

**NO RACISM HERE:**

**Modern Turkey and the question of race and national identity**

Didier Drogba and Emmanuel Eboué, two top football players for the Galatasaray club from the Ivory Coast in West Africa, were subjected to vile racist chants from fans in the terraces during a match in Istanbul in May 2013.<sup>1</sup> Many leading figures in Turkish football and sport journalism were quick to criticise the behaviour of fans, saying such “rude” behaviour is unacceptable in Turkish football. There also was almost universal criticism of the fans’ behaviour as rude and totally unacceptable in such a passionate, football-crazy, and “peace loving” nation with a strong tradition of hospitality towards foreigners. However, there was an equally strong denial the fans’ behaviour was not racist, based on a claim Turkish identity and culture don’t include any racist aspects, and that racism is completely out of Turkish character.<sup>2</sup>

At a press conference, the Turkish football club, Fenerbahce, defended its fans waving of bananas at the players during the match, saying that there were no racist intentions. One fan who was photographed waving a banana claimed he had undergone a medical operation and was now on a fruit rich diet, and the banana was for his own consumption. He then added that some of his friends are black! Another fan, who was also filmed waving a banana, said he had also no racist intentions, claiming he didn’t even understand the term, racism, but rather was simply offered a banana by his friend to eat, and in the excitement of that moment of the match they shouted for their team while holding their bananas in their hands!<sup>3</sup> These explanations were accepted and circulated by the majority of commentators, both in football journalism and in the wider media in Turkey, implying they were more credible than the idea there is racism at work in Turkish culture.

Not much occurs in this country that does not bear directly or indirectly on football. In February 2006, when Samuel Eto’o famously walked off the pitch after Real Zaragoza fans shouted racist slogans at him during a La Liga game, one Turkish journalist wrote that Eto’o was warming to the idea of coming to Turkey

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<sup>1</sup> Palash Gosh, “As Erdogan Meets Obama, Africans in Turkey Face Racism, Discrimination,” *International Business Times*, 16 May 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.com/erdogan-meets-obama-africans-turkey-face-racism-discrimination-1265037> (accessed in December 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Emre Akoz, “Drogba’ya Muz: Terbiyesizce Ama Irkci Degil,” *Sabah*, 15 May 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/akoz/2013/05/15/drogbaya-muz-terbiyesizce-ama-irkci-degil> (accessed in December 2014).

<sup>3</sup> *Hurriyet Daily News*, 15 May 2013, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-football-goes-bananas-in-racism-row.aspx?pageID=238&nID=46955&NewsCatID=362> (accessed in March 2016).

because there is no racism in Turkey to bother him.<sup>4</sup> This debate and publicity about racism in football reflects a wider problem in Turkish society. Football, which Eduardo Galeano described as “ritual sublimation of war,” occupies a very important place in Turkey,<sup>5</sup> and has always been highly political. When Fuat Hüsni (Kayacan), a Military Academy student in the Ottoman Empire, formed the very first Turkish-Muslim team, the *Black Stockings*, in 1901, he was charged in a military court with “setting up goal posts, wearing the same uniforms as Greeks, and kicking a ball around.”<sup>6</sup>

The claim that there is and was no racism in Turkey is an illusion; there are no known societies in the world where racism has been rendered non-existent, in the sense that “no civilisation has a monopoly on racism.”<sup>7</sup> In Turkey, however, this claim/ illusion is so widespread and embedded it has become one of the main clichés about Turkish culture shared by a majority of the population and repeated by journalists and politicians too often. Many citizens, political leaders and cultural elites from all sides of Turkish political spectrum, strongly deny there is racism in Turkey – arguing instead theirs is one of the most hospitable and inclusive cultures in the world. For example, Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, claimed on 26 March 2015, “Thank God... there is no racism in Turkey; it has never found a base for its roots. When we look at Europe and other countries we see how far behind us they are, and we feel really sorry.”<sup>8</sup>

*“The dominant race in a society, whether white or otherwise, rarely admits to its own racism. Denial is near universal. The reasons are manifold. It has a huge vested interest in its own privilege. It will often be oblivious to its own prejudices. It will regard its racist attitudes as nothing more than common sense, having the force and justification of nature. Only when challenged by those on the receiving end is racism outed, and attitudes begin to change. The reason why British society is less nakedly racist than it used to be is that whites have been forced by people of colour to ques-*

<sup>4</sup> *Internet Haber*, 27 February 2006, <http://www.internethaber.com/etoo-turkiyeye-geldi-2453h.htm> (accessed in March 2016); *Milliyet Internet*, 26 February 2006, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/02/26/son/sonspo01.asp> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Eduardo Galeano, *Soccer in Sun and Shadow*, translated by Mark Fried, (London and New York: Verso, 2003 – first published in 1998), 17.

<sup>6</sup> “Futbolun ustundeki politika golgesi,” *NTV*, 22 February 2011, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/spor/futbolun-ustundeki-politika-golgesi,BLZYs8j6JU6AOh50VARc3A/xbuKbXwS8U-ovWiRi6ENmw> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>7</sup> “Étienne Balibar: War, racism and nationalism,” *An interview with Etienne Balibar* by Clement Petitjean, 17 November 2015, Verso books blog, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1559-etienne-balibar-war-racism-and-nationalism> (accessed in January 2016).

<sup>8</sup> *Hurriyet Daily News*, 26 March 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/deputy-pm-says-there-is-no-racism-in-turkey-at-opening-of-renovated-synagogue.aspx?pageID=238&nID=80216&NewsCatID=341> (accessed in September 2015).

tion age-old racist assumptions. Nations are never honest about themselves: they are all in varying degrees of denial.”<sup>9</sup>

Academic discussions of Turkey’s history and its contemporary politics and culture has generally been underpinned by the assumption, “Turkish nationalism is ethnic, or...cultural, nationalism. It is rather an inclusive civic nationalism.”<sup>10</sup> Or, as another writer claims, “Kemalist nationalism is cultural and political, not racist... Turkish history and...textbooks...echo the inclusionary and homogenising character of Turkish nationalism.”<sup>11</sup> And, “the Kemalist notion of nationalism...is not based on race or ethnicity...it aimed at the creation of a homogenous Turkish nation based on the unity of culture, language and ideals,” claimed in another book by two significant political scientists on Turkish identity and nationalism.<sup>12</sup> And, “racism is a rare phenomenon in Turkey, even among nationalist thinkers,” claimed by another academic.<sup>13</sup> These comments reflect a general contemporary assumption by many researchers, both in Turkey and outside, who argue that Turkish nationalism is among those most civic nationalisms of Europe, and therefore has no racist aspects.<sup>14</sup>

A number of critical studies appeared from late 1990s onwards. However, they mainly focus on the early republican period, arguing that avowedly secular Kemalist elite was not essentially racist, but its approach to ethnic and religious minorities was not in harmony with “egalitarian” and laic Turkish constitution.<sup>15</sup> Murat Ergin, in his excellent sociological research of the early republican period, goes one step further and accepts that the issue of race was at the centre of Kemalist modernisation process and did perform an important function in the 1930s, “regulating the negotiations between Turkish identity and modernity.” To Ergin too, however, racial discourses adopted by early republican elite was rather accidental, an indirect result of a desperate search for finding a strong positive national identity within the context of 1930s’ European modernity.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Martin Jacques, “The global hierarchy of race,” *the Guardian* (20 September 2003), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/20/race.uk> (accessed in July 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Metin Heper, “Kemalism/ Atatürkism,” *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Turkey*, ed. by Metin Heper and Sabri Sayari, (Routledge, 2013), 139-148.

<sup>11</sup> Meral U Cinar, *Collective Memory and National Membership: Identity and Citizenship Models in Turkey and Austria* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey, The case of the AKP* (London: Routledge, 2010), chapter 11.

<sup>13</sup> Umut Uzer, “Racism in Turkey; The Case of Huseyin Nihal Atsız,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 22, No. 1, 2002, 119.

<sup>14</sup> Ayhan Aktar, “Trakya Yahudi Olaylarını ‘Doğru’ Yorumlamak” [“Interpreting the Jewish Incidents of Thrace Right”], *Tarih ve Toplum*, 155, (1996), 45-56; Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey. Who is a Turk?* (Routledge, 2006), 63-64.

<sup>15</sup> N. Maksudyân, “The Turkish Review of Anthropology and The Racist Face of Turkish Nationalism,” *Cultural Dynamics*, 17(3), November 2005, 291-322; S. Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?*

<sup>16</sup> M. Ergin, “Biometrics and anthropometrics: the twins of Turkish modernity,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2008, 282-304; M. Ergin, “Is the Turk a White Man?” towards a Theoretical

The purpose of this article is to challenge these claims by revealing there is a “dark side” to Turkish nationalism, and that the official discourse of Turkish nationalism as inclusive and civic suppresses another truth that an explicitly ethnic and racial discourse shaped Turkish nationalism in the early years of the republic and continues to define modern Turkish nationalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We focus first on how “race” has been a central tenet in the formation and development of Turkish identity, and argue there is little or no evidence to support that claim, that an obsession with racial characteristics of Turks, such as blood and other allegedly unique physical aspects of Turkish race, continues. Secondly, we describe how the founders of the Turkish Republic interpreted Turkish nationalism by mimicking or emulating key aspects of white European racism, which suggested a “white race” was an “ideal,” which then became the signifier of citizenship in the new Turkey.

