitted into the mouth of the living. Clinical language is
based on the logic that the evil West holds a secret Greeks have to uncover. Neverthe-
less, setting the scientific gaze of the Westerner before the desire for it, leads us
nowhere; it is also the Greeks’ forgetfulness that excludes their own desire to be treated
as patients from the picture that produces the impression of subjection.29 To invoke
Žižek’s argument, ‘the mystery … is to be sought not beyond its appearance but in the
very appearance of mystery’.30 At the same time, we should highlight an unmistakably
Victorian logic in the passage, which is concerned with ideas of moral physiology. The false causal link between morality and bodily disease, which was not uncommon in the Victorian era, underlines the passage.

The child or nephew of the Great Powers has to be mischievous. If he is a good boy, then his parents/uncles cannot discipline it. This partially explains why British commentators are upset every time someone brings to the fore the colonial aspect of this discourse, in which British economic interests, and not Greek incompetence, primarily dictate a negative attitude towards the Greek Great Idea. An amusing incident of such nature took place when the American Minister at Athens, Charles Tuckerman, published his influential travel diary *The Greeks of To-day*. In his witty chapter on the Great Idea, Tuckerman described the chasm between Greece’s actual condition and the Greek nation’s ‘sweet belief’ in its uniqueness, when his smooth language changed with the following comment:

> Attenuated, poverty-stricken, a political pauper at the close of the revolution, yet possessing a certain shrewdness and wit which commanded the respect of those who had come forward in the character of ‘national guardian’, Greece, who without their timely aid, would have sunk back into barbarism and obscurity, boldly demanded a larger share of territory for which she had sacrificed so much. Dissatisfied with the spoonful of political broth, the Oliver Twist of nations had the unblushing temerity ‘to ask for more’.

The sarcastic presentation of the Oliver Twist emphasised the ignoble side of British intervention in Greek affairs and proved to be too much for George Finlay, The Times correspondent in Athens, who counter-attacked immediately:

> Mr. Tuckerman, the late Minister resident of the United States at Athens, has published a book with the title *The Greeks of To-day*, in which he expresses his decided disapprobation of British policy towards the Hellenic Kingdom. He is a profound diplomatist in ‘ifs’ and, as he declares himself a staunch friend of the Greeks, a few of his observations on the political characteristics of Athenian society deserve to be cited. ... In the height of his philhellenic enthusiasm Mr. Tuckerman calls Greece ‘the Oliver Twist of nations, asking Europe for more gifts and benefits than diplomacy will concede’. Other Philhellenes who have directed the attention of the Greeks to practical measures or reform in less epigrammatic phrases have been accused in Greek newspapers of being ‘calumniators of Hellenism’.

Admittedly, Tuckerman was vitriolic in his comments on British policy. In another section of his work, Greece was presented as the lame mendicant who is told by Britain that since she has only one leg (the Greek Kingdom), which she cannot use, she should not regret the loss of the other (Greek-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire), because she ‘would not know how to use it’. Interestingly, the imaginary adviser in Tuckerman’s story is Britain. Putting aside the fact that other newspapers stressed that Tuckerman’s narrative had not been intended ‘for an English audience’, the twofold metaphor of ‘patronage’ and parental loss in the Twist narrative seemed to have travelled to the other side of the Atlantic. Again, we should connect the use of this fictional character by Tuckerman, as well as Finlay’s rage, to the idealisation of childhood in the Victorian social imagination. The changing treatment of children in the middle-class sphere did not apply to working-class family life. Most of the working-class children had to work from a very early age, a phenomenon that insulted Victorian philanthropic sentiments. Greece’s representation as an abused and deprived European
Twist was very effective: apparently, Tuckerman’s Dickensian sarcasm struck two very sensitive Victorian chords at the same time!

