Introduction: Imagining Independence

On 25 March 2021, Greece celebrated the bicentenary of the Greek War of Independence – or the 1821 revolution – through which it broke away from the Ottoman Empire and materialised as a nation-state. Celebrations started on 24 March with the grand opening of the renovated National Gallery in Athens and a formal dinner at the Presidential Mansion. The guests of honour represented the three European powers that had assisted the Greek independence effort: the then Prince of Wales and his wife the Duchess of Cornwall, the Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and his wife and the French ambassador in lieu of President Emmanuel Macron. In his brief address at the National Gallery Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis discussed paintings by Greek and European artists that depict the War of Independence as examples of the cultural affinities between Europe and Greece and emphasised the common stance between Greece and the three European powers in the 'great battles of humanity' over the last two centuries (Hellenic Republic – Prime Minister, 2021).[1] As such, the celebration was unambiguously framed as a reaffirmation of Greece's Europeanness.

As the Greek leadership and its European counterparts celebrated the nation's foundational event by wandering in the centre of the Greek capital, Greeks could only watch the celebrations on the TV due to the strict Covid-19 lockdown regulations implemented by the Greek government. The national body was, thus, absent from the commemoration of the national past, which was to be re-imagined by the European gaze. In other words, while the ailing body of the nation was locked out of sight, this particular re-enactment of national memory drew attention to Greece's uneasy position in the European project: 'a nation forever situated in the interstices of *East* and *West*', as per Stathis Gourgouris's apt phrasing, 'and ideologically constructed by colonialist Europe without ever having been, strictly speaking, colonized' (2021: 6).

The Prime Minister's unwitting *exposé* of Greece's uneasy relationship to Europe – what Michael Herzfeld calls a peculiar 'crypto-colonial' condition (2002) – came in a period of profound economic, social and political crises. Since 2010, Greece has received three bail-out packages that would ostensibly solve its sovereign debt and deficit problems in return for large-scale structural reforms, severe austerity and privatisations.[2] In this context, Greece's GDP has dropped by one-third, privatisations of public assets – including the energy market, seaports, airports and transport – are underway, the overall downsizing of the public sector has accelerated, unemployment rates have risen alarmingly

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[1] All quotations from Greek sources are translated by me, unless otherwise stated.
[2] For a concise account of the Greek bailout, see Varoufakis (2016: 152–68).

(in 2013 unemployment was at 27.5 per cent) and more than one-third of the
population lives in extreme poverty (Pagoulatos, 2018). At the same time,
tourism – Greece's 'heavy industry' – was flourishing with tens of millions of
visitors each year who were attended to by underpaid and overworked staff;
visitors whose presence merely emphasised the inequalities of wealth and
further strengthened what Herzfeld calls a 'humiliating dependence [...] on
foreign models and power' (Herzfeld, 2016: 56). The promised growth of the
economy proved to be a fiction that merely implemented what David Harvey
calls 'accumulation by dispossession': the expression of a 'liberal form of
imperialism' resulting from 'political unwillingness of the bourgeoisie to give
up any of its class privileges' (Harvey, 2004: 69). A fiction, in other words, that
rehearsed a neocolonial state of dependency, whereby the troika of creditors –
the European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary
Fund – was determining economic and political decisions by indirect and,
often, direct interventions.

In response to the escalating economic and political crises, several social
movements emerged to reclaim democratic politics, particularly in the first half
of the 2010s: the *aganaktismenoi* (indignant) movement that staged people's
assemblies in Athens's central square between May and July 2011 is
a prominent example. The electoral rise of a coalition of the radical left
(SYRIZA) from four to almost 27 per cent in 2012 and to power in 2015 on
an anti-austerity platform further marks the disillusionment of the electorate
with the political establishment. At the same time, anti-immigration and nation-
alist rhetoric as well as a state doctrine of intolerance to political dissent
permeated mainstream political discourses (Vasilaki and Souvlis, 2021: 21–
31). The legitimation of far-right rhetoric is also reflected in the 2012 electoral
success of a neo-Nazi party (Golden Dawn) that secured twenty-one seats in the
Greek parliament and, subsequently, intensified its street violence. In the same
period, finally, increasing numbers of refugees have been attempting the peril-
ous crossing of the Aegean Sea, triggering xenophobic reactions as well as
humanitarian responses while also raising ethical questions about Greece and
Europe's border-control policies (cf. Cox and Zaroulia, 2016).

