

From Trauma to Self-Reflection: Greek Historiography meets the Young Turks ‘Bizarre’ Revolution¹

Vangelis Kechriotis
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The images illustrating the enthusiasm and hope following the Young Turks movement are well known. In the urban centers, in particular, the parades involving members of all communities, Muslims as well as Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish, have been the central theme in the accounts describing the events of that period. A corpus of similar texts which were produced later, sometimes much later, by individuals who participated in those developments, take as their starting point those celebrations. However, this happy period did not last for long. The cheerful colors were succeeded by dark ones and the dream was turned to a nightmare.

The aim of this paper is, firstly, to follow the major themes in narratives produced by figures of that period which, even if not *stricto sensu* historiographical, provide a framework of meaning through which later generations will find their path. The second part will be a brief account of the historiographical reconstruction of the period in the academic field, nowadays. The focus will be on the last decade, when we can trace a shift of paradigm, on various terms.

i) Who is to blame?

The people who described the events of 1908 and the aftermath had been, in most cases, personally involved in the political controversies, often by taking different sides.

The texts we have spotted are Ap. Alexandris, *Πολιτικά Αναμνήσεις* (Political Memoirs), Patrai, 1940, Em. Emmanoulidis, *Τα τελευταία έτη της Αυτοκρατορίας* (The last years of the Ottoman Empire), Athens, 1924, A.Ch. Chamoudopoulos,

It appeared in Christina Koulouri (eds.), *Clio in the Balkans*, CDRSEE, Thessaloniki, 2002, pp. 91-108.

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Ελληνισμός και Νεότουρκοι (Hellenism and the Young Turks) Salonica, 1926, and, *Η Νέα Φιλική Εταιρεία* (The New ‘Phriendly Society’), Athens, 1946, Ion Dragoumis, *Όσοι ζωντανοί* (Whosoever is living), Athens, 1926, Dimitrios Georgiadis, *La regeneration de la Turquie, est-elle possible?*, Paris, 1909, Neoklis Kazazis, *Les Grecs sous le Nouveau Régime Ottoman*, Paris, 1908, Pavlos Karolidis, *Λόγοι και Υπομνήματα* (Speeches and memoranda), Athens, 1913, Spyridon Mariolopoulos, *Οθωμανοί και Έλληνες* (Ottomans and Greeks), Athens, 1908, Athanassios Souliotis-Nicolaidis, *Οργάνωσις Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Society of Constantinople) edited by C. Boura & T. Veremis, Athens, 1984, and *Σημειωματάριον* (Notebook), 1971, George Cléanthe Skalieris, *La Décentralisation et la Réforme Administrative*, Constantinople, 1911.

The attitude and the choices made by the different parts of the Greek-Orthodox community concerning the Young Turks politics were not unanimous. However, this is not always mirrored in the contemporary accounts. The agents, as it is usually the case in similar events, had a full picture of what followed the Revolution through the Balkan wars and the WWI up to the tragic conclusion of 1922. Therefore, they could impose on the events a meaning and an interpretation heavily influenced by its long-term consequences. Furthermore, for them, remembering those events was a painful task, since a similar account constituted more or less the description of a defeat. The contextual time was, therefore, open only towards the past. The circle of events they described had been already concluded. Therefore, the textual time was similarly transformed in order to correspond in this *post factum* reorganisation of memory. The approach of the authors tended to be ‘anachronistic’.

There is no doubt, in their view, that a lot of things went wrong. What is at stake, though, is who was to blame. In that sense, the texts obtain an apologetic character and at the same time contribute to a preliminary investigation with historiographical claims but mainly with didactic purposes and, certainly, without any academic sensitivity. The accusations were partly addressed to the opponents within the Greek-Orthodox community. However, the main attack targeted the Committee of Union and Progress.

Three points are worth mentioning here. Firstly, the major events or the main figures of the movement are only described in their interrelation with either the author’s activity or at least, as a background for the activity of the Greek-Orthodox community. Very often, one has the impression that the center of action and decision

is or should be the Greek- Orthodox community. The historical subject of these narrations could never be the Unionist agents or the movement itself.

