IMAGES OF TURKS IN GREEK POLITICAL CARTOONS. ASPECTS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

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Abstract: American cartoonist C. D. Batchelor believed that "a political cartoonist should have in him a little of the clown, the poet, the historian, the artist and the dreamer". There is no standard formula for this combination but it seems there is a norm for Greek editorial cartoons portraying Turks. This paper identifies the elements that contributed to the development of ethnic stereotypes in Greek political cartoons after 1974. When Cyprus operations ended in the summer of 1974, Greece and Turkey went through a short period of relaxation and mutual sympathy, followed by diplomatic tensions and military crises. The article presents general aspects of Greek political caricature, with an emphasis on political situation and politicians in both countries. What kind of nationalism is reconstructed in political cartoons? Is this a kind of patriotism or national breed feelings of superiority by using ethnic stereotypes? Does cartoon contribute to conflict exaggeration? Our goal is to prove that the Greek political cartoons perpetuate misunderstanding through misrepresentation. Stereotypes are represented by figures and / or political figures depicted through textual and visual messages. The methodology for this study is the qualitative analysis of selected cartoons, during 1974 and 1999.

Keywords: political cartoon, stereotype, Aegean dispute, press discourse, misrepresentation

Greece and Turkey are two neighbouring states with wide coastlines at the Aegean Sea. Recent history reminds us of a bilateral dispute related to oil exploration and exploitation rights and thus to the sovereignty over certain areas in the Aegean. After World War II, the diplomatic relations between the two states passed through a crisis almost every ten years. The dispute started with the interethnic conflict in Cyprus (the intercommunal violence in the 60s and 70s) and continued with the disagreement regarding the sovereign right over some areas in the Aegean Sea. After the 1974 military operations in Cyprus, the controversy took the shape of an energy dispute and referred to the disagreement over the interpretation and application of international law.

The core problem was the claim over some areas in the Aegean, said to be rich in oil reserves. On the one hand, Turkey's position was that the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean were not entitled to a continental shelf region and the delimitation line of the continental shelf should pass, from North to South, through the middle of the Aegean. The Turkish Government was the advocate of the solution of sharing the Aegean in equal parts between the two states, in order to have equal economic and defence opportunities in the area. On the other hand, Greece's position was in favour of delimitation of the continental shelf using the *median line* between the Greek islands in Eastern Aegean and the western shores of Turkey.

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Eventually, tensions took the shape of crises in 1976 and 1987, when Turkish marine research vessels were sent out in the Aegean to conduct oil research in the disputed continental shelf – considered to be Greek by the authorities in Athens. Consequently, Turkey and Greece appealed to the United Nation Security Council and to the International Court of Justice at The Hague (1976) and both international bodies had urged the neighbouring states not to make use of violence in solving the Aegean Sea issues and to continue bilateral negotiations in order to achieve a solution in the best interest of both countries. The perspectives of Greece and Turkey always differ on the distribution of the blame for the tensions in the Aegean and leaders' references to a "just and lasting solution" rarely accommodate any understanding of what constitutes a fair outcome according to the other side. The 1996 incident was caused by Turkish journalists' attempting to show a live display power over the Imia rocks in the Eastern Aegean, followed by a similar Greek act.

The Aegean dispute is a local issue that could turn into a regional conflict if remained unsolved, with both NATO's southern flank pillars weakened by animosity. Is tension in this case maintained only by claims, provocations and defiance or is it also fostered by channels of public cultural and political expression like literature, press, social tools and arts? Recent history shows a distorted media image of the Turks, which has become ingrained in the Greek culture. Cartoons in newspapers may play an important role in political discourse, due to their emphasis on identity characterisations and portrayals of certain groups. The Turkish people we here analyse resent the acute and unfair associations cartoonists make in their sketches. Images of Turks are often related to aggression and brutality and these stereotypes promote mutual misunderstanding.

A stereotype can be defined as a person's "knowledge, beliefs and expectancies about a social group" (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986, p. 133). It is known that, once formed, stereotypes or in other words certain beliefs, are applied to all members of the group, regardless the variation they may show in many respects. So stereotyping involves the overgeneralization of attributes to group members (Hamilton, Sherman, Crump & Spencer-Rodgers, 2009, p. 179). The cultural mechanism that promotes stereotypes on Turks is supported by political cartoons; channels like television, printed press, film and arts disseminate expressions of ethnic bias. Language has a strong impact on the collective perception of Alterity, but editorial cartoons carry complex meanings in a striking image by creating simplified, negative representations of the 'other'. Editorial cartoonists rely on public emotion and distort reality and facts to emphasise contradiction, weaknesses and defects of contemporary political dispute or social phenomena. The power of cartoons cannot be underestimated: ethnic bias is promoted through misrepresentation and can generate altered perception on reality and promote feelings of hatred.

Political cartoon can be described as a process of selective influence over the individual's perception of the meanings attributed to portrayals in such way as to encourage specific interpretations and feelings and to discourage others. These framing techniques are in fact the skills of the cartoonist and part of its artistic vision and can be successfully used to reduce the ambiguity of topics by contextualizing the information in a way the recipient can connect to what he already knows. In reality, cartoons do not transmit actual facts, but induced potential meanings of symbols they represent and cause affective responses. They materialize a political statement in graphic imagery supported by relatively few facts (Kamalipour, 1995, p.143).