Against this backdrop, discussions around independence returned with
renewed urgency as some commentators suggested that Greece had become
a 'debtors' colony' (Georgiopoulos, 2018), while others spoke about the
'revival of a peculiar cultural colonisation' (Tziovas, 2014; quoted in
Tsatsoulis, 2017: 60). Similarly, a growing number of theatre productions
have been revisiting the history of the War of Independence thinking through
notions of independence again and anew. *Re-imagining Independence in
Contemporary Greek Theatre and Performance* examines such practices and

more specifically focuses on representations of the 1825–6 siege and exodus of Missolonghi, an event from the Greek War of Independence that, as I discuss in the next section, occupies a central position in its mnemonic canon. How might, I ask, theatre and performance revisit the memory of the nation's foundational moment and re-imagine independence in the present predicament of dependency? How might such performances engage with (the invention of) the national past and enable a process of 'unlearning', as per Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's formulation (2019), so as to re-imagine the communities they inhabit in the present moment? Such questions set the ground upon which the arguments in this Element take shape. But first, it seems imperative to contextualise the Greek War of Independence in the histories and geographies in which it was involved.

The Greek War of Independence in Its Contexts

In *The Age of Revolutions*, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that the 1821 Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire is part of a wider wave of national revolutions that, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, occurred between 1815 and 1848 (1977: 138–9). The early successes of the Greek uprising inspired a wave of international support that mobilised Philhellenism, according to Mark Mazower, 'into an expression of a new kind of politics – international in its range and affiliations, popular in its origins, romantic in its sentiments and often revolutionary in its goals' (2021: 218). This new kind of politics saw volunteer fighters travelling to Greece from all over Europe, committees being set up to gather financial and in-kind support for the Greek cause and artistic works calling the European public to arms by imagining and depicting the horrors of the Greek struggle. In this sense, the philhellenic cause became 'one of the earliest instances of international humanitarian intervention' (Mazower, 2021: 236). This kind of international mobilisation, this 'new kind of politics', was the sign of a rising political subjectivity that would, eventually, shape modern Europe: nationalism.

Paschalis Kitromilides maintains that nationalism was the 'major political force' in the project of modernity, driving European societies' transformation into modern states (2021: 6). The Greek revolution was part of this political milieu even though, as Hobsbawm purports, it stands out as the 'only case [where] the perennial fight of the sheep-herding clansmen and bandit-heroes against *any* real government fuse with the ideas of middle-class nationalism and the French Revolution' (1977: 173). In other words, the Greek War of Independence was envisioned as a national revolution by the (mainly) diasporic bourgeoisie: a mercantile class originating in the Danubian principalities, the Black Sea and the Levant, educated in European capitals and advocating

Enlightenment ideas. Nevertheless, as per Hobsbawm's argument, the war was primarily sustained by the uneducated peasantry of mainland Greece, local chieftains and bandits that, as in other cases in Europe and at least in the beginning of the struggle, hardly exhibited 'any feelings of national consciousness, let alone any desire for a national state' (Hobsbawm 1977: 169–70; cf. Mazower, 2021: 326–47). This 'fusion' of discreet political projects joining forces in the Greek War of Independence reflects the complex processes of the imaginary institution of modern Greece – that is, the formation of the Greek subject. It also accounts for the initial disenchantment of European volunteers in the Greek cause who came to realise that the Greek peasantry 'little resembled how they had imagined them' and were reluctant to 'acknowledge that the Greeks too were products of the Ottoman world' (Mazower, 2021: 236); a world that alongside the rest of Balkans was, as Dimitris Tziovas notes, 'invented [. . .] as Europe's "other"' (2003: 2). As the idealisation of the Greeks by the philhellenic cause was tested by actual encounters with them, support for the Greek cause was also questioned. This changed with the fall of Missolonghi in 1826.

