

# Beyond the East-West Dilemma: Rethinking Greekness through Diffracted Gazes in Contemporary Greek Travelogues

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## 1. Questioning the traveller's homeland in contemporary travelogues

Travel writing, according to imagological approaches, has been one of the main sources of national typologies. The reasoning behind this was that firstly, the traveller can only perceive what he already knows and secondly, by writing down his/her account, his/her insight is standardized (Beller - Leerssen 2007: 449). Furthermore, the rhetoric of national images of self and other must be related to its functions within a broader set of political practices. Current criticism has repeatedly blamed travel writing of the traditional form as «inherently conventional, Western, Eurocentric and conformist» and for pushing the imperialist colonial agendas by disseminating powerful discourses of difference (Edwards - Graulund 2012: 5; cfr. Thomson 2011: 4-6).

The complex flows of people, goods, information and technologies across the planet, especially during the last century, have called into question the traditional ways in which different cultures have been distinguished and classified. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new stance concerning otherness can be identified in contemporary travel writing which moves beyond the typical for the genre imperialist vision: the writers are more self-reflexive about how travel

and travel texts mingle with ideological positions, technologies of travel and perception, as well as the established modes of narrating difference<sup>1</sup>. Innovative textual practices explore new ways of addressing these issues in relation to the people and places encountered.

In order to avoid the one-sided vision of the host culture, Roland Barthes proposes in his *Travels in China* the adoption of a “sideways gaze”. This gaze observes more than one direction at the same time, namely it combines in the western traveller’s gaze, the Western and the non-Western point of view (Barthes 2012: 177; cfr. Westphal 2011: 128)<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, Barthes does not take into the account the importance of the encounter of the traveller with the Other. This encounter with otherness, which «impels one to come face to-face with the other», fractures both a boundary and an apparatus of representation (Islam 1996: vii). The hosts can challenge the cultural imperialism of the traveller by returning his/her gaze. The Other’s gaze or “host gaze” is directed towards the traveller, or even towards the traveller’s gaze upon the host’s community (Moufakkir - Reisinger 2013: xi-xiv) and may result in the destabilization of preconceived understandings of otherness and identity. This interactive traveller’s experience is designated in tourist studies by the interesting concept of “chorasters”. The latter are travellers who not only bring meaning to the tourist space (“chora”) from their own position in their own culture but who also «creatively incorporate into their sense of self the experiences of interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds in the

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the narrator’s authority is challenged “through surprising juxtapositions, non-linear narratives, multiple voicing and complex configurations of documentation, memory, fact, fiction and fantasy” (Edwards and Graulung 2012: 10).

<sup>2</sup> By acknowledging the incompleteness of the subject’s gaze in the imagological or “egocentered” approaches, Bertrand Westphal’s geocriticism proposes the “multifocalization”, i.e. the examination of a multiplicity of heterogeneous points of view which all converge in a given place (2011: 122-131).

tourist space» (see Wearing - Wearing 1996: 235; Ankor - Wearing 2013: 188).

In the travelogues, the encounter between the traveller and the host often takes the narrative form of a dialogue between the two parties, an option which emphasizes their mutual engagement and their equal relation. Equality between the two parts frequently requires a repositioning and destabilizing of the privileged observer's position, conventionally attributed to the travelling subject. Travel writers habitually differentiate themselves from those they describe by situating their authority in a «stable, superior and unquestioned home» that provides them with a strong sense of identity (Lisle 2006: 137). This article focuses on the traveller's self-reflective gaze about his own homeland, as it is "diffracted" through the gaze upon the host's country. In optics, diffraction is a phenomenon in which rays of light interact to produce new patterns, not just of the *same* reflected – displaced– elsewhere. Challenging diffractions of the traveller's homeland may be produced when the traveller, through the dialogue with his/her host, acts as a "choraster". This often involves a reassessment of his/her national self-conceptions.

