



## EXPERIENCING THE MYTH: GREEKNESS AND THE GERMAN HERO

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### **Abstract:**

This article explores the influence that an unexpected athletic success can have on the construction of national identity while attempting to answer the question on how such a success can be used as a means to overcome national crises. Using a reflective analysis, this study examines the impact of the Euro 2004 Championship on Greece's national identity, highlighting the correlation between two events associated with Greekness, to wit national pride and Hellenic identity in the sport, economic and social contexts. The first event was the unpredicted victory of the Greek football team in 2004, thanks to their German coach Otto Rehhagel, and the second Rehhagel's visit to Athens in March 2013, in his informal role of political mediator, in an attempt to contribute to restoring Greek-German friendship which had been shattered during the country's period of economic memorandums. This conceptual paper uses a qualitative discourse analysis to explain and understand human action through an examination of media texts and symbolic narratives: the headlines and narratives on the Euro 2004 victory in the Greek and foreign press and media, along with the slogans used by football fans after each victory, voicing the 'superiority' of Greekness.

**Keywords:** Greekness, national identity, media, gender, hegemonic masculinity, sport, Euro 2004, Rehhagel, economic crisis, historical memory, the *closest other*

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## 1. Introductory thoughts: Greekness (τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν), the collective sense of Hellenic identity

This article explores the influence that an unexpected athletic success, an unforeseen sports triumph can have on the construction of national identity while attempting to answer the question on how such a success can be used as a means to overcome national crises. Having as a point of reference a sporting event and a key protagonist of this event, we seek to highlight and analyze some important aspects of Greekness: Greek national identity. Before doing so, we would like to briefly refer to scholarly discussions on Greekness (shared identity) or Hellenic identity, two concepts usually used as synonyms. The purpose of this article is not to focus on the plethora of academic research on Greekness, on the complex, multifaceted and conflicting views on Hellenism (Patsantaras, 2015b)— or "Pan-Hellenism" (Kyle, 2009), which is based on culture and not on territorial or political unification— or even on the discussion on "Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture" (Hall, 2002). However, we need to point out that studies on Greekness and "Greeknesses" (Papari, 2018) generally refer to descent, common ancestry, politics, culture, a stronger sense of a common/shared Greek cultural identity or the collective sense of Hellenic ethnicity (Gruen, 2020; Mitchell, 2012; Patsantaras, 2015b), among other things.

A celebrated passage in Herodotus helps us understand how the Greeks identified the bonds that held them together. The historian Herodotus "*puts into the mouths of Athenian spokesmen, responding to Spartan concerns about possible defection to the enemy in the Persian war, a notable statement of solidarity. The Athenians affirm their unequivocal allegiance to the Hellenic cause by asserting that Greekness (τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν) rests on common blood, common language, shared shrines and sacrifices, and similar ways of life—which they would not betray*" (Gruen, 2020). This ringing declaration is regularly cited as the collective sense of Hellenic ethnicity in accordance with modern constructions of ancient ethnicity regarding common group descent, customs, language and religion, argues Erich S. Gruen (2020), American classicist and ancient historian, in his study on *Herodotus and Greekness: Ethnicity in the Ancient World – Did it matter?*

Apparently, it did matter as regards the "*sense of Greekness*". As Lynette G. Mitchell (2012) points out, according to Herodotus, in the second half of the fifth century BC, during the Persian wars, the Athenians refused to betray the Greeks to the Persians because of "*their sense of Greekness (to Hellenikon)*", that is, their sense of shared identity based on common blood, language, cult, and way of life (Mitchell, 2012).

Donald Kyle (2009) focuses on Herodotus' accounts concerning sport and specifically those that reveal the intersections of sport (agonistic festivals and athletes) and Greek ethnicity, religion, politics and warfare. Herodotus, he argues, makes occasional but significant use of sport to characterize peoples and individuals, while referring to several athletes, but primarily for their political or military achievements.

In his study titled *The Athlete of the Ancients*, Henriques A. Valentine, in 1898, also refers to Herodotus and discusses the care and devotion paid to "*muscular and physical education*", arguing that "*the ancient Greeks were a magnificent nation of athletes, and is some*

*of their methods could very well teach us many a good lesson...The candidates for Olympic honours were not confined to the athletic class only. Philosophers, mathematicians, historians, orators, poets and musicians were found among the list ... the Greeks owed their supremacy over contemporary nations to the care and devotion paid to their muscular and physical education"* (Valentine, 1898: 184-188 in Nikitaras, Kamberidou & Skoridilis, 2008).

Throughout the centuries, in revising the national historical past as regards the construction of modern Greek society<sup>i</sup> and the ways the Greeks understood Hellenism and their Greekness, Katerina Papari's (2018) study shows that the Greeks of the nineteenth century were generally defined as those who spoke the Greek language; embraced the Orthodox Christian dogma; borrowed terms mostly from the West in their attempt to proclaim their identity in relation to the rest of Europe. A century after the foundation of the Greek state, the ways the Greeks understood Hellenism and their Greekness, namely the attributes that distinguish Greek identity and culture from other European cultures, were still based on the Western neoclassicist standards, thus fortifying Western interpretations of the classics ... over the Greek ones. This led to structuring the national imaginary according to broader Western historical narratives.

In her analysis on "Greeknesses", Papari (2018) argues that in modernizing and revising the national historical past, new historians, such as Spyridon Zambelios and Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, marginalised writers of the past, and sought ways to express the identity of the nation according to the way they were now coming to perceive it. German and Greek intellectuals, during the interwar crisis, focused on national identity as something being threatened and challenged by radical transformation. The intellectual elites in Greece concentrated on incorporating their ideological and partisan assumptions to the meaning of Hellenism. Accordingly, Papari (2018) explores the social dimension of the notion of Greekness, examining the state and social order during the period of the interwar crisis and the elements that constituted a new imaginary institution of the nation, arguing that *"the ideology of Greekness offered a means for the government to resolve the issues of the interwar state and, in particular, the challenge of its political survival and continuity."*

She also maintains that a conservative examination of Greekness promoted hegemonic discourse during this period and that the main concern of the intellectuals of the time was to take advantage of Hellenism's cultural capital in order to propose a technique of governance. Certainly, as regards this hegemonic discourse, especially concerning women and the *gender order*, we need point out that the latter does not change overnight. Hegemonic structures—or rather hegemonic masculinity—have been reproduced throughout the centuries (in sport, the military, politics, etc.) creating an ideology of male superiority that is socially and hierarchically exclusive and has marginalized women (Kamberidou, 2019) and diverse social groups.<sup>ii</sup>