After an initial victorious campaign in the first two years of the war, during which the Greeks occupied most of the Peloponnese (the southernmost peninsula of the mainland), the arrival of Ibrahim Pasha from Egypt in 1824 revitalised the Ottoman hopes to end the uprising. He soon managed to recapture most of the Peloponnese and contain the Greek insurgents in a small area around Nafplion, the two small islands of Hydra and Spetses, and Missolonghi, a small coastal city in the west of mainland Greece that had endured two sieges between 1822 and 1823. After a third siege that started in the spring of 1825 and lasted for over a year, Ibrahim managed to capture the city in a victory that was supposed to seal the success of his military campaign and end the Greek uprising. Nevertheless, the fierce resistance of the besieged Missolonghites and their subsequent desperate exodus in April 1826, when food and other supplies were becoming increasingly scarce, captured the European liberal imagination. Rather than spelling the end of the Greek war effort, it triggered a sense of 'respectability' while widening the 'social breadth' of sympathy for the Greek cause (Mazower, 2021: 344). Subsequently and against all odds, England, France and Russia entered the war effort and it came down to the naval success of the allied fleet at the bay of Navarino in the Peloponnese in October 1827 to decide the fate of Greek independence.

Missolonghites subsequently emerged in the European imaginary as '"martyrs of the cross" in a clash between Christianity and Islam'. Borrowing the words of Gilbert Heß, Christina Koulouri points out that among philhellenic circles, Missolonghi became a 'synecdoche of the Greek struggle for liberty',

connecting 'diverse systems of images and discrete interpretative models' into one 'material topos' (2020: 58). It is for this reason that this Element specifically focuses on contemporary re-imaginings of the events of Missolonghi – because it forms the topography par excellence in the mnemonic canon of the Greek revolution; the landscape in which the Greeks ostensibly performed again and anew their ties to their perceived ancient ancestors. The landscape, conversely, in which Europeans found what, in Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt's formulation, was 'that which we ourselves should like to be and produce' (1807 [1963]; quoted in Gourgouris, 2021: 123): a 'sublimated' and colonised, as I will discuss later, Hellenic ideal. But first, it seems crucial to briefly turn to Humboldt's 'we'; that is, the European public.

A European Public

Humboldt's proposition implies a European public that imagines itself as coherent. Yet, who partakes in this imagined community? Where is this European 'we' located? Manuela Boatcă argues that (European) social theory has produced a 'sanitized version of European history that ignores both the experience of the East and the South of Europe, as well as the West's colonial and imperial history' (2021: 390). In this sense, the European public, as articulated by Humboldt and much later by Jürgen Habermas (2012), seems to refer to an imagined European subject of enunciation that is ostensibly coherent and which has been, as per Gurminder K. Bhambra's argument, erected at the back of the colonial project (2022: 241).

Discourses of European unity and singularity are, therefore, founded in the project of colonialism, while perpetually producing, as per Boatcă's proposition, 'a historically consistent politics of difference within Europe that has systematically reproduced the East and the South of Europe as peripheral formations of a Western European core' (2021: 394). In addition, discourses of European unity and singularity 'depend on the silencing of the historical role of its member states and their predecessors in creating the main structures of global political and economic inequality during European colonial rule' (Boatcă, 2021: 395). In other words, Europe's position as the 'wealthiest continent on the planet', as Bhambra maintains, 'is an inheritance that derives from the very same historical processes that have left other places poor' (2022: 240). Europe's politics of difference alongside the processes of silencing and extraction of wealth that are constitutive of the European public are also at work in the making and development of modern Greece. Before the European public, as I discuss in the next section, Greeks have historically appeared under two guises: as celebrated descendants of Europe's ancient ideal and as its deprived

epigones, 'forever "catching up" with the West' (Boatcă, 2021: 394), as the
Greek crises have demonstrated anew. Or, as Herzfeld has summarised this
conundrum that has both motivated and haunted Greeks' nationalisation,
Greece is 'a country claiming at once to be the ancestor of Europe and yet
also widely seen as one of the continent's newest and least European states'
(Herzfeld 2016: 37).

