In Praise of Irrationality:
Self, "East" and "West" in Greek Teachers' Speeches on National Day Commemorations

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In this qualitative study of school discourse on national day commemorations, focus is on the "social creativity strategies" through which group members can improve their social identity. Discourse analysis was carried out on thirty-nine teachers' speeches delivered in Greek schools between 1998 and 2004. The speakers scorn rationality and logic, stereotypically attributed to "the West" (a "West" which is perceived not to include Greece), as cold and not human. The Greeks' successful national struggles are presented instead as the result of irrationality. They claim irrationality to be the most human and thus the most valuable quality, which places Greece first in the world hierarchy. The results are further discussed in terms of their implications for learning and teaching in the classroom, as well as for policy and research. Key Words: Teachers' Speeches, National Day Commemorations, Greek Schools, East and West, Social Identity, Social Creativity Strategies, and Social Comparison

Introduction

The paper deals with the speeches delivered by Greek teachers at school on national day commemorations. Focus is on the "social creativity strategies" through which group members can improve their social identity. The main research questions concern the way the past events are presented: What may particular choices mean from the speakers' point of view? How can these choices serve to maintain a positive self-image for the group? After discussing the concepts of comparison, social creativity strategies and reference group, I report research findings on (a) Greek society and (b) Greek schoolbooks in relation to the concepts discussed. Then I briefly describe the school context in which the speeches are delivered as well as the methods used in data collection and analysis. Finally, I present relevant aspects of the speeches and discuss the findings, concluding with a few thoughts about pedagogical, social and political implications.

Conceptual Framework

Comparison and Reference Groups

People experience relative deprivation when they perceive they are "so obviously deprived relative to what they deserve and others get" (Hyman, 1960, p. 388). The social and psychological outcome of comparison is dependent on the reference group employed in the process of comparison (Hyman, p. 587). A reference group may be a truly existing group of people in which the actor participates directly, such as a family; it may be a social category, such as an ethnic group or a social class; lastly, it may be imaginary, such as humankind or posterity. Reference groups

"constitute the structure of expectations imputed to some *audience* for whom one organizes his conduct" (Shibutani, 1955, p. 565, Emphasis added).

Self-Enhancement and Social Creativity Strategies

It is assumed that people need to have a positive view of self. When comparison leads to a feeling of inferiority, conscious or unconscious cognitive strategies are activated that counter the perceived threat. Such mechanisms, referred to as social creativity strategies (Hogg, 1995), may be activated at intrapsychic, interpersonal or intergroup level, each level influencing the others (Dragona, 1996). When a group is evaluated negatively compared to others, the social identity of each of its members is potentially threatened. Members may thus carry out the comparison applying new criteria, gaining a new perspective on the situation. By switching the frame of reference the group can thus maintain a positive self-image and enhance self-esteem (Turner & Brown, 1978, as cited in Dragona).

The "West" and the Rest

Broad social categories such as "the west" and "the east" evoke a set of stereotypical traits that are assumed to be ordinary and natural for the members of each of these categories. Thus a sharp line is drawn between, among others, modern and traditional, civilized and uncivilized, rational and irrational, reason and emotions (McDonald, 1993). The "west" is assumed to differ from the rest of the world as the site of scientific and technological inventiveness, logic and bureaucratic rationality and rational government (Herzfeld, 1992). Eastern peoples, instead, have been described as lazy, uncivilized, underdeveloped, backward and irrational. At the opposite end of this schema, in which the most human quality is human rationality, romanticism instead assumes and extols the uniqueness of each people and its *Volksgeist*,[1] which manifests itself not in reason but rather in passion, emotions and feelings (Wolf, 1994, p. 5).

The Greek Nation and the "Others"

Reference Groups and Comparison in the Greek Context

For the purpose of this paper we can consider two basic reference groups: the Ottomans/ Turks and the westerners/ Europeans. Within the nationalistic discourse of modern Greece, "barbarity" sums up the Turks' supposedly inhuman and rapacious cruelty and their alleged lack of religion, where religion is defined as Christianity (Herzfeld, 1997, pp. 46–47). The Turks are seen as the source of symbolic pollution: they introduced shiftiness, illiteracy and disrespect for norms. In everyday speech, what are seen as negative traits of today's Greeks are blamed on the Ottoman past (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 20).

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[1] Far from the clear-cut distinction that is part of commonsense knowledge, terms such as Romanticism and Enlightenment always designate ambiguous categories present in different proportions in all theoretical formulations (Neigburg & Goldman, 1998, p. 74).

The Greek romantic concept of nation includes a peculiar conjunction of a complex of superiority with a complex of inferiority (Kokkonas, 2000). The term "Europe" is used in a variable way by the Greeks both to include and exclude themselves: "Inclusion alludes to the founding role of Classical Greece in Europe, while exclusion represents the adoption of a self view as oriental and illiterate" (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 42). Groups of Greek intellectuals seem to adopt the image of "oriental" and "underdeveloped" that they see reflected in the European mirror (Frangoudaki, 2001, p. 155). More recently, integration in the European Union has increased a sense of the weak political and economic position of Greece within Europe.

