

Greece in the 1940s

*Occupation and Civil War in Digital
Culture, Screen Media, and the Arts*



EDITED BY

Leandros Savvides and Ioanna Ferra

DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND SOCIETY



GREECE IN THE 1940S

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THE GREEK 1940S: CONSTRUCTING COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN DIGITAL CULTURE, SCREEN MEDIA, AND THE ARTS

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There has been a prolonged and diffused discussion about the nature and the purpose of defining history, in the context of “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992). Indeed, contemporary scholars operate within a rich intellectual landscape of complex debates, as this emerged by the intersections of memory studies and cultural production. These intense debates around the conceptualization of memory/memory construction, history, and culture illustrate how individuals and societies engage with and interpret the past (Erll & Nünning, 2008; Radstone, 2020; Tamm, 2013). In this context, technology had a significant impact in shaping the relationship between memory and historical experience, as well as memory and political identities. This new complexity dominated by a shift in the process of interpreting history, redetermining the hegemonic forces and crafting historical narratives. At the same time, this shift challenged the prevailing certainties which established over the past three decades, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, contributing to the transition from a unipolar world to a multipolar one. In this destabilized context, examples of historical revisionism are either consciously pursued or resulted as part of cultural markets. Such examples indicate the value and impact of

mobilizing a variety of narratives, modalities, formats, and mediums in order to reconsider the past and interpret history. In the case of Greece, some of these points can be observed within the doctrine of alleviating the political discourse and historical narratives from the “ideological hegemony of the left.”

Mylonas (2024) notes that there is a growing interest by citizen initiatives to embark on interventions in the public sphere, offering counternarratives of history. Such endeavors could be associated with the concern of losing a cultural aspect of collective memory that was once widespread. These initiatives are more likely to push the boundaries of the increasingly shrinking public sphere to form political subjectivities, as mass politics have been in crises and in constant decrease in legitimacy since the retreat from class (Wood, 1998), discrediting for grand narratives of the world at the expense of managerial and technocratic responses to politics. What seems to be the pattern is that historical revisionism is a constant battle between social, political, and economic forces. Memory and collective memory (one that can take the form of cultural signifier) of large groups of people appear to be a powerful tool that political actants are trying to shape for political ends, as they become of primary importance for shaping political identities of the future.

The new multipolar world seems to have no reference point, everything is in flux. Different examples and events, including regional wars, indicate a challenge regarding reading and building histories, situating these are “in the right side of history.” The Russian–Ukrainian conflict is a great example regarding building narration and memory, pointing out historical continuities. In only some of the dominant frames, this conflict became known as a “Special Operation” in Russia’s narration or, in a different approach, a war between the Western powers and the United States, with proxy the Ukrainian government and Russia, making in both cases strong references around the rise and the defeat of Nazism in the World War II (WWII). While this seems like a refraction of what is at stake, there is a brewing discussion on whether history is indeed again on the move, as competing powers pose no alternative to each other.

Notably, this is not the first time that historical continuities are constructed and debated during periods of recent crises and political turmoil, with reference to WWII. In the European context, similar examples can be found on different occasions, with some of the most indicative coming from the global recessions and the anti-austerity movement. The ideological and political turmoil of the interwar and WWII period looked both on the division between the European North vs South, as well as on the ideological differences and the

rise of far-right politics, populism, etc., while at the same time, questions around class, poverty, and inequality formulated drawing from historical continuities and debates, as shaped after WWII.

This is where the politics of memory becomes significant. The intensity by which each political force manufactures their own narrative gives an insight into the way that contemporary disputes emerge. To this end, each political actant has now a wealth of mediums that they can use to construct narratives and distribute them within multiple societies. While classic 20th century ways of narrative construction could take the route of institutional infrastructure, funding agencies, large scale cultural projects such as films, or systematic media coverage of news from a certain angle, the development of digital media, and the proliferation of cultural products online, alongside the engagement of users, provide another terrain in which the politics of memory take place.

Looking at the case of Greece, the so-called and heavily projected Greek Crisis and the anti-austerity movement, the political turmoil and polarization of those days reflected in the rise of far right, bringing under (re) consideration and in the public discourse some of the most significant periods of the contemporary history of the country, including Occupation and Civil War. At the same time, during the last decades, there were several films and documentaries concentrating on that period, while in the digital sphere, there are often references and debates which highlight the historical continuities, starting since the 1940s.

In the literature, there are several studies focusing on the representation of Occupation and Civil War, and more recently, expanding the discussion to the construction of collective memory. Therefore, digital media indicated another aspect regarding the way that the turmoiled decade of 1940s is seen in contemporary media. The emergence of digital media, either in the form of social media and algorithmic curation, or in the field of digitization of news focusing more on journalism, puts into the spotlight questions regarding digital collective memory and historical continuities. This book aims to contribute to the field by offering scholarly insights into an emerging field. It examines how various forms of media, particularly within the evolving cultural industry and digitization, shape the construction of collective memory regarding the 1940s. The book focuses on further expanding the discussion regarding media contribution in shaping collective memory, as similar patterns can be seen in different countries, integrating the debate within interdisciplinary frames of culture, science and technology studies (STS), and media studies. Starting with Yiannis Skalidakis' chapter, which traces the roots of conscious historical revisionism strategies in Greece, this edited volume

expands the discussion beyond history per se. It focuses more on how history is constructed, produced, and consumed within the landscape of different media and audiences. The book concentrated on the evolution of technology and the transition to the digital media context, which brought new and old questions regarding memory construction and the media, under consideration.