### **1.1 King Otto's glorification and fall: "Greeks need their German to achieve the impossible"**

This paper discusses Otto Rehhagel's glorification and deification as a national figure and a mythical hero in 2004— which inspired symbolic narratives on Greekness— and

subsequently his fall from glory in 2013. It was inspired after watching the first public presentation of the documentary "King Otto" in Athens, Greece, June 7, 2021.<sup>iii</sup> The documentary on Greece's 2004 Football Triumph, directed by Christopher André Marks, was dedicated to the German football coach Otto Rehhagel.<sup>iv</sup>

In 2004 the Greek national football team, under the guidance of their German coach, won the European Cup (UEFA Euro 2004), contradicting all forecasts and expectations, which according to reports *stunned the world*. This unexpected sport victory inspired symbolic narratives on Greekness, that is to say Greek identity, national pride, and national unity not only in the football stadiums, cities, towns and main squares in Greece and Portugal, but all over the world. During this period of enthusiasm and social intoxication and euphoria, a number of ideologies and narratives were cultivated connecting Greeks to their historical roots and culture. The press portrayed the Greek football team and their German coach as having awakened and restored Hellenic virtues: national consciousness and continuity; social cohesion and progress; community spirit and social bonds, to name a few.

This victory was portrayed as a Greek-German achievement as well as the result of the German coach's exceptional football tactics and strategies,<sup>v</sup> such as his "*wooden horse tactics*" (Guardian, 4/6/2004).<sup>vi</sup> Accordingly, Rehhagel was featured in the press as the Greek mythical hero Hercules (also known in Greek mythology as Heracles or Herakles) and received the treatment of a national hero who helped Greece find the place she deserves in the modern world, as highlighted in the German newspaper *Bild* (5/7/2004). Moreover, in 2005, the German government awarded Otto Rehhagel with the *Bundesverdienstkreuz I Klasse* (Federal Cross of Merit) for strengthening Greek-German friendship. Specifically, the 8th minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia, P. Steinbrück said: "*There is hardly anyone who has done as much for Germany's reputation in Greece and for Greek-German friendship as Otto Rehhagel over the past few decades.*" (Athener Zeitung, 13/5/2005).<sup>vii</sup>

With this 2004 European football victory,<sup>viii</sup> national pride reached its peak, the Mayor of Athens Dora Bakoyannis declaring Otto Rehhagel an honorary Athenian, specifically an honorary resident of Athens and Greek society was swarmed with the slogan: "*Greeks need their German to achieve the impossible*" (in the Greek daily, *To Vima-To Bήμα*, 16/3/2013).

Five years later, in 2009, the international financial crisis impacted the Greeks more than any other European people, and the Greek-German friendship was negatively affected. Why? The 'European' plan to save the Greek economy was conceived under the direct supervision of the German government. This *Made in Germany* recovery plan to save the Greek economy enraged, angered or was not received well by the majority of the media, nor by the country's political representatives. It was considered an attempt to conspire against Greece's national sovereignty, independence and right to national self-determination. Thus, hostile reactions to Germany emerged and were cultivated in the political sphere and in other social-cultural domains of Greek society. This political-social crisis between Greece and Germany generated fears concerning the potential loss of national pride and national sovereignty, upsetting socio-political relations between the

two nations, and resulted in anti-German sentiments frequently being expressed in Greek society.

To contribute to reconciling relations between Greece and Germany, in March 2013, the German coach Otto Rehhagel visited Athens as a delegate of Chancellor Angela Merkel.<sup>ix</sup> In his new informal political role as mediator, the former national hero was treated with hostility and suspicion, as opposed to his VIP treatment, reception and glorification in 2004. This study, having as a point of reference a sporting event and a key protagonist of this event, seeks to highlight and analyze some important aspects of the composition of Greek national specificity (Greekness: Greek national identity). Three semantically interconnected sections/parts make up this effort.

The first part seeks to understand how a sporting event, and in this case a football triumph, is linked to perceptions of a nation, thus discussing views on national identity (Anderson, 1983; Elias, 1996; Hobsbawn, 1983) while taking into account exploratory studies on the semantic coupling of sporting events with national identification (Elling et al. 2014; Joke, 2005; Lechner, 2007; Maguire & Poulton, 1999; Patsantaras, 2015; Vincent et al., 2010).

The second part highlights various expressions of Hellenic national identity (Greekness), resulting from the Greek football team's success in 2004. The authors seek to understand the selective interconnection and relation of this football triumph with the historical depth of Hellenism. To do this, we examined the headlines and narratives of Greek and international newspapers—primarily those published July 5, 2004, one day after the national triumph— which were rich with themes, images and narratives tied to Greek national identity. The Greek and international dailies discussed in this paper were chosen because of their national prominence, their sports coverage, and their diverse demographic readers and representations. The headlines were used to determine the meaning and textual construction of Greekness.

Using a qualitative textual analysis, the aim is to gain insight into how Greek national identity (Greekness) was constructed, portrayed and understood during this period. We also dared an analysis of the provocative or rather *extreme* slogans used by football fans after each victory, which were heard in the streets and squares of Athens, the capital city of Greece. These slogans show how Greeks negotiated, performed, activated and revived their own identities, expressing *national superiority*, on the occasion of the football triumph.

The third part of this study is based on specific newspaper reports in addition to blog commentaries on Otto Rehhagel's visit to Athens during the economic crisis in March 2013 and his role as political mediator. The purpose of this section is to understand the ways in which Hellenic national identity (Greekness) manifests itself during the economic crisis and how it clashes or conflicts with the perspectives of Greekness constructed during the Euro 2004 period.

Our research clearly shows that the discourse, perceptions, characteristics and interpretations of Greekness—that we *invent*, imagine, formulate and construct—predetermine our relations with ourselves as well as with others. *Invention*, in this article, refers to the process of construction in reference to the selected past. This qualitative

discourse seeks to explain and understand human action through the analysis of media texts and narratives (McAdams, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1995).

## 2. The National Triumph of 2004: beyond all expectations

The Greeks made football history, winning the UEFA Euro 2004, on the night of July 4, 2004. Virtually the entire Greek population watched the epic final between Greece and Portugal, which reached the highest ratings ever, 83.9% (Patsantaras, 2015b). This illustrates how a football event can become a dominant means of social communication: namely, how a football event of international or global importance and scope, has the power to communicatively penetrate all social stratifications. In other words, how a sport victory enables people of multiple and diverse social backgrounds, social spheres and social characteristics form a sense of collectivity which is semantically based on the perception and the idea of a nation, thus facilitating the formation of a collective identity.