### *The (re-)birth of Turkish nation*

The modern Turkish state emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire which which was on the defeated side in the First World War, 1914–1918. Immediately after after the end of the Great War, an independence war began against the Greek army in Anatolia, which was acting with the full support of the Allied powers. This extended the fighting on Turkish soil by an extra four years, and became to be known as the Turkish War of Independence. Following the defeat of the Greek military on 15 September 1922, the ceasefire of 11 October forced the Greek army to evacuated eastern Thrace leading to the opening of the Lausanne peace conference. While the conference maintained suspense over the conclusion of peace, in 1923 Turkey under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal began to establish basic institutions as well as policies for the new Turkey. During this time, Mustafa Kemal developed his critique of economic backwardness of his country and its culture, and introduced his main goal: how to achieve western standards of political and economic management, or in other words “how to make Turkey European.” The model for a new nation-state, Mustafa Kemal believed, was to be found in the civilization(s) of Europe and the West, where he believed modern thought and reason had made societies developed and prosperous.<sup>17</sup>

Mustafa Kemal genuinely believed that “new Turkey” should cut all its “Eastern/Muslim” origins adrift and define its new identity within the framework of the “white/Western” civilizations. Even at the moment of opposition to the plans of the European powers over Turkish lands, the self-Orientalised Turkish elite deployed Euro-Orientalist perceptions in the formulation of Turkish national-self and legitimacy.<sup>18</sup> In doing this, the Turkish delegation at Lausanne sought to convince the British, French and Italian delegates that “new Turkey” had nothing in common with the “old Eastern/

Framework for Race in the Making of Turkishness, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (Nov., 2008), 827-850.

<sup>17</sup> Lord Kinross, *Ataturk. The Birth of A Nation*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, pb edition in 1990 – first published in 1964), 411-464.

<sup>18</sup> Suna Kili, *The Ataturk Revolution. A Paradigm of modernization*, (Istanbul; Is Bankasi Kultur Yayinlari, 2003), 83-90.

Muslim Turk” represented by the Ottoman Empire, and attempted to “prove” the Turkish race was part of the white European race and had nothing to do with ward Oriental/ Eastern races.”<sup>19</sup>

Such an emphasis on colour and on whiteness in particular, was in line with the general “scientific” context existing in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, where the concept of race was a preoccupation for the growing fields of human sciences. In particular, during the 1920s and 30s, the doctrine of race reached a crest of acceptability and popularity among respectable intellectual circles in Europe.<sup>20</sup> However, a large number of so-called scientific researchers were involved in developing the concept of Aryan supremacy, which later fuelled the institutional racism of Hitler’s Germany in the 1930s. Mustafa Kemal’s thinking to a large extent was influenced by these ideas when he launched his version of Turkish-ness in the 1920s. By design, this new version of Turkish identity provided some comfort and an extra boost for Turkish national pride and self-esteem, which sadly had been undermined during years of decline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. To accomplish this, physical anthropology, historical writing, and linguistics were tailored to produce tools to construct a “positive” national identity. This then started an official process of drafting/ constructing historical narratives for the younger generations as well as imposing a new identity from above.

A number of institutions were established to support this nation-building process. These collected “scientific” data to prove that the Turks were indeed a white European Aryan race. In this way, race was employed to legitimize and rationalize the political geometry of the emerging Turkish nation-state, giving it a position within the global hierarchy of races. As discussed below, the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the birth of the most significant tools for this campaign within three key institutions: The Turkish Institute of Anthropology, Turkish Historical Society and Turkish Linguistic Society.

The Turkish Institute of Anthropology was founded first in 1925, and enjoyed strong support from top officials of the state. The Institute was created as a unit within the Medical School of Istanbul University, and named the Anthropology Research Centre. Later, after the university reform, it was connected to the School of Science and then in 1935 it was transferred to the School of Languages History and Geography in Ankara. The centre began publishing *The Journal of Turkish Anthropology* in 1925 in two languages, Turkish and French, which funded research and published various claims about the Turkish race using physical anthropological methods. The first research article published in March 1926 was titled, “comparative analysis of the Turkish race and other races living in Istanbul.” In it,

<sup>19</sup> B. Gokay, *A Clash of Empires*, (London: Tauris, 1997), 151-163.

<sup>20</sup> The Europeans’ belief in their inherent superiority found its most systematic expression in the doctrine of racial typology, according to which the human population consisted of a limited number of permanent human types with distinctive characteristics. (Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 54-56.)

Greeks, Jews and Armenians were named as “other races living in Istanbul,”<sup>21</sup> a categorization clearly borrowed from the scientific racism of the West. Over time, Turkish researchers turned their attention to embryology and genetics to an effort to make a case to rejuvenate Turkish race as white-Aryan, and not Middle Eastern.

The Turkish Historical Society was established six years after the founding of Turkish Institute of Anthropology for a similar purpose, and became one of the major major instruments for manufacturing a kind of Turkish history to support the construction of a new Turkish ethnicity. These claimed links that connected the people of Turkey with a mythical bloodline to pre-Islamic “white” ancestors in ancient central Asia, and a handful of scholars and their research teams were employed to dig out relevant evidence to further develop this claim under the strict supervision of Ataturk himself.<sup>22</sup>

The Turkish Linguistic Society was established in 1932 with the first Turkish Linguistic Congress which explained its task as “to bring light, the beauty and the richness of the Turkish language and to elevate it to the height that befits its value among the languages of the world.”<sup>23</sup> This purification of the language was soon extended to claims the Turkish language was the first and primeval language, and that all other languages were derived from it – the so-called Sun Language Theory. On the basis of such linguistic claims, the Kurds, who made up about one-fifth of Turkey’s population, were described as uncivilised, so-called “mountain Turks.” Ismail Besikçi, a Turkish sociologist, was likely the first to expose these were Turkish racist theories, which were introduced to support the denial of Kurdish ethnicity in official state discourse.<sup>24</sup>

In 1925, Ismet Inonu, the first Prime Minister of the Turkish Republic and Mustafa Kemal closest associate, expressed this sentiment bluntly:

*“we are openly nationalists... and nationalism is our unifying feature. Other ethnic groups have no effect on the Turkish majority. Our job is to turn the non-Turks of this land into Turks! Those who are opposed to Turks and Turkishness will be cut off [from society].”*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, “The Turkish Review of Anthropology and the racist face of Turkish nationalism,” *Cultural Dynamics*, 17(3), (2005), 291-314.

<sup>22</sup> For the history of the TTK, <http://www.ttk.gov.tr/index.php?Page=Sayfa&No=1> (accessed in September 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Turk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti Nizamnamesi (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1932), 3

<sup>24</sup> Ismail Besikçi, *Türk Tarih Tezi, Gunes-Dil Teorisi ve Kurt Sorunu [The Turkish History Thesis, The Sun-Language Theory and Kurdish Question]*, (Ankara: Yurt Yayinlari, 1991 – first published in 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Given in Zeynel Abidin Besleney, *The Circassian Diaspora in Turkey: A Political History*, (Routledge, 2014), 73.

Later in 1930, Mahmut Esat (Bozkurt), the Justice Minister, was even more candid:

*“I am a member [of the CHP] because by doing what it has done to date, this party has reinstated the Turkish nation, the real master to its rightful position. I want to tell everyone, friend and foe alike, that Turks are the masters of this land. Those who are not real Turks have only one right in the Turks’ homeland – that is the right to be a servant, the right to be a slave.”*<sup>26</sup>

From the beginning the new Turkey identified itself directly and immediately with the history, culture and perceptions and judgments of the western world, claiming a total break with the Ottoman and Islamic past. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself famously vowed to “cleanse the Turkish mind from its Arabic roots.”<sup>27</sup> What is particularly interesting in this process, white supremacist racial definitions were borrowed and reproduced, identifying Turks as an ethnic group that was privileged at the expense of other groups. The category of the “white race” was originally invented in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Theodore Allen’s words, “as a ruling class social control formation” meant as the means for powerful European-American elites to exploit and effectively control the labour power of black slaves. Tragically, it was adopted and used as a guiding principle in the new Turkish Republic,<sup>28</sup> which defined Turks as the “whites” of Turkey - more intelligent and civilised, more creative and morally upright than other, “inferior” races, and by extension other religious and ethnic minorities living in Turkey.

In 1935, the tomb of Mimar Sinan, the most acclaimed architect of the Ottoman Empire, was opened by a team formed by the Turkish Historical Society with the aim of measuring with compasses and other tools and proving that Sinan’s centuries-old skull was a clear indication of his “pure Turkish stock.”<sup>29</sup> Measuring skull sizes, craniology, was something which could not have been imagined in the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup> Turkish Historical Congresses met in 1932 and 1937, where the “scientific” origins of Turkish-ness, blood and heritable ties were debated openly, and an agreement was reached on essential purity and supremacy of Turkish blood. Eugene Pittard,<sup>31</sup> the Swiss anthropologist, whose work was seen

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Merve Sebnem Oruc, “It’s Our History, Idiot,” *Daily Sabah*, 10 December 2014, <http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/merve-sebnem-oruc/2014/12/10/it-is-our-history-idiot> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of The White Race*, vol. II, (London, New York: Verso, 2012 – first Verso ed. 1997), 107, 116-117, 562-568.

<sup>29</sup> “Peerless Turkish architect claimed to be headless in tomb,” 7.9.2010, *Turkish Daily News*, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=-2010-07-09> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Craniology was the belief that the size of the brain or skull represented the superiority or inferiority of certain individuals or ethnic/ racial groups.

<sup>31</sup> Eugene Pittard, “Neolitik Devirde Kucuk Asya ile Avrupa Arasinda Antropolojik Munasebetler,” *Belleten*, 2/5-6 (April 1938), 38.

and practiced as a racist account of humanity, not only participated but was announced as the honorary president of these congresses.<sup>32</sup>

*“[A]n open heart full of pure feelings and friendship” for all<sup>33</sup>*

It has always been claimed that recognition of a citizenship of Turkey was based on universal rights of the entire population, and that the new Turkish state considered all peoples of the world equal whatever their ethnic and religious backgrounds. This follows from Mustafa Kemal’s statement that “new Turkey” is structured on principles of humanism and the vision of a united humanity.

