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Greek History Textbooks after the Civil War Period. Ideology and Construction of National Identity.

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Textbooks are cultural artifacts; therefore for their production and classroom use a range of ideological, political issues as well as sets of values are raised. In turn these issues function at various levels of power, status and influence. Narratives and stories are chosen by nation states and embedded in textbooks in order to offer a core of cultural knowledge which future generations are expected to both assimilate and support.¹

What is more, school textbooks are crucial instruments for the process of constructing legitimated ideologies and beliefs and also for the reflection of history, knowledge and values which are considered important by powerful social groups. Although they are authored by individuals, textbooks convey broader cultural 'messages' and, in terms of their social function, have been said to bear similarities to government policy documents. It has also been claimed that the function of textbooks is to 'tell children what their elders want them to know' and to 'represent to each generation of students a sanctioned version of human knowledge and culture'.²

In the case of Greece, after the end of the Civil War (1949) and during the decades of 50's and 60's the school History textbooks served the state's aim to reinforce the dominant ideological triptych of nation-religion-family. The main purpose of the construction of this ideology was to conceal the structural contradictions of the post-civil-war society and to annihilate the modern European scientific thought in the cultural life of the country.

Greek Civil War (1946-1949)

A brief discussion of the Greek Civil War is necessary in order for one to understand the political situation in Greece at the time and give an explanation of the context surrounding the publication of a series of History textbooks for primary school just after the end of the warfare. The two rival groups were the Greek government army, which was supported by the U.K. and the U.S.A., and the Democratic Party of Greece, the military branch of the Greek Communist Party (KKE), backed by

Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia. A very simple interpretation of the Civil War would be the following: it was the result of a highly polarized struggle between leftists and rightists. Greek right-wingers and Western Allied governments saw the end of Greek Civil War as a victory in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Left-wingers countered that the Soviets never actively supported the Communist Party's efforts to seize power in Greece. Both sides, at differing junctures, had nevertheless looked to an external superpower for support.³

The Civil War left Greece in ruins, both financially and politically. Furthermore, it divided the Greek people for the ensuing decades, initiating hatred and abhorrence. The polarization and instability in politics continued and finally led to a military regime imposed the coup d'état of 1967.

Greek Educational System after the End of the Civil War

The result of the Civil War had a great impact on the educational system and the history textbooks' ideology and narrative. The main purpose of the conservative parties that were in power was the formation of national identity. This objective was pursued through the reinforcement of the dominant ideological triptych *nation-religion-family*. School textbooks, produced by the State, were one of the means used towards that end. Textbooks and especially the ones of history were used for propaganda and consolidation of the State's dogma.

In order to thoroughly observe the educational system after the end of the Civil War, we should first note some of its basic elements: In 1950-just one year after the end of the Civil War- twenty-three books are approved after a national competition to be used for teaching History of the 6th grade in Primary schools. A few years later, in 1956, thirteen books more were added to the approved list. All these books were

being republished and used in schools until 1967, the year that dictatorship was imposed onto the country. According to the regulations of the textbooks' approval: "one of the main purposes of the book is to reinforce students' the national morale".⁴

Textbooks after the End of the Civil War

The events of the Civil War were immediately included and narrated in History textbooks, which were published only a few months after its end. This uncommon practice probably reflects the 'need' at that time, to separate the 'good' from the 'bad' ones, to reinforce the new political system and, to teach which side was 'right' and which was 'wrong'. This effort of imposing the 'right' story was also evident that period of time that writers were 'forced' to include facts that could not be justified or evaluated properly.

The 'good' and the 'bad' sides of the story referred to the opposing parties of the war that has just ended. In this post-war context the 'good' Greek citizen had to be obedient and utterly committed to the ideological and political orientation of the state and had to receive an ethnocentric education based on the principles of Nation and Christianity. Their main duty was to prove their dedication to the country, to fight for its independence from external and internal enemies and to be a 'good Christian' as well. The extract below describes these characteristics:

But our national forces-army and people-despite their fatigue, did not relent. They once again opposed the new foreign imposed insidious enemy with a 'NO' and they fought with the same determination that they had fought before against the Germans, the Italians and the Bulgarians and they won. Within a month the communist forces submitted their weapons and called for negotiations. The agreement of Varkiza followed giving those who strayed the

opportunity to return to the sphere of the National Homeland, after having recognized and denounced the movement of the ethnocide communism.⁵

And in another example:

Throughout their long history, Greeks always stood united around the grand idea of freedom they fought for it and for other noble ideals too. Greeks believe in God and love their Country. They love freedom and respect family. These are the principles and foundations of our Country; these are the ideals of our race. Greeks fought for these in the past and will always fight for these in the future.⁶

On the other hand, the ‘bad’ Greeks were all those who supported the leftists during the Civil War. An example of the ‘bad’ ones representation in History textbooks is the following: “The Slavs in cooperation with a few wicked and perverse Greeks conspired against Greek independence and caused new endless rivers of blood, to flow starting five years ago until recently”.⁷