The Nationalisation of the Greeks

The nationalisation of the Greeks entailed, according to Gourgouris, the 'mim-
icry' of 'an explicit and programmatic *colonization of the [Hellenic] ideal*' by
European culture (2021: 124). In this schema, modern Greeks can appear in the
European public sphere, as long as they embrace Europe's 'desire', as per Homi
Bhabha's conceptualisation of colonial mimicry, 'for a reformed, recognisable
Other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (1984:
126). The modern Greek subject, thus, was instituted by way of re-forming into
a colonial subject that mimics the European desire for re-discovering its
Hellenic roots. This is what Vangelis Calotychos calls a 'discourse of ab-
sense' that 'works on its object by a cenotaphic logic', whereby the modern
Greek subject remains an empty signifier – a canvas where colonial desire can
invent the classical ideal anew (2003: 47).

   Central to this process was the work of Adamantios Korais (1748–833), a key
figure of modern Greek Enlightenment. Korais's lifelong project of national
pedagogy sought to enable an act of transfer, whereby Greek intellectuals ought
to 'transfer to the heads of our nation the ripe ideas of the enlightened nations'
(1814; quoted in Kotides, 1995: 20). Such an act of transfer, *metakenosis* in
Korais's terminology, illustrates in no uncertain terms the aim of his pedagogical
project as a Hellenisation of the Greeks. Moreover, it induces, as per Gourgouris's
analysis, 'an anxiety of influence' (2021: 92), which places modern Greece at the
heart of European imaginings (where it appears as an embodiment of Europe's
ancestry), while also consigning the Greek subject to the position of an inadequate
Other that can never fully rise to the expectations of its own – and Europe's –
genealogy. Or, in Gourgouris's articulation: 'Neohellenic imaginary with the
presence of an irretrievable, but permanent, ancestry', which continually produces
'a dogmatically idealized state and its hopelessly inadequate historical rendition'
(2021: 152–4). As a consequence of a long-standing 'two-fold colonial gesture',
according to Tziovas (2021: 233), this conundrum reflects the dual articulation of
colonial mimicry that, in Bhabha's analysis, produces an imitation of the imperial
subjectivity and its difference. To paraphrase Bhabha: to be hellenised is emphat-
ically not to be Greek. Or, in the words of Calotychos, 'it is the modern Greek, that

"dirty descendant," who disturbs this colonization of space for those who read or appropriate Greek landscape as symbolic capital' (2003: 32). Modern Greeks, as per the European gaze absent from the Hellenic landscape, mimic the colonisation of the ideal by undergoing a process of self-colonisation which, as Calotychos argues, 'works to reinforce a form of cultural, intellectual, and political dependence' (2003: 49).

The claim to ownership of ancient Greek drama is a case in point in relation to this condition of dependence. Dimitris Tsatsoulis suggests that this is part of the 'cultivation of a peculiar kind of Greek nationalism [. . .] by Western Europe. This way [Europe] was "granting" a topos of the western imagination to a specific nation' (2017: 59). Along the same lines, Eleftheria Ioannidou argues that, since the establishment of the Greek nation-state, ancient theatres emerged as national heterotopias, where the Greeks, as the rightful owners of classical heritage, claimed 'exclusive authority over classical antiquity' (2011: 386). Subsequently, performances of classical dramas in ancient theatres 'were expected to propagate the idealized view of modern Greece as an inheritor and successor of classical antiquity' (Ioannidou, 2011: 390). In this sense, even though they claimed ownership of ancient theatres, the Greeks still recognised their indebtedness to the European colonial gaze. Nevertheless, the discussion around the ownership of classical heritage clearly frames the immaterial sphere of cultural production as a commodity and reflects its appropriation by the economic logic of modernity where the value of – material and immaterial – commodities is fundamentally associated with the principle of property. In a very modern sense, therefore, the Greeks have sought to reclaim their assumed cultural identity and tradition by claiming ownership, that is, by affirming their commitment to the cultural and economic logic of European modernity.