The second relative point is that, either by arrogance, or through the need of self-reassessment or both, the authors in most cases describe the aims of the Greek - Orthodox community quite bluntly. It is, therefore, difficult to imagine how they could expect that every other community, especially the Turkish Muslim one would sympathize with their expectations. As a matter of fact, the Unionist leadership strongly opposed the claims of the Greek- Orthodox community which felt deeply frustrated and reacted abruptly.

However- and this is the third point- very soon, almost everybody in the community was convinced that all non-Muslim communities - the Greek-Orthodox *par excellence*- were victims of a vicious game, a fraud. The Young Turks had in their mind, from the very beginning, to eliminate every other community in the Empire by turcifying everybody and in order to avoid immediate resistance they used ‘Ottomanism’ as a pretext. They could, that way, paralyse the inner structure of the communities and easily deprive them from their vigor. In this plot, all the good guys are only on the one side. Certainly, there are also some evil ones among ‘us’, but they are the ones who co-operated with the enemy.

ii) Celebrating a defeat

In order to illustrate the points mentioned above we will use as an example the study *Ελληνισμός και Νεότουρκοι, εθνική δράσις του υπόδουλου Ελληνισμού κατά την Νεοτουρκική περίοδον 1908-1912 (Hellenism and Young Turks, national activity of the enslaved Hellenism during the Young Turks era)* written by A.Ch. Chamoudopoulos, and published in Salonica, in 1926.

One of the main concerns of the writer is to defend the support given by the community to the CUP, not only at the outbreak of the movement but also later on during crucial debates in the Ottoman Parliament. He points out that the Christians had any reason to trust this movement, since the CUP included all liberal elements. The revolutionaries invited all nationalities of the state, calling them to work together for the creation of an Eastern Empire. The common action was necessary in order to prevent intervention by the Great Powers, Russia and Austria in particular, who did not only threaten the integrity of Turkey, but also put in danger the status of its

Christian communities. Towards that purpose, the Young Turks promised to protect all liberties of the non-Muslim communities:

‘Those were the promises given by the Young Turks, who managed to mislead the non-Turkish nationalities, the Greeks in particular, who being a Royal nation (βασίλειον γένος), in the areas of their national heritage, imagined that it would be possible to prevent a dismemberment of Turkey, which would be harmful for Hellenism, and to contribute to the creation of an Eastern State in which they would play a prominent role, due to their intellectual superiority and their economic and commercial prosperity. The developments proved they were wrong, but the future generations should not accuse them of being naïve, since when they (the Greeks) realised the danger, they revolted. This had as a result the initiation of understanding among the Christians of Turkey, which led to the turnover of the CUP and later to the Balkan coalition and the Balkan-Turkish war².

Concerning compulsory conscription, the author defends the deputies who voted for the bill when the Unionists brought it to the Parliament. Not only did they act according to instructions of ‘well-informed’ circles, but also the very existence of Christian soldiers within the Turkish army, contributed to its easier collapse during the Balkan war³.

The overt way that the author defends Greek choices, ends up justifying any beneficial for the Greek side activity, projecting the warfare which followed to the whole period. This is how, for instance, he describes Vassileio Gkika Mousouro, Minister of the Post service in the Ottoman government during the WWI.

‘An ideal Greek. The services he offered to the struggle were precious. Through his presence in the Turkish government, there was a Greek eye. Nothing could be done, no decision was taken in the Porte, unless the Greeks were informed about it and acted accordingly’⁴.

Yet, it was not only the CUP to blame. There were also Greeks who followed the CUP, and they have no excuse for that:

² A.Ch. Chamoudopoulos *Ελληνισμός και Νεότουρκοι, εθνική δράσις του υπόδουλου Ελληνισμού κατά την Νεοτουρκική περίοδον 1908-1912 (Hellenism and Young Turks, national activity of the enslaved Hellenism during the Young Turks era)*, Salonica, 1926, 6

³ *ibid*, 34

⁴ *ibid*, 54

‘Hence, the numerous Greeks, those who followed the Committee cannot justify themselves towards History and the Nation. Even their claim that it was the attitude of the nationalities which irritated Young Turks is abolished by the course of events. The nationalities only defended themselves against this or that action of the Unionists, who aimed at applying the program they had conceived long before and there was nobody who could convince them to reconsider’⁵.