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We chose to cover three vast periods corresponding to the three above mentioned most intense periods in the Greek-Turkish relations: 1976-1977, 1987-1988 and 1996-1997. The Greek daily political newspapers that we have selected for analysis are of national distribution: 'Kathimerini', a non-tabloid newspaper and three tabloids: 'Eleftherotypia', 'Ta Nea' and 'Eleftheros Typos', all published in Athens. We acknowledge that some cartoons are constructed to represent the other side negatively and indirectly maintain the Greek-Turkish tension by creating and promoting stereotypes about the Turks. Generally, cartoons tackle themes related to bilateral crises and they refer to unsolved political matters, conflict situations, politicians' attitude and public perception and expectations, with a negative touch. 'Kathimerini' is more likely to have neutral views towards the events and is positive to dialogue.

Ethnic categorisation depicted in cartoons refers to the negative image of the other, either hostility or offensiveness. Turkey is perceived as a country that takes advantage of the Greek Government's goodwill and considers the Aegean Sea a space of claims. Turkey's reasons are considered claims, a term that strips from the start the Turkish arguments of any possible legal validity. Instead, Greece's actions are seen as legal and naturally intended towards defending national interests. The misperception of Turks may negatively influence policymakers' actions and decisions because of the unrealistic images created. In other words, false images and inaccurate information may corrupt the policymaking process.

A noticeable cartoon which relies on contradictions is the one depicting a huge Turk, half submerged in the Aegean waters, trying to explain to a Greek that Turks desire joint exploitation operations in the Aegean, but the hug of friendship he is trying to give to the Greek is describing a circle which is actually limiting the space of the fellow counterpart in the Aegean waters. Another cartoon is depicting a poorly dressed Turk, with a gun in his hand, on the shores of Turkey, trying to put his bare foot on a Greek flagged small rock in the Aegean and asking himself if he should set his step or not on that rock. Apparently, the text is Greek, but then one realises that in fact the text is written with Greek characters but is pronounced like in English: "To be or not to be". There is a well-chosen paronomasia, because the English "be" is phonetically associated with the Greek word "μπει", which means "to go in", "to step in". So, the Turk's question in the cartoon is whether he should step or not into the Aegean Sea.

Political cartoonists use the Turkish stereotype in their images, but sometimes they feel free to portray Greek figures, especially political leaders like Karamanlis and Simitis, in difficult or embarrassing circumstances created by the analytical mind of the artist in direct relation to real facts and events. Thus stereotyping addresses to both Turks and Greeks. A suitable example is a cartoon depicting the encounter of two marine vessels in the Aegean, one state-of-the-art Turkish vessel, named "Piri Reis" after the Ottoman admiral and geographer, and one old and almost wrecked Greek boat, named "Elpis" or "Hope". A Turk waving his hand asks the Greeks if they were looking for oil, too. One of the three Greeks on the boat answers they were looking for their lost sovereign rights, while the other two are actually depicted looking at the skyline in search for something and in an empty bucket they draw out of the seawater. Another cartoon describing the difficult Greek political position was published around the Imia crisis, in 1996. It represents a rather embarrassing political situation for the Greeks, as it is depicting a character that looks like the Greek prime-minister Simitis, holding a boat's steering wheel in the air, while

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being hold by a huge American hand, and saying to a staring Greek folk: "Don't worry, the handling of national issues is in strong hands". This cartoon recalls the active role of the United States in the termination of the Greek-Turkish crises.

People all over the world rely on mass-media for information about the outside world and, because of that, media have become very powerful in creating images about nations and cultures, images that may not always be real. Stereotypes play an important role as they have the virtue of simplicity; they follow the law of absolutes - of good and evil, of 'us' - the ingroup - against the 'other' - the outgroup. In the process of categorisation, ethnic identities are made simple, but history and people are far too complex to be reduced to simplified terms. Stereotyping distorts perception through oversimplification, but it is also dangerous breeding grounds for resentment, irrationality, animosity and ethnic conflict. So, public attitude is extremely sensitive and may be fashioned by media's news and commentaries and the journalists' opinions and interpretations. Our research shows that the Greek press achieved a rhetorical construction of the identity through the strategic deployment of the difference between the Greek 'us' (responsible, peaceful) and the Turkish 'them' (deceitful, treacherous).

We recognize that the views of a limited group of newspapers under study may not be representative of the views of the entire Greek media or indeed of the views of the Greek public. However, we believe that the political cartoons selected for study are significant for describing the dominant elements of national identity. Our analysis does not generalize, but it attempts to describe the way in which stereotypes function to express feelings of nationhood. Cartoons depict Greece's ethnocentric position as correct and legal, while Turkey's actions are seen as dangerous provocations and they may not promote suitable climate for good neighbouring. The display of simplified images of the 'other' comes on the background of exaggerated conflicts. Political cartoons try to emphasize in a deemed humoristic way the positive self-presentation of 'us' and the negative representation of the Turks.

Instead of promoting stereotypes, media must raise public awareness of the hate speech problem in relation to history and to work in favour of eliminating the outdated stereotyping phenomena from its discourse. Therefore, media professionals should seek permanently to find ways to educate people about themselves as well as about the others and to avoid any form of nationalistic discourse and imagery, propaganda and prejudice while presenting events or drawing conclusions, in order to prevent nationalistic approaches of different topics. Comprehension of cultural heritage is the key to understanding the historical background of a nation and overcoming phenomena of prejudice, nationalism, chauvinism and xenophobia. Perhaps a more fruitful avenue of future research would be instead to compare these cartoons with the similar found in the Turkish media.

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