Unlike Finlay’s immediate response, the Greek translator of Tuckerman neither censured nor commented on the passage. It is also telling that other Greek commentators did not repudiate this vocabulary, but they modified it. In their case, Greece’s image as a child was replaced by the mother metaphor. Given that Greece’s treatment in the Don Pacifico affair (1850), the Crimean War (1854–1856) and the Dilessi Murders (1870) was of a kind that the British would reserve for an unclaimed colony, this rhetoric could be examined with the help of post-colonial studies. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha, following Frantz Fanon’s writings, claimed that the language of the coloniser re-merges both as mimicry and mockery once it is adopted by the colonised. As other readers of Fanon pointed out, Bhabha identifies in mimicry the double effect of imitation/parody and subordination/resistance. This ever-present possibility of slippage discredits the coloniser’s version of colonised otherness. The two notions of mimesis ‘interact and cross continually’, producing confusion and subverting roles in colonial discourse. It could be claimed, however, that mimicry is not always the result of colonial oppression, but of any kind of political oppression. On the other hand, the Greek rhetoric had more nuances that post-colonial theory cannot explain. I will proceed now to explore the political significance and the nuances this forked language acquired in Anglo-Greek relations and in Greek domestic affairs, when the Greeks simultaneously re-addressed it to their British protectors and the unredeemed Greeks of the Ottoman Empire.

**The Child Who became a ‘Mother’: The Symbolic Structure of Anglo-Greek Relations and the Greek Hegemonic Project**

In 1865, a year after the cession of the Ionian Islands to Greece, the Greek entrepreneur Stefanos Xenos published in London his historical study *East and West*, in which he examined the trajectory of Anglo-Greek relations. Xenos was opposed to the demolition of fortresses in the Ionian Islands when England handed them to the Greek Kingdom. Criticising unfavourable British comments – which he saw as signs of a ‘despotic attitude’ – on the riotous behaviour of the Ionian Greeks, he stated:

> The conduct and dispositions of the Ionians are perfectly intelligible. Let us suppose the case of a respectable mother with her children falling into slavery, and reduced by averse circumstances to extreme want; but one child escapes, and has the good fortune to meet a wealthy patron, who adopts him, for whom he provides every comfort, and who gives him every advantage becoming his new position. But, at length, the mother, with one or two of her other children, after a hard struggle, succeeds in raising her head again in the world and becoming free. She has not been able to recover from her early position – far from it; but she enjoys an independent, though humble, existence. Now, what may we suppose would, under such circumstances, be the natural feelings of the son whom a powerful patron has placed in a position so much superior to that of the rest of his family? Would not his first impulse be a desire to return to his mother, and afford her that aid which the education he had received, and the wealth he had acquired, rendered him so competent to afford her to free his own brothers still in slavery? But should the patron refuse
his consent, existence becomes a torture to the protégé, who can think of nothing but his mother’s position, and can listen only to the voice of nature.37

This captivating image – a mother with her lost sons – is based on the principle of substitution or slippage: Greece, the mother of European civilisation, becomes a ‘poor mother’ who has lost her freedom. The comment on slavery is nicely inserted: this mother is a woman who, having lost her freedom, is not respected anymore, like the slaves of the Oriental harems whose status was reduced to that of a concubine. The son-version of Greece is transferred to the Ionian Islands, still represented as young and subordinate. Britain is the only persona in the story whose status and role remains unchanged. Playing the role of a symbolic Father, Britain is always ready to impose the Law on the tormented Ionian protégé.

The whole metaphor is also suggestive for other reasons that can be explained by an analysis of the internal function of female imagery and the criss-crossing of nationalist and gender discourse in Greek culture. Michael Herzfeld explained that in Greek culture to copulate with the kinswomen of one’s enemies is to equate sexual rivalry with social difference. This happens because the ‘rape’ of a woman is symbolically a violation and penetration of ‘the domestic hearth’.38 In this instance, ‘woman’ and ‘home’ are woven together as metonyms. If we have a second look at the passage it is easy to realise that for Xenos the symbolic ‘rape’ of Greece is not in fact conducted by Britain, but by Turkey. Therefore, his metaphor – a, no doubt, nauseating one for an English audience that was tormented by its restrained and hypocritical sexuality39 – is at the same time a metaphor of British patronage and the narrative of Greek culture’s adulteration by the Turkish uncivilised character.

There was more, nevertheless, to the Greek rhetoric, since the audience for the Greek metropolis was split into Britons and subjected Greeks. When addressed to Britons, the Greek discourse would present the mother figure as a weak degraded creature. When addressed to the non-native Greeks of the Ottoman Empire, the very same maternal image would become the patron whom all the unredeemed Greeks ought to love and respect.