Greece as a homeland might be considered as an especially thought-provoking case, due to its complex geopolitical position. It lies at one of the traditional imaginary geographical borders of East and West and the East-West dilemma is a part of its identity (see Peckham 2001: 48; Koutsourelis 2016: 4, 6-7). In this article, challenging conceptions of Greekness and the nation-state model at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are investigated in Greek travel writing, which is a relatively unexplored field.<sup>3</sup> The works of Mitsos Kassolas, *The Other America* (1973) and Anastasis Vistonitis, *Beijing: The Rose and the Lotus* (1995), recording travel experiences to the Far West and the Far East respectively, constitute interesting studies for a number of reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> On the claim for contributions to the under-explored field of Modern Greek travelogues, see Tziovas 2014: 71. For an introduction to Greek travel literature, see Panaretou 2002.

Firstly, both USA and China represent actual economical and political poles of great geopolitical importance. As Debbie Lisle discusses in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, contemporary travelogues participate in, and respond to, the anxieties created by late 20th-century globalization (2006: 3). They often engage with familiar struggles about global politics such as the protection of human rights, the promotion of democracy and the reduction of inequality. Vistonitis and Kassolas, who are both literary authors and journalists as well, seized the opportunity to raise in their travelogues several critical political questions about the world and democracy at the end of the 20th century and the role of Greece in the global scene.

Secondly, in both travelogues one may find travellers' self-reflections about Greece and Greekness which are triggered through extended dialogical scenes with their respective hosts in the USA and China. At the same time, the dialogical form is placed at the heart of the travelling experience and is reflected even in the travelogues' titles. Mitsos Kassolas' travelogue –which won the First Greek State Travel Writing Award in 1974– echoes the title of Michael's Harrington's influential book *The Other America* (1962), a study on poverty and oppression in the United States. Kassolas reports his personal experience of America by choosing to focus on immigrants, and particularly those of Greek origin<sup>4</sup>. He meditates not only about contemporary life conditions in the emblematic liberal democracy of the USA but also about the conception of Greekness, filtered through this American experience. Anastasis Vistonitis by his travelogue entitled *Beijing: The Rose and the Lotus* (1995) makes a reference to Lindsay's poem, "The wedding of the rose and the lotus" (1912). This reference stands as an allegory for the dialogue between the West (rose) and the East (lotus). Furthermore, his travel report on China is mediated through references to his previous sojourn in the USA for six years. Vistonitis – a cosmopolitan poet, who has also published essays

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<sup>4</sup> Mitsos Kassolas was himself one of these Greek immigrants who left Greece to escape the Regime of the Colonels (1967-1974).

on human rights, liberty, oppression, fascism and cosmopolitanism - uses these double lenses, the Chinese and the American, when he meditates about Greekness and democracy at the time of globalization.

Finally, while travel may be playing a significant part in the formation of cultures and identities, as Caren Kaplan points out, in the postmodern world there are very different experiences of displacement, such as homelessness, tourism, exile, and immigration. So «displacement is not universally available or desirable for many subjects, nor is it evenly experienced» (Kaplan 1996: 1; see also Bird *et al.*, 1994). The two examined travelogues were also chosen because they involve the two major types of displacement: the “voluntary” type, Vistonitis’, and the “compulsory” type, Kassolas’.

## **2. Displacing “Greekness”: towards a transnational definition**

Both in the cosmopolitan and the diasporic displacement of the authors, what is challenged through the dialogues with their hosts is the conception of Greekness, as it has been constructed since the establishment of the Modern Greek State in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alongside the canonical historical national narrations of Spyridōn Zambelios and Constantine Paparrigopoulos, namely the *History of the Hellenic Nation* (1860-74) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Modernist literary generation of the 1930s consolidated Greekness as a rather “restrained” notion, like any other notion of “authentic” identity. It is «an idea of fixed boundaries and closure: it excludes what is not authentic and true –the non Greek– and portrays the original, the eternal Hellenic, as an autotelic unity» (Lambropoulos 1988: 100). Such a conception, mainly concerned about the “authenticity” of the Greek identity, aspires to “exclusivity” and the ensuing nationalist rhetoric of “continuity” and “purity” of the Hellenic nation. It does not tolerate uncertainty, indeterminacy or openness.