While Greece fought the ultimate battle, a bitter snake was being born within its nest. Slavic communism. Agents of eternal enemies of our race sowed the seeds of disintegration of National Unity. The souls tired from their commitment to the great cause of liberation and allowed these seeds to root in some of the weak. In the end this enemy became terrible, dangerous. It deceived the partisan spirit of the Nation and enslaved the Greek resistance to its own purposes.⁸

The rivalry between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ patriots is described by textbooks too:

Unfortunately two years after the liberation (1946), some *bad Greeks* began disrupting the homeland again. They wanted to rule Greece through violence and to implement new social systems that have no relation to our beautiful homeland. In order to achieve their purpose they took up arms and went to the mountains. They created guerilla groups and began to fight Greece. One cannot describe the disasters they wreaked once again in our country. But Greeks, *good patriots*, did not allow them to ruin their homeland. They did away with their work tools and grabbed up arms again. They strengthened our army and with the support of our allies threw themselves bravely into battle to punish them as they deserved.⁹

This war, as mentioned in the beginning, was not fought only between the Greek people. The international ‘powers’ behind each group had their own agenda¹⁰. That created a classification of these powers in ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. According to who they supported, they were classified as either ‘friends’ or ‘enemies’. According to the dominant narrative at the time the ‘friends’ of Greek nation were: the Queen and King of Greece, the English Forces and the United States of America. These allies were supposed to save Greece from the ‘danger’ of communism. This however allowed them to interfere with Greece’s ‘internal affairs. This is demonstrated by the following textbook examples:

Greece is in danger. The morale of the people is rigid. Queen Frederica of the Greeks travelled throughout Greece, boosting people’s morale and tirelessly encouraging the Greeks. Sometimes in hospitals near the injured as loving mother, sometimes at Konitsa, where the national forces crushed the guerilla, immediately after the battle near the frightened guards (akrites), sometimes

near the heroes that still fight, gives courage, relieves those in pain, offers consolation to those in misfortune, boosts the hope and scatters her glory.¹¹

The enemy however was spread throughout the whole country. A corner of Athens was the official home of the nation. And it won. And it saved the Greek homeland. English allies proved to be valuable reinforcements in this new struggle. Communism, tattered sought negotiation. The Varkiza agreement gave them the right and the opportunity to come to their senses. The Nation displayed all its bravery.¹²

Similar ideas are also expressed in the following extract: “In those crucial moments, the Greek nation decided to stand simply with England’s assistance. But because Greece had offered so many sacrifices in the struggle of the Allies, the U.S. President Truman decided to support the struggle of Greece and to protect its integrity.”¹³

The ‘enemies’ of the Greek Nation are also represented in History textbooks of that period. They are identified as our ‘Northern neighbours’ and in general all the ‘Iron Curtain Countries’. Greece had to fight against them in order to avoid the ideological and political dominance of the communists. All the above are clearly illustrated in the following examples: “But our Greek army, by closely following them, managed after four years of hard struggles to extinguish and expel them out the country beyond our borders. Therefore, our country, thanks to the bravery of the Greek army, after four years of battles, was saved from Slavic danger”.¹⁴ Or “The guerrillas were Greeks who had been armed and sent against our country by our northern neighbours, whose postwar plan was to extract the Greek territories of Macedonia”.¹⁵ And:

And this new war lasted for almost 4 years. It was crueler and more savage causing new endless rivers of blood and resulted in so many disasters in the

country that had never happened before during its short historical life. For the Greek race the danger was very grave, for if our northern neighbours' plans succeeded, it would cause its disappearance off the face of earth.¹⁶

The language used to describe the actions of the leftists is usually negative and polarized. This could cause feelings of hatred and rivalry among school students instead of feelings of reconciliation and understanding, as it would be more appropriate and advisable after a period of a Civil War.¹⁷

This kind of use of language in textbooks of that period might be the origin of a continuous opposition that still exists in Greek political and social life.¹⁸ One may see such examples in the further examination of 'crimes against the nation':

The communists were defeated and expelled from the sacred soil of our homeland. As they left, they committed other crimes too. They dragged thousands of innocent civilians, especially from Northern Greece, taking them as hostages to Albania, Bulgaria, Romania etc. Included among them were thousands of Greek children that were seized from their parents' arms and kept restrained in communist countries. Our country once again emerged victorious but destroyed.¹⁹

"Looting, arsons, murders, forcible conscriptions, taking children away by force and other serious crimes were committed during this period of time in the country. Because, the revolt wanted by all means to impose onto the country the illiberal communist regime".²⁰

"All the other forces of the national army simultaneously planned a general attack and the rebels were overthrown. Some of them surrendered to national forces and others

fled to neighbouring communist countries. The national sky is bright again. Greeks sing hymns to the Virgin Mary attributing the victory to Her. People breathe again”.²¹

In other textbooks we read:

They (the guerrilla) even reached the point to crucify priests on trees. But the worst was a new gathering up of children. 28.000 young Greek children were kidnapped and transferred to Slavic countries. Many villagers in order to save their children and themselves from the savage rebels abandoned their villages and moved to cities, which were safe.²²