But what is most important is the unity of the nation. Later on, the ‘numerous’ collaborators are totally marginalised. The ‘coward and amphoteric’ are not supposed to be more than a handful⁶.

However, the diversion of attitudes within the Greek-Orthodox community, was already mentioned in some of the texts of that period. A picture of this multitude of views is given, for instance, by Apostolos Alexandris, envoy of the Greek government in his memoirs.

“...a chaos of opinions concerning the issues related to Hellenism. Most of the Istanbulites shaped their views drifted by the friendly attitudes and democratic views of prince Sabaheddin, others in an enthusiastically naïve manner, praised the real equality of the new state. Ion Dragoumis (famous ideologue and diplomat), on the other hand claimed that the intellectual and material superiority of Hellenism would soon impose itself on the reborn Empire. Bousios (ideologue and parliamentary deputy) ended up supporting that Turkey, through the dispersion in the parliament of Greek views and political principles would turn into a New Byzantium⁷”.

At the same time, the attitude towards Muslim Turks, in general, is ambiguous. On the one hand, the collaboration with the ‘Freedom and Understanding’ Party directed by Prince Sabaheddin, creates the necessity of a more politically and less ethnically minded behavior. Accusations do not regard Turks in general, they are only addressed to Young Turks:

‘The rising resentment on the part of Christians against the Committee had repercussions among the Turkish people, who having with a lot of difficulty digested the newly appeared theories of the Young Turks, could very well realise to which steep the state was driven by its ‘pro machina’

⁵ *ibid*, 10

⁶ *ibid*, 11

⁷ Apostolos Alexandris, *Πολιτικά αναμνήσεις*, (Political Memoirs), Patrai, 1940, 19

saviors. Turk, even if illiterate, had developed a philosophy of the ‘simple people’ and could see where the situation would lead us. And he started reacting against his new masters’⁸.

On the other hand, talking about the ‘Freedom and Understanding’ party, he cannot dissociate himself from stereotypes:

‘We do not know what would be the behavior of this new party towards Christians, if it dominated. Turks are always Turks’⁹.

In any case, the outcome of the struggle is not presented at all as a defeat. The Christians, even if they did not manage to achieve the creation of a powerful Eastern State, they contributed to the dissolution of European Turkey, according to the aspirations of their brotherly Balkan states, and not along the lines drawn by the Great Powers¹⁰.

It seems that the Young Turks Movement and what followed has been a story of great misunderstanding. Different communities and social groups could only see in the movement the liberation from the autarchy of Abdülhamid and the fulfilment of all their aspirations. That’s how Pavlos Karolidis¹¹, a Greek deputy and at the same time History professor at the University of Athens described his own vision:

“The new regime of the Ottoman state, outcome of the July Revolution opened the way for sincere cooperation between not only the peoples but also the states of the East and the Turks. This cooperation meant, in my view, the respect on the part of the Turks of all the rights and interests of Hellenism in Turkey, which would be for the benefit of the Turks themselves and the sincere and lawful behavior of the Ottoman Greeks. At the end, it meant the collaboration of the Greek and Turkish element against the Slavic one and at the same time the collaboration of the Greek and Turkish state for the protection of common interests”¹².

⁸ *ibid*, 37

⁹ *ibid*, 44

¹⁰ *ibid*, 53

¹¹ On Karolidis see more in Exertzoglou Charis, “Shifting Boundaries, language, community and the non-Greek speaking Greeks”, *Historiein*, 1999, 75-92 and in Vangelis Kechriotis, ‘Greek-Orthodox, Ottoman-Greeks or just Greeks? Theories of Coexistence in the Aftermath of the Young Turks Revolution’, in *Etudes Balkaniques, Autumn 2004* (forthcoming).