## **2.1. Between East and West: From the Modern Greek “Particularism” to the Greek idiosyncrasy**

According to the imagological approach, national identities can be seen as internalized collective self-images taking shape in the structural context of a Self-Other opposition (Beller –Leerssen 2007: 22). A number of polar oppositions of modern subject formation are traditionally included in the conception of Greekness, e.g. ancient/modern, civilized/barbaric, Oriental/European, central/peripheral. Once modernity has established its legitimacy on the basis of antiquity, Greece, although placed at the periphery of Europe, acquired a central position in the European imagination. The creation of the Modern Greek state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century needs to be understood as one of the most important affirmations of a Western and especially European identity (Prevelakis 2016: 122; Derrida 1992: 262-263). This somehow masks the tension between Greece’s mythic status and its ambivalent historical position at the crossroads of East and West. Greece’s national imaginary is built upon its conception of belonging somewhere between East and West: it is supposed to be the West’s familiar neighbour –it even occupies the singular place of a symbol in European thought– but, at the same time, it is also “different” by virtue of its affinities with the Orient.

After the War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire (1821) and the creation of a modern state, the Other was the Orient. However, since the publication of the German scholar Fallmerayer’s controversial theories against the purity of the Greek nation, the Modern Greeks had to embrace their own Orient, Byzantium, in order to affirm the unbroken racial and cultural continuity between ancient and modern Greeks (Gourgouris 1996: 142-43). As a result of this turn to Byzantinism and to the Orthodox Church, the West became to a certain degree an “Other”. At the same time, Greece participated in the modernizing process that affected Europe from the late 18th century onwards.

This ambivalent stance towards the West and the complex Modern Greek national imaginary have usually been examined within

the problematic of Otherness. For the «consistent necessity of Neohellenic culture to define itself as “Other to all Others”» (*ibid.*: 275), this Modern Greek “particularism”, diverse explanations have been articulated. According to Gregory Jusdanis, Greece’s self-perceived otherness, is the result of its “belated modernization” compared to the other European nation-states. The imported western models did not function like their European counterparts, and were even resisted quite often as they clashed with the complex local realities (Jusdanis 1991: xiii). As a result, Modern Greece views itself as a case apart, as both inferior and superior to Western culture. On another equally important axis, the Modern Greeks’ fascination with their ancestors -reiterating the European classicism- has been expressed at the expense of contemporary Greek reality. The latter remained underrepresented in the national identity narration which focused mainly on the idealized past as an internalized lost utopia without an active link with the present and the future.

The topics of Modern Greek particularism, the mythical roots of national identity and the problematic relation with the rest of the Europeans occur in Vistonitis’s travelogue when the Chinese host, a renowned intellectual of his country, engages in a long, in equal terms conversation with the narrator comparing the Western and the Chinese civilizations. Besides, China has never been a radical Other for the West. European travel writers were familiar with the Chinese civilization and regardless of its exotism, they recognized China as a place with an evolved civilization and a rich economy (Todorov 1993: 26). The Chinese intellectual encourages the narrator to speak about his perception of Greekness by claiming that «we all have a general idea about the Greek world, but it must be different when a Greek describes it» (Vistonitis 2005: 123). The narrator attempts a national self-definition by declaring first of all his belief in the values of democracy. He also exposes what he calls the “Modern Greek paradox” and, as a final point, the difficulty to fully and exclusively assume a Western identity:

I told him some of the things I believed. That the values of democracy are placed above the individual ones, and the interest of the community is above the personal one [...] about our national fights against tyranny, the difference of extent between our historical past and our actual geographical space, wherein lies the root of the Modern Greek paradox [...]. Finally, about the Europeans and the problems we have with them (*ibid.*: 123-124).