Mustafa Kemal was praised as a great humanist leader of modern times for these these much quoted words: “I look to the world with an open heart and full of pure feelings and friendship.”<sup>34</sup> However, like many other nationalist ideologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Turkish nation-building process happened within the context of a particular hierarchy of races according to which non-Turkish groups were considered second class/ inferior compared with the dominant group of Turks. In 1936, influential historian Semseddin Günaltay gave a lecture titled, “The Homeland of the Turks and the Question of Their Race.” In the lecture, he described the supposed racial origins of Turks, classifying Turks as “pure white,” by virtue of the original homeland of the Turks in Turkistan, which he referred to as, the “cradle of the Neolithic age.” What makes these words more significant is Günaltay also was a prominent member of the Turkish parliament, a close associate of Mustafa Kemal, and a highly influential scholar who would later preside over the Institute for Turkish History. By insisting on Turks whiteness and Europeaness, Günaltay was playing within the existing racial hierarchy, trying to portray the Turkish race as close as possible to what he considered the dominant group, the white European, who were the standard bearer of cultural worthiness.<sup>35</sup>

Racial hierarchy is the categorization of races on the basis of their physical and perceived attributes. Based on these characteristics, races are ranked at the top or at the bottom of the hierarchy. This structure then helps to shape the power and the prejudices of each race.

<sup>32</sup> Afet Inan, Mustafa Kemal’s adopted daughter, gained her PhD in the University of Geneva in 1939 under the supervision of Eugene Pittard. Inan’s PhD thesis was on the racial characteristics of the Turkish people. (see Zafer Toprak, “Atatürk, Eugène Pittard ve Afet hanım. En büyük antropolojik anket,” *Toplumsal Tarih Dergisi*, no. 215 (January 2011), 20-24.) Eugene Pittard’s work was supporting “scientific racism,” i.e. the belief that the white race must avoid coming into contact with the non-white races for fear of racial contamination. Pittard wrote his *Race and History* in 1926 where he sets out a definite relationship between race and social behaviour based on a study of human skulls and brains and classified various racial groups according to their intellectual capabilities.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.columbia.edu/~sss31/Turkiye/ata/hayati.html#peace> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.columbia.edu/~sss31/Turkiye/ata/hayati.html#peace> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Kader Konuk, “Eternal guests, mimics, and dönme: The place of German and Turkish Jews in modern Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 37 (2007), 10.

“The existence of a *de facto* global racial hierarchy helps to shape the nature of racial prejudice exhibited by other races. Whites are universally respected, even that respect is combined with strong resentment. A race generally defers to those above it in the hierarchy and is contemptuous of those below it. [...] This the centrality of colour to the global hierarchy. Other factors serve to define and force a race's position in the hierarchy-levels of development, civilisational values, history, religion, physical characteristics and dress - but the most insistent and spread is colour. The reason is that colour is instantly recognisable, it defines difference at the glance of an eye. It also happens to have another effect. It makes the al hierarchy seem like the natural order of things: you are born with your colour, something nobody can do anything about, it is neither cultural nor social but in origin.”<sup>36</sup>

The founders of the Turkish Republic accepted this hierarchy of races and tried to present Turks as part of the dominant white European group. This “whiteness”<sup>37</sup> thereafter provided a racially-coded discourse of power for Turkey’s self-consciously crafted “Western identity.”<sup>38</sup>

Over the last 90 years, there have been accounts of prejudice, discrimination and open hostility experienced by the Republic’s minorities, non-Muslim groups as well as Muslim Kurds and Alawites. It’s worth noting that the terms “Turkish blood” and “Turkish ethnicity” have been used interchangeably in official documents, as well as in public statements made by state officials. When in July 2010 General Basbug, the highest ranking military officer in Turkey in 2010, referred to “real Turkish blood” in a speech on TV, or state officials, in a news conference in Eskisehir in January 2009 displayed placards with slogans as “No Armenians and Jews are allowed through this door... but it is free for dogs to enter,” they were revealing just the tip of an iceberg.<sup>39</sup>

In the republican period, Mustafa Kemal and his close associates tried to create an ethnically homogeneous country, a “pure Turkish Turkey,” from the ruins of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire.<sup>40</sup> The ethnic cleansing of the Armenian citizens of the Empire in 1915 – the first major, brutal act of ethnic cleansing of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen-

<sup>36</sup> Martin Jacques, “The global hierarchy of race,” *the Guardian* (20 September 2003), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/20/race.uk> (accessed in July 2015).

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of “whiteness” and “white privilege” see Leonardo Zeus, “The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of ‘white privilege,’” in E. Taylor, D. Gillborn and G. Ladson-Billings (eds), *Foundations of critical race theory in education*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 261-276.

<sup>38</sup> Meltem Ahiska, “Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Volume 102, Number 2/3, Spring/Summer 2003, 351-379.

<sup>39</sup> Radikal, 07 January 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/kopekler-girermis-yahudiler-ve-ermeniler-giremezmi-915950/> (accessed in March 2016); Esra Ozyurek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Duke University Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>40</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, “Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists: Identity Politics, 1908-1938.” In Kemal H. Karpat (ed.), *Ottoman Past and Today’s Turkey*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 150-179.

tury, which followed the population exchanges between Turkey and Greece under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, cleared the ground by cleansing large numbers of non-Turkish elements. Not accidentally, the forced Greco-Turkish population exchange of 1923 has been identified as a predecessor to Nazi ethnic population policies that followed.

This preconditioning can be seen in the way that the racist German press in the 1920s and 1930s linked Atatürk's policies and reforms to the debate over Nazi's ethnic homogeneity claims, and the perception of Turkey's "ethnically homogeneous" success story continued to appear explicitly in the Nazi discourse during the interwar period. For example, in 1922 the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi Party's weekly paper, praised Atatürk as the "Father of the Turks," "strong man" and real leader who embodied the "heroic spirit" and the *Führerprinzip* that demanded absolute obedience.<sup>41</sup> Being against multi-ethnic entities Nazi commentators praised the so-called ethnic cleansing of Anatolia, from the 1915 Armenian genocide to 1923 Greco-Turkish forced population exchange, calling for the adaptation of "Turkish method" for an effective solution to its minority question.<sup>42</sup>

The "enlightened" leaders of the new Turkey considered themselves as social engineers who could establish a "society of science."<sup>43</sup> The Turkification project as a part of this modernisation process was conceived racially, following the larger discourse of the time offered by advocates for white European, Aryan races. When Kemal spoke of the future of his country in terms of a western idea, he also was reaffirming the self-identity of a small Turkish elite of which he was a distinguished member. This adoption included the "performance for the imagined Western audience,"<sup>44</sup> such as adopting the "respectable taste and behavior" of dominant white European culture by imitating western styles. This included wearing western clothes, listening to western classical music, etc. The western-oriented Turkish elite also would and did use this privileged position to feel superior to their own people.

The adoption of this racially defined identity also enable the Turkish elite to articulate the "Eastern," the "Oriental," the "Muslim Turk," to a receptive Western audience, creating the appearance that as a "westernized" Turkish elite they were "*enlightened natives*." Yet, they were never regarded as authentically or accepted as white. For example, in 1927 a British official described Mustafa Kemal and his close associates in Ankara as follows:

*"It is consequently disturbing to us to come suddenly upon the Asiatic in his natural nakedness, and it is only after close contact with the men in power in Turkey today that one bows to the essential truth that Mustafa Kemal Pasha and his entourage are*

<sup>41</sup> Dominic Green, "Why Hitler Wished he was Muslim," *The Wall Street Journal* (16 January 2015).

<sup>42</sup> See Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Sena Karasipahi, *Muslims in Modern Turkey*, (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 48-49.

<sup>44</sup> Meltem Ahiska, "Occidentalism: The Historical Fantasy of the Modern," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102, 2/3, 2003, 367.

*crude orientals, ...whose Western civilisation is still in the main no more than an ignorant aspiration...*<sup>45</sup>

Eventually, Kemal's "modern Turkey" was accepted, but only as a useful outsider incorporated into the West as a weak partner.

The self-perceptions of individual members of the Turkish elite have remained closely rooted in the identity-formation processes of those early days, and therefore it wasn't difficult for the whole country to slip into an extreme nationalistic and racist frenzy against "others" from time to time. During the 90-year history of the Turkish Republic, racism and ethnic discrimination have been prevalent and institutionalised against non-Muslim and non-Sunni Muslim minorities, and there were many occasions when social and political feelings erupted into widespread violence against these groups. To cite just a few significant examples:

On 6 September 1955, the newspaper *Istanbul Express* published the news of the bombing of Atatürk's birthplace in Thessaloniki, claiming that the house was bombed by Greeks. Pro-government nationalist press then tried to incite the Turkish public against Greek and other non-Muslim minorities living in Turkey. The brunt of the damage was sustained by Greek businesses and residential areas in Istanbul, but the damage also was extended to Greek cultural centres along the Bosphorus, and Greek churches, with the Panayia, one of the oldest Byzantine structures, being gutted.<sup>46</sup> Hundreds of houses, shops, schools and churches were burned and looted. Three people were killed and 30 injured. Years later, it was revealed that the events had been planned and implemented by elements controlled by the Turkish intelligence services and contra-guerrilla groups with the knowledge of the government, and that the bomb had been planted by 21-year old Oktay Engin, an agent who was later appointed in 1992 as the governor of Nevşehir, a Turkish province in Anatolia.<sup>47</sup>

In another example, in December 1978 right-wing conservative Sunni masses in the city of Kahramanmaraş attacked a neighbourhood, predominantly inhabited by Alawites (Turkish Shiites), destroying and burning 210 houses and 70 workshops and murdering 111 people. The offenders were Sunni Turks, led by fascist gangs of "Grey Wolves," who were part of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) allegedly backed-up by the local authorities. During this massacre, dozens of inno-

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum by Geoffrey Knox, acting British Councillor in Ankara, 20 May 1927, in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, Part II, Series B, vol. 31, Turkey March 1927-December 1929, ed. by Bulent Gokay, (University Publications of America), 17-18.