¹² Karolidis, *Λόγοι και Υπομνήματα, (Speeches and memoranda)*, Athens, 1913, 16

iii) Dealing with stereotypes

The first more systematic historiographical approach coincides with the publication of the well-known 16th volume collective work *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* (History of the Hellenic Nation) (the 17th volume was published last year). This publication was initiated in 1971 and aimed at creating a new, more elaborate and sophisticated ‘canon’ of Greek historiography, following the ‘national time’ established by Paparrigopoulos, the ‘national historian’ of 19th c.. The author of the part referring to the developments before the Balkan wars (the volume was published in 1977) was Thanos Veremis. Even if the framework provided for the understanding of the developments within Ottoman history is well presented, the author seems to follow certain of the themes already established. Two typical examples:

“The Young Turks, even if they attacked initially all the backward institutions and thus religion itself, ended up by merging Muslim identity with Turkish national identity”¹³.

And:

“The real aims, however, of the Young Turks were finally revealed. The Turkish military, who had imposed themselves on the movement, were not interested either in political liberties nor in decentralization plans and free development of the ethnicities, but in the preservation of the integrity of the Empire and the privileges of ‘Turkish ruling race’ over the other ethnicities”¹⁴.

The *leitmotiv* of a well-organised fraud still prevails and the question of how Turkish nationalism managed to merge with religion is not even raised. However, one of the major features of the Unionist policy was secularism and this was the reason which turned against them all religious elements who felt, and very rightly so, that their traditionally privileged position was in danger. Now, whether the Unionists used religion as a vehicle in order to attract the support of Muslim populations is an issue, which cannot be addressed here¹⁵.

However, Veremis was one the first Greek historians who worked systematically on the *Society of Constantinople* (Οργάνωση Κωνσταντινουπόλεως),

¹³ *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* (History of the Hellenic Nation), Ekdotiki Athinon, 1977, v.XIV’, 255

¹⁴ *ibid*, 255

¹⁵ This is the how Sükrü Hanioglu describes the use of religion by the Young Turks in Sükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, Oxford UP, 1995. Exertzoglou strongly criticises this distinction between political aims and political discourse (see below).

founded in 1907, before the Revolution and, initially, aimed at coordinating Greek activity against the Bulgarian threat. With the break up of the Movement it turned into one of the major vehicles of the Greek views inside or outside the Ottoman Parliament. In 1984, together with Caterina Boura, Veremis published the manuscript of Athanassios Souliotis-Nicolaidis, leading figure of the *Society*. This text, written in the 50s, proved a very rich source of information on the period. We will refer to this work, later. At this point, it is enough to point out that Boura, in her introduction, opens the spectrum of diverse views existing within the community. Thus, she successfully deconstructs the stereotype of national unanimity against the Revolution, which had been perpetuated, as we have seen, mostly by the protagonists themselves:

‘A considerable part of Greeks opposed the Society of Constantinople and collaborated with the Unionists. This attitude expressed the will of many Greek Ottomans to remain within the Ottoman Empire and participate in the creation of the Young Turkish state.....This attitude also echoed the official policy of the Hellenic state which initially favored a strategic cooperation with the authorities. However, the national policy, as formulated by the national center would later aim at the inclusion of Greeks to a powerful state, as envisined by Venizelos’¹⁶.

This line of argumentation as far as the Hellenic state’s ambiguous policies are concerned has already been articulated, though. A few years earlier, A. J. Panayotopoulos, had published his article ‘Early relations Between Greeks and the Young Turks’, in *Balkan studies*, 21 (1980), 87-95. This account provides us with an elaborate picture of the relations between Greeks and Young Turks, especially for the period before the movement. However, the movement itself still remains at the background. The role of protagonists is kept again for the Greeks. What is new, however, in Panayotopoulos’ account, is a thorough investigation of the way the Hellenic state but also other Hellenic agents tried to take advantage and manipulate the Movement during the formative period, having different views on the benefits or the threats that a change of regime could bring for the Greek-Orthodox communities of the Empire. It is here that the debate over the role of the Hellenic state, during this period, is initiated and will be broadened later by Thanos Veremis and Caterina Boura. The main argument will be that the Hellenic state was very cautious, and had

¹⁶ Thanos Veremis-Katerina Boura (eds), Αθανάσιος Σουλιώτης-Νικολαΐδης, *Οργάνωσις Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (Society of Constantinople)*, Dodoni, Athens 1984, 24

in fact no clear policy, which prevented it from taking benefit out of the new developments¹⁷.