Reference Groups and Comparison in Greek Education

Greek education presents the Greek nation as "culturally superior" due to descent from ancient Greek civilization and the influence of antiquity on Western Europe and culture (Frangoudaki, 1996b, p. 143): "Everything is presented as if Greekness were not just one specific form of cultural identity among many, but a different human species" (Paparizos, 2000, p. 147).

In school textbooks the Ottoman/Turk and the "west" constitute the two poles of a "continuum of otherness" (Avdela, 1996a; Frangoudaki, 1996a). Europe is presented in an ambiguous light: though superior, she owes her superiority to ancient Greece—a debt that goes unrecognized (Avdela, 1996b; Iraklidis, 1995; Koulouri, 1999). Cultures are assessed in a hierarchy at the top of which is the culture of those European countries that are considered more developed (Avdela, 1996b; Frangoudaki, 1996a, p. 398). The resulting perception of Greece as inferior is handled through emphasis on classical Greece, stress on the cultural continuity with antiquity, celebration of a national identity and a national character that have allegedly remained unchanged through centuries (Frangoudaki, 1996a, p. 350). Moreover, the self is also enhanced through denial of influences from the Ottomans or any culture perceived as inferior (Avdela, 1996a, p. 64).

The National Day Commemorations at School

The Greeks celebrate two main national holidays in Greece, on 25 March and 28 October respectively. The former commemorates the start of the revolution for independence from the Ottoman Empire (1821). The latter, besides being the day of the flag, celebrates the "No" (*to Okhi*) of Greece to the Italian Fascist aggression (1940). In all schools a commemoration ceremony is organized, including songs, poems and readings from relevant works of literature or from newspapers/ chronicles of the time. A commemoration always starts with a speech, usually prepared and also delivered by a teacher, though in upper secondary schools it may be delivered by a student. A detailed description of these celebrations is provided by Bonidis (2004).

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Method

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Discourse Analysis

This study is a qualitative discourse analysis of teachers' speeches delivered in secondary schools in Greece within the framework of national day commemorations. Qualitative research tries to grasp the processes through which people construct

meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 49). Discourse analysis is an interpretative approach that studies talk and texts as sociocultural products and as forms of social action embedded in the broader context of social interactions in which participants do identity work. Discourse analysis is thus suitable to the study of how particular identities are constructed, achieved, sustained and sometimes changed during social interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Therefore it is a promising approach to the exploration of the primary research questions in this study: As concerns the vocabulary and structure of a speech, and especially the standpoint from which events are narrated, what may particular choices mean from the speakers' point of view? How can these choices serve to maintain a positive self-image for the group?

But can the speeches be really considered (parts of) interactions? Previous research has shown that teachers write/ select/ shape their speech taking into account the reactions they expect on the part of the principal, the colleagues and the authorities that attend a school celebration. Depending on their priorities and the self-image that they want to convey, the speakers may choose one version of the past rather than another. On the same basis they may rationally decide to include or avoid certain terms (Benincasa, 2006). In this sense the delivery of a speech may be said to constitute an interaction.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

The speeches, thirty-nine in number, were delivered in secondary schools in a town in Northern Greece between 1998 and 2004 within the framework of the national day commemorations that are celebrated twice a year. The "data" consists of written texts composed for the purpose of being delivered in public. At the beginning I started collecting speeches just out of curiosity, and I did not think in terms of "sampling strategies". I collected part of the speeches personally at the end of celebrations that I attended either as a schoolteacher, which I was until year 2000, or as a simple spectator. Commemorations are held at roughly the same time in all schools, and for each commemoration I could attend the relevant celebration either in one school only or in two schools that were close to one another. Therefore, in order to maximize the "crop" from each national celebration, I asked acquaintances in the teaching profession to hand me the speech they had pronounced at their school celebration.

Speeches are publicly delivered and, as some teachers told me, very seldom the product of individual authors/ speakers (see below). All the same, I soon realized that many teachers-authors behave as if they were rather jealous of their "products". In fact, some of them refused to hand me the text they had delivered. After experiencing several refusals I started to feel uneasy about asking, like I was intruding into someone's private thoughts. In some cases I could have simply used a tape-recorder during the celebration-- after all, they were ceremonies open to the public and anyone could attend. However, I eventually discharged this solution. All papers are public documents and only those delivered in public were used as part of the analysis. Since there is no Institutional Review Board at my university, I attended to research ethics by (a) only analyzing papers that were delivered publicly as speeches and (b) removing all identifying information about the persons who wrote or delivered the speeches.

When I started thinking of writing a paper out of the texts I had collected, I could see that the available sample already provided rich information and, under

certain aspects, saturation of categories was apparent (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). That is, certain themes, such as "national character" and "school and memory", were repeating themselves and no new information was emerging (on these two topics see Benincasa 2004 & 2006, respectively). The sample may be called naturalistic, as the speeches have been produced for other purpose than being used in this study. In this sense, I can claim that I adopt a nonreactive method (Brewer & Hunter, 1989), inasmuch as (a) I did not contribute to the production of the speeches (as would have been the case with interviews) and (b) the speechmakers wrote (or chose) their speech without knowing that they would become "parties to research" (Brewer & Hunter, p. 128).