Vistonitis, alongside the faith in democracy, stresses the Greek national resistance against all forms of tyranny. This is a rather stereotypical approach, a part of the national self-image, from the glorious victories of the ancients against the “barbarians” up to modern times, namely the revolution against the Sultan’s armies in 1821 and the nation’s heroic resistance against fascism and the Nazi occupation during World War II (Beller - Leerssen 2007: 169). This same aspect, the national struggles for freedom, «that never concerned exclusively Greece’s own rescue or liberty» (Kassolas 2006: 184), is also overemphasized in the narrator’s questioning of Greekness in Kassolas’ travelogue. In both travelogues, the national struggles for freedom and democracy are viewed as the Greek idiosyncratic feature *par excellence*, a unifying line of national identity from antiquity until modern times. Indeed, to the question of what can be perceived as the modern enemy of Hellenism, Kassolas’ narrator opts for an answer involving the loss of this spirit of independence («The enemy comes from the fact that Greeks do whatever the foreigners tell them to do», *ibid.*: 194).

## **2.2. Beyond the East-West duality: exploring a transnational Greek citizenship through the prisms of diaspora and cosmopolitanism**

A review of the historical context reveals indicative correspondences between geopolitical challenges and the peculiarities of national images of self and Other at a given moment. In the Greek travelogues examined, one may notice a displacement at the end of the



20<sup>th</sup> century beyond the traditional East vs. West duality –as the differences between them are fading out through globalization and the expansion of capitalism. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China has stood at the center of speculations about the possibility of a new world order. China is explored in Vistonitis’s travelogue as an alternative to Western/American capitalism and to models of existing communism. Nevertheless, China despite its rapid economic growth seems to promise only to alter the positions of the players within the existing world system, providing «capitalism with Chinese characteristics» as expressed in the title of the book by Chinese economist Yasheng Huang (2008).

Through globalization the world loses dominating centers and the very idea of centrality and all its arbitrary hierarchies is rendered void. This very development could also lead to a fading of the national self-narration about the Greek “particularism”, the choice to be determined as “the Other of Others”. This self-determination was the major concern since the founding of the Modern Greek State (1830) in order to consolidate its existence by promoting the authenticity, racial purity and historical continuity of the Greek nation. In the examined travelogues’ depictions of Modern Greek national identity, the need to define Greek identity in terms of difference and exclusion seems no longer prominent. These travellers’ accounts do not lead to a postnational conception as an alternative to the nation-state. What is expressed in the texts is a rather transnational understanding of Greekness, based upon the common ground with the Others. Transnationalism as a concept does not contain only the «movement of people, but also notions of citizenship, technology, forms of multinational governance, and the mechanisms of global markets» (Quayson - Daswani 2013: 4). Besides the material geographies of labour migration or the trading in goods and services, the transnational cultures also include the symbolic and imaginary geographies through which we attempt to configure our increasingly transnational world.

Whether the transnational experience in these travelogues is through migration and diaspora (USA), or through cosmopolitanism (China), there is a desire of broadening national borders, namely the

imaginary ones. The contemporary concept of “diaspora” is useful in our analysis as it is an inherently interactive one since it «involves an understanding of the shifting relations between homelands and host nations from the perspective both of those who have moved, whether voluntarily or not, and of the host societies in which they find themselves» (Quayson - Daswani 2013: 3). The status of immigration and the hybrid national identity of Greek-American diaspora call openly for self-reflexive questions about Greek national identity in Kassolas’s text. During the gatherings of the Greek American community on the occasion of two public lectures where the issue of homeland is raised by eminent members of the Greek diaspora, the narrator engages in a provocative dialogue with the speakers and the audience by asking disturbing questions such as «What is to be Greek, nowadays?» and «who will teach again Hellenism to the Greeks?» (Kassolas 2006: 185). After some quite disappointing answers and the failure of self-definition by the members of the Greek American community in the USA, who acknowledge that «It is very hard to be Greek» (*ibid.*: 193, 195-6), the narrator arrives also at the end of the dialogue to statements of aporia concerning his national identity. In addition to the uncertainty regarding Greekness, disconcerting realizations, beyond the traditional geography of the nation-state, are made by the narrator, as for instance, concerning Astoria, a neighborhood in New York with thousands Greek immigrants. Astoria is counted by the narrator as one of the largest Greek cities among Athens, Piraeus and Thessaloniki (*ibid.*: 196).