In 1990, in the collection *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality*, edited by Martin Blinkhorn and Thanos Veremis, published by SAGE-ELIAMEP, 1990, Veremis published his article 'From the National State to the Stateless Nation, 1821-1910'. Unlike his previous accounts, the stereotype of Unionist fraud is being challenged here and the discourse employed is more analytical:

'Ottoman Greeks who backed the Young Turks CUP were moved by its initial promise to grant political rights to all Ottoman subjects....Adherence to the principles expounded by the CUP amounted to abandoning the privileges as well as the handicaps of the millet system. The liberal wing of the Young Turk movement, which developed into a full-fledged liberal party, attracted most Greek support because it combined the promise of liberalisation with the preservation of the *millet's* cultural identities"¹⁸.

At the same time, Veremis challenges the full identification of the Patriarchate's views with the policy of *Society of Constantinople*¹⁹ and he accuses Feroz Ahmad of dealing with the Greek-Orthodox community in a monolithic way²⁰. It is the first time, it's worth mentioning, that a Greek historian participates in a debate among Ottomanists, concerning this period.

iv) The 'Bizarre' Revolution

However, it is only in 1992 that we have the first study of the Revolution itself as a major event and not as the context for the Greek activity. Elli Skopetea in her book *Η Δύση της Ανατολής, Εικόνες από το τέλος της Οθωμανικής Αυτοκρατορίας* (The Sunset of the East. Images from the end of the Ottoman Empire) includes a chapter on the Young Turks Revolution under the title *Μια Παράξενη Επανάσταση* (A strange/bizarre Revolution). In her book, through literature, diplomatic

¹⁷ *ibid*, 12

¹⁸ Thanos Veremis, 'From the National State to the Stateless Nation, 1821-1910' in Martin Blinkhorn & Thanos Veremis (eds), *Modern Greece: Nationalism and Nationality*, SAGE- ELIAMEP, 1990, 18

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 18

²⁰ Feroz Ahmad, 'Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire 1908-1919' in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, V.I (New York 1983) 401-434.

correspondence and the press, she traces the stereotypes which imbue Western discourses on the East but also the Eastern discourses on the West. Following the same path, she brings forward the ambivalent response of the Europeans, a mixture of surprise, enthusiasm and anxiety. Moreover, she places the study of the Revolution in a broader analytical framework of revolutionary events and focuses on the distance between the 'claims' and the 'results', since no agent can visualise in advance the kind of potentials the course of a Revolution can launch:

'The unusual in the particular case has to do, on the one hand with the proportion of this discrepancy, the huge distance between the happy take off and the end which was dominated by mutual hatred. On the other hand, given that the immediate co-protagonist, the West participates both in the 'claims' and the 'results' in the traditional ambiguous way, it conceives the Revolution..... as a triumph of western influence, ...but at the same time, it seeks to prevent the logical outcome..... which would be the restriction of this influence'²¹.

As a matter of fact, in her account, deeply influenced by the debate on 'Orientalism'- in her introduction, though, she criticises Said for adopting a monolithic view of the West- the Revolution is described within the framework of the 'awakening' of the East, within which it ceases to be a strictly Ottoman affair and gains a comparative perspective²².

On the nature of the Young Turk Revolution, she seems to follow Ahmad's view that the CUP deliberately established the peculiar regime of controlling from the backstage without bearing any responsibility for long-term politics, what she calls a 'peculiar double authority'²³.