I soon realized that the collected material does not change much across celebrations and from one school to another. As several teachers told me in informal conversations, speech writing is based on a variety of sources. These range from school textbooks to chronicles of the time to commercially available publications that contain ready-made speeches. Sometimes teachers borrow or exchange speeches with one another or merge several speeches to make their own. As a result, consisting to a large extent of stereotyped phrases and standard associations of words, speeches are highly predictable. Under many respects most of them sound very much like one another. It sometimes happens that whole sentences, and even groups of sentences, are repeated across speeches delivered by different teachers. Two speeches handed to me by two different teachers and delivered on two different occasions proved to be one and the same speech. This implies that these texts cannot be considered strictly individual products, nor expression of the authors' attitudes or feelings. They are rather to be viewed as collective products, not simply in the sense that each individual memory constitutes the site of intersection of various collective memories that are based in the groups to which the individual belongs (Thanopoulou, 2000). According to some of the teachers involved the social context of the school commemoration makes certain demands that most speakers choose to satisfy (Benincasa, 2006). Given the perspective of the study and the context of speech delivery, focus is on the language used rather than the people generating that language. It follows that giving details such as the gender of the speech-maker or the type of school where a certain speech was delivered is beyond the point.

The process of speech creation may be affected by the political climate, but this does not concern the particular topic of this paper and the time period when these speeches were delivered. Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), the socialist party, was in power from 1981 until May 2004 with the exception of a four-year period between 1989 and 1993. The political climate has not changed so as to lead us to expect a change in the type of speeches delivered in school.

The Researcher as a Tool

The collection of speeches examined in this paper pre-dates the design of the paper itself. As I said, I started collecting speeches out of a keen interest in this type of ceremonies, most probably due to my national background, which is not Greek, and my lack of familiarity with such experiences. In fact, when I was a schoolgirl in Italy national commemorations used to involve only the army in Rome. Looking back on my schooldays in the1960s I do not remember such an emphasis on the idea of nation, at least not in the terms in which it appears in the Greek teachers' speeches I have examined here and in previous research on the topic (Benincasa, 2004, 2006). On the whole, all the activities devoted to national holidays in Greek schools, which amount

to several school days a year, were something completely new to me. Over time, and after several readings, I "located" a number of interesting (to me) topics. The quotation marks around the word are meant to question the very concept of locating. Taking it at face value it would involve accepting the assumption that the something I "located" was there beforehand, and I simply found where it was hiding. However, I do not conceive of my encounter with the speech manuscripts in this way. The topics-- the research questions, that is, the questions I deemed worth asking-- are the product of the encounter between the texts, which do have an objective existence, and my perceptive apparatus, which, far from being neutral, has been culturally and socially shaped.

Married to a Greek citizen and therefore a Greek citizen myself, I have worked as a teacher in state schools in various areas of Greece in the periods 1987-1992 and 1998-2000. More than being simply non-Greek, I am citizen of the country involved in the October 1940 events. At the time of the events celebrated on October 28 Italy and Greece were on opposite fronts in the war (1940). One might ask whether I am detached enough from those events. Actually on at least one of the first October celebrations I attended, almost thirty years ago, I was not: I definitely remember feeling annoyed at something the speaker said about Italy or "the Italians". With this exception I felt interest and curiosity. With time I became more sensitive to the whole atmosphere of a school celebration, as I realized when, on some occasions, I was moved to the point of tears.

I tend to exclude that the individuals who refused to contribute to my speech collection did so because of my specific origins. However, being non-Greek has probably been an obstacle in my negotiations with teachers-speakers. My double status of Italian and (former) secondary school teacher, of which these people were aware, may have contributed to some teachers' negative attitude to my request. Other teachers probably perceived the process as a kind of examination and feared that, studying closely their texts, I might come to criticize them.

The Analysis

Analysis means splitting a whole into its components. It involves elaborating on data, breaking it down into components, searching for patterns, categorizing, organizing the elements in a novel synthesis, with the aim to learn something new and finally rearranging the components into a picture that will enable the researcher to tell others what has been learnt (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). To say how exactly this is done is more difficult. As an interpretative approach, discourse analysis cannot be reduced to a set of instructions –a kind of "recipe"—for mechanically going through a series of pre-defined, pre-planned and sequential stages. In fact, interpretation involves judgment. I rather followed a circular procedure like the discourse analysis described in Potter and Wetherell (1987). In ethnographic research and more generally in qualitative research the whole research design is circular, in the sense that the researcher can go back and forth between the various phases: literature review, data collection and analysis constantly call for one another and proceed simultaneously (Bogdan & Biklen).

In this study an initial literature review on some concepts that seemed likely to be useful for an understanding of the topic (e.g., "stereotyping") sharpened my perception, allowing me to see more and more details when I subsequently went through the speeches again. I gradually "discovered" (see below) key words, recurring ideas and phrases, some of which demanded further reading of the relevant

research literature. When, with enhanced "sensitivity," I went back to the speeches, I was able to notice new details. This procedure was repeated several times until I was no longer seeing new information (data saturation). The first step consisted in carefully reading the texts several times, taking note of even the tiniest detail (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and adding my own remarks when I had any. The first notes were gradually enriched and constituted the basis for further ordering and classification. While reading I was comparing, contrasting and ordering units and exploring how they are like or unlike each other, grouping together terms that seemed to belong to the same semantic field.