This twin metaphor can be traced in a letter sent to the Greek nationalist newspaper Palingenesía by a Constantinopolitan Greek in 1868. The letter was concerned with European, especially British, persistence in keeping Turkey ‘alive’ by sabotaging the Cretan struggle. For the anonymous Greek, the imminent threat for Turkey was the Great Idea of the Panhellenes, which contributes to the ‘conception and birth of the East’. Greece is suitable to play a leading role in the East, because it has proved that:

She has such great aspirations that she could raise gales in the East, if not in Europe as well. She should, like a loving mother, declare that she will never let down and deny her persecuted, hurt and blood-stained daughter, challenging thus Europe to dare, if she can, to abstract forcibly the East from her mother; she should, even following Turkey’s example, protest every now and then against the violation of human rights in Crete. She should prove that she has intellectual skills which will allow her to succeed Turkey who is still alive only because – to cite European commentary – ‘there are no able successors’. Finally she should prove that Greece is independent and not a European feud.40

Though in theory the article was addressed to abstract ‘Europeans’, the actual addressees were Britain and a Greek readership. The ‘conception’ of the East and the reclaimed ‘daughter’ belong to the realm of the very same rhetoric that was examined
above. The image of the ‘loving mother’, central to this passage, retains its ambiguity: on the one hand, this mother is a dynamic matron. On the other hand, the reference to ‘shoulds’ and feudalism open a small fissure within the Greek discourse. Through this fissure one can see the Greek Kingdom’s gendered identity as an unexpressed fear of subordination that has already taken place.

The same pattern is encountered in an article on the dinner organised in Manchester for the Cretan struggle, only this time it is addressed solely to a Greek audience. Markos Renieris, representative of the Cretan Assembly and the Central Committee for the Cretan Insurrection in Athens, claimed in his speech that God himself asked for the union of Crete with Greece, because ‘families cannot be separated’. Some months later, the Clio journalists came back to the issue of what will happen to Greece if Crete capitulates.

Internally, Greece will go through a period of insurmountable anomaly, which the wounded honour will magnify. … In external affairs, Greece’s position will be insufferable; the enslaved Greeks will never dare to raise their head again, since they will be taught that Greece might perform the loving mother up to a point, … but she would never be disposed to run high risks in crucial moments. Let us not delude ourselves. Greece should not only support the struggles of the subordinate children, but also sympathise and suffer with them. Otherwise, what kind of loving mother would she be for the revolting brothers, if, when she senses danger, she transforms herself into an inconsiderate stepmother?

The same language was used by the Central Committee for the Cretan refugees at Athens, an organisation that worked as a mediator between the rebels and the Greek government. It is obvious that the trope had a certain function to fulfil in the Greek imaginary, but also in the state discourse. However, I would like to highlight the social extensions of this gendered language first. If one puts the image of female Greece adjacent to that of Britain-patron, then one has the usual apologetic account on gender inequality. Yet the examined rhetoric assumes a different dimension when it is examined alongside the conservative Greek discourse on education. For the Greeks, women in their culture were destined to play a role that would keep them in a position of social subordination. Women might have been presented as the first pedagogues of young Greek generations, but their contribution to the Greek nationalist project had to be performed within the domestic confines and far away from the light of publicity. Their role would often be ambiguous, as they appeared both as ‘subordinates and masters, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting’.

The transposition of the language of kinship onto the plain of politics is, however, a question of a different order. This language was complicit to that of Greek nation-building because it coincided with the debate on Greek citizenship. The autochthone Greeks (or Greek natives of the Kingdom) had been initially privileged over the heterochthones (or alien, non-indigenous Greeks) in this respect. The debate on naturalisation of heterochthone Greeks had coincided with the first use of the term ‘Great Idea’ in the Greek Parliament in the 1840s. In the second half of the nineteenth century, naturalisation of the non-indigenous Greeks was deemed to be a prerequisite for the ‘nation’s’ self-fulfilment. However, the privileged position of the metropolitan Greeks as architects of this process, continued to be asserted.

One has to bear in mind what the process of naturalisation comprises to understand the significance of this debate. The state makes non-indigenous peoples naturalised
citizens – that is, it makes them ‘people whose subjectivity conforms to the nature of the society that grants them citizenship, a nature that allows for their subjectivity to be nationalized’. Naturalisation (the German Naturalisierung) finds its Greek equivalent in πολιτογράφησις (politografisis), the inscription upon one of the mark of the citizen (from polis and graφο, engrave). This process naturalises the notion of national subjectivity because it makes the subject’s nationality look inherent. This, along with the insistence of the native Greeks to be regarded as first-class citizens vis-à-vis their ‘heterochthonic’ brothers, found its analogue in the language of family bonds: the very language the Greeks of the Kingdom employed in the Anglo-Greek dialogue. Thus the family vocabulary that the Greek press used naturalised questions of citizenship and participation of the non-autochthon Greeks in Greek politics, while at the same time asserting the hegemony of the political centre of Hellenism, Athens. Its function was to ‘cover up’ Greek cultural, social and political fragmentation, and to make the ‘Greek nation’ (an fictional entity comprised by the Greeks of Greece, the ‘unredeemed’ ones of the Ottoman Empire and those of the Diaspora, whose civil rights in the Greek Kingdom were being debated) look naturally uniform: like a loving family.