However, the way she elaborates on the aims of the Young Turks is significantly different from what had prevailed until then. She describes how they:

²¹Elli Skopetea, *H Δύση της Ανατολής* (The Sunset of the East), Themelio, Athens, 1992, 158-159

²² *ibid*, 161

²³ This view has been strongly criticised by Kansu in Aykut Kansu, *Politics in Post-revolutionary Turkey, 1908-1913*, Leiden, Brill, 2000. The author suggests that the Unionists were not strong enough to take hold of the government, so it was not so much political handling which dictated their choices, as it was a matter of necessity.

‘were obliged to proceed to the Revolution with an incomplete program. Since they aspired at the support of all the Ottoman national groups,... the only comprehensible solution of the time, the national state, the ‘national unity’, could be put forward only in a covered way’.²⁴

and elsewhere she is attributing to them the use of a double language which in the end punished them²⁵. The Young Turks are not accused of fraud any more, but basically of political short-sightedness.

However, her analysis is dominated by the modernisation discourse, according to which the actual developments were inevitable and followed a path determined by the course of history. In her view:

‘It was an unstable balance of anachronisms within a modern, however, Revolution. In the case of the revolutionaries the anachronism lay at the stepping point: ...the maintenance of the Empire as a vision for 20th c.,... in the case of western powers the anachronism was the target, a parliamentary western state which would leave intact the regime of Capitulations’.

And she concludes that the most direct ‘modern’ result of this ‘modern’ Revolution, has been the acceleration of the circle of nationalist movements in the Empire, which was what the revolutionaries had tried to avoid²⁶.

And elsewhere:

‘The Turkish army prevailed, in a deterministic way, in the same deterministic way Turkish nationalism prevailed’²⁷.

The Greek responses to the new regime are only hinted here. Skopetea suggests that it was just natural for them to see in these developments the great opportunity for Hellenism²⁸. But on this issue, she elaborates much more in her chapter *Οι Έλληνες και οι εχθροί τους* (The Greeks and their enemies), 10-35, in

²⁴ *ibid*, 176

²⁵ *ibid*, 178

²⁶ *ibid*, 177

²⁷ *ibid*, 168

²⁸ *ibid*, 170

Ιστορία της Ελλάδος του 20ου αι. (History of Greece in 20th c.), Vivliorama, Athens, 1999.

There, she deals, in particular, with the concept of ‘misunderstanding’, which seems to prevail around the new regime, by attributing misconceptions to structural features of the Ottoman society. In other words, the fact that the identity elements which were officially recognised- language and education- were under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate, which could not be considered as a western institution. In that sense, the Greeks could not participate through their institutions in the western reforms taking place, even if they considered the developments favorable for them. And she concludes:

‘What, initially can be taken as a huge misunderstanding (modernisation with an anachronistic view), reveals the only shape that Greek nationalism could take within the Ottoman state²⁹’.

The problem with this analysis, despite its value for the understanding of power relations during that period, lies at the fact that it eliminates the multiplicity of views which coexisted for quite some time. Moreover, as already mentioned, it takes the outcome of the struggle for granted, projecting it to the events themselves. However, the agents of the period, who ignored the end of the story, could negotiate on several possible courses of action.

iv) Between social reality and political discourse

In 1997, Sia Anagnostopoulou published her book *Μικρά Ασία 19ος αι-1919 Οι Ελληνορθόδοξες κοινότητες. Από το Μιλλέτ των Ρωμιών στο Ελληνικό Έθνος* (Asia Minor, 19c-1919, the Greek-Orthodox communities, From Millet of Rum to the Greek nation).

In her chapter under the title ‘The Young Turks Revolution: The new ‘Ottoman’ framework of authority: 1908-1914’, she raises the issue:

‘But what are the real aims of the Young Turks? To abolish once and for all the privileges of the Patriarch in secular issues, such as education, or abolish completely the liberties of the non-Muslim

²⁹ Elli Skopetea, ‘Οι Έλληνες και οι εχθροί τους’ (Greeks and their enemies), 10-35 in *Ιστορία της Ελλάδος του 20ου αι.* (History of Greece in 20th c.), Vivliorama, Athens, 1999, 27

communities, as pointed out by most accounts, contemporary and later ones. The answer to the question is difficult and complex, as complex as the period itself³⁰.