Michael Herzfeld suggests that Greece offers a 'most striking case of disemia grounded in the ambiguities of "Europe", at once the spiritual ancestor and, in the early years following accession and once again since crisis struck [. . .] the political pariah of the European Union' (2016: 23). In this sense, the project of nationalisation continually oscillates between an austere neoclassicism fuelled by the anxiety of not appearing European enough and an ostensible Oriental backwardness that meets the Orientalist expectations of the European gaze. If, as per Edward Said's contention, the 'Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century Europeans, but also because it could be – that is, submitted to being – made Oriental' (2003: 5–6), in modern Greece, the European gaze has found a suitable space of ambivalence, where national imaginings are constantly produced as both European and Oriental; both inside and outside of European imagination but always determined by its gaze.

The War of Independence in the Theatre

In *1821 and the Theatre*, Walter Puchner points out that plays representing the War of Independence and, more generally, historic drama 'contributed to the support and deepening of the national ideology and, often, the national mythology' (2020: 135). Put differently, historic dramas were integral elements to the process of nationalisation. A sub-genre of historic drama that became significant in this respect was 'patriotic drama'; such plays were first published in the build-up to the 1821 uprising, were mainly written by members of the mercantile middle class of the Greek diaspora and, when staged, were performed at educational institutions of the Danubian principalities (Hatzipantazis, 2014: 157–91). In many ways, these early patriotic dramas were carrying out Korais's national pedagogical project. Mostly following the neoclassical tradition, these works echoed Enlightenment ideas and drew their themes from ancient Greece: the past 'that which we ourselves should like to be and produce', as per Humboldt's formulation; the past that would become the inspiration for a national 'awakening'. Later articulations of patriotic drama also included representations of the War of Independence and gradually shifted from neoclassicism to romanticism. The work of Ioannis Zambelios, in many ways rehearsing Korais's national pedagogy, is paradigmatic of early patriotic dramas as it reflects the initial commitment to neoclassicism and the gradual transition to less austere forms, although never quite embracing the romantic aesthetic. Zambelios's work is also exemplary in establishing a connection between the classical world and modern Greeks, something that, according to Anna Tabaki, 'comprises an ideological constant' (2021a: 322). Another example of 'patriotic dramas' was Evanthia Kairi's *Nikiratos* (1826), written in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Missolonghi with which I engage in more detail in Section 1.

Patriotic dramas in the newly formed state increasingly focused on representations from the war. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the production of such dramas was encouraged as part of dramatic contests, while also achieving significant box-office success (Puchner, 2020: 134). As more former Ottoman territories were annexed by the Greek nation-state, such dramas worked to further nationalise the growing population. In the first half of the twentieth century, independence-related patriotic dramas persisted, but their themes also spread to other genres, such as comic and dramatic idyll, comic revues and school plays (Puchner, 2020). As Puchner maintains, the extant production of patriotic dramas and, more generally, the use of patriotic themes coincided with periods of crisis, national disaster or external threat (2020: 133). In the inter-war period, patriotic drama became part of a legitimised cultural milieu and gained 'philosophical depth', rather than serving predominantly nationalist or commercial purposes, as it did in previous periods (Puchner, 2020: 173).

After World War II, representations of the War of Independence became less frequent: changing social, political and economic conditions seem to have reduced the need for plays inspired by the War of Independence (Puchner, 2020: 133). A notable exception was the period of the dictatorship of the colonels (1967–74), when the nationalist regime attempted to capitalise on patriotic drama and, more generally, the use of the national past (cf. Van Steen, 2015 and 2021; Tsoukalas, 2021a and 2021b). Even though this was the case earlier in the post-war years, when the dictatorship ended, there were significant attempts to demystify the national past – perhaps as a result of the dictatorship's ultra-nationalist discourse and use of history. This included, in the immediate post-dictatorship years, subversive revivals of nineteenth-century plays that dealt with issues of national identity as well as new plays representing the War of Independence. An important example of the latter is Vassilis Ziogas's *The Bottle*, written in 1973 and staged in 1979; it created an absurdist universe for the re-telling of the events of Missolonghi. Another example was Andreas Staikos's 1991 play *1843*, which revolved around the ways in which certain members of the emerging Greek bourgeoisie capitalised on their participation in the war for personal gain. The return of the War of Independence on the Greek stages after 2010, finally, can be partly justified as a build-up to the celebrations of the bicentennial, but, as I propose in this Element, it is mainly a consequence of the condition of the crisis that exposed Greece's foundational dependency anew. As I discuss in Sections 2, 3 and 4, rather than questioning the use of the national past by the state, performances between 2010 and 2021 seemed to problematise its national institution.[3] They seem, in other words, to rethink independence within what Lina Rosi calls a 'post-national' framework that extends beyond history's incarceration in the 'official closed narratives' of the nation (Rosi, 2021).