For example, although football is perceived as an androcentric, hegemonic or male-dominated sport, emphasizing masculinity and sharing an affinity with war, including its metaphors on heroism, sacrifice and honor, after the 2004 European Championship, it became the most popular sport for women as well (Kamberidou, 2019; Kamberidou, Bonias & Patsantaras, 2019; Kefi-Chatzichamperi, Kamberidou & Patsantaras, 2021; Maguire & Poulton, 1999; Patsantaras, 2015a,b; Whannel 2002).

This awareness of a collective identity (*us/we*), which derives its dynamics from the nation's history, traditions, narratives and mythology, could also simultaneously or occasionally manifest multifaceted rivalry against certain '*others*' who do not belong to the nation. The semantic space that constitutes and feeds this rivalry (*us versus others*)—if and when correlated with the current socio-cultural-political conditions—appears to be co-created by many factors and is typically unstable and unpredictable (Patsantaras, 2014, 2007).

The way in which the dipole *us* and the *others* is constructed, as regards a national perspective, has been described in an extremely interesting way by Norbert Elias (1996) who discusses how and why human beings perceive they belong to the same nation. This is what keeps them within the boundaries of the group which they define as *us* or *we* when they communicate with each other, while, at the same time, it allows them to exclude other human beings who are perceived to belong to another group, eg. *the others* (Elias, 1994: xxxvii).

Elias (1994) pays special attention to *national habitus/codes*<sup>x</sup> which he explores in correspondence with the way the history of a nation is perceived, usually through reconstructive memory.<sup>xi</sup> He attributes a dominant role to habitus in terms of shaping social structures, personalities and behaviors. Following this line of thinking, Maguire and Poulton (1999: 4) argue that national historical memory is in a latent state (*sleeping/dormant memory*) in the habits of the people that make up a nation, thereby allowing for an emotional connection between an individual and a nation. Anderson (1983) argues that these memories enriched by common collective actions, inventions, traditions and experiences give meaning to the idea of the nation, reflecting it as an

*imaginary community*, while at the same time forming the framework for the development of stories and narratives concerning the nation.

As regards international sports competitions, the narratives related to the nation usually spotlight a national specificity or particularity, which occasionally (in the case of victory) takes on the character of a national *charisma*. The fantasy or dream of a nation with an extremely special national charisma, as Elias (1996: xiii) observes, can be preserved in a variety of ways: through the teaching of history and through historical monuments and masterpieces reflecting a nation's period of glory. However, this national charisma or specificity can be maintained mainly through modern achievements that refer semantically to the greatness of the past, thereby symbolically confirming national continuity.

In placing the Euro 2004 triumph in such an analytical perspective, it becomes clearer how the Greek team's performance awakened national memories, national pride and enabled the reconstruction of the glorious, heroic and magnificent past: memories that refer to a small nation with great achievements. Namely, the Euro 2004 achievement exceeded or went *beyond our capabilities*, thus awakening historical memories and re-activating a national habit/tradition.

This concept, event or fact *beyond our capabilities* is an inherent property of the myth. It connects reality to the myth, which had created the conditions for an experiential identification to it (the myth) for all individuals or people involved in various ways. This interconnection or relation between the myth and the event/fact operates as an identification mechanism that provides feedback, semantically, for the collective experience. For example, in that past, Greece was never treated, considered or perceived as a country which was good at football, therefore the 2004 national victory was *beyond all expectations*. Consequently, it was perceived and understood as something supernatural, metaphysical, unreal, exceptional or unprecedented, and accordingly associated with myth as regards *timeless mythical Greek charisma*.

The national team's victory, despite all the negative forecasts, activated a fantasy and imaginary deeply inherent in the Greek subconscious: e.g. the modern Greeks, exactly as their ancient ancestors, are capable of carrying out and accomplishing the impossible! This fantasy which was activated through a fact/event (the national team's victory) was transformed into an experienced social reality. In this perspective, the nation is not an arbitrary, ambiguous or vague community but is experienced as a living social reality.

Athletic success in international sporting events can trigger or awaken national memories: a resurgence or revival of *custom codes* associated with national identity (Maguire & Poulton, 1999; Patsantaras, 2015). Accordingly, we argue that the Greek football players, as representatives of their nation, were transformed or converted into an *imaginary shield* in order to defend national continuity and national uniqueness, while symbolically reflecting, through their 2004 sport action/triumph, the special charisma of the Greek nation.

In this perspective, the football achievement is a mythical triumph that ignited a national euphoria. At the same time, it provided a symbolic-imaginary identification,

specifically a means of semantic interconnection between classical ancient Hellenic greatness and the cultural Hellenic present for all those involved in the event directly or indirectly. That is, it was a means of bridging the gap, which according to Herzfeld (1991) is inherent in historical ideals as well as in monumental space and social time. This may explain what has been described in this article as an experiential identification with the myth: experiencing the myth.

During the 2004 European Football Championship, and in line with the successful course of the national football team, the discourse in the Greek and international media invoked Hellenic greatness, including ancient Greek myths/mythology in a variety of ways. Explosive, euphoric and uncontrolled waves of national pride— or rather a national frenzy— were apparent in Greek society. In fact, if an outside observer happened to see, hear or listen to the Greek fans chanting slogans in the streets of Athens, he or she could have been shocked, and not perceived the slogans or chanting as patriotic celebrations, but as expressions of a national frenzy, although the boundaries between patriotism and nationalistic expressions are usually blurred and fluid.

### **3. Greekness revealed in the slogans: *the closest other***

At international football competitions, in the *language* of the football fans, you usually hear slogans that refer to national representations which portray one nation as superior to another. For the outside observer, this may be offensive or insulting as regards the rival players and fans. These slogans are usually expressed in a playful way and— as the opponents generally do not understand the national language—they seem to go unnoticed or they are accepted as normal. On the other hand, deviations and insults could also lead to violent clashes between rival fans.

Slogans may have complex goals and consequences. They have no owner and are highly malleable and strongly influential as far as the emotional state of the fans is concerned (Collins, 2008; Patsantaras, 2014). They are relational and reflective; addressed to individuals and groups; may appear to provide a forum or a way of empowerment and self-definition; reflect prevailing beliefs, dominant conventions and hidden ideologies; provide the means to resituate one's individual and collective self and remake the social world; and provide clues or information on how concrete experiences and events are conceived. Through slogans, we can predict what is going to follow.