Thus, this edited volume provides an insight into the Greek 1940s, as seen in different forms of media, exploring the construction of collective memory and concentrating on some of the most significant historical sequence of events of the contemporary Greek history (Occupation, Civil War, etc.). These sequences of military and political turning points are important as they can draw important conclusions about winners and defeated of the war and the political implications for today's Greek political landscape. Some of these events, such as the brutal violence of the Nazi occupation in Greece, became an important cultural signifier during the last decade of memorandums and has been used by politicians to argue about the German–Greek relations during the Greek crisis and especially around the Greek Referendum, in 2015. Another important one which the book looks at is the Treaty of Varkiza in which the Resistance fighters, despite holding power in extensive territories immediately after the Occupation, have signified the withdrawal from a revolution and the focus on liberal democratic elections. The agreement (or treaty as is also known) effectively disarmed the faction predominantly credited with the liberation of Greece from Nazi occupation, rendering it impotent against a resurgent Greek state employing a military approach against the Resistance fighters. This has also left deep scars in Greek society, the cultural residue of which could be seen during the last decades of memorandums. Consequently, we believe that the field is not saturated of works; on the contrary, new mediums and developments suggest a resurgence on how collective memory is manipulated according to contemporary politics.

The 1940s is naturally considered as “a decade of social disintegration, political collapse, and mass violence unprecedented in degree and scale” (Mazower, 2000, p. 1). Greece experienced some of the most significant moments in its contemporary history which, as we shall see in the chapters, define the sociopolitical context even today. The postwar era was dominated by right-wing narratives which had a significant impact on the development of collective (historical) memory, as seen in different countries. In Greece, the dominant narrative surrounding the Occupation and Civil War has been shaped by the historical changes and democratic struggles that followed. This evolution spans from the 1960s, with discussions of sociopolitical resistance, to the extreme right-wing discourse of the military dictatorship in the 1970s, and eventually to the “political reconciliation” of the 1980s. This reconciliation

marked the beginning of a new historical era in which the political system fostered a sense of national polarization and disunity (*dichonia*).

Up until the late 1980s, literature largely focused on the resistance during the Occupation. However, from the early 1990s onward, scholarly attention expanded to include topics such as the Civil War and collaboration with the Axis.

Even though lately, there has been an increased focus on the investigation of this period, it is the dominant media industries which constructed in different ways the public discourse and collective memory of the Civil War to this day. On the other hand, latest approaches on the study of Occupation and Civil War suggest that the media silencing of the forces of liberation is followed by an intensified academic attempt at the rewriting of history. Conservative academic historians drive this process, claiming a sort of “hegemony of the left,” “myths and violence of the left” in public discourse, which was developed especially after the fall of the military junta in 1974. Historians such as Nikos Marantzidis (2013) and Stathis Kalyvas (2006) suggest that left-wing forces are unjustified to assert that their efforts are not being represented enough or proportionally in media and official historiography.

On the contrary, there is a suggestion that the violence perpetrated by the Resistance forces is what resulted in the brutal occupation practices applied by the Nazis, explaining the Civil War/post-Civil War state emergence and practice of persecution of communists, socialists, democrats, or sympathizers. Rewriting history, along so-called objective lines, shows that the claims of the left regarding the historiographic representation are untrue and therefore illegitimate. As Skalidakis describes in his chapter, such “objective lines” are based on futile attempts to describe their agendas as objective research. Latest studies show that such an attempt by historians fits into a framework of liberal democratic Europe, thus having a specific ideological agenda, which in no way holds an objective outlook on history. In other words, such frameworks of analyzing and rewriting history fit into the description of a continuation of the Civil War in other ways because such revision of history is producing and reproducing ideology, politics, and power by scholarly means.

Considering the impact of the 1940s on influencing and polarizing Greek political culture to this day, this edited volume brings together academics, researchers, and practitioners to investigate the historical continuities and discontinuities in the public discourse and the creation of diverse sets of publics, polarization and conflict in Greece, and internationally. At the same time, this book focuses on how different forms of media contribute to the construction of public discourse and collective memory online and offline, as observed focusing on different forms of media – from films to journalism, to

art and digital media. Finally, the book attempts to bring into attention the connection between traditional and interdisciplinary approaches, pointing out the continuity of traditional historical revisionist mediums and attempts and the use of new digital/computational methods, for studying contemporary media contribution and practices, regarding the representation of the 1940s.