As a conclusion to the aforementioned brief account of the history of stage representations of the War of Independence in modern Greece, it is important to place patriotic and historic dramas within the national theatrical canon. The works that form this canon are not uniform; they employ a wide range of representational strategies and belong to different genres. What is common in these works is their consistent observation of the constant re-making of national

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[3] Apart from the examples discussed in this book, I indicatively mention some productions that are relevant to the discussions in this book: *Dance me to the End of Greece: Foreign Travelers in Greece*, by Kyriaki Spanou (Benaki Museum, 2012); *Athanasios Diakos: The Return*, by Lena Kitsopoulou (Athens Festival, 2012); *Golfo*, by Spiridon Peresiades (National Theatre, 2013, dir. Nikos Karathanos); *Golfo*, by Spiridon Peresiades (six versions between 2004and 2014, dir. Simos Kakalas); *Haiti, a Performance about History* (HATARI theatre group, 2016); *The Woman from Zakynthos*, by Dionisios Solomos (Municipal Theatre of Piraeus, 2021, dir. Antzela Brouskou); *1821, the Revue*, by Dimitris Karantzas and Foivos Delivorias (Municipal Theatre of Piraeus, 2021); *A Country Two Centuries Later*, by Andreas Flourakis (Dodoni Festival/ Municipal Theatre of Kozani/Anima theatre company, 2021).

subjects and, as such, their participation in this process (cf. Hatzipantazis, 2014). In studying and, to a certain degree, delineating this canon, theatre historiography has often produced modern Greek theatre history as part of a linear movement towards an inevitable national completion (cf. Tabaki, 1993 and 1997; Hatzipantazis, 2014; Puchner, 2020). Important as this approach may be in tracing the parallel development of a national theatrical tradition and national identities, here I am interested in the national canon as part of a wider web of cultural practices involved in the institution of modern Greece – a set of performative acts of transfer that produce as much as document the institution of Greekness vis-à-vis the transformations of Greek society; practices that constitute a scenario that produces modern Greece each time it is rehearsed – every time again and anew. I call this the scenario of independence.

Methodological Considerations: Scenarios as Containers of Memory

I borrow the term 'scenario' from Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), and I am particularly interested in the ways in which, as an analytic strategy, it enables the study of archival documents in tandem with performative repertoires. Scenarios, as Taylor proposes, operate as 'meaning-making paradigms that structure social environments, behaviors, and potential outcomes' (Taylor, 2003: 28). They work, in other words, as containers of cultural knowledge and memory and institute communities as they are enacted by them – each time again and anew. If archival documents are presumably durable, the repertoire 'both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning' (Taylor, 2003: 20). And it is the durability of the document – which ostensibly contains unalterable knowledge that has to be discovered – in conjunction with the malleability of the repertoire – which requires the presence of the community to be produced again and anew – that allows scenarios to both reproduce and resist dominant narratives and discourses within a given social environment. A scenario does not imitate the event it commemorates but re-activates it by way of including spectators in its frame and 'implicating' them 'in its ethics and politics' (Taylor, 2003: 33). A scenario, thus, is fluid: it changes, it slips and it adapts.

Taylor discusses the act of the 'discovery of America' as constitutive of the 'scenario of discovery' that imposes a gaze whose scope determines 'universal' knowledge. The scenario of discovery 'constructs the wild object and the viewing subject – producing a "we" and "our" as it produces a "them"' (2003: 54). Similarly, Azoulay discusses the operation of the photographic shutter 'as a synecdoche for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether' (2019: 2): each repetition of its movement reproduces the imperial logic in much the same way that each repetition