<sup>46</sup> *Internet Haber*, 6 September 2014, <http://www.internethaber.com/tarihin-utanc-sayfasi-6-7-eylul-olaylari,-neler-oldu-718357h.htm> (accessed in September 2015); *Zaman* (8 February 2009), [http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazarlar/mustafa-armagan/6-7-eylul-olaylarini-menderes-tertiplemisti\\_812750.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/yazarlar/mustafa-armagan/6-7-eylul-olaylarini-menderes-tertiplemisti_812750.html) (accessed in September 2015).

<sup>47</sup> *Birgun* (12 December 2009), <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/baris-gazeteciliginden-sinifta-kaldik-16352.html> (accessed in September 2015); *Bianet* (6 September 2001), <http://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/4458-oktay-engin-devletin-sorumlulugu-var> (accessed in September 2015).

cent children, women and men were murdered based on the racial hate nourished by the fascist gangs against Alawites.<sup>48</sup>

A third example can be found in the tragic events leading up to the assassination of Hrant Dink, the editor of AGOS, the only Armenian newspaper in Turkey.<sup>49</sup> Dink dared suggest that Sabiha Gökçen, Atatürk's adopted daughter and the first woman war pilot of the Turkish Republic and a leading figure in the early republican period, might be an Armenian orphan. This claim was considered an insult against her "pure Turkish blood" of Sabiha Gökçen. This prompted a series of court cases against Dink, where he was tried under the notorious Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code charging him with "denigrating Turkishness," an official accusation of insulting Turkish blood.<sup>50</sup> The trials took place in the midst of a lynching campaign led by an ultra-nationalist media, and were frequented by a mob of fascists attempting to attack him and his supporters. This intense campaign of hate against Armenians lasted over three years, with Hrant Dink shot dead outside his newspaper's office in Istanbul, on 19 January 2007.<sup>51</sup>

More than 90 years after the establishment of Turkish Republic, the limitations and contradictions of Turkish national identity are increasingly coming to the fore. As Turkey moves deep into the twenty first century, an existential crisis of identity and sense of confusion about ethnicity, nationhood, religion, secularity, and Turkey's role in the world is has intensified. Over time, the biological and cultural racism inherent in Turkish nationalism has manifested itself in a hierarchical structure that is increasingly separating "real" rulers (political and economic elite) of Turkey from the mass population. This toxic historical legacy going back to the 1920s and 30s remains as a powerful theme underlying Turkish identity in modern era, and culturally based racism and its physical manifestations have continued down to the present day.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey, even open, scientific racism (racism based on blood) is not some kind of historical throwback – it is very much alive and kicking. A hierarchical and racist mentality is left un-interrogated by the state and society – it's still commonplace in Turkey to emphasise racial purity, particularly purity of blood, and the lineage (bloodline) of the Turkish race. Many people in Turkey, and in particular the educated urban middle classes, still nonchalantly seize every opportunity to emphasize their "whiteness" in order to distinguish themselves as "European," separated from millions of their co-citizens who are considered traditional, religious and "Asian." Their Turkey is culturally and biologically close to those of the West European states, and they hold on to the idea it was an accident of history that Turkey

<sup>48</sup> *Hurriyet*, 21 December 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/27816853.asp> (accessed in September 2015); B. Gokay, *Soviet Eastern Policy and Turkey* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 108-110.

<sup>49</sup> Wikileaks, 10ISTANBUL6 09ISTANBUL376, [https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/041ISTANBUL374\\_a.html](https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/041ISTANBUL374_a.html) (accessed in September 2015)

<sup>50</sup> J. White, "Fear and loathing in the Turkish national imagination," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Volume 42 / Spring 2010, 215-236.

<sup>51</sup> Ersin Kalkan, "Sabiha Gökçen mi Hatun Sebilciyan mı," *Hurriyet* (21 February 2004), <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/index/ArsivNews.aspx?id=204257> (accessed in September 2-15).

found itself in the Middle East with a majority that is not “civilized” and “European,” unlike themselves.

When in 1999 a powerful earthquake struck Kocaeli in western Turkey, the of Turkey’s Health Minister Osman Durmus shocked many. This event, one of the most devastating disasters in the recent history, which claimed more than 12,000 and displacement of a further 200,000 people, brought Greek and Turkish people together, including an overwhelming display of humanitarian empathy and action by Greece. For example, immediately after the earthquake Greek search and rescue teams, doctors and volunteers arrived in Turkey with money, basic necessities and blood donations from the Greek people. However, the Turkish Health Minister nounced that Turks did not need to be tainted with Greek blood,<sup>52</sup> making it clear that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Turkey the language of racist nationalism (a reminiscent of the *Manifesto of Racial Scientists*,<sup>53</sup> published in fascist Italy in 1938), can be used to maintain the purity of the self and prevent mixing with the “other,” even if it is self-harming.

In January 2008, then Chief of General Staff, General Buyukanit, was pictured on television showing a Turkish flag, painted with “real Turkish blood” by a group of school children. The flag was represented to commemorate the death of soldiers killed in the fight against PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) guerrillas. The students were apparently experimenting in a biology class to prick their fingers with a pin. Being motivated by the heavy patriotic atmosphere in the country where casualties were widely reported through ultra-nationalistic ceremonies, the students decided to use their own blood to paint a Turkish flag, now known as the “blood flag,” which is red with white crescent and star, and sent this to the Chief of General Staff with a letter saying that they would be happy to sacrifice their own blood in the fight for the homeland of the Turks. Funerals of soldiers killed in clashes with Kurdish guerrillas frequently turn into anti-Kurdish hysteria that are followed by attempts to lynch Kurdish citizens across Turkey. A number of doctors and teachers were reported to be disturbed by the students’ act, but General Buyukanit declared with pride on TV: “Such a nation is ours,”<sup>54</sup> and a nationalist daily distributed copies of the “blood flag.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Comerford, “Turkish quake victims find many friends abroad, but few in their own government,” *The Irish Times*, 28 August 1999, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/turkish-quake-victims-find-many-friends-abroad-but-few-in-their-own-government-1.221294> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>53</sup> *The Manifesto of Racial Scientists*, published in Italy in 1938, also referred to as the Charter of Race or Racial Manifesto, identified some groups as inferior and warned the Italians not to mix with them. The Jews were the most obvious targets, but Ethiopians, Albanians and Arabs were also targeted in the Manifesto. (see Olindo de Napoli, “The origin of the Racist Laws under fascism. A problem of historiography,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, Vol. 17, issue 1, 2012, 106-122.)

<sup>54</sup> *Sabah*, 14 January 2008, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2008/01/14/haber,D5EF5E4296304355A36E7F0AEDE242A5.html> (accessed in February 2016).

<sup>55</sup> *Bianet*, 13 January 2008, <http://bianet.org/english/education/104134-buyukanit-spreads-militarism-among-children> (accessed in March 2016).

For most of the republican period, and not only during security crises and war, Kurds have been defined as racially inferior in Turkish popular culture. In Turkey's key's popular culture, Turks are portrayed with a European appearance, proper accents, and manner, and the absence of such attributes is used as a mark of Kurdishness.<sup>56</sup> Ismail Besikci describes this as "Turkish style racism...humiliating and looking down on the Kurds."<sup>57</sup> As the largest minority in Turkey, Kurds have been described in physical contrast to Turks, who are portrayed as light skinned, with blue blue or green eyes and a lack of facial hair. In contrast, Kurds are often described with with "inferior" physical qualities, such as darker skin and thick facial hair. Many humour magazines, and even in some left-liberal ones, as well as some daily newspapers, depict "Kurdishness" this way, which is then linked to a lack of "culture," or *kiro*.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes this stereo-type is used to describe Easterners and not just Kurds.<sup>59</sup> But such racial stereotypes do not correspond to reality, because it is not really possible to distinguish between a Turk from a Kurd, or from an Armenian or Jew, based on physical characteristics.

### *Racism against Syrian Refugees*

In contemporary Turkey, every Turkish child grows up memorizing Atatürk's 1927 address to the youth, which says "the strength you need is already imbedded in your noble blood." Atatürk's words, "how happy the one who says he is a Turk," "One language, one people, one flag," and other similar slogans still inscribed on plaques and pedestals across the country, particularly often and in large formats in the Kurdish East and Southeast.<sup>60</sup> All primary and secondary schools still teach a "Turkish" history that begins with the Huns of Central Asia, which gives an exclusively ethnic, not civic, sense of Turkey as a nation. And nationalist demagogues still speak of "pure Turks," which clearly excludes Kurds and all non-Muslims, and which more

<sup>56</sup> Tanil Bora, "MHP'nin GÜc Kaynagi Olarak Kurt Meselesi," *Birikim*, 134-135, June-July 2000, <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim-yazi/3296/mhp-nin-guc-kaynagi-olarak-kurt-meselesi#.VsyNtLSJbAl> (accessed in February 2016). Dr. Ismail Besikci was arrested and spent 17 years in prison simply by writing books on oppression of the Kurds in Turkey. The charge lodged against him was "insulting the memory of Atatürk and undermining national feelings." (*New York Review of Books*, 12 August 1982, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1982/08/12/the-case-of-dr-besikci/>, accessed in April 2016)

<sup>57</sup> Ismail Besikci's statement to the judges in the court on 18 April 1990 following the publication and subsequent confiscation of his book *Interstate Colony - Kurdistan*. He was charged with "disseminating propaganda and undermining national pride," *Variant*, issue 6, [http://www.variant.org.uk/6texts/Ismail\\_Besiki.html](http://www.variant.org.uk/6texts/Ismail_Besiki.html) (accessed in May 2016).