Like with the term "located" before (see *The Researcher as a Tool*) the quotation marks around the word "discovered" in previous paragraph are meant as a hedge. I could have used a less controversial term, such as "generated". However, the term "discover", used and simultaneously "repudiated" through the use of quotation marks, helps me convey that I conceive of research data as a construction. Though my approach aims to be inductive, in the sense of trying to avoid imposition of categories, I am well aware that pure induction is a myth. The very process of note taking is intuitive, and influenced by several factors, like the researcher's background and assumptions (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 191).

The corpus might be analyzed in many different ways, each of them potentially leading to a different paper. In this study I only develop *one* way of reading the data. The fact that the speakers compared their national group with other peoples awakened my curiosity as to the details and the implications of this comparison: I started paying attention to the way in which the comparison was carried out. I saw that in all texts Greece has a special place in the universe of nations, which led me to ask a further question: How, according to the speakers, is Greece special? When the specific terms I found started increasing in number I tried to see whether I could group them in a way that made sense, given the particular project: What are the most common categories used? While reading I tried to sort out the material relying on analogy and contrast. For example, when the category "human being" started to seem important in the analysis I started looking for similar concepts or for opposite ones. An example of the latter is the case when the speaker compares the enemy to an animal (human being vs. animal). The material is organized by topic and by function (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 181). For example, the criterion of function has inspired the following questions: How are the categories e.g., "human being" and "animal" employed to create a hierarchy between peoples? How are they used to improve the image of self?

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Several features of this study should minimize bias ad enhance rigor and trustworthiness. Since in qualitative studies the researcher is the main instrument, I have provided some information about my background.

To most native members of Greek society the taken-for-granted cultural knowledge is familiar and thus "invisible". This implies that most cultural meanings are implicit and thus hard for participants to bring to surface and verbalize. Lacking the primary socialization that most Greek people have gone through I am potentially in a position to be able to observe actions and interactions from the outside. From this standpoint my status of "adopted" member is likely to be beneficial to the study. On the other hand, I have gone through thirty years' immersion in the setting in which the speeches have been delivered, and I have also become extremely familiar with the

language. The "setting" I refer to includes a number of dimensions, among which "Greek national culture" (whatever it is) and school life in Greek schools are the most notable, though not the only ones.

In order to further enhance rigor and trustworthiness I aimed at providing a thorough account to take the reader into the setting of speech delivery, using direct quotations from the speeches that I have examined. Moreover, I have described in detail the procedures of data collection and analysis. During the whole research process I made a conscious attempt at maintaining a neutral attitude. In particular, to enhance credibility I try to compare my findings, whenever possible, with evidence from the work of others. Given the "sensitivity" of the topic I was glad when I could find support in scientific literature written by *Greeks*.

The Findings

The findings are organized in a way that reflects mainly the themes and terms/ concepts emergent from the analysis, most third level headings being either direct quotations or paraphrases of key points in the speeches.

Reference Groups

The reference groups that appear in the speeches are mainly three: the ancestors/ descendants, the Ottoman/ Turks and the rest of the world, mainly the Europeans: because of the events commemorated, the Fascist Italians and, to a lesser degree, the Nazi-Germans. Unlike the group of the Ottoman/ Turks, the rest of the world or the Europeans can be further distinguished into peoples/ countries against which the Greeks have fought and peoples/ countries with which there have never been hostilities.

The ancestors.

Ancient Greece is proudly described as the place "from where the spirit, order and civilization sprang." The past generations are presented as watching contemporary Greeks and dictating that they "should keep free the land that they handed down to us." In the speeches, today's Greeks are continuously invited to compare themselves with the ancients, who are set as examples.

The Ottomans / Turks.

The Ottomans/ Turks are only presented in the role of "enemies," "conquerors," "oppressors" and "tyrants". They are described as uncivilized, greedy, ignorant, uncouth, violent, merciless, coarse and inhuman, and occasionally referred to as "dogs". The Ottomans/ Turks invent "satanic ways" to win over the Greeks. They commit "wild atrocities" and are themselves "wild beasts" that pollute the "holy soil of the fatherland". These negative characteristics are textually/ syntagmatically related to a specific (and at the same time vague) geographical area as in the phrases "Asian conquerors", "wild Asian swords" and "eastern despotism".

The Europeans and the rest of the world.

The broad unit "rest of the world", which appears especially in October speeches, seems to refer to different realities depending on the context: "wide masses of the peoples of Europe and America," "the peoples of the earth," but also "the whole of Europe" and "foreign public opinion." However, it often refers to those countries/ peoples that were not involved in the struggles being celebrated. Those of them that invaded Greece in the 1940s are described as "impudent invaders," "violent," "inhuman" and "unmanly." The German invaders in particular are associated with terms such as "hordes," "horror," "ferocity," "insanity" but also "Saxon monster" and "Hitlerian Minotaur." About the Italian soldiers, one speaker mentions that they fought as heroically as the Greeks, but they could not win because, unlike the Greeks, they lacked faith in their struggle. All the other references to the Italian enemies are negative, even though the language used to refer to them is usually softer than that employed for the Nazi-Germans. Those peoples/ countries that in the same period were oppressed by Fascism and Nazism are presented as possessed by fear, terror and black defeatism, included those among them who were "powerful and renowned."