As if that was not enough, with brutal kidnappings they gathered the Greek children, especially from the region of Western Macedonia, and sent them to Iron Curtain countries (Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Hungary). They tried to make them Slavs and part of the rebel’s army. Soon it became clear that almost 26.000 Greek children were taken away by force. Unfortunately most of them are still restrained, even though there are many protests against this practice.²³

The central feature of every textbook that includes a narration concerning the Greek Civil War, is the idea of victory. The new political situation in Greece was formed by the result of this war; therefore the ‘triumph’ should be emphasized, promoted and described in the books in the best possible way. In the textbooks that do not include descriptions of the Civil War, we find a very common but ideologically important stereotype: Greece is likened to the mythical phoenix bird that is reborn from its ashes. Needless to say that, only a few years later, this image became the emblem of the military regime imposed by the coup d’ état of 1967. Such examples are to be found in the following extracts: “The struggle of our national army for freedom,

independence and integrity of our country ended in complete and glorious victory. Yet again Greece fought successfully for the ideals of Freedom and Democracy, that she gave birth to and first implemented".²⁴

Or by reading the ideas expressed in the overviews written at the end of each History textbook: "However, its periods of decline were followed by periods of renaissance and recreation and the Greek Nation was reborn like the mythological phoenix from its ashes".²⁵ "Our Nation like the Phoenix is reborn again from its ashes. Without human sacrifices, there are no great deeds. Rivers of pure Greek blood watered every inch of our territories".²⁶

Conclusions

"The words 'Greek' and 'Greece' are bright ideas. They mean progress and endless source of culture. Our fathers made Greece respectable to friends and terrifying to enemies. The young with their care, shall fulfill the ideals of our God sent race".²⁷ These words summarize the kind of ideas conveyed by history textbooks in order to form young children's beliefs and identity. There was no place for doubts or other beliefs.

All these ethnocentric principles conveyed by the textbooks concerning obedience to the nation, faith in religion and fear of any political change seem to have influenced deeply the last generations in Greece. Instability, lack of unity and progress, recriminations still characterize the political life in Greece by opening way to extremist groups to manipulate the masses and polarize the future.

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- ³ C. M. Woodhouse, *The struggle for Greece 1941-1949* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002).
- ⁴ N.1471/50
- ⁵ D. Doukas, *Istoria Neas Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Atlantis, 1956), 134-5.
- ⁶ N. Papaspyrou, *Istoria tis Neas Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Dim. N. Tzaka-Stef. Delagrammatika Ekdotikos Oikos: 1950), 135.
- ⁷ Ch. Dimitrakopoulou, *Oi apeleftherotikoi agones tou ethnous* [The liberation struggles of the nation] (Athens: Alikiotis, 1950), 144.
- ⁸ G. P. Kournoutou –I. G. Driva, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Vivliopoleion of “Estia”, 1950), 107-8.
- ⁹ A. Patsi, *Elliniki Istoria Neon Chronon* [Greek History of Modern times] (Athens: “New School”, 1950), 129.
- ¹⁰ G. Margaritis, *Istoria tou Ellinikou Emphiliou Polemou 1946-1949* [History of Greek Civil War 1946-1949] (Athens: Vivliorama, 2001).
- ¹¹ N. Katsikas and others, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: “Ferraios”, 1950), 130-1.
- ¹² G. P. Kournoutou –I. G. Driva, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Vivliopoleion of “Estia”, 1950), 107-8.
- ¹³ P. Papadopoulos- V. Douklia, *Istoria tis Neas Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: “Promitheyitiki, 1956), 142.

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- ¹⁴ N, Antipati- El. Alexiou- D. Katsadima, *Istoria tis Neoteris Elladas* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Kentavros, 1956), 146.
- ¹⁵ A. Kyriazopoulos- N. Diamantopoulos, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Patra: I&X. Kagiafa, 1956), 158.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ¹⁷ G. Salomon-B. Nevo, *Peace Education: The concept, principles and practices around the world* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2002).
- ¹⁸ Greece seems to be still divided in rightists and leftists who fight for power and control not only of politics but also of social life. The economical crisis intensified this lack of disunity.
- ¹⁹ M. Mpigkas, *Istoria ton Neoteron Chronon tis Ellados* [History of Modern Times of Greece] (Athens: Ekdotikos Kosmos, 1956), 148.
- ²⁰ N. D. Giannia- D. G. Giannakou, *Istoria ton Neon Chronon* [History of Modern Times] (Athens: Fos, 1956), 139.
- ²¹ N. Katsikas and others, *Istoria tis Neas Elladas* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: “Ferraios”, 1950), 132.
- ²² G. Manios, *Istoria tis Neas Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Rea, 1950), 137.
- ²³ I. Kampanas, *Istoria tis Neas Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: I. Kampanas, 1956), 141.
- ²⁴ V. Petrounias, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: Archaioi Ekdotikos Oikos D. Dimitrakou, 1950), 138-9.
- ²⁵ N. Dimitrokallis, *Istoria tis Neoteris Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: “Nikodimos”, 1950), 146.

²⁶ St. Daskalogianni- L. Megalopoulou, *Istoria Nevoteras Ellados* [History of Modern Greece] (Athens: D&B Loukopoulou, 1950), 116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.