<sup>58</sup> *Posta*, 8 September 2013, <http://www.posta.com.tr/PostaKarnaval/HaberDetay/Bizim-sosyete-biraz--kiro-.htm?ArticleID=193816&PageIndex=2> (accessed in February 2016);

<sup>59</sup> Asena Gunal, "Mine G. Kırıkkanat ve Beyaz Türk Oryantalizmi," *Birikim*, 144, April 2001, <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/birikim-yazi/5496/mine-g-kirikkanat-ve-beyaz-turk-oryantalizmi#.VssVrrSJbAk> (accessed in February 2016).

<sup>60</sup> Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Gençlige Hitabe*, 20 October 1927, <http://www.ataturkungencligehitabesi.com/> (accessed in February 2016).

recently has been used against (Muslim) Arabs as the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey increases.

According to UN figures, Turkey now has around 3 million Syrian refugees have come since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in March 2011. As the of refugees has grown, so too has widespread racism and xenophobia against refugees increased. Currently the world's largest refugee-hosting nation, Turkey initially praised for its open-door policy towards Syrian refugees and its work in its camps. However, recently it has been sharply criticised for failing to proper services and protection to them. Currently, only about 235,000 of these refugees live in the 22 state-run camps with another 515,000 registered as urban and the authorities does not support the remaining 2.25 million who live outside camps with shelter or food, even during cold winter months.<sup>61</sup> Insults and open and covert racism against the Syrians are in evidence in the newspapers and on social dia. Everyday racism against Syrians also is common and widespread, as they are thought to be criminals, beggars and people of "low culture." This is all chronicled and reinforced by daily newspapers, which are full of headlines concerning "the of Syrian beggars" and warnings about how they will take away jobs from the real citizens, the Turks.<sup>62</sup>

There's now increasing resentment of Syrians everywhere and they are being openly attacked and marginalized on a daily basis. Syrian asylum seekers have been exposed to attacks by local communities for various reasons such as causing housing rents to increase, pushing up the unemployment rate due to their lower wages compared to Turkish citizens, increasing the crime rate and even giving rise to traffic jams. Turkish newspapers are daily full of such horrific attacks against refugees by racist mobs. Right-wing nationalist groups, together with some local gangs, are hunting Syrian refugees in city streets, and when they are caught they are badly beaten. But sadly, millions of ordinary Turkish citizens, who are not part of such fascist gangs, have been bystanders offering little, if any, protection to their Syrian neighbours trying to survive increasingly in ever more desperate conditions. Further, racist attacks against Syrians receive almost no condemnation from officials or the public, and with language barriers, poverty, and lack of clarity and advice about their legal rights, these refugees are too often mistreated and taken advantage of. Apart from the lack of a clear legal status and full access to rights, this lack of compassion in Turkish society is an important reason why the Syrian refugees want to leave Turkey risking their lives.<sup>63</sup> Turkish people laud themselves

<sup>61</sup> *TRT Turk* (14 January 2015), <http://www.trtturk.com/haber/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi-2015-103549.html> (accessed in September 2015).

<sup>62</sup> *Haberturk* (1 August 2014), <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/975425-istanbulda-sariyer-nufusu-kadar-suriyeli-yasiyor> (accessed in September 2015); *Milliyet* (19 November 2013), <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-da-suriyeli-dilenci/gundem/detay/1794783/default.htm> (accessed in September 2015); *Bugun* (29 September 2015), <http://www.bugun.com.tr/yasam/yasitlari-okulda-olan-suriyeli-cocuklar-1851942.html> (accessed in September 2015).

<sup>63</sup> *Haber sol* (11 May 2015), <http://haber.sol.org.tr/turkiye/istanbulda-suriyelilere-saldiri-116151> (accessed in September 2015); *CNN Turk* (3 May 2015),

for their sense of hospitality and generosity, but such long-standing claims are now being tested by their treatment of Syrian refugees.

The impression often formed from reading the popular press is that currently there is no worse insult for many Turks to dub them “Arabs,” in particular “Syrian Arabs.” There is a deep-seated and very ugly racism against Arabs in the, mainly so-called educated sectors of, Turkish society. A left-liberal comic magazine, *Penguen*, in June 2010 published an issue with the cover picture depicting Turkey’s president Tayyip Erdogan as a monkey wearing a traditional Arab outfit and saying, “I am not wearing underwear.”<sup>64</sup> *Penguen* was founded in 2002, and has become one of the country’s most widely read satirical magazines, described as “a breath of fresh air.” Yet, as left-wing magazine *Counterpunch* pointed out,<sup>65</sup> while it was apparently trying to provide a critical view of right-wing Islamist president Erdogan, it did so using a racist Arab image.

Turkey’s secular middle classes loudly and continuously voice their complaints about Syrian refugees and Middle Eastern Arabs in general by combining their critique of the authoritarian conservative policies of Islamist president, Tayyip Erdogan, and his AKP by denigrating him as a Middle Eastern, non-European. The implication of these references is that Erdogan and his followers are not refined and cultured like they are as white Western Europeans. Many leading members of Turkey’s secular urban elite also openly express their disdain for Syrian refugees, publicly referring to their language and different styles and criticizing the government for allowing the refugees turning Turkey into a “Middle Eastern” country away from the “civilised West.” Even though Turkey’s urban middle classes, in fact, are the least affected by the refugee situation, in the pages of secular-left magazines Syrian refugees and Arabs in general are scapegoated for a plethora of issues, including crime, traffic jams, rising prices, unwanted crowds in their gentile coffee shops and restaurants, and terrorist attacks.<sup>66</sup> Looking at the narrative of Turkey’s urban secular classes, notwithstanding their palpable animosity toward all things “oriental” Asian, Middle Eastern, and their disdain for “*kiro*” and Kurdish workers in the slums of Turkey’s cities, they may rightly qualify by analogy to the Euro-American white supremacists that have now resurfaced.

<http://www.cnntrk.com/turkiye/sanliurfada-suriyeli-gerginligi-3-yarali> (accessed in September 2015). 2015).

<sup>64</sup> *Radikal*, 26.01.2011, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/yilin-irkcilarini-seciyorlar-1037921/> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>65</sup> Michael Dickinson, “Cartoon Capers,” *Counterpunch*, 31 March 2005, <http://www.counterpunch.org/2005/03/31/cartoon-capers/> (accessed in March 2016).

<sup>66</sup> *Milliyet*, 30.8.2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yoksa-biz-irkci-miyiz-pazar/haberdetay/31.08.2014/1933307/default.htm> (accessed in March 2016); Nur Banu Kocaaslan, “Suriyeli Yazar Bekir Sidki: Dun Kurtler, Hrat Dink Hedefti, Bugun Suriyeli Multeciler,” *Diken*, 29.8.2014, <http://www.diken.com.tr/suriyeli-yazar-bekir-sidki-ey-turkiyeliler-ulkenize-siginmamiz-size-kendi-dunyaniz-disinda-bilgi-edinme-firsati-veriyor/> (accessed in March 2016).

*Postscript*

Turkish nationalism, like other nationalisms, has many different forms which have evolved over time and influenced by internal and external conditions. As we argue here, racism is not new in Turkey, and supremacy-oriented ethnic and racist ideas have been an integral part of Turkish nationalism from the beginning of the nation-building project in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Turkish nationalism originated and was shaped by racist discourses borrowed mainly from European racist texts of the 1920s and 1930s. The problem of racism, however, didn't end in the 1920s or 1930s, but continued to evolve without serious challenges or revision and is now a key part of official Turkish identity. As it became embedded in institutional framework of the Turkish state, it remained more or less the same, and the ugly face of Turkish racism has always been just around the corner waiting to be ignited by a crisis or political manipulation. The European Union's Turkey progress report, published in October 2014, warned that Turkish media are using "hate rhetoric" to target minority groups, including Kurds, Alawites, Christians, Armenians, Jews and other non-Muslims.<sup>67</sup> But, it appears to have had little impact.

Hate crime and racist rhetoric sharply increased after the failed coup on the night of 15/16 July 2016. The AKP government declared its former ally, the religious group led by the US resident Fethullah Gülen, responsible for the coup attempt, and immediately after the coup attempt was defeated Erdogan's counter-coup was in full swing. The country witnessed a widespread right-wing Islamist outburst of violent attacks against not only those suspected supporters of the coup, but also all other critiques of AKP regime. In an attempt to fully complete his grip on all defiant oppositional layers of society, Erdogan called all his supporters to the street with guns and established control through right-wing Islamist mass mobilizations. With the support of police, pro-government gangs armed with guns, knives and axes, attacked Alevi and Kurdish neighbourhoods, such as Gazi or Okmeydanı in Istanbul, Tuzluca in Ankara, and Armutlu in Antakya. Similar gangs attacked people in bars and restaurants consuming alcohol in secular hip neighbourhoods of Istanbul, such as Moda and Suadiye, shouting slogans against drinking alcohol and the like.<sup>68</sup> Even six months after the failed coup attempt, racist and fascist attacks against minority groups, and in particular against Kurds and Alawis, continue all over Turkey without interruption.<sup>69</sup> In many of cases, security forces joined the armed pro-AKP paramilitaries, and state authorities generally

<sup>67</sup> *BBC Monitoring* (30 October 2014), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/hate-speech-on-the-rise-in-turkish-media> (accessed in September 2015).

