PREFACE

THE WEST PUZZLED me from an early age. I grew up in a village in Crete. I was seven when Turkey invaded Cyprus, in July 1974. Cyprus was an independent state. Crete, the other large-ish island in the eastern Mediterranean, was part of Greece. After the invasion, Greece went on a war footing and my father was mobilised. War between Greece and Turkey in relation to Cyprus seemed more than likely. Meanwhile, democracy was being restored in Greece after seven years of rule by vulgar military clowns. I needed to understand it all. There were no books whatsoever in our house. And my whole family were impeccably innocent of any educational influences. What had just happened made me both anxious and curious. I began to watch the news on television and to read serious newspapers. As other children noticed that I was hopeless at football but more and more immersed in politics, they nicknamed me 'the politician' (ο πολιτικός). As a result of that interest in politics I noticed that the man who had been flown back from exile in Paris late one night (in Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidential aeroplane), to take over as provisional prime minister, Constantinos Caramanlis, kept declaring in his speeches that 'we belong to the West'. I began to wonder what that meant—and why on earth it was so important. For it was contested by opposition politicians, who argued that 'the West' was responsible for what had happened in Cyprus.

As I grew older, meanwhile, I acquired new nicknames. One of them was 'Mustafa'—because of my keenness to dance to a song of that name (known to me in at least three versions). I was told that I was good at belly-dancing and I most certainly enjoyed dancing to Middle Eastern music. Did that make me 'Eastern'? But then, I was passionately in agreement with the aforementioned prime minister when he tried, and managed, in 1981, to make Greece the tenth member of the EEC, which was a clearly 'Western' group of countries, from Ireland to West Germany and Italy. Surely that meant that Greece was 'Western', as a member of both NATO (which it had joined in 1952) and the European Community of Western European democracies?

But was it that simple? There were other things, besides the political alignment of the country in Cold-War Europe. My paternal grandfather had been born before Crete joined Greece in 1913 (when the island was autonomous but still under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire). He would occasionally refer to himself as Roman ('Romios'). That was the way Greeks in the Ottoman Empire (which in turn called them 'Rum') self-identified. They saw themselves as the descendants of the conquered Greek-speaking, Orthodox Christian, Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital in Constantinople, the New Rome. It was the 'Eastern' Roman Empire, and the Church in which I was baptised was the 'Eastern' Greek Orthodox Church. Its doctrine was obviously Christian and to that extent very close to that of churches further west, but its chants and music sound unmistakeably 'Eastern'. So too does the Cretan folk music I grew up with.

Meanwhile, I was taught at school—a lot—about ancient Greek history, philosophy, literature and art, Athenian democratic politics and how they affected Europe and the West. Growing up in Crete, I was also taught, of course, about the 'Minoan' civilisation that predated the Greeks. And according to ancient Greek mythology, it was to Crete that Zeus took Europa—the Europa after whom a continent was named. But it would be much later that I would realise, among other things, how important Minoan Crete would become for Afro-American and Asian thinkers and activists in the early twentieth century, as the crucial link mediating between Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek cultures. As a glance at the map can remind one, Crete lies at the intersection between three continents in the eastern Mediterranean.

To be Greek was to inhabit a complex mix of heritages. Later, as I studied at university, first in Athens and later at University College London, there came the historiography and political thought I was studying, enjoying and admiring. At some point John Stuart Mill and other major modern political thinkers entered my life and thoughts. They and their ways of thinking were 'Western'. Did I have to choose between being Western and being Eastern? Were these self-contained entities with different essences, or were they just words, sweeping generalisations, or at least changeable, flexible narratives? Could one have multiple identities, or did one have to choose? The matter was . . . well, existential. All these questions—and many others—are both raised and, I hope, answered in this book. I have asked a great number of highly sophisticated women and men who have reflected on related questions what they thought of these issues and dilemmas, and their answers are in the following pages.

This book may well challenge more or less everything the reader thought about the idea of the West. It will certainly surprise those who thought that 'it' always

existed, or at least existed 'from Plato to NATO'. But it will meanwhile challenge the assumptions of those who thought that it must have emerged after World War II with the onset of the Cold War. It will also surprise those with more specialist knowledge, who have read in the extant scholarly literature that the idea of the West emerged in the West in the 1890s or thereabouts. It will most certainly give second thoughts to those who assumed that the idea of the West emerged in juxtaposition to Asia, or Islam. It will also present a challenge to those who thought (and have been told routinely in the academic literature) that the idea of the West arose to cater to the needs of high imperialism. Such readers will certainly be intrigued to read of the extent to which the first explicit and thorough articulation of the idea of the West emerged as part of a staunchly anti-imperialist theory and political programme. Similar surprises await those who take for granted that the idea of the West inherently involves adherence to liberal democracy, rights, individualism and the like. The book will also take issue with the impressions of those who take for granted that the idea of the West had Anglo-America at its core and is simply an extension of the so-called Anglosphere. As T. S. Eliot put it, the West is 'a subject about which everyone thinks he has something to say'. And this book is likely not to conform to existing preconceptions about what constitutes it. It is not a history of the West, but rather a history of what many different people have understood 'the West' to be. That is, however, an important history.

The book endeavours to reconstruct the history of when, how, and why 'the West' emerged as a sociopolitical concept, to what uses it has been put in the two centuries since its emergence, how many different things it has meant, and what the implications and repercussions of each of the different meanings are. The task is daunting, for the meanings and uses have been many and diverse. But I can at least say with confidence that no work exists that remotely matches this one in terms of tracing the many different uses of the concept, connecting them to their respective historical contexts, and analysing the significant implications and consequences of each of them. If this book provokes others to come up with more meanings and uses, or with better analyses of their respective contexts of emergence, then it will have fulfilled its ambition of alerting readers to the inadequacy of our current understanding of a long, complex and certainly fascinating story.

I have made a deliberate decision to avoid 'academese', including extensive methodological discussions. They are very important, and I have played my own small part in inflicting them on hundreds of intelligent and patient MA students for the best part of the last two decades. But I think the reader would hardly wish this book to be any longer than it is already. And there are others who have written

on these methodological questions with much more authority and eloquence than I can ever aspire to. The reader will glean my methodological approaches through the result. Meanwhile, there is an important argument that many of the methodological writings stress about the importance of the uses of language in politics: words do matter; and re-descriptions and redefinitions of words to mean what the user (speaker, author) may wish them to mean can help people win arguments in debates, and followers in political and ideological battles. I fully subscribe to the validity of this argument, and this book will contribute a striking example of why and how words matter, and hence of why not letting others own or monopolise the meanings of words matters. Precisely for this reason, a good history is needed.

Author's Note on Quotations

For quoted passages, where reference is not given to a published translation in English, translations from French, German, Greek (ancient and modern) or Turkish are my own. Italic emphasis in quotations follows the original in cases where it is not indicated in an endnote as added.