The answer she is offering creates a reversal of the existing framework:

‘It is certain that neither Turkish nationalism constitutes from the very beginning the major element of the policy of Young Turks nor Greek nationalism constitutes the main element of the policy of the Greek deputies. On the contrary, we can trace the field of mutual reinforcement of all nationalisms which develop during this period and mainly of the mechanisms of legitimization’³¹.

In this account, the Young Turks Movement on the one hand and the developments within the Greek-Orthodox community on the other, are studied in a comparative perspective. The problem of identity formation is treated through the interrelation of ‘heterodoxies’ which are built simultaneously. At the same time, the author gives at least two elements of the Revolution which she therefore uses as key-notions in order to comprehend the attitudes and conflicts within the Greek-Orthodox community. These elements are: i) the gradual development of a modernizing radicalisation and ii) the restructuring of the social platform from above, due to the ‘alliance’ of the state elites with certain elites of the ‘social periphery’³². In that sense, she also opens her scope to the study of a revolutionary procedure as such, without taking for granted the outcome and trying to reflect on the possible alternatives. She elaborates on the aims of the Revolution and points out that their attempt was not to destroy the different groups, but to abolish the religious *milli* way of legitimization. Therefore, she focuses mainly on the distinction between the Patriarch and the secular elements of the Greek-Orthodox community, which probably make dimmer other social groupings which, in due time, took sides along the main lines.

However, unlike Skopetea, she does not build her argument on Young Turks’ ‘double language’ as something established from the beginning but she is trying to follow this language as the outcome of a procedure. She also definitely differentiates herself from Veremis on the issue of the ‘merging between national and religious

³⁰Sia Anagnostopoulou, *Μικρά Ασία 19ος αι-1919 Οι Ελληνορθόδοξες κοινότητες. Από το Μιλλέτ των Ρωμιών στο Ελληνικό Έθνος*, (Asia Minor, The Greek-Orthodox Communities. From Rum Millet to the Greek Nation), Athens, 1998, 462

³¹ *ibid*, 458

³² *ibid*, 458

identity’, by bringing forward the secular element on both sides. The problem with this approach is that it carries an essentialist overtone, since, even if it tries to deconstruct historiographical misconceptions, it does not place itself within the framework of analysis but carries claims on reinstating the truth.

In 1999, Princeton University Press published a volume entitled *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism*, edited by Dimitris Gondicas and Charles Issawi. In this volume, we find an article by Caterina Boura entitled ‘The Greek millet in Turkish Politics: Greeks in the Ottoman Parliament (1908-1918)’. The author had already published a version of the article in *Greek*³³. The new element she brings forward here is that the turn of political developments had found the Greeks unprepared to face the electoral challenge. It is important that, despite the conflicts within the Movement itself, the Young Turks are described as a well organized group with clear targets –which is certainly not the case- while the Greeks are presented as not prepared and divided, trying to reassure their presence in the parliament. Consequently, in this case, it is the Greeks themselves to blame for their failure to achieve a strong representation. In this account, we can certainly trace the evolution of the relevant literature from witch-hunting to self-reflection. As a matter of fact, Boura had already followed a similar argument, in the introduction for the publication of Souliotis-Nicolaidis’ manuscript:

‘Initially, the relations of Young Turks with the Greeks of Macedonia were determined by mutual interests. The Greek notables aspired at an improvement of their position against the Bulgarians. The Greek government kept a cautious attitude and so it lost the chance to develop contacts with the new regime³⁴.

These arguments seem to formulate an alternative explanatory framework which, at the same time, implicitly urges for a coherent foreign policy nowadays. However, there is a point of difference between the 1984 and 1990 texts and it has to do with the defensive role Boura attributes to the *Society of Constantinople*:

³³ Katerina Boura, “Οι βουλευτικές εκλογές στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία. Οι Έλληνες βουλευτές 1908-1918, (Parliamentary elections in the Ottoman Empire. The Greek delegates),” *Deltion tou Kentrou Mikrasiatikon Spoudon*, 4, 69-85

³⁴ Thanos Veremis-Katerina Boura , 12

‘Today, a policy which seeks to consolidate the nationalities (*millet*) seems contradictory to the cultural prevailing of the ‘Eastern ideal’..... The *Society* shifted to a policy of supporting the privileges of nationalities as a retreat under the threat of Young Turks nationalism’³⁵.