As a way to develop an insight into what that forms the backdrop and basis upon which politics of memory take place, the book starts by introducing some key debates around historical revisionism and the Civil War. In the second chapter, Yannis Skalidakis discusses contemporary approaches regarding the “Wars of Memory” and the way that WWII is conceptualized and memorized nowadays. What is the impact in contemporary politics? Skalidakis argues that while Kalyvas and Marantzidis present their work as a scientific endeavor, their revisionist approach is driven by a predetermined political agenda. Their emphasis lies in condemning the left as a totalitarian or even criminal force, rather than genuinely re-evaluating historical interpretations.

One aspect of their revisionist project involves documenting leftist violence during the Nazi occupation period, portraying it as a precursor to the broader narrative of the Greek Civil War. This perspective overlooks the historical context of the occupation and employs selective methods of data collection, such as body counting, to support their claims. Skalidakis draws parallels between Kalyvas and Marantzidis’ approach and that of the German New Right, highlighting their attempts to discredit alternative historical interpretations and portray themselves as victims of ideological suppression. Ultimately, the overarching goal of historical revisionism in Greece, as in other contexts, is to denigrate and marginalize leftist ideologies and resistance movements, thereby shaping the political landscape of the present.

Then, Panagiotis Dendramis discusses the Greek Civil War, as seen in films. The author concentrates on the way that the conflict between the opposite sites, the Hellenic Army (ΕΣ) and the Democratic Army (ΔΣ), produced and reproduced in cinema pointing on the peculiar dialectic relationship between history and cinema. As he points, history and cinema are in constant interaction. Movies represent human stories, which have a significant impact on the way we construct past remembrance. The author illustrated key factors that influence the creation of films, including artistic vision and motives. Focusing on the dialectic relationship between history and cinema, starting from the period of conflict, this relationship was later undermined for two decades reflecting on the formation of new sociopolitical structures. Then, this discussion around cinema and history, re-evolved during the 1970s, having particular artistic and ideological characteristics, and since re-emerges from time to time capturing public attention.

Focusing on traditional media, the next chapter by Ursula-Helen Kassaveti delves deeper into representations of WWII, not only in films but also within the broader Greek entertainment landscape. This analysis covers how these representations were shaped up until the era of audiovisual deregulation in the early 1990s. The term “audiovisual deregulation” refers to the process of relaxing or removing government regulations and restrictions aiming to promote competition, innovation, and investments in the media sector, raising though concerns regarding media concentration, cultural homogenization, and the quality of programming. By employing quantitative and qualitative approaches, the Kassaveti explores the question regarding how cultural products (e.g., Greek TV Series, etc.) echoed particular stances, historical continuities and discontinuities, within the pre-existing representations of War and Nation, as shaped within the realm of state television and domestic entertainment scene.

In Chapter 5 and 6, the focus moved to the representation of the “Others” both in films and journalism. Next, Yiorgos Andritsos explores further the association between films and the historical understanding of the 1940s, by concentrating on the way that the representation of the German conquerors evolved and transformed in films, from the mid-1940s up to the early 1980s. During the examined period, traditional media and especially films exert an enormous influence over the shaping of popular historical understanding. The author distinguished three key periods reflecting on significant sociopolitical development in Greece: from the end of Occupation to the imposing of the dictatorship, then the period during dictatorship up to the fall of junta, and finally the period up to Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) coming in power in the 1981 elections. The main queries that the author explored include issues over representation of German conquerors, the evolution over time, and aspects of the representation that remained constant within the examined period.

In Chapter 6, Yiannis Mylonas developed an insight into the ways in which Greece’s war reparations discussed in the German news media. The author conducted a qualitative examination of 30 relevant articles sourced from the daily newspapers *FAZ* and *Die Welt*, spanning the period between 2015 and 2019, to delineate the predominant themes surrounding Greek reparations. Employing qualitative content analysis, coupled with insights from critical discourse analysis, the study scrutinized a corpus of 30 articles. While acknowledging the wartime atrocities perpetrated against Greece by the Wehrmacht and other occupying forces during WWII, the notion of debt as such is rebuffed, with Greek reparations demands being labeled as “populist” and “unattainable.” Instead, a pragmatic and “forward-looking” approach is advocated, effectively implying a dismissal of the calls for war reparations.

The analysis concludes that divergent historical revisionist arguments inform the discourse within these newspapers, underscored by economic considerations and German nationalistic sentiments.

Theodoros Kouros, in Chapter 7, explored the construction of national narratives, as process of memory construction and impose to the community, and the community's response regarding this process. The dominant historical memory is closely associated to the notion of national identity, and these interdependent terms are dynamic and subject to transformations. This chapter focuses on these transformations by looking on what the author describes as "adventures" of the memorial and the way that these evolved during the second half of the 20th century, reflecting to the evolution of social memory and forgetting. Based on ethnographic field research ethnography, the study included observation of commemorations, interviews, as well as archival and bibliographical research, for developing an archaeology of the memorial. This