In the “Epilogue” of his journey to America, written in 1988 and 2005, Kassolas treats questions of national identity in terms of openness, incorporation and cosmopolitan citizenship based on democratic values.<sup>5</sup> First of all, he proposes a civil integration of the “Other Greece” hidden in the *Other America* –namely the Greek immigrants in America. This applies as well to the Greek immigrants

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<sup>5</sup> For the demand that all world citizens enjoy human rights and political participation, see the concepts of “cosmopolitan democracy” and “political-legal cosmopolitanism” (Taraborrelli 2015: 47-85).

in Australia, Canada, Germany and anywhere in the world where there are large and prosperous Greek communities (*ibid.*: 345-7). He claims that this full incorporation of the Greek diaspora with a right to vote would define Greek identity beyond the borders of the nation-state and would eventually increase the prosperity of Greece. It is interesting to note that this position transcends the modernist model of nation-state which excludes the diasporic phenomenon (Prevelakis 2016: 192). Kassolas sees Greece diachronically not in terms of “uniqueness” but in its “multiplicity”: «Because Greece is not one, it has never been one, there are many Greeces which have started from the metropolis» (2006: 33). What is brought to the fore then, is the perennial ability of Greeks for “networking” beyond their national territory. In the recent geopolitical studies there is an emphasis on the importance of the “network” structure of Hellenism through the extended Greek diaspora and the existence of other national areas outside the Greek state (Prevelakis 2016: 207).

For Kassolas, the Greek national identity has never been “national” in the narrow sense of the term of the nation-state: due to Greece’s geographical position as a bridge between East and West, its civilization, its struggles for liberty and for a number of other reasons, «the Greek conscience has always held and still holds universality» (Kassolas: 183-4). In the part of his “Epilogue” written in 2005, Kassolas proposes to open the Greek identity and civil rights as well to the foreign immigrants living and working in Greece without having the fear of losing the “purity” of the national identity. There must be no fear of “being bastardized” as a nation because, as he claims, this hybridity could be an advantage, given that «the bastard nations are the ones which survive» (*ibid.*: 348). He even states that it was this way that «we have survived inside and outside Greece, and not as a “pure” Aryan race» (*ibid.*). This view, contrary to the idealized stereotypical narration of national “purity” converges with the most recent Modern Greek approaches acknowledging the cultural diversity of Hellenism, the fact that Greece has been a crossroads traversed, inhabited and

dominated by a succession of populations (cf. Tziouvas 2001; Prevelakis 2016: 135-8)<sup>6</sup>.

In order to achieve this transnationalism in Greekness, great emphasis is placed on the cultivation of a humanist Modern Greek education, as a means for the ultimate incorporation of the foreigners living in Greece. Kassolas proposes: «Let's make our Greek education enlightened, human, and this will unite us and incorporate us and we will not be anymore so few Greeks in the world» (2006: 348). This conception of a transnational Greek identity broadens to the point to include citizens of other nationalities who share the Greek ideals, both in political and aesthetic terms both inside the territory of the Greek nation-state and abroad<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, by this choice, Greeks, as claimed by Kassolas, will also be better incorporated in the world scene and not seem like a case apart. This perception of Greekness beyond the shared ethnicity stems from Isocrates's notion of the name "Greek": «the name *Greek* seems to be not that of a people but of a "way of thinking"; and people are called Greeks because they share in our education rather than in our birth» (*Panegyricus*, 50). As Maria Koundoura argues, Greece «cannot help but see itself as a "state of mind" more than a nation-state». Accordingly, the timeless "Hellenic" is seen as the "transnational style" to which the "national" tends to conform in order to acquire an idiosyncratic identity (Koundoura 2009: 12).