"…And Greece Came Again, as Always, to the Limelight"

The way historical events are recalled often evokes the theatre metaphor: The world is a stage and the Greeks the main actors: "The curtain quickly rose, and Greece came again, as always, to the limelight." Some of the other "peoples of the world" are necessarily co-actors, since a war requires an enemy, but they may be at the same time spectators of the deeds performed by the Greeks on the stage. While watching, the audience make predictions, e.g., that "the Greek race [will] die," or draw conclusions, e.g., that "Greece had definitely died as a nation." The public is variously referred to as "foreigners," "foreign public opinion," "all the peoples of Europe/ of the earth," "all the world" and "humankind." According to the speakers, before the start of the revolution the European peoples did not take the Greeks into account, and the reasons as they appear in the speeches vary. For a start, Greece is geographically marginal (in the speeches, "this rocky land on the border of Europe," or "this rocky extremity of Europe"). Also, in the speakers' perception of the perception of the "west," Greece is not greatly taken into account because it is small, poor and powerless.

After the start of the revolution or after the *Okhi* respectively, the public's negative expectations are discomfirmed: "The peoples stood dumbfound before the wonder of the Greeks of 1940, and watched the titanic struggle of little Greece on the mountain-tops of the Pindus with bated breath." The "foreigners," the "peoples of Europe," etc., are surprised, speechless and astonished. They feel awe and sympathy for the Greeks, as well as "deepest respect that becomes admiration." The speakers imagine the European public drawing a comparison with the ancient Greeks. Watching the Greek fighters of 1821, the Europeans recognized in them "heroes and demi-heroes," the "genuine descendants of the Marathon fighters and Salamina fighters. And Europe bowed her head with shame." Moreover, the Greeks "proved that they could establish an independent state."

Greek Values are Universal

In commemoration speeches on the two major national holidays, the achievements of the nation and the ideals that were behind them are often presented as unique, like the nation itself. At the same time, some speakers attribute a universalistic dimension to both the struggle of 1821 and the *Okhi*, which is "a landmark in the development of world history."

When "brutal violence and tyranny threaten humankind" the Greeks always "struggle against barbarity" to defend "pure ideals and the basic values of the civilized world." The Greeks' ideals "constitute the necessary presupposition of human existence." Their demands for "freedom, peace, dignity and respect of the human person" are ultimately "universal demands and their values are "so human that they do not have boundaries." The "destiny of the Greek" involves "guiding the peoples of the earth," providing examples of manly behaviour, and teaching the world "the eternal moral values, the great virtues that honour the human being".

"Spirit Wins Over Matter"

In the speeches, the comparison between the Greeks and their enemies is often made in terms of numbers/ quantity. Thus, "a handful of Greeks" rose against "thousands, countless enemies," that were backed by "great and all-mighty Empires" and could count on "terrific offensive machinery." Not knowing the force of spirit, the enemies believed that their material superiority would be enough to gain victory. However, "the strength of the Greek soul" made up for the "lack of material equipment." In a system in which the spirit is accorded greater value, "real defeat is not material, external." Rather it is "an internal, psychological condition" of accepting defeat within one's soul—something that the Greeks allegedly never did. Thus, eventually "the weak won over the strong."

"A Big Folly"

It is repeatedly said that the Greeks fought in spite of the fact that the struggle was unequal–so unequal that "logically [it] was doomed." The revolution is referred to as "a big folly": "On this much tormented, but always sound soul of theirs, did the Greeks rely in order to make the big folly—the revolution." "This was what logic said," writes a teacher: "Who wouldn't label this act sheer insanity?" A statement from a well-known text that is often read during the celebration goes: "The world said we were mad. If we were not mad, we would not have carried out the revolution." The Greeks are described as acting "without calculation, without thinking." Here it is clear that thinking has negative connotations and so has logic in a teacher's remark that "cold logic is a long way from the flame of the heart."

Behaviour that goes against logic is presented as the utmost characteristic of humanity: "This is the value of the human being: to demand, and to know that they are demanding the impossible, and to be sure that they will achieve it. And to fight for that, beyond any logic, with faith and obstinacy. Then, the miracle happens—the miracle that the *wingless* mind could never imagine. Then, *the impossible becomes possible*" [Emphasis added].

One speaker alone stresses the beneficial effect of the "perfect organization" of the Friendly Society (a clandestine organization finalized to spreading nationalistic

ideas throughout Greece). Others mention the "rudimentary organization and co-ordination" of the struggle. One speaker remarks that "the terrain had been prepared in a suitable way (...). The preparation did not refer so much to tactics and organization for the struggle, but rather to the strengthening of the souls and the consolidation of faith in success." The "each time powerful of the earth" are said to be acting on the basis of "barren calculations." Therefore, in the eyes of "foreigners," the Greeks' behaviour in relation to the struggle is labelled as "insanity."