<sup>68</sup> "Özgün: Alevilere yönelik saldırı tehlikesi devam ediyor," 15 September 2016, <http://anfturkce.net/guncel/ozgun-alevilere-yonelik-saldiri-tehlikesi-devam-ediyor> (accessed in September 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Violence against all minorities was widespread in the weeks following the failed coup, including violent murder of a well-known transgender activist in Istanbul and the beheading of a gay Syrian refugee. (*France 24*, 19 August 2016, <http://www.france24.com/en/20160819-turkey-lgbt-trasgender-activist-death-highlights-rise-hate-crimes-hande-kader>. Accessed in September 2016)

refused to provide any protection to Kurdish and Alawi citizens of Turkey, saying that these are “innocent and rightful responses by Turkish people against coup-plotters.”<sup>70</sup>

Academic research on race regards racism as a multidimensional and highly adaptive system, which ensures an unequal distribution of resources between racial groups.<sup>71</sup> Because the dominant group, which in this case is Sunni Turks in Turkey, builds and dominates all significant institutions, often at the expense of and on the uncompensated work of other groups, their interests are embedded in the foundation of Turkish state and society. While many individual members of the dominant group may not be racist, and may even act against racism in their personal life, they still benefit from the unfair distribution of resources controlled by their group. This in-built systemic and institutional control allows many members of the dominant group who are Sunni Turks, Turkey’s “whites,” to live in a social and political environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. In other words, all Sunni Turks gain privileges that come from not facing racism, even if some of those beneficiaries are not be completely aware of them. Many Sunni Turks can still have problems and face barriers, but systematic racism will not be one of them.<sup>72</sup> This also explains why so many people in Turkey, including journalists, politicians and academics, vehemently deny there is a deep-rooted and widespread racism in the country.

In conclusion, modern Turkey was established on two essential principles of 1920s nation-states: white supremacy, and division of the world into “superior” and “inferior” races. This foundation has never been questioned critically, allowing racism to remain embedded within the Turkish state and society. Until this foundational aspect of racism is acknowledged, Turkey, or any other “modern” nation-state built on this foundation, one cannot fully and effectively deal with racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>70</sup> “Tüm Türkiye Genelinde Kürtlere Dönük Faşist Saldırıları Devam Ediyor,” *Telgraf*, 15 September 2016, <http://www.telgraf.co.uk/tum-turkiye-genelinde-kurtlere-donuk-fasist-saldirilar-devam-ediyor.html> (accessed in September 2016).

<sup>71</sup> Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism. An Interdisciplinary Theory* (London: Sage, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Considering her own position as a white woman, US activist Peggy McIntosh writes: “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.” (Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies*, Wellesley College, Center for Research on Women, 1988, 14.)

Katerina Nikolaou\*

## Byzantium and its perception in the mid-twentieth century “Classics Illustrated” comic books<sup>1</sup>

A business endeavor launched in the United States in October 1941 was destined to change the way people approached world literary classics. Aiming at multiplying its theretofore select, numerically limited reading public, as well as expanding the latter’s age range by incorporating children and adolescents, Russian-born publisher Albert Lewis Kanter came up with the idea of creating a series that would combine the benefits of a “popular” narration with cheap illustrated publications.<sup>2</sup>

Elliot Publishing Company placed the literary masterpieces of the great authors in the service of the “ninth art,” in a series originally called *Classic Comics*.<sup>3</sup> The first issue of the New York-based publication, *The Three Musketeers*, marked the nascence in the publishing firm’s comic book department of a product with stories that were not all about the antics, sentimental adventures or comedic goofs of pulp

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<sup>1</sup> At the core of this study lies my paper on “Byzantium and Byzantine women in the mid-twentieth century Greek ‘Classics Illustrated’ comic books,” which I delivered at the conference *Transformation and adaptation – the reception of Byzantium between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries* held in Poland (5-6 September 2014, University of Silesia in Katowice). I would like to thank the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and its Special Account for Research Grants for funding to attend the meeting. The text of that presentation has been modified and expanded, while keeping within the limits imposed by publishing in a scholarly periodical. The earliest discussions with my dear friend and colleague Konstantinos G. Tsiknakis on the topic of the presence and presentation of Byzantium in general, and of Byzantine women in particular, in the *Classics Illustrated* series date back many years. Once again I thank him.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in Thanasis Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρότας και το έργο του για παιδιά και εφήβους. Θέατρο–Ποίηση–Πεζογραφία–«Κλασικά εικονογραφημένα». Ερμηνευτικές, θεματολογικές, ιδεολογικές, παιδαγωγικές προσεγγίσεις* [Vassilis Rotas and his work for children and adolescents. Theater–Poetry–Prose–“Classics Illustrated.” Interpretational, topical, ideological, and pedagogical approaches] (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 2007), 531, there is a wealth of bibliography, both local and international, on the theoretical approaches to, and the study of, illustrated magazines. As a whole, this literary production goes far beyond the scope of the present study; for the needs of the latter, only brief references to the genre in question and some of its particular characteristics were deemed necessary. For the theoretical approaches to the comic-book genre, simply on an indicative basis and because its subject matter is closely related to the focus of our study, see Giannis Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη και ελληνικότητα στα κόμικς* [Historical memory and Greekness in comic books] (Athens: Kritiki, 2000), 27-52.

<sup>3</sup> For a history of the *Classics Illustrated* series, see Dan Malan, *The Complete Guide to Classics Illustrated*, v. I-II (USA: Classics Central Com., 2006).

heroes; instead, in its pages it summarized the best-known works of literature. Lacking the development, depth and storytelling skills of their famous authors, but with the help of the pen of exceptional artists, it had the ability to stir an emotional reaction from the product user, thereby liberating his or her imagination, thus putting the literary text's invisible description on display for everyone to see.<sup>4</sup>

Starting with the fourth issue, *The Last of the Mohicans* (1942), Kanter (under the pseudonym Albert W. Raymond, a combination of the co-owners' first names) switched the publication to a company owned by himself, called Gilberton Publishing Co., and apart from editor, also served briefly as art director.<sup>5</sup> In March 1947, with the series now numbering 34 titles, it began to be published under the banner *Classics Illustrated*; the next year saw a reduction in the number of pages from 56 (originally 64) to 48. Another series, *Classics Illustrated Junior* (1953-1971), was also published, containing fairy tales and stories for younger children. The visualization of the classical novels was done by pencilers and inkers that were well-known in the comic-book industry, such as Malcolm Kildale, Louis Zansky, Rolland H. Livingstone, Enter Iger, Henry C. Kiefer, Alex A. Blum, Lou Cameron, Norman Nodel, Reed Crandall, George R. Evans, Gray Morrow and others.<sup>6</sup>

The publication continued until 1962, when it ceased after 169 issues and sales that totaled 200,000,000 copies in the US alone. Its titles continued to be reprinted and in the following decades various unsuccessful attempts were made to revive the series.

After World War II, with American comic books beginning to flood the European market, *Classics Illustrated* were translated and published in many countries.<sup>7</sup> Among them, Greece was a relative latecomer in becoming acquainted with the product in question, due to the Greek Civil War and subsequent political turmoil, and and so the flourishing of comics in Greece may be dated to the 1950s and later.

Despite the fact that magazines such as *Η Διάπλασις των Παιδών* [*Children's Edification*]<sup>8</sup> had laid the groundwork for comic books to be more easily accepted by

<sup>4</sup> This particular description of the *Classics Illustrated* series by Aris Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες των Κόμικς» [“The comic-book aristocrats”], *Εννέα (Ελευθεροτυπία)*, no. 36, 2/5, may be found online at <https://www.mycomics.gr/classics/36ennea.htm> (accessed July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> William B. Jones, Jr., *Classics illustrated: a cultural history* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 35.

<sup>6</sup> Panayota Feggerou, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” και το ιστορικό μυθιστόρημα για παιδιά: μύθος και πραγματικότητα» [“Classics Illustrated” and the historical novel for children: Myth and reality”] (PhD diss., National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, 2012), 281.

Aris Malandrakis, «Η λογοτεχνία στο περίπτερο» [“Literature on the newsstand”], *Επιλον (Ελευθεροτυπία)*, no. 42 (January 26, 1992), 27-30.

<sup>7</sup> The second volume of Malan, *The Complete Guide*, is devoted to the publication of *Classics Illustrated* outside the United States.

<sup>8</sup> On the role and significance of this magazine for children, which dominated the field of children's literature for almost seven decades, see Vicky Patsiou, «*Η Διάπλασις των Παιδών*» (1879-1922). *Το πρότυπο και η συγκρότησή του* [“*Children's Edification*” [1879-1922]. *The role model and its construction*]. (Athens: General Secretariat for Youth, 1987).

the Greek reading public, the printing initiative of Atlantís Publications that hit the stands on March 1st, 1951,<sup>9</sup> caused bewilderment and made fanatical enemies, as well as passionate supporters. Ten years after the series had made its first appearance in America, the Pechlivanídes brothers (Michális, Kóstas and Giórgos), experienced in publishing children's books as well as in offset printing, transplanted in Greece and its milieu the *Classics Illustrated* comic books they had come to know during one of their trans-Atlantic voyages – complete with four-color prints.<sup>10</sup>

It is true that the comic books in question were not noted for their strict to the rules of their genre: their illustrations did not promote the comical element, did they present recognizable formulaic heroes, frozen in time and in the series' tenuity.<sup>11</sup> They were in effect illustrated narratives, with proportionate amounts of text (speech) and image; in fact, speech played the principal part and did not function merely in support of the image, as was the case elsewhere. Thus, a certain degree of theatricality was achieved and the story evolved along with the text and the frame-by-frame successive images. Furthermore, there was also a narrator with a heavy workload: he explained the evolution of the plot, provided necessary information and connected the various parts of the work.<sup>12</sup>

The debut issue, Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, similar in appearance to the corresponding American title, contained a set of instructions on how to read the book, but also a note from the publishers with which they wished to convey the new books' mission statement, while at the same time attempting to mitigate the expected backlash. Within a framework of widespread anti-Americanism that permeated many sections of Greece's post-Occupation society, a product that appeared to cheapen classical literature offered itself for negative criticism.<sup>13</sup> So they

<sup>9</sup> Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*, was the first issue in the Greek series, 10 years after it was originally published in the US series. An analytical presentation of the first issue and its reprints may be found in Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 451-71.