By questioning the long-established definitions of Greekness which, from the Greek Independence War (1821) up to the integration in the European Union (1981) were rather characterized by a gradual closure of horizons (see, Prevelakis 2016: 51), the transnational

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<sup>6</sup> See Bhabha (1994: 5), who argues that "the very concepts of homogenous national cultures" or "organic ethnic communities" are in a profound process of redefinition.

<sup>7</sup> See also Appiah (2002:22) for the conception of a "cosmopolitan patriotism", as a situated form of cosmopolitanism capable of reconciling universalism and particularism.

conception of Modern Greek identity is explored through these travelogues as a broadening of Greekness beyond the national borders and as a form of embracing more hybrid, composite identities.

### **2.3 The geopolitics of the translocated Greekness: a narrative of connectivity with the Others and promulgation of democratic values in the globalized world**

If we accept that national stereotypes do not aim at objectively describing a prior reality –in fact, national images actively construct that “reality”- they should be viewed as aiming to influence their recipients. They must thus be examined in terms of their potential functions in specific historical, cultural and aesthetic contexts (see Neumann 2009: 287). Globalization has formed new conditions, demanding a re-evaluation of national identities bound to the modern nation-states. The present case-study, by investigating and organizing alternative national images through these travelogues, attempts to approach Modern Greek identity as an open question. This approach incites novel thinking concerning the issue of the potential role of Greece at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

An overt ethical and political stance is expressed in these travelogues against contemporary economic and political oppression both in East and West. The absence of colonialist politics in Modern Greek history is a considerable asset as it could facilitate the relationship of Greece with non-Western people. This could even qualify the country for a role of mediator between the Westerners and the rest of the world (see Prevelakis, 2016: 202). In Vistonitis' *Beijing: The Rose and the Lotus*, the Chinese host, during the discussion with the Greek narrator about the problems and paradoxes in the relationship between Greece and Europe, poses questions inciting to reflection concerning the affinities of Greece with the West and the East respectively. The Chinese interlocutor challenges the stereotypical familiarity of Greece with the West and even stimulates the Greeks to

take an active role in their relationship with West by reconfiguring “which Europe” they want:

Can you tell me how do you explain that the West claims that it is built on the foundation of Greek culture? Do you feel as a Westerner? [...] “Maybe you, Greeks, have to decide which Europe you want”. And then: “It’s nice you have come here, even for a while. By observing other nations, we better understand ours. And then, who knows? We may have more in common than you think” he concluded. (*Ibid.*:125)

In Vistonitis’ travelogue, after the discussion about the totalitarian eastern regimes, the “host gaze” is incorporated in the content and even in the form of the narrator’s harsh political criticism of the West, which seemingly failed as well to fulfill the promise of a true democracy. At the end of this travelogue, the narrator appears to adopt the Chinese philosophical trope of short aphorisms in order to criticize the pitfalls of Western civilization more accurately: he deplores the western myth of the “infallible progress”, of «technology that would have opened the field of the future and unified the civilization». Instead, technology rather contributed to «a repression of any attempt of individual revolution». As he concludes, «nobody has imagined that the societies at the end of the century would continue to be equally oppressive and in addition would have become executive» (*ibid.*: 220-1). The traditional western criticism towards his country’s slow paced modernization, which is supposed to undermine the full assumption of its collective European identity, is also revised through his oriental travelling experience. The technological “belatedness” of Greece is no more to blame since it can be rather seen as a means of escaping totalitarian control (*ibid.*: 229) and can be integrated in the nation’s narrative of “resistance” against subjugation.