Interpretation and Discussion

Interpretation involves presenting what I have learnt in understandable terms. The meanings teachers-speakers may attach to words they pronounce at a school national celebration may be much broader than those described in this paper. For example, they may be concerned with the reactions of (particular members of) the audience and possible gains or losses in relation to their image as teachers and democratic individuals (see Benincasa, 2006). However, the present section limits itself to the research questions formulated in *Discourse Analysis* and *The Analysis*. This section is organized in a way that reflects both, (a) the themes and terms/ concepts emergent from the analysis and (b) the themes and concepts that emerged from the literature review, among which the concepts of "reference groups" and "social creativity strategies" are particularly relevant. Within the narrower framework of this paper, based on the evidence presented in *The Findings* I attempted to describe how e.g., the categories e.g., "human being" and "animal" are employed to create a hierarchy between peoples and improve the image of self. I tried to highlight relations and connections between ideas and concepts, grouping together those that looked similar. Since the literature review was carried out in a continuous dialogue with the processes of data collection and analysis, the concepts in the analysis do not impose themselves on the corpus of data.

There are several obvious limitations to this study, which the author herself acknowledges. The most important springs from the size of the sample and the way it was selected, which do not allow to generalize to other contexts, although the findings may be useful in consideration of more in-depth research and provide a foundation for conducting future research on this topic.

The Nation on the Stage

The speeches suggest the metaphor of a theatre where Greece is the main actor, "always in the lime-light." On the stage Greece carries out her struggles against two classes of enemies: the Ottomans/ Turks and the Italian-Fascists (and in some speeches, the Nazi-Germans). Compared to the enemies, the Greeks show greater courage and a stronger faith in victory, and eventually prevail in spite of their material inferiority in terms of numbers and equipment. The Ottomans/ Turks, described as ignorant, uncivilized and unbelievers, pollute the holy soil of Greece. Their wilderness and violence are textually related to geographical terms, e.g., "Asian swords," in ways that suggest causality, i.e., they are wild *because* they are Asians. Actually, wildness and cruelty are part of the orientalist stereotype of the "east" (Burke, 2003). Both classes of enemy are described as violent, merciless and inhuman. The Greeks' behaviour is sometimes further qualified as "virile." This image is part of the stereotype about the "west": "The literary commonplace of the west showed the dominant figure of the male Christian soldier-hero courting and

converting the female oriental/effeminate Orient" (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 109, quoting Kabbani, 1986, p. 15).

The ancestors and descendants of Greece, foreign public opinion and all the peoples of the earth watch the performance. All of them are employed as reference groups, but most frequent reference is made to the "west." Asia, exemplified by the Ottomans/ Turks, is presented as violent, uncivilized and intellectually inferior. The judgement of the "rest of the world" in general does not seem to matter as much as the judgement of the "west." The "powerful countries of the west" are admittedly richer than Greece and more civilized, if civilization is measured by scientific and technological advancement/ material welfare. They were the ones that could give free way to the creation of an independent Greek state, and in this sense a positive judgement on their part has practical (political) importance.

The speeches feature a temporal comparison with the ancestors and the duty to be commensurate with the glorious past. The ancestors and descendants, too, are imagined in the act of watching the Greeks acting on the scene: the "foreigner" spectators, and especially "Western Europe," compare contemporary Greeks to the ancient Greeks and, recognizing in them the ancient heroes, bow their heads in shame. The western newspapers of the time indeed reported the war as "a virtual replay of the Battle of Marathon and the Persian Wars" (Just, 1989, p. 83).

Taking the perspectives of the "west," the speakers show that they are aware of (potential) criticism from Western Europe for not being up to European standards. The "foreigners" watching the performance are perceived to expect that "the Greek race will die." Thus, when they see their predictions proved wrong, they are surprised, astonished, and suddenly feel strong respect that becomes admiration. Finally, everybody, including the enemies, praises the Greeks for their heroism and the way they fought their struggles.

The speakers show that they resent the stereotypes they perceive are being applied to their national group by "the west." At the same time they perceive the Ottomans/ Turks through the same stereotype. This suggests that it is not the orientalist stereotype itself and the very idea of a hierarchy of peoples that is being questioned, but rather *that* instance of the application of the stereotype and the legitimacy of the resulting hierarchy. Frangoudaki (2001) has found a similar mechanism at work in the lively debate about the Greek language. Groups of Greek intellectuals, adopting the northern European stereotype, denounce their co-nationals and their language as inferior. As descendants of classical antiquity (p. 155), though, they claim a top position in the hierarchy of peoples: "Within this ideological construct, *equality is not a right that springs from questioning the ladder of hierarchical ranking of peoples...* Rather, it is a right that springs from the nobility titles of the Greeks who are natural direct descendants of their ancient ancestors" (Frangoudaki, 2001, p. 156, Emphasis added).

Reference Groups and Relative Deprivation

Why do the Europeans seem pessimistic about the final outcome of the Greeks' struggles? In the speakers' perception of the perception of "the Europeans," one reason is its southern/ eastern marginality. Evoking a scheme centre-periphery, the speakers seem to connect geographical marginality with a low position in the hierarchy of peoples/ countries, and with moral marginality/ inferiority. Moreover, they describe Greece as small, poor and powerless. The above set of traits may be

called a metastereotype (see e.g., Sigelman & Tuch, 1997), i.e., the Greeks' perception of European stereotypes of Greeks.