The slogans coined by Greek fans during the 2004 European Championships can be analyzed from such a perspective. They were heard in the streets and cities of Greece after each victory of the Greek football team, revealing how Greekness is perceived and experienced by the popular culture. To illustrate, many economic immigrants from Albania were in Athens during this period and together with the Greeks, they celebrated the Greek team's success. The Greek fans, however, did not acknowledge a national identification with the Albanians. Even during the common celebrations, national/ethnic boundaries were maintained. For example, the Greek fans shouted and repeated, jokingly and playfully, the slogan: "*Albanian You will never become a Greek!*" This slogan reflected a strengthened solidarity between the Greeks (*us*), while the provocative slogan *Albanian*



*You will never become a Greek* reflected the deep demarcation/division between Greeks and Albanians, the latter becoming *the closest other*.

We need to point out here that, although the Greek national team did not beat the Albanian national team, the Albanians were transformed into the *invented* or *perceived other*, thereby becoming *the closest other* that expressed Hellenic superiority. Why the *closest other*? How was this 'superiority' expressed? Firstly, both the Albanians and the Greeks celebrated together, cheering, praising and glorifying the Greek team's triumph throughout the country. Additionally, during the mass celebrations in Athens, the capital of Greece, after each football victory, the Greek fans together with the Albanian fans, chanted and shouted sexist slogans against the Portuguese and the French football players such as: "*The penis of the Greeks is heavy; Give me a blowjob (David Sergio) Trezeguet S'il vous plait, S'il vous plait.*"

Moreover, when the national team arrived at the Panathinaikon Stadium in Kallimarmaro in Athens, 90,000 Greek fans inside the stadium shouted, chanted and repeated these slogans in the presence of the Prime Minister, religious leaders and state officials. Subsequently and simultaneously, these slogans were heard and repeated by tens of thousands of Greek fans who were outside the stadium.

Additionally, when the Greek team beat the Portuguese team both in the premiere and in the final event, the Greek fans celebrated the victory by shouting: "*What do you not understand... Dick in the premiere, dick in the final*", declaring in a sexist, hegemonic masculinity perspective the *timeless superiority* of the Greek race. Yet, depending on the way you read these slogans, you can also interpret them as radical, racial-nationalist outbursts or as national and ethical deviations, aberrations, anomalies and absurdities.

Certainly, before embarking on such analyses, one needs to consider the cause and the event, along with the time and space variable, since behind such slogans lay *dormant national memories* and hidden ideologies which are awakened at football competitions. As Storm and Jakobsen (2020) argue in their analysis concerning the intangible effects at football tournaments, the results and outcomes differ among nations and events. Football matches can create conditions of inclusion and strengthen solidarity or, the opposite. They can contribute to social exclusion and the deepening of divisions.<sup>xii</sup>

#### **4. Media coverage: "*Olympus has new gods*", "*the Gods smile on Greece*", "*ascent to soccer Olympus*", "*the wooden horse tactics*", "*Ancient Greece had 12 gods, modern Greece has 11*"**

The media plays a dominant role in the construction and presentation of national identity or national specificity during international sport competitions (Elling et al., 2014; Vincent et al., 2010; Whannel, 2008), awakening national consciousness (Anderson, 1983). Basically, newspaper headlines, media texts, selective coverage and the projection of images, symbols and narratives about a nation arise from a combination of history and social knowledge—popular myths, stereotypes and symbolic references— and are ingeniously weaved around an extraordinary event while reflecting prevailing beliefs and hidden ideologies (Patsantaras 2015, 2015b; Roberts 2002).

The narratives invented by the media after a triumph, nostalgically refer to classical antiquity, the distant past or the golden age of a nation. Such inspiration, based on a selective reconstruction and recall of the historical past, usually unites people and a nation (Hobsbawm, 1983). The national culture is revived and recreated through the selective use of narratives, habits, myths and symbols related to national identity, making its positive aspects extremely popular. Myths, memories, symbols, inventions and traditions<sup>xiii</sup> of ethnic heritages are those elements which give power to the sense of national belonging. For example, after the Euro 2004 victory Greek and international newspaper headlines drew upon myths and traditions of the ancient Greek past. Sporting events that take place at an international level (such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup) are extremely important sources for the reconstruction of national identity (Billings et al., 2015). Through such events and specifically through sporting success, the historical past of a nation is rediscovered and reinterpreted (Smith, 1999: 9), the triumph reflecting continuous national progress.

Hobsbawm (1983) and Anderson (1983) suggest that in order for national identity to continue, it must be constantly reinvented and verified according to the current cultural reality. This means, among other things, that it has to be verified through contemporary events and facts. International sports competitions provide opportunities and possibilities for selective appeals to the history of a nation and traditional inventions. *Dormant/sleeping national memories* are awakened through national narratives, symbols and images used by the media. Research shows that unexpected international sports triumphs give rise to declarations of national uniqueness and national pride (Vincent et al., 2010).<sup>xiv</sup> Even in the context of globalization, during international sporting events, there is an increasing trend of fans for national and local identification (Hargreaves, 2002; Patsantaras, 2015, 2007).

Sport events like the Euro 2004 show that despite the globalization, commercialization and spectacularization of football, national boundaries remain extremely relevant. Sporting practices or symbols such as the national flag and the national anthem sung in the stadiums, acquire a sanctity that revitalizes and awakens national consciousness. For example, in the Portuguese stadiums Greek fans wore traditional costumes and held symbols reminiscent of all historical periods of Greek civilization.<sup>xv</sup> They were sharing a myth, a sense of common ancestry, a common culture and memories associated with a specific *homeland*. It makes no difference whether such practices are themselves rational or irrational. The point is they exist and they influence people. After the Euro 2002 triumph, the news stories, media narratives and *inventions* in Greece and around the world referred to classical antiquity, Greek mythology and traditions. The connection between reality and myth is always sought through an event and such a connection can only take place in the context of a fact /an event (Euro 2004 victory).