What escaped analysis, thus far, is that some Greeks presented their country as the dishonoured mother of Europe to Britons. The idea of ‘Greece’ as the cradle of European civilisation was nothing new in the 1860s and the 1870s. The mythologisation of Hellenic civilisation in the European imaginary started with the development of the German Altertumswissenschaft into a serious academic multi-discipline, which comprised the study of ancient Greek, archaeology and Hellenic history. In Britain, as well as in other Western European countries, the theory of the superiority of European Hellenocentric civilisation compared to that of the colonised ‘races’ justified the very project of colonisation. European historians created a myth about ancient Europe, according to which African and Asian origins and innovations were ‘written out’ of history. The ‘regeneration’ or ‘resurrection’ of Greece as a modern Kingdom was also the outcome of philehellenic enthusiasm, which had its roots in such disciplinary practices. The philehellenes aspired to resurrect their own past – that is, the Hellenic past they had previously appropriated – in the Greek peninsula. Their need to see modern Greece ‘evolving’ into a country ‘after their likeness’ was their yearning to see their intellectual/political philehellenic project in the flesh.

This dream was an open secret, and it certainly influenced Neohellenic self-perceptions. Inevitably, the modern Greeks began to recognise in themselves a superior ‘race’ – the descendants of Plato and Aristotle. The question was how to achieve recognition from Britain and thus fulfil their civilising mission in the East by re-conquering all the lost Greek provinces. It is here that we find Neohellenic mimicry at work. The paradox in the Anglo-Greek dialogue of the 1860s and the 1870s was that, in the Greek discourse, the British observer would find himself being at once child and father – or, more precisely, the-name-of-the-father, the absolute authority that regulates the subject, to remember Lacan – while Greece performed at once the mother and the child. This discourse is homologous to the Oedipal complex, and the reversal of Greek and British roles alludes to a repression/prohibition of ‘incest’. The Greeks alluded to this prohibition in order to ‘chastise’ Britons for their ‘ungrateful’ behaviour towards the ‘mother’ of Europe. In short, the Greeks tried to present Modern Greece as the resurrected progenitor/parent of British culture, who had to be helped to become a great nation. By invoking the ghostly Hellenic past that haunted the British present, the Greeks hoped to apply to Britain the same disciplinary attitudes that British commentators had ‘tried on them’. This reversal of roles was clever because it could successfully
incite and replicate Victorian embarrassment shrouding the role of women in British middle-class society. Amid Victorian campaigning, carried out by the apparatuses of ‘social, medical and legal enforcement’, which encouraged female chastity and prudishness, Britons found themselves being accused collectively for an unforgivable crime with multi-layered symbolic extensions.

**Conclusion: Static and Evolving Images of Subjection**

From this brief analysis it becomes evident that the trope of family and kinship performed a multiple function in Greek and British culture and politics. In British discourse, it valorised the British imperial self-image and represented Greece as a weak British protegé, a colony. In Greek discourse, it undermined British colonial self-perceptions, but also presented the Greek Kingdom as the centre of a Greater Hellenism, which was seeking its self-accomplishment by means of territorial expansion. Allocation of roles on a symbolic level was reciprocal, although the Greeks utilised British masculine imageries to construct their own language of resistance. In this rhetoric of protection, one parent was constantly missing from the structure: the British were good fathers without a ‘wife’ and the Greeks were good mothers without a ‘husband.’ The Greek children who appeared in the British rhetoric half-orphans became mothers in the Greek language of protection. This was a ‘messy’ family business, for it involved a lot of ‘violence’. Of course, the ‘missing parent’ logic that underpinned both the Greek and the British discourses might have been a subtle sign of self-contentment for both sides, but it is more accurate to point out that this theatrical representation of interdependent roles is what we encounter in all nuclear families and what makes the nuclear family functional. It was small wonder then that both Greeks and Britons based their discursive patterns on relevant (Neohellenic and Victorian) social experience.