<sup>10</sup> The appearance of *Classics Illustrated* played a key role in their success. The quality of printing was excellent; the four-color process was used throughout, and they were printed the new offset system, on white European-standard paper. See Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες», 3/5.

<sup>11</sup> Panagiota Feggerou, «Το Ιστορικό Μυθιστόρημα και τα Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα. Το Παράδειγμα του Ιβανόη» [“The Historical Novel and Classics Illustrated. The Case of Ivanhoe”], 5, old.primedu.uoa.gr/Forum%20neon%20epistomonon/Panagiota%20Feggerou.doc (accessed July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 532.

<sup>13</sup> Feggerou, *op. cit.*, 4. Regarding the reactions, debates and controversies –including those that took place in the Greek Parliament– caused by the circulation of *Classics Illustrated*, see *ibid.*, note 7.

An interesting point is the criticism leveled against comic books in general by Giannis Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα. Μια άγνωστη προσφορά του Κορινθίου ποιητή στο χώρο του παιδικού βιβλίου» [“The comics of Vassilis Rotas. The Corinthian poet's unknown contribution to children's literature”], *Πρακτικά Γ' Τοπικού Συνεδρίου Κορινθιακών ερευνών (Κόρινθος 28-30 Νοεμβρίου 1997)* (Athens, 1999), 170: “These pulp-fiction magazines mostly derive from the US sub-culture products of mass consumption, their subject matter revolving around war, crime, money, and romance. They abuse humanitarian ideas, disfigure and debase the language in a nightmarish fashion, lead to attitudes of contempt of human life, undervalue patriotic feelings and high ideals such as liberty and fatherland (words and terms that are nowhere to be found in their pages), and generally

wrote: “publication of these books throughout the world has limited the insipid, shallow and harmful pulp editions, the criminal, pornographic, gangster stuff. So, taking this into account as well, parents ought to recommend *Classics Illustrated* to their children, for in this way they help both develop their minds and protect their souls.”<sup>14</sup>

True to their aim, the Greek *Classics Illustrated* series [*Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*] included, apart from the successful translations of corresponding American can titles, a number of issues with themes taken “From the Mythology and History of Greece”<sup>15</sup> that did not depend, at least as far as History was concerned, on pre-existing literary texts, but constituted completely new creations. In this way, Greek children would not only come in contact with the works of great literature that, due to to political, social and economic conditions, were not always within their reach;<sup>16</sup> they would also receive an education by fortifying their knowledge of history, since illustrated magazines or books are more easily and willingly understood and assimilated by children in the course of the learning process.<sup>17</sup> A panorama of Hellenism unfolded in 83 titles<sup>18</sup> dedicated to the full range of Greek history, from Antiquity and Byzantium to the War of Independence and the Cretan revolution, as well as to classical, medieval and Modern Greek literature, all viewed through the prism of ethnocentrism prevalent at the time.

After its rehabilitation in the minds of scholars during the second half of the nineteenth century, Byzantium had finally taken its place in official Greek historiography. Integrated as an inextricable link in the unbroken chain of national continuity, it was no longer treated solely as keeper of the legacy of Antiquity, but also as a creative force from which modern age flowed.<sup>19</sup> It was this perception, this outlook of

maim children’s souls and emotions, gradually leading them to moral degeneration.” All these negative characteristics attributed to comic books are the extreme opposite of the utterly positive image of *Classics Illustrated* according to the same author; *ibid.*: “...they exuded humanitarianism and, what’s more important: they were fragrant with the sweet smell of Greece!”

<sup>14</sup> Malandrakis, «Οι Αριστοκράτες», 3/5.

<sup>15</sup> Greek-themed issues debuted in October 1951. The first issue produced by Greek contributors and inspired by a Greek theme was no. 43, *Perseus and Andromeda*, with text by Vassilis Rotas and illustrations by Kostas Grammatopoulos. See Giannis D. Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα. Θεματική και ιδεολογία» [“The “Classics Illustrated” by Vassilis Rotas. Subject matter and ideology”], *Ερευνα*, no. 13 (98), January 2001: 59 and note 5, with relevant literature. The names of the contributors are not recorded in the publication; the name of the scriptwriter is divulged in a list of *Classics Illustrated* printed by Atlantis Publications at a later date, while the paternity of the illustrations may be deduced by comparing them to similar ones from another issue which bore the artist’s signature. See Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 62 note 6.

<sup>16</sup> Peggy Kounelaki, «“Κλασσικά” με τους ήρωες του Ομήρου. Τα μυθικά πρόσωπα της Ιλιάδας και της Οδύσσειας στη νέα σειρά των “Κλασσικών Εικονογραφημένων” της “Κ” σε διασκευή Βασ. Ρώτα» [“Classics” with Homer’s heroes. The mythical personages of the Iliad and Odyssey in the new series of “Classics Illustrated” by *Kathimerini*, revised by Vas. Rotas], *Καθημερινή* (February 16, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 546.

<sup>18</sup> Skarpepos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 19 and 20, note 9, mentions 83 issues with Greek titles and content deriving from Greek history, mythology, and literature. Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 271, states that there were as many as 90 titles.

<sup>19</sup> Vaggelis Karamanolakis, *Η συγκρότηση της ιστορικής επιστήμης και η διδασκαλία της Ιστορίας στο Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών (1837-1932)* [*The Formation of Historical Scholarship and the Teaching of History*]

Byzantium, that exceptional men (and women) of letters,<sup>20</sup> as well as distinguished painters and engravers, set out to serve.<sup>21</sup> However, what must be particularly mentioned is the fact that 70% of the titles were the creation of militant members of the intellectual Left, Vassilis Rotas and Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki. The former was a notable playwright, poet, critic, prose writer and translator.<sup>22</sup> The latter distinguished herself as a humanities educator, prose writer, author of plays for children, translator, and essentially a poet. Her poem *Εμπρός ΕΛΑΣ* [Forward ELAS!], written in the spring of 1944, had become the anthem of the Greek People's Liberation Army.<sup>23</sup> These creators, in an effort to make ends meet (at least that was the explanation provided by those close to Vassilis Rotas),<sup>24</sup> attempted to present a version of the past that would conform both to their own left-wing beliefs and to the right-wing perceptions forced upon society; the latter, nevertheless, ultimately gained complete dominance. However, even if the commitments they had undertaken vis-à-vis the publisher did not allow them to be completely true to their own ideas,

*ry in the University of Athens (1837-1932)]* (Historical Archive of Greek Youth 42), (Athens: Secretariat for Youth – National Hellenic Research Foundation/Institute of Neohellenic Research, 2006), 317-24.

<sup>20</sup> The names of scriptwriters (Vassilis Rotas, Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki, Georgia Deligianni-Anastasiadi, Stephanos Xenos, Th. Synodinos, Eirene Photeinou, Eleni Papadaki, Voula Damianakou) are recorded in 67% of the issues: Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 59. As noted by the author, *ibid.*, a systematic study of all the texts and illustrations in the Greek series of *Classics Illustrated* could yield the creators of even more issues: the names of illustrators would be easier to ascertain, those of the scriptwriters rather more difficult – and less complete.

<sup>21</sup> Only 21% (19 out of a total of 90, according to G. Barges) of the issues contain illustrators' signatures. Thus, we only know the names of Kostas Grammatopoulos, Nikos Kastanakis, Vassilis Zissis, Giorgos Vakalo, Paulos Valasakis, Giannis Dragonas, Mentis Bostantzoglou (Bost), Nitsa Theologou-Savrami, Takis Katsoulidis, Gerasimos Livieratos, and Alkmini Grammatopoulou. See Barges, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα” του Βασίλη Ρώτα» 59; Malandrakis, «Οι αριστοκράτες», 5/5; Feggerou, *Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα*, 282-3.

<sup>22</sup> On the work of Vassilis Rotas for children and adolescents, see Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, and with regard to his contribution to *Classics Illustrated* in particular, *ibid.*, 531-48.

<sup>23</sup> On Sophia Mavroeidi-Papadaki see, among others,

[http://www.mavroidi.gr/smp/smp.gr/smp\\_menu\\_main\\_gr.htm](http://www.mavroidi.gr/smp/smp.gr/smp_menu_main_gr.htm) (accessed July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017);

<http://www.ekebi.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=461&t=523> (accessed July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017) with literature.

<sup>24</sup> Vassilis Rotas translated texts from the US series, but also wrote texts for Greek issues, in order to supplement his income, since “he was divorced at the time, and he needed the money for alimony,” according to an interview given by his last partner, Voula Damianakou; see Marili Margomenou, «Τα εικονογραφημένα τριών γενεών Ελλήνων. Πενάκι ανά χείρας και φύγαμε!» [“The illustrated publications of three generations of Greeks. *Drawing pen in hand, and away we go!*”], *Το Βήμα* (August 25, 1996). It was perhaps because he saw his involvement in this as a sideline that he never mentioned it while he lived; references to his participation in *Classics Illustrated* may be found in *Βασίλης Ρώτας*, a slim volume on his life and work published by Voula Damianakou after the author's death: see Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 170, and Idem, «Τα “Κλασσικά Εικονογραφημένα”», 61.

they maintained their own high standards when it came to issues of literary and theatrical ethics.<sup>25</sup>

The Greek series of *Classics Illustrated* dedicated a total of 13 issues to the history of Byzantium, eight to male protagonists or men in general and five to members of the female gender. The number may seem –and probably is– rather low when compared to the total number of 83/90 Greek titles; it should be noted, however, that *Classics Illustrated* was the only Greek comic-book series ever to deal with Byzantium and the history of Modern Greece.<sup>26</sup>

Their pages sing the praises of the personalities and achievements of (in chronological order of reign) Constantine the Great, Julian the Apostate, Justinian, Heraclius, Basil the Bulgar-Slayer, Constantine Palaiologos, while they also describe the heroic deeds of Byzantine *akritai* and especially of Digenes Akrites. The five women selected were Athenaïs–Eudokia, Eirene the Athenian, Theodora the Blessed, Blessed, Kassiane and Anna Comnena – or rather her work, *Alexias*.<sup>27</sup>

The questions that we will try to answer here is why them and not some others and, by extension, in what way were those particular personages presented.