In the hierarchical universe that they depict, the speakers perceive that the highest position is occupied by western countries that can boast a set of characteristics that seem to be bound to go together: they are large, wealthy and powerful and, of course, they are at the centre of Europe, i.e., at the centre of the centre. Moreover, although "the wide masses of the Americas" are mentioned in one speech, the construction is euro-centric, the centre of Europe thus coinciding with the centre of the world. The Greeks often mention the small size of their country as a drawback, both within the EU and in the world arena. Like poverty and powerlessness, geographical marginality and small size are perceived as moral failings in the Europeans' eyes. A social order is substantially a *moral*, and therefore a normative, order. In one speech the Greek people is allegedly "despised" by the "west." Politicians in their speeches often mention that Greece has now become "wealthier and more powerful in Europe," the latter point often being made in newspapers in which the socialist government, in power until March 2004, used to publicize their beneficial effect on the country, e.g., "Greece is in step with the powerful."

Unlike a comparison with the Ottomans/ Turks, a comparison with the reference group referred to as the "west" awakens a sense of relative deprivation (Hyman, 1960, p. 388). The speakers believe that the Greeks have the right to have first place in the world: first and foremost, because their ancestors gave humankind the "lights of civilization"; then, because they have defended the achievements of the human spirit and the universal moral values that made them possible. Therefore it is unfair that their country is not being treated as it deserves.

"Irrational is Beautiful"

In the speeches the Greeks' most celebrated characteristic, heroism, brings irrationality onto the stage. If, since the Enlightenment, reason has been viewed as the distinguishing characteristic of the human being, the Greeks of most speech narrations display characteristics which are the exact opposite: besides scorning reason and rational behaviour, they attach little value to numbers, inasmuch as they do not let themselves be discouraged by the enemies' great number and their massive war equipment. Quantity is scorned in comparison to quality—the quality of the Greek soul. According to the speakers, the outcome proves that the Greeks judged correctly: eventually quality wins over quantity. The speakers narrate how the strugglers were not guided by utilitarian considerations. It seems that the struggles of the nation have not been conducted on the basis of planning, organization, selection of goals and of means rationally chosen to attain those goals. It seems rather that the nation has been guided by feelings. Planned and organized action is associated with "strategic political expediencies" or "action guided by interest and calculation" and is thus condemned.

An extreme irrationality is presented as the very quintessence of humanity. This attitude to life leads to success: "Then the impossible becomes possible." The Greeks are extremely human because they let themselves be guided by irrationality. The Enlightenment view is replaced by a view that may be called romantic, where action is the result of culture, national character, faith, passion and feelings. Contemporary politicians may use this type of claim, too.

"Irrational is Human"

The stereotypes about the "west," even when not directly present in the speeches, are evoked by opposition through the way the Greeks are extolled. A number of parallel oppositions stand out in many speeches: material civilization vs. spiritual civilization, matter vs. spirit, mind vs. heart and cold vs. hot, e.g., "cold logic" vs. "the flame of the heart." All of them refer to an underlying opposition between the "west" and Greece. Departing from an awareness that the values most respected (by the peoples that count, i.e., by the peoples of Europe) are the ones related to matter/ quantity, the speakers claim rather that the opposite holds. Since spirit is superior to matter, Greece is superior to the "west." Reversing the scale of values that they perceive to be commonplace in Western Europe, the speakers place their national group and country at the top of the hierarchy. The statement "the Greeks' behaviour is irrational" acquires its value from the context: by switching the frame of reference from Enlightenment universal rationalism to Romanticism, the valency of the statement becomes positive. Social creativity strategies allow the speakers to maintain a positive self-image of their national group and enhance the self.[2]

In extolling irrationality the speakers play down logic, planning and rational behavior as "barren," "cold" and "not human." Technology, too, is presented as an enemy. Inasmuch as it provides the enemy's "terrific offensive machinery and its "tools of destruction," technology acquires connotations of barbarity. Today the "barbarian attitudes" that the domination of technology brings with it, threaten to "enslave the *yenos*." Thus again, the dominant hierarchy is reversed: the "west" is barbarian while Greece is civilized. According to some writers of speeches, the "foreigners" cannot understand irrational behaviour, which suggests that they are not fully human. Compared, on different grounds, to (the stereotypes of) both Ottomans/ Turks and Europeans, the Greeks prove to be the most human of all, and "Greek" becomes thus synonymous for "human being." Because they were inspired by universal human values, the Greeks' struggles are attributed a universal dimension. Contemporary Greek public discourse often presents the Greeks as endowed with "humanism," the important contribution that Greece can offer humankind, in contrast to a "west" that can only boast the strength of technological progress. Some handouts for the school subject "Composition," distributed by a teacher to his upper secondary students in the late 1990s and dealing with the "role and mission of Hellenism in the world community today," claim the following: "The most important mission of Greece is spreading humanist values and principles as they have been shaped and formulated within the Greek spirit since ancient times, as this is the most important deficit of world culture as it is presently being shaped." I have heard such arguments in everyday conversations, e.g., during informal discussions with university students.

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[2] Social creativity strategies are not limited to the celebration context. For example, in many Greek people's view the "Europeans" criticize the Greeks because they allegedly do not work as hard as the peoples of central and northern Europe. This is likely to lead to unpleasant feelings about the self. A typical reply to this imagined criticism is that "Northern Europeans only know how to work. They're like machines–like robots. Greek people, instead, know how to enjoy life." The comparison is thus "translated" into terms that are much more favourable for the in-group and enhance self-esteem.