However, it also goes without saying that despite their evolutionist conception, both Greek and British imageries operated under purely structural principles because they were static. In the 1860s, thirty years had passed since the birth of the Greek Kingdom, but Greece was still a child. More than thirty years had passed since Britain had assumed the parental role for Greece, but it still remained a vigorous parent. It would have been naïve for historians to conflate here the process of Anglo-Greek symbolisation of the ‘real’, with the real itself: neither Greece nor Britain were actual living organisms to be subjected to the principles of physical evolution. Gendered imageries operated only on the symbolic plain, that of intercultural communication, and for specific political reasons. This is what is called in Lacanian ‘the symbolisation of the real’, a prerequisite for the establishment of inter-subjective identities.55

Yet, there is a conclusive remark to be made for such time-resistant imageries, which can certainly constitute the theme of another study: Neohellenic regeneration, which was always projected into the future, had its negative equivalent – degeneration – which was an undesirable state of things for the British. The clinical language used in the Anglo-Greek dialogue was, therefore, the ‘symptom’ of this British fear. It is, in fact, useful to examine the discourse of degeneration and regeneration together in order to understand what was foreclosed from the Anglo-Greek symbolic structure. This was nothing other than British decline, a nightmare that visited Victorians in their sleep ever since Darwinism and Gibbon’s cyclical historic evolution intruded into their imaginary. In this respect, the British rhetoric of protection did not serve to emphasise the past of Anglo-Greek relations, but to repress sad reflections on a hideous British future. A static conceptualisation of the Anglo-Greek relationship would secure a frozen British
imperial self-image, and would conceal British anxiety. The British were trapped into an eternal present – a kind of ‘Nemesis’ for their imperialist desire as the nationalist Greeks might have argued.

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Notes

17. *The Times*, 16 May 1870.
23. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to make a proper reference to Kristi Bohata’s PhD thesis (University of Wales) on representations of ‘Britannia’ in nineteenth-century Anglo-Welsh cultural exchange. Kristi Bohata is currently working on gendered imageries of Britain and Wales, and her
research, thus far, shows that Britain was assigned an exclusively mothering role in Anglo-Welsh relations.

24. See ‘Is India Fit for Home Rule?’ *The Empire Review*, 39/280, May 1924, pp. 488–496. This is a very interesting article that presents a variation of this language.


26. To highlight this point, I cite from another article that was written after the Dilessi Murders in *The Daily News* of 18 May 1870. This article expresses doubts about the way the Greek authorities carried out the enquiry after the massacre:

> We have a great demand to make upon the Greek Government and nation. ... The Greek Government is bound, as much in policy as in justice, to give the fullest satisfaction to our righteous demands, and our consideration in the Mediterranean is not so poor and doubtful that before the legal proceedings can properly begin we must needs supporting by fluttering the Union Jack before the Greek Judges. Every functionary in Greece will understand that whenever Britain speaks she speaks with the voice of the whole Empire.


35. *The Levant Herald*, 22 March 1873. The *Levant Herald* journalist did not attack Tuckerman for his views, though the fact that for him Tuckerman expressed the ‘American view’ shows an attempt to differentiate English and American opinions on Greek affairs.


41. *Clio*, 24, 5 April 1867.

42. *Clio*, 15, 27 September 1867.

43. *Aion*, 28 March 1868.


46. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 6. See also relevant introductory chapter in Christopher Gittings (ed.), *Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity* (New Lambton: Dangaroo Press, 1996), pp. 1–8. Although the Greek case does not provide us with a colonial example, the ambiguity of gender imagery remains the same.


49. To quote Etienne Balibar:

> No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized,
the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized, that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture, and interests which transcend individuals and social conditions. (Etienne Balibar, ‘The Nation Form: History and Ideology’, Review (Fernand Braudel Center), 13/Ssummer 1990, p. 349)


53. Lacan is more interested in Freud’s ‘father’ as it appears in Totem and Taboo (1912–1913); this is the ‘dead father’, whose death leads to the prohibition of incest, because his ghostly authority is stronger than ever:

If this murder of the father is the faithful moment of the debt through which the subject binds himself for life to the Law … the symbolic father, in so far as he signifies this Law, is certainly the dead Father. (From Écrits, in Elizabeth Grosz, Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction (London/New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 68)