Kassolas’ *The Other America*, recounts in dialogical form mainly stories about the unsuccessful integration and the failure to belong of the Greek American immigrants. One reason for this is the disillusionment caused by the harsh American reality of poverty and

oppressive capitalism. The American democracy did not turn out to be the land of promise. The other is the perpetual longing of the Greek immigrants for their homeland, imagined as a paradise lost. According to Avtar Brah, diaspora's "homing desire" is not necessarily the same as wanting to return to a physical place, the "desire for homeland" (1996: 180). The feeling of diasporic nostalgia may then be seen as also future-oriented and utopian, even though it is traditionally tied to a sense of things past. In both travelogues, a longing for the human-centered values of the ancient Greek civilization, is shared by the narrators, alongside with a yearning for a future utopia of true democracy at a world-level.<sup>8</sup> Such narratives, by discussing Greekness in the current global status quo through a diasporic nostalgia model, are oriented both towards the past (longing for the ancient Greek values) and towards the future (e.g. considering a role of the country as a transnational mediator between East and West through the defense and promotion of democratic values in the globalised world).

By claiming the role of «Greece as a part of the world and not as an isolated province or a photographic reproduction of the others» (Vistonitis 2005: 220), the narrator in Vistonitis' travelogue aspires to see his country as a fully participating partner in the global scene. Greece is not conceived as "different" or "Other to all others", nor as assimilated and hence "familiar". Through the prisms of diasporic nostalgia and cosmopolitan citizenship, alternative narratives of Modern Greekness could be traced in both texts. They embrace a transnational broadening of the national identity at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by featuring "openness", "translocated citizenship" and "connectivity" with western and eastern people sharing the same democratic ideals against oppressive political and economic forms (namely forms of globalization).

The travelogues are written respectively in the decades preceding and following Greece's joining of the European Union in 1981, a major

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<sup>8</sup> For the conception of "true democracy" as a movement of democratization, an ideal that no state incarnates, see Critchley 2007: 114-23.

event which consolidated the Western, and more specifically European, identity of Greece and provided new grounds for heated debates about Modern Greek identity (see Zacharia 2008: 279). The country's entry in the Eurozone (2001) was a further consolidation of its "Europeanness", the acknowledgment of a strong collective European identity. A few years later, this process has been harshly challenged by a series of social issues due to the current Greek economic crisis combined with an increasing influx of illegal immigrants into the country. These facts could probably cause a folding back to more traditional national conceptions about Modern Greekness as "authentic" and "restrained" to the boundaries of the nation-state. On the other hand, perhaps they could also empower the narratives about a transnational resistance to economic globalization through the return to human-centered Greek values (see Kassolas' "Epilogue" to his travelogue written in 2005). Only the methodical study of the national images produced in the diverse forms of the contemporary Greek fictional and non-fictional discourses could really test out these speculations.

## Conclusions

As the debates about the meaning and substance of national identity and belonging continue to be of major importance, it seems relevant to explore processes of revitalizing our self-conceptions in a restlessly changing world where various forms of the local and the global interact. This article has attempted to study the eventual contribution of contemporary travelogues in the renewing of national imagery. Through the example of Greek travelogues examined here, it is argued that contemporary travel writing by cultivating a dialogical stance which takes into account the Other's gaze, by embracing positions of uncertainty and by engaging with critical political and geopolitical issues could activate the potential to re-imagine the traveller's homeland and the world in ways that do not simply reiterate the status quo. The alternative versions concerning Greekness



in the travelogues examined through the prisms of diaspora and cosmopolitanism have challenged the stereotyped national narrations in more or less audacious ways. The development of new possibilities and the search for new roles for the country in the globalised world scene at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century demand the exploration of new Modern Greek self-images, less clear-cut, more favorable to the circulation of information, goods and people and thus more open to the Others and to the organization in diverse scales beyond the nation-state.

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