Dehumanizing the Other

The equation Greek = human being is matched by another equation: other= animal. Moreover, in one speech mention is made of the "Saxon monster," and the "Hitlerian Minotaur," whose referents are even less than animals inasmuch as they do not have a place in the natural order. Compared to the ferocious behaviour of their enemies, the Greeks again stand out as quintessentially human, while their enemies are cast into the role of the Greeks' "moral contraries" (McDonald, 1993). For thousands of years human beings did without the notion of humankind. Humankind stopped at the boundaries of tribe, of the linguistic group or of the village. Very many populations, usually referred to as primitive, call themselves by a name that means "human beings," or sometimes "good," "excellent" or "perfect," thus suggesting that other tribes or groups or villages do not share in those qualities, and maybe not even in human nature (Lévi-Strauss, 1991, pp. 18–19). In many contemporary societies, "outsiders are 'animals,' or at least 'appreciably less human than ourselves'" (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 40).

Some basic terms used to convey the alleged negative traits of the "other," e.g., inhuman, unmanly and unbelievers, in Greek all contain the privative *a-*: *apanthropi*, *anandri* and *apisti*, respectively.[3] This usage, suggesting a "negative reading" of the enemy, places the "other" in a position of incompleteness, and thus of inferiority. On the other hand, the Greeks perceive that others view them in a similar way—as lacking something. They use the same type of compound words to describe themselves as they perceive that others, especially western people, view them: weak, powerless, immature and irresponsible. In Greek, *adhinati*, *aniskhiri*, *anorimi* and *anefthini*–all with a privative *a-*.

Concluding Remarks

Some of the issues that have been recently featuring in the media worldwide can be described as debates about the "east" and the "west," about how they differ and how they are alike. To be sure, plenty of stereotypes are being used in the process. This paper shows how "east", "west" and related concepts may be deployed in Greek schools. Though teachers may not really endorse the words they write and deliver on national commemorations (Benincasa, 2006) it is also through their practices that these stereotypes get reproduced. Finally, the fact that the speakers may perceive an opposition Greece vs. "west" shows that the content of the categories "west" and "east" depends on the speaker's point of view.

The speeches reflect the ethnocentrism that research has found in schoolbooks. Much has been written about the dangers of ethnocentrism in schools. Exposition to the speeches examined here may result in a traumatic experience for pupils that identify with one or more of the national groups that play the role of the enemy in these "performances," but it may be an unpleasant experience for any pupil who does not regard her-/ himself as Greek. Besides being harmful for the relationships of Greek pupils (and adults) with pupils who are immigrants' children, it is harmful for the Greek pupils themselves, for their relation with their national identity, and for the development of their critical faculties (Frangoudaki, 1999).

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[3] Private *a-*: a prefix that means "not" or "without". Together with the prefixes *un-* and *non-* it is used in English, too, with the same meaning.

Can ethnocentrism be avoided in schools? As concerns the commemorations of which these speeches are part, in Greece it seems unrealistic that any government will abolish the celebrations in school in the near future. First, no government will be willing to shoulder the political cost of a decision that is likely to go against a significant part of popular feelings. Second, as some teachers told me, national celebrations are the occasions for political authorities, national and local, to be present at public ceremonies and thus make themselves visible. Furthermore, in countries like Italy, where national celebrations had a minimum of space in public life, they have been going through a revival in recent years. Generally speaking, the widespread revival of ethnicity and nationalism suggest that national commemorations are to stay in Greek schools for some time to come.

However, national commemorations can be given a different direction, at least within education. Peoples may learn to enhance their self-esteem in alternative ways. Frangoudaki (2000) proposes, among other things, that Greek schools celebrate the Okhi with Italian schools and transform the anniversary into an occasion for the two peoples to discuss together about the evils of Fascism. More generally, school discourse about the past should treat the concepts of fatherland and nation as historical products that served certain social goals at a specific time (Frangoudaki, 2004).

Initiatives in education, though, cannot be expected to function in isolation. Changes in the same direction would be required, for example in the way the media, the politicians and even researchers deal with relevant topics. So far research in the social sciences has greatly contributed to the establishment of an image of the world as a collection of nations, as eternal, primordial entities, each of them internally homogeneous. Sociology and anthropology alike have revolved around the categories of culture, society and nation. As Thornton (1988) observes, though ethnography seems to describe the human realities that are its object of study, through writing it rather *creates* them. While this article too can probably be blamed from this point of view, research practices involving pupils may be more harmful in some way. Elsewhere I discuss some of these practices and suggest some ways to find answer to the same research questions without so heavy repercussions (Benincasa, 2008).

More than any changes from above, a change in people's experiences is likely to allow (and demand at the same time) new ways of dealing with the past. In the town where the speeches were collected there are many families where one of the parents is not Greek. Their children would be referred to as e.g., Greek-Italian and Greek-Albanian. This population of hyphenated people (Benincasa, 2008), that is increasing also in the rest of Greece as well as worldwide, is likely to bring a gradual change in the way humankind is perceived. In the space of several generations, following demographic change, the model of a world made of discrete and bounded nations based on exclusive membership is likely to give way to other types of imagined communities.

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