Media coverage of elite sports tends to interpret the victories and achievements of domestic athletes as resulting from the positive characteristics inherent in their nation, and not simply from physiological factors.<sup>xvi</sup> Greece's victory at Euro 2004 is such an example:

International and national media coverage of the event used traditional stereotypes regarding the character of the Greek (national character) that alluded to ancient Greece, associating the origin of Greekness (the Greek spirit) with the mythical Hercules. Among the most interesting versions of the presentation of Greekness are those that identified the Greek football players and their coach Otto Rehhagel with Olympian mythological figures. For example, the day after the 2004 triumph, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and the Euro 2004 official website broadcasted that "*Olympus has new gods*" (Ashby 05/07/2004). The New York Times (5/7/2004) headline read: "*The Gods smile on Greece*", and the article referred to "*soccer Olympus*".<sup>xvii</sup>

Additionally, on the day of the victory the New York Times (Lisbon, July 4, 2004) reported: "*Today, 14 players largely unknown outside their homeland completed their unlikely ascent to soccer Olympus by beating Portugal, 1-0, in the final of Euro 2004.*" The article titled *Greece Wins European Championship* also referred to the slogan written on the side of the Greek team's bus: "*Ancient Greece had 12 gods, modern Greece has 11*" (New York Times, 4/7/2004).<sup>xviii</sup>

The next day another New York Times article (July 5, 2004) titled *SOCCER; The Gods Smile on Greece, Europe's Soccer Champion*<sup>xix</sup> repeated the news, and on July 6, 2004 the New York Times title read *Soccer: One to make the gods smile*.<sup>xx</sup> On July 6, 2004 Peter Berlin of the International Herald Tribune wrote: "*An evening that had started with clouds balloons in the Portuguese colors of red and green ended in clouds of confetti in blue and silver as the Greeks collected their trophy*",<sup>xxi</sup> the color blue symbolizing the Greek flag. A version of this article also appeared in print in The International Herald.

An article in *the Guardian* published June 4, 2004, before the victory, applauded Otto Rehhagel's "wooden horse tactic" while observing that "*A minority in Greece criticise him [Rehhagel] for his unadventurous tactics, but the majority laud him to the blue skies for leading them to their first European Championship finals since 1980.*"<sup>xxii</sup>

One day after the victory, French newspapers also referred to the past and Greek mythology in their glorification of the Greek team and their coach. The daily Liberation's (5/7/2004) front page coverage read: "*The Lightning of Zeus!*"; L' Equipe (5/7/2004) "*Unbelievable but Greek... the biggest surprise in the history of football!*"; Midi Libre (5/7/2004) reported "*Homeric Victory...The Odyssey ended with triumph*";

The German newspaper Bild (5/7/2004) depicted Rehhagel with a royal crown in the front page that read: "*Rehacles I, King of Europe*"; the Greek daily Chora/Χώρα (05/07/2004) reported: "*Greeks and Germans... two nations united in one heart...the Greek [heart].*"; The Greek daily To Vima/Το Βήμα (5/07/2004) identified the German coach of the national team with Zeus and Hercules, giving him a paternal and heroic role.

Rehhagel was quoted as saying: "*football has managed to unite the country, something politics wasn't able to do,*" in an article by Tasos Kokkinidis in the Greek Reporter two days after Greece's football triumph. In the article titled *July 4, 2004: When Greece Stunned the World to Win Euro 2004* (The Greek Reporter, 7/4/2004), the journalist points out: "*That most unlikely football win against the highest of all odds was a triumph of the modern Greek spirit.*"<sup>xxiii</sup>

Inspired by such publications, Greeks around the world were *experiencing the myth*, reviving the myth of Greek continuity! They were experiencing a national euphoria, seizing the opportunity to identify themselves as a unique and elite nation. Research shows that such triumphs are associated with the regeneration and revitalization of a nation (Dauncy and Hare, 2000). During the Euro 2004, German stereotypes such “*discipline, efficiency, reliability, self-confidence and hard work*” were promoted and praised in the media (O’Donnell 1994) internationally and in Greece, along with the German character of Rehhagel and his football strategy (See Greek daily To Vima, 4/7/2004).

The international sport media usually associates German football with discipline, efficiency, effort, excellent organization and hard work, and less with virtuosity, creativity and esprit (Parr, 2015). According to the political press, coach Otto Rehhagel had bridged German stereotypes such as rationalism, systematic work and strict organization with Greek stereotypes such as emotion, fighting spirit and courage in the face of challenges that go beyond possibilities. His coaching tactics proved to be a complete success despite the criticism regarding his defensive style of play during the game (To Vima, 4/7/2004).

Rehhagel created a football style<sup>xxiv</sup> which left room for a semantic connection between the football achievement and classical antiquity, thus reviving the myth of Greek continuity. The German coach focused on team building and not on the individual.<sup>xxv</sup> It is important to add here that the Greek football team was ‘*poor*’, in other words, the team did not have the necessary funds or financial resources to acquire internationally acknowledged football stars. All the players were Greek and without any pan-European or worldwide fan base. Consequently, it was a pure national victory.

The New York Times (5/7/2004), the day after the triumph, wrote: “*The most unexpected victory in history...and many of the supposed superiors on the football field can take a lesson in organization and team spirit.*” Team spirit is rewarded here, as is the forgotten code of national behavior found in classical antiquity. At this point, we would like to deliberately and selectively refer to the special *national charisma* incarnated by the Greek national football team in 2004. This *national charisma* is characteristically described in the 5th century BC by Herodotus in the dialogue between Xerxes, king of the Persians and Dimaratos, the deposed king of Sparta, on the eve of the famous battle of Thermopylae (Gruen 2020).

Xerxes tells Dimaratos that he will exterminate the Greek troops because he has a large and select army. The fact that Greece is a *poor country*, says Dimaratos, forces its inhabitants to aim to become great, and to acquire *Virtue*, mainly in two ways. These two ways, which in this narrative are perceived as characteristics of Hellenism/Greekness are: (a) intelligence, inventiveness, ingenuity/wisdom and (b) the democratic values, rules, and laws which facilitate their excellent social cohesion and organization. Greek supremacy in this narrative arises from their social organization and not from racial characteristics.

It is important to mention here that modern Greece was never acknowledged for her organization and Rehhagel corrected this failure in the case of the national football team as confirmed in the media narratives. His team played with ingenuity (wisdom),

excellent cohesion and organization, elements which are regarded as national characteristics of the Greeks. The football players were symbolically transformed into a *bridge* which connected the past (classical antiquity) to the present.

To reiterate the slogan that prevailed in Greek society after the football triumph, in order for the Greeks to organize and achieve high goals, "*they need their German...*"<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **5. King Otto dethroned: Rehhagel's return as political mediator and the *undesirable other***

In March 2013, in an effort to restore Berlin's image in Greek society, Otto Rehhagel accepted Chancellor Angela Merkel's proposal to visit Athens as part of the official delegation under German Deputy Labor Minister H. J. Fuchtel. As regards his new role as informal political mediator, the German daily *Bild* described Otto Rehhagel, the new "*King Otto*",<sup>xxvii</sup> as "*the best mediator*" and quoted him saying: "*I will gladly go to encourage my Greek friends*" (*Bild*, 26/3/2013).