It is more probable though that the defence of ‘privileges’, was not something the *Society* and the Patriarchate would negotiate at all, from the very beginning. We do not need to take the description of the leading figures at face value. The arsenal of the political struggle could not possibly be considered as only a product of Young Turks’ aggressiveness.

A new picture, though, concerning the different stages of the movement seems to be established in her later article:

‘The Young Turks’ early principles had been those of the French Revolution. They had sought to reconcile the peoples of the Empire, aiming at maintaining its integrity. But now, any national ambitions that non-Muslim and non-Turkish people might have nourished were incompatible with the new conception of state and had to be abandoned’³⁶.

The different periods are mentioned and the description tends to be more reflective than before. Along the line of Skopeta and Veremis, she describes Young Turks’ policy as sincere but short-sighted:

‘The Young Turks aimed at a constitutional government that would soon remove all elements of internal strife and fuse the various nationalities into an Ottoman nation. Bestowing equal rights to all subject peoples, they expected from them, in return to abandon their communal traditions and....offer their allegiance to the Ottoman government’.³⁷

A parenthesis at this point is necessary. The volume *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism*, consists of the procedures of a conference which took place in 1989. In fact, it was the first time that Greek and Turkish colleagues came together to discuss such issues. The outcome in most of the accounts bears the influence of such an atmosphere where academic debate can overcome language of hostility and

³⁵ *ibid* 22

³⁶ Caterina Boura, “The Greek millet in Turkish Politics: Greeks in the Ottoman Parliament (1908-1918)” Dimitris Gondicas and Charles Issawi (eds), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism*, Princeton University Press, 1999, 201.

³⁷ *ibid*, 196

controversy. The same could be said about the present meeting organised by the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe and Sabanci University which brings again around the same table Greek and Turkish academics to contribute their thoughts on national stereotypes on textbooks and historiography.

In 1999, Charis Exertzoglou published a review article about three influential works on the Young Turks³⁸ in the review *Σύγχρονα Θέματα* (Contemporary Issues). The author of the review follows a different approach on the issue. In his view:

‘it is more significant to try to understand the Revolution not through its causes but through the new dynamics it brought forward and which cannot just be attributed to its causes’³⁹.

He thus elaborates more on the argument supported by Skopetea about the discrepancy between the ‘claims’ and the ‘results’ of a revolution. However, he is trying to overcome the major bipolar which dominates almost all accounts, that is ‘centralisation’ vs ‘decentralisation’ and the way it is transformed under the influence of the ethno-religious interests. He suggests that those trends should not be presented as concrete ideologies. They contribute to the articulation of political discourses the same way as nationalism or religion.

At the same time, Exertzoglou challenges the mechanistic approach which disconnects political action from the political discourse. The political discourse, in his view, as an intermediary, has an active role and it should not be considered as a mere tool of the acting subject.

‘These discourses do not act as veils covering real aims or real social interest but contribute on their turn to the restructuring of the political and social environment, provide new positions for the social agents and create a new landscape which does not correspond to the respective aims’⁴⁰.

The influence of the ‘linguistic turn’ on historiography in this account is apparent and it seems that the distance covered from the representation of the trauma from the protagonists themselves up to the reflection on issues of language and

³⁸ Sükrü. M. Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, Oxford 1995 Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*, Leiden, 1997 Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks, Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, University of California Press, 1997.

³⁹ Charis Exertzoglou, ‘Οι Νεότουρκοι’ (The Young Turks) , *Σύγχρονα Θέματα*, 1999, 223-228.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

terminology is a considerable one. It goes without saying that this development was not a monolinear one and it evolved around the influence of not only internal alterations of collective identity but also its contact with broader intellectual trends. What is still a desideratum is a more systematic involvement of Turkish and Greek historians in the debates over this controversial period.