The answers have to do both with the more general educational/ pedagogical role these comic books were called upon to perform and with the perception of Byzantium it was decided they would support and reinforce. As far as the first aim is concerned, comic books in general were and are, without a doubt, carriers of many and various role models, either positive or negative, that influence the edification and socialization of individuals and thus contribute, to a great degree, to shaping the personality of their readers, including for the most part the younger reading public. Their content is related to fundamental life relations and promotes values such as heroism, friendship, love of country or of nature, dignity etc., that appear as eternal truths. Their principal motif is the opposition between good and evil<sup>28</sup> and the continuous struggle to secure justice, harmony and balance between the

<sup>25</sup> At least that was the case with Vassilis Rotas, whose work has been the focus of dedicated studies and has been praised by the authors for its high quality; see e.g. Karagiannis, *Ο Βασίλης Ρώτας*, 546. Cf. Barges, «Τα κόμικς του Βασίλη Ρώτα», 170: “even when he ‘worked’ under some publisher and according to standards that most probably did not satisfy him personally, onto even the most insignificant (to him) page he outlined he would pour all those juices that flowed through his more authoritative and personal literary work.”

<sup>26</sup> Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> See Fig. 1. For the study at hand the following issues were used: *Ο Μέγας Κωνσταντίνος* [*Constantine the Great*] – no. 1231; *Ιουλιανός ο παραβάτης* [*Julian the Apostate*] – no. 1254; *Ιουστινιανός ο αυτοκράτωρ* [*Justinian the emperor*] – no. 222; *Ηράκλειος. Αυτοκράτωρ του Βυζαντίου* [*Heraclius. Emperor of Byzantium*] – no. 1193; *Βασίλειος ο Βουλγαροκτόνος* [*Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*] – no. 1041; *Κωνσταντίνος Παλαιολόγος* [*Constantine Palaiologos*] – no. 1110; *Βυζαντινοί Ακρίτες* [*Byzantine akritai*] – no. 1187; *Διγενής Ακρίτας* [*Digenes Akritas*] – no. 1035; *Αθηναΐς. Η αυτοκράτειρα του Βυζαντίου Ευδοκία* [*Athenais. The Byzantine empress Eudokia*] – no. 1219; *Ειρήνη η Αθηναία* [*Eirene the Athenian*] – no. 1241; *Θεοδώρα η Μακαρία* [*Theodora the Blessed*] – no. 1246; *Η Κασσιανή* [*Kassiane*] – no. 1229; *Άννα Κομνηνή (“Η Αλεξιάς”)* [*Anna Comnena (“The Alexias”)*] – no. 1222.

<sup>28</sup> Skarpelos, *Ιστορική μνήμη*, 63.

world's beings. In every case Good defeats Evil and the villains are punished for their deeds.

The Graeco-Christian image of the Byzantine Empire had to conform to these positive role models and values, which brings us to the second intended aim. With the subject matter of the titles connected to the curriculum of elementary and secondary education, the point was to promote those heroes of a fundamentally Greek and dominantly Christian Byzantium who served that particular purpose. Thus, preference was given to historical figures who either gave utterance to the ideals of Hellenism through their work and their actions, supported the dominance and spread of Christianity, and defended or restored “Greek” territorial integrity, or – and I am referring here to the case of Julian – through their misplaced naïveté and concomitant failure highlighted, although this was not their intention, the grandeur of that which they vainly sought to fight. Therefore, one can easily perceive the rationale behind both the selection of protagonists and the orientation of the content; the latter is briefly presented in the following paragraphs.

Constantine I was portrayed as helping the Christians at a very young age, ing that he stood up for justice,<sup>29</sup> while he was made *augustus* by his dying father, who furthermore placed the crown upon his son’s head himself.<sup>30</sup>

The issue is dedicated almost in its entirety to the protagonist’s course to single rule. His successive clashes first with Maxentius and then with Licinius are not presented as a fight for the survival of the strongest, but as the struggle of a just, wronged *augustus* to liberate the persecuted Christians in both West and East, to unite the whole population under the protection of the symbol of the Cross, to “re”build churches, to open the prisons and give properties back to those who had been deprived of them because of their faith.<sup>31</sup> The story ends with his decision to build Constantinople; the latter’s consecration was celebrated by a mass in the newly-built magnificent temple of the Christians (!).<sup>32</sup> Almost simultaneously with

<sup>29</sup> *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Constantine cries out: “The people of Italy expect us to liberate them” (*Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 14); when he presents the *In hoc signo vinces* symbol to his soldiers, he declares: “We are not waging war to conquer, but to help those enslaved!” (*ibid.*, 17). The crowds receive the victorious Constantine in Nicomedia with the acclamation “Welcome, the liberator of Christians!” (*ibid.*, 39).

<sup>32</sup> *Κωνσταντίνος ο Μέγας*, 43. Both text and illustration allude to the Hagia Sophia. The Justinian issue also makes a specific reference to the church of Hagia Sophia destroyed during the Nika Revolt having been built by Constantine the Great (*Ιουστινιανός*, 16). However, the earliest Hagia Sophia (a basilica, not the building depicted in the illustrations) was built by Constantius II, the son of Constantine; see Peter Schreiner, *Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ιστορία και Αρχαιολογία* [*Constantinople. History and Archaeology*], trans. Annete Fosvinkel (Athens: National Bank of Greece Cultural Foundation, 2014), 42.

The works of Constantine in the New Rome are almost unknown, as precious little is mentioned in contemporary sources. Only Eusebius, the emperor’s biographer, made an effort to praise the city’s Christianization, which he arbitrarily attributed to the emperor; see, Cécile Morrisson, «Η πρωτεύουσα», in ed. Cécile Morrisson, *Ο βυζαντινός κόσμος, τ. Ι. Η Ανατολική Ρωμαϊκή Αυτοκρατορία (330-641)* [*The Byzantine world, v. I. The Eastern Roman Empire (330-641)*], trans. Anastasia Karastathi

the foundation of the New Rome (AD 324), the emperor's mother, Helena, set off on her journey to the Holy Land in order to find the True Cross.<sup>33</sup>

Julian's stance against Christianity was attributed to the sensitive disposition of the the protagonist, who was adversely influenced during his traumatic childhood by the the insistence of his first tutor, Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, on Christian education and practice.<sup>34</sup> His philosophical studies at Pergamum, Ephesus and Athens, at the feet of pagan teachers and Neoplatonic philosophers, brought him closer to the Greece he loved. Julian's mistake, according to his crypto-Christian wife Helena, was that he sought to return to the worship of the Twelve Olympians, looking upon "the brilliance of a beautiful culture as the work of a specific religion."<sup>35</sup> But was it not so? The emperor acted as a dreamer, with the heart of a child, and, finding himself himself in the grip of a fallacy, he wished, like the Greek he claimed to be,<sup>36</sup> to revive Ancient Greece.

Justinian diverges from the absolute ideal served by the *Classics Illustrated* with regard to Byzantium. Yes, he was the Christian emperor whose "jewel in the crown" was the church of Hagia Sophia, but he was also the ruler that "restored the ancient Roman Empire as a unified global power."<sup>37</sup> Of the 13 "Byzantine" titles this is the one that stays more faithful to the historical sources, although it also includes the legends regarding the architectural plan of Hagia Sophia. The Nika Riot, narrated with a relatively high degree of accuracy, considering the genre, the imperial couple's love relationship and the friendship between Justinian and Belisarius that triumphs despite all the calumnies form the canvass on which the era of Justinian was embroidered. The work's highly knowledgeable author<sup>38</sup> did not allow himself to get carried away by jingoistic slogans; perhaps that is the reason why the issue has not reprinted in one of the series' repeated later republications.

(Athens: Polis, 2007), 270. Both pagan and Christian rituals marked the inauguration of Constantinople; see Albrecht Berger, *Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ιστορία, τοπογραφία, θρησκεία* [*Constantinople. History, topography, religion*], trans. Christos Tsatsoulis (Athens: Herodotos, 2013), 27-30.

<sup>33</sup> In actual fact, the emperor's mother set off on her journey to the Holy Land after the dramatic family events that took place in the palace in 326, i.e. the execution of Crispus, Constantine's first-born son, on his father's orders. Crispus' stepmother, Fausta, accused him of violating her honor. A few months later, Fausta was also put to death, having been charged with adultery. Helena began her journey in the summer of that year; Aikaterini Christophilopoulou, *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία, τ. Α': 324-610* [*Byzantine History, v. I: 324-610*] (Athens: Herodotos, 2012), 195 and note 78.

<sup>34</sup> *Ιουλιανός*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ιουλιανός*, 26, while in *ibid.*, 28, Helena prays for the salvation of her husband: "Have mercy on him, Lord! He knows not what he does! And yet he has the heart of a child."

<sup>36</sup> When his counselors advised him to initiate a persecution of Christians, he responded: "No, no, I will not become a Nero! I am a Greek!": *Ιουλιανός*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> *Ιουστινιανός*, 45. Cf. *ibid.*, 30: "The great Roman state is restored," and *ibid.*, 31: "You have restored the Roman Empire." However, the "Brief Introduction" [Σύντομη Εισαγωγή] to the plot notes: "Thanks to his skills... the Byzantine Empire was organised into a highly efficient state and spread to Asia, Europe, and Africa, supplanting the decayed Roman Empire." There is no doubt that the terms are used here in a "Byzantinocentric"–"Hellenocentric" fashion, with no grounding whatsoever in rigorous academic work.

<sup>38</sup> The events are depicted according to the narratives of Procopius, John Malalas and the *Chronicon Paschale*.