In his interview in the Greek daily *Skai* (26/3/2013),<sup>xxviii</sup> Rehhagel commented, in a symbolic way, that if Greek society united, as it had in 2004, it would soon overcome the crisis! He also emphasized that the Greeks need to place their trust in Germany's recovery plan for the Greek economy, as they had placed their trust in his coaching tactics in 2004 which resulted in Greece's victory at EURO 2004. Here are some of the reactions that followed:

*"The decision to send Rehhagel to Athens for some positive publicity is just one bad decision in the plethora of misguided choices that Berlin has taken since this crisis began"*, is the analysis in the Greek digital newspaper ekathimerini-com (14/3/2013) titled *From austerity to Ottocracy: Rehhagel's return*.<sup>xxix</sup>

We would like to remind our reader here that during this period many Greeks held Chancellor Angela Merkel responsible for the tough austerity measures that were implemented by the Greek government: "*To think that his appearance in the midst of Greece's worst economic crisis since the Second World War – with parts of the country experiencing symptoms of a humanitarian crisis and extremism on the rise – will somehow smooth things over is ridiculous ... This is beyond the powers of one man, regardless of how successful or respected he is. As skepticism about Berlin's motives and policy choices grows around Europe, there can be little hope of overcoming the negativity in Athens with publicity stunts*" (ekathimerini-com, 14/3/2013).<sup>xxx</sup>

An article in *Neo Kosmos* (2/4/2013), the Greek-Australian paper published in Greek and in English also refers to Rehhagel's new role as "goodwill ambassador": "*Berlin has enlisted the help of Otto Rehhagel, a much-loved football coach among the Greeks, to make Germany popular again in crisis-hit Greece ... Rehhagel, who led Greece to victory at the Euro 2004, is holding talks in Athens as a goodwill ambassador.*" Speaking to reporters in Athens, Otto Rehhagel stressed that "*Greece and Germany were connected by friendship and a common culture. Whatever happens, Greeks will remain our friends. We have to help countries that are down on their luck*" (*Neo Kosmos*, 2/4/2013).<sup>xxxi</sup>

But in his new role as political mediator in 2013— as opposed to his role of the successful coach glorified and exalted as Zeus, Hercules and King Otto in 2004 – Rehhagel awakened other national memories and was accused of being *the other*, a *bum*, an *idiot*, and *the enemy of Hellenism/Greekness*.<sup>xxxii</sup> He had unintentionally revived historical memories regarding another aspect of Greekness which was related to the German occupation, invasion, oppression and sufferings, namely memories from the heroic resistance of the Greek people against Nazism during the Second World War.

Rehhagel was transformed into the *undesirable other* during the economic/financial crisis in 2013 (which started in Greece in 2009), and those who supported his call and recommendations were identified as those who had collaborated with the Nazis during the German occupation. Populist political party leaders, mainly from the extreme left and the extreme right, exploited this incident for their political agendas. In other words, Rehhagel's 2013 reference to the 2004 football success evoked different memories with other narratives and experiences.

International discourse confirms that a nation emerges through dialogue with *others*, and as something more than a theoretical (imaginary) community. This among other things means that the way we sense *others* emerges as a semantic derivative of the elements we use to form the '*we*'. It emerges as a semantic derivative of the way we occasionally construct the meaning of '*we*', to wit our nation, our national identity, our Greekness. Specifically, the *nationally different other* appears as a volatile entity.

For example, newspapers and social media narratives were full of negative stereotypes concerning Germans. Several popular Greek dailies revived images of the Second World War, with narratives advocating tighter national sovereignty and rhetoric determined to revitalize a rigid nationalistic perspective on Greek national identity. The Sunday issue of the Greek daily *Eleftherotipia* argued that "*Rehhagel's arrival divided the Greek world*" and accused him of treating Greece as a "*third world country...so the new Otto will have to be dethroned*" (Kiriakatiki *Eleftherotipia*/Κυριακάτικη *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 31/3/2013).

Such news stories also evoked historical memories which symbolically referred to the social and political problems associated with the formation of the modern Greek nation-state in the nineteenth century, re-awakening memories that had been dormant in the subconscious of the modern Greek.

The modern Greek nation-state was established through a convergence of colonial and national methods. Specifically, a form of colonialism in the spirit of the Bavarians and other Western Europeans who sought to control the political structures and state institutions of the newly formed nation-state (Hamilakis 2007: 123, 292). Rehhagel's intervention was linked to this historical memory and perceived as a planned attempt by Germany to control the political structures and institutions of Greece.

In essence, it was interpreted as a form of neocolonialism or as "crypto-colonization" as Herzfeld (2002) defines it. In this perspective, Rehhagel recommendation regarding the modernization of state institutions as a precondition for overcoming the economic crisis was viewed with suspicion and skepticism.

Mistrust towards Europe, towards concrete European nation-states has its origins in complex interpretations of historical events,<sup>xxxiii</sup> which could conversely play a decisive role in the formation of Greekness. This skepticism or suspicion is evident when we examine how the modern Greek nation-state emerged in the nineteenth century, after the Greek revolution, the country's emancipation from the Ottoman yoke, followed by *neo-Hellenism* (revival of an idealized ancient Greek past),<sup>xxxiv</sup> *modernization* (formation of state institutions based on Western standards) and *experiential tradition*.<sup>xxxv</sup> These processes emerged simultaneously and intertwined with each other in the construction of the Greek nation-state and identity. However, the idealized ancient Greek past and the reality of everyday life (*experiential tradition*) did not always coincide but evoked conflicting contradictory national narratives and identities.

In the modern world, in Western culture, Greece's modernity was never separated or understood independently from classical antiquity. We need also point out that the idealization of classical antiquity alienated modern Greece from its historical and social reality. *Neo-Hellenism*—the revival of the ancient past— was a symbolic tool that facilitated inclusion, access or association with modern Europe. Europeans perceived Greek antiquity as their spiritual ancestor and the cradle of European culture (Bernal, 1995). Modern Greece, on the other hand, was considered *a poor relative* of the majestic ancient culture, a perception which was transformed with Greece's victory at the Euro 2004. In other words, there was a direct semantic reconnection to the ancient Greek past. The *experiential present* emerges as a natural consequence of a historical continuity.

Symbolically, Greece's 2004 Euro victory created a sense of liberation from the *poor relative identity*. The 2004 victory associated neo-Greeks (modern Greeks) directly with classical antiquity thus identifying them as superior Europeans. It is important to reiterate that, in Greece, the issue of institutional reconstruction based on European-Western standards was always connected to colonialism. Rehhagel, in his new role of political mediator, had revived these *bad memories*.

There was no football event or victory in 2013, hence the revival-memory-reminder of the 2004 Euro victory was used for political purposes. In other words, during the economic crisis in 2013, Rehhagel's recommendation-intervention was not appreciated. It was not evaluated in the context of sport communication or as a football triumph. It was perceived and interpreted in a political-ideological context or as serving political agendas that would be detrimental for Greece.

## 6. Concluding remarks: Using the past as a runway to takeoff into the future

The triumphant journey of the Greek football team during the European championship in Portugal in the summer of 2004 was accompanied by dithyrambic stories. The portrayal of the glorious ancient Greek past in the headlines and front pages of the Greek and international press, created an ephemeral national euphoria and a state of Hellenic cultural intoxication. This unexpected-*mythical* victory reawakened historical memory and Greek mythology, creating an energy that unified Greeks around the world. The Greek team's triumph emerged as a national achievement that activated the imagination,

reviving *uninterrupted Greek continuity* (Greekness). We need reiterate here that the football success revealed an *endless-timeless Greek continuity* as regards historical and social dimensions.

The Euro 2004 victory was not used to create a new myth. It did not mobilize, inspire or lead Greek society to reflection<sup>xxxvi</sup> on matters of national, political, traditional, moral or aesthetic importance. It did not push Greek society to reinvent or re-imagine itself and launch new or different perspectives for the future. For example, although sport successes/victories produce and reproduce social capital, including gender equality (Kamberidou, 2019; Kamberidou & Patsantaras, 2007), the Euro 2004 triumph did not accomplish this. The football institutions in Greece proved to be inferior to the circumstances regarding the utilization of this valuable social capital. They did not use or take advantage of this significant opportunity. It seems the effects, the results of an athletic success are short-lived and usually disappear after a few days (Gassmann et al., 2020). The 2004 triumph resulted in a short-lived euphoria without any macro-sociological influences. In addition, Rehhagel's second visit to Athens in 2013 revealed another aspect and dimension of Greekness, one that is semantically connected to other historical memories inherent in our present, along with its effects.

In the context of the 2004 football triumph, the newspaper headlines showed one version of Greekness which was rooted in ancient ties and bonds, and specifically that of an *imaginary genetic continuity*. Moreover, the media marketing of the 2004 football triumph disproved and refuted certain nineteenth-century western European perspectives and stereotypes that questioned the cultural linkage of the modern Greeks to antiquity. On the other hand, another version of Greekness, another narrative appeared in 2013, during the economic crisis. This version was based on political and economic processes and not on a sport victory or sport communication. These two versions of Greekness led to different expressions, and different nationalist narratives.

This study clearly showed that the type of Greekness we *invent* predetermines our relations with *others* on a European level and on a global level, in addition to our relations on a national level. Invention, in this perspective, refers to the process of construction in reference to the selected past. Consequently, the type of Greekness we invent varies according to time and events and may depend on a range of historical, political, social and cultural variables.

Today, if we go beyond the usual technocratic discourse, we could argue that Greece's failure to overcome the economic crisis is literally located in the way we collectively understand our '*we*', our national identity, our Greekness. In this spirit, following Anthony Smith's (1988: 21) way of thinking, the Greek nation is not "*a product of modernity whose structures emerge through processes of modernization.*" According to this approach, the Greek nation state could be a derivative of Modernity, although its structures did not arise through the modernization processes. This understanding is principally related to our social imaginary (sociological imagination) which is multidimensionally contradictory, as shown by the circumstances, events, inventions and connections regarding our collective experiences with history. It is related to our



connection with history in addition to our collective experiences with the current socio-political-economic realities: facts and events.

In idealizing the historical past, we are moving into the future using ‘reverse gear’, to wit, we are using the past as a runway to takeoff into the future. In other words, we should not use our ancient Greek references and heritage to restrict, limit or confine ourselves to an idealized version of the past. This is where the problem lies. We have to use these references to move forward during this critical period for our collective and national continuity. As Cornelius Castoriadis points out, the social imaginary is not only the object of History, but it is the one that writes History.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> The ancient past was revived in the form of neo-Hellenism, which adopted the principles and ideals of classical Greek civilization, and then became the dominant ideology in the construction of modern Greek society. Neo-Hellenism refers to the admiration and adoption of the civilization and culture of ancient Greece. (See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. [http://www.fact-index.com/h/he/hellenic\\_greece.html](http://www.fact-index.com/h/he/hellenic_greece.html)).

<sup>ii</sup> It is important to emphasize here that women are not a social group—they are not ‘one single entity’—but make up over half of the global population (Kamberidou, 2019). Concerning hegemonic masculinity, see discussion in: Georgiou, Patsantaras, Kamberidou (2018). Homophobia predictors – A case study in Greece: heterosexual physical education student attitudes towards male and female homosexuality. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport (JPES)*, 18(2), 1209-1216. DOI:10.7752/jpes.2018.s2180.

<sup>iii</sup> See the *King Otto Trailer (2021) Greece Winning The 2004 Euros*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlcimgAJuXs>

<sup>iv</sup> See article in Greek Reporter by Patricia Claus (June 3, 2021) "[King Otto": Film on Greece's 2004 Football Triumph Hits Screens \(greekreporter.com\)](https://greekreporter.com/2021/06/03/king-otto-film-on-greece-2004-football-triumph-hits-screens/).

<sup>v</sup> Undeniably, coaching tactics determine the outcomes of a significant football competitions and matches (Wagg 2007).

<sup>vi</sup> See: The Guardian (4/6/2004). "Greece: Otto Rehhagel", Euro 2004 [Greece: Otto Rehhagel | Euro 2004 | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2004/jun/04/greece.otto.rehhagel) Mon 7 Jun 2004 23.35 BST.

<sup>vii</sup>The Minister-President of Nordrhein-Westfalen (from 2002-2005), P. Steinbrück said: “Es gibt kaum jemanden, der in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten so viel für das Ansehen Deutschlands in Griechenland und für die griechisch-deutsche Freundschaft getan hat, wie Otto Rehhagel”, (Athener Zeitung, 13 May 2005).

<sup>viii</sup> Victories are not always necessary for expressive testimonies of national identification. Participating in international championships in football is sufficient to trigger demonstrations of national pride (Tuck, 2003).

<sup>ix</sup> Angela Merkel served as the Chancellor of Germany from 2005 to 2021.

<sup>x</sup> The term *Habitus*, first used by Elias in 1939, refers to the internalized and deeply subconscious memories, thoughts, predispositions, and perceptions that form a second nature.

<sup>xi</sup> As regards the reconstructive dimensions of memory, see Mead 1932, Olick & Daniel 1997.

<sup>xii</sup> See as an example, [in.gr](https://www.in.gr/2004/09/05/greece/ektetamena-epeisodia-se-oli-ti-xwra-meta-ti-liksi-toy-agwna-albanias-elladas/), 5/9/2004: article in Greek titled “Widespread incidents across the country after the football match between Albania-Greece ended”, Sept. 5 2004 (updated 22:45). It reports on clashes with Albanians in Athens after the football match between Albania-Greece. <https://www.in.gr/2004/09/05/greece/ektetamena-epeisodia-se-oli-ti-xwra-meta-ti-liksi-toy-agwna-albanias-elladas/> (accessed 4/8/2022).

<sup>xiii</sup> Here, the term invent/invention refers to processes of construction in reference to a selected past. Discussions on invented traditions are highly relevant in the discourse on national symbols, national histories and national identity (Hobsbawm 1983: 6).

<sup>xiv</sup> In terms of national prestige great sporting achievements exert micro- and macro-social influences (Lechner 2007, Patsantaras 2015) and this influence varies when taking into consideration diverse social groups that differ based on gender, educational level, social class, etc. (Elling et al. 2014, Kamberidou 2019). As regards the gender dimension see: Kamberidou 2019, Kamberidou, Bonias & Patsantaras 2019, Kefi-Chatzichamperi, Kamberidou, & Patsantaras 2021.

<sup>xv</sup> However, a systematic analysis of the meanings to which these symbols refer would show different results, including competing and conflicting definitions or versions of Greekness (Patsantaras, 2015b).

<sup>xvi</sup> For example, see Cox, R., Hills, L., & Kennedy, E. (2015).

<sup>xvii</sup> See article in: New York Times (5/7/2004): *SOCCER; The Gods Smile on Greece, Europe's Soccer Champion* <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/05/sports/soccer-the-gods-smile-on-greece-europe-s-soccer-champion.html> (accessed 7/8/2022).

<sup>xviii</sup> See article in: New York Times (4/7/2004). *Greece Wins European Championship*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/04/sports/soccer/greece-wins-european-championship.html> (accessed 7/8/2022).

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xx</sup> See: Soccer: *One to make the gods smile (July 6, 2004)*: <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/06/sports/IHT-soccer-one-to-make-the-gods-smile.html> (accessed 7/8/2022).

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxii</sup> The Guardian (7/6/2004). "Greece: Otto Rehhagel", Euro 2004 [Greece: Otto Rehhagel | Euro 2004 | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2004/jun/06/greece.otto.rehhagel) Mon 7 Jun 2004 23.35 BST (accessed 7/8/2022).

<sup>xxiii</sup> The Greek Reporter (4/7/2004). "July 4, 2004: When Greece Stunned the World to Win Euro 2004", by Tasos Kokkinidis <https://greekreporter.com/2022/07/04/greece-euro-2004-champion/#:~:text=%E2%80%9C%5BFootball%20has%5D%20managed%20to,the%20time%20will%20never%20forget> (accessed 6/8/ 2022).



<sup>xxiv</sup> The connection between the style of play and national identity is a common theme that we encounter in such sporting events. The style of play reflects organizational, social and moral characteristics that are found in the historical depth of a nation (O'Donnell 1994, Maguire & Poulton 1999, Lechner 2007, Patsantaras 2015b). The style is the specific form of self-presentation, a given (national) community recognizes it as its own and, therefore, it is unique. The final achievements of the Greek team seemed to be more important than the demonstration and promise of the particular offensive playing style. The final result triggered feelings of pride in most people, even though many respondents criticized the team's defensive style.

<sup>xxv</sup> Rehhagel's coaching is perceived as community (Gemeinschaft) as promoted in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany. He appears as a classic German football coach who places emphasis on the team and not on the individual. More analytically see Patsantaras 1994, 2015, 2015b.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Specifically, the slogan was: "*Greeks need their German to achieve the impossible*" (in the Greek daily, To Vima-To Βήμα, 16/3/2013).

<sup>xxvii</sup> As regards the royal title, we need inform our readers that King Otto was the first king of Greece. Specifically, in 1828 Greece was under the leadership of Ioannis Kapodistrias, but after his assassination in 1831 the country experienced a civil war. At this stage, the *Great Powers* (Great Britain, France, and Russia) intervened and decided to make Greece a kingdom. At the London Conference of 1832, they offered the Greek throne to the 17-year-old Bavarian Prince *Otto of Wittelsbach of Bavaria*, who became the first king of Greece. King Otto was deposed from the royal office in 1862. As regards the German coach Otto Rehhagel, he was 'ordained' /called King Otto II, since he contributed to the Greek nation's global recognition and helped Greece find the place she deserves in the contemporary world.

<sup>xxviii</sup> [www.skai.gr](http://www.skai.gr) 26/3/2013 (accessed Sept. 7, 2016).

<sup>xxix</sup> ekathimerini-com (14/3/2013). *From austerity to Ottocracy: Rehhagel's return*, by Nick Malkoutzis: <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/149285/from-austerity-to-ottocracy-rehhagels-return/> 14.03.2013 • 10:08.

<sup>xxx</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Neo Kosmos (2/4/2013). [Germany enlists Otto Rehhagel in Greece 'charm offensive'](http://neoskopos.com/en/2013/04/02/sport/germany-enlists-otto-rehhagel-in-greece-charm-offensive/). Neo Kosmos, the Hellenic Perspective since 1957, 2 April 2013 10:43am <https://neoskopos.com/en/2013/04/02/sport/germany-enlists-otto-rehhagel-in-greece-charm-offensive/>

<sup>xxxii</sup> See Real FM, 21:48, 27/3/2013. Evidently, the media that composed and constructed the *myth* is also the one to deconstruct it, in accordance with social time and space. In other words, the power of the media to construct and reconstruct social reality is undeniable.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> See details in Gourgouris, 1996; Hamilakis, 2007.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> As cited in the beginning of the article, the ancient past was revived in the form of neo-Hellenism, which adopted the principles and ideals of classical Greek civilization, and then became the dominant ideology in the construction of modern Greek society. Here, *neo-Hellenism* refers to the admiration and adoption of the civilization and culture of ancient Greece. In this perspective it was history, classical Greek antiquity and its elements (or the byzantine empire and its elements) that defined even the imagined borders of the newly emerging Greek nation-state which included "any land associated with Greek history or the Greek race" (Leontis, 1990: 43).

<sup>xxxv</sup> See details concerning these processes in Gourgouris (1996) and in Hamilakis (2007).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> See concept of reflection in line with the system-theory perspective (Luhmann 1975: 199).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) was a Greek philosopher, the author of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, and co-founder of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group. His works on social institutions and autonomy have influenced the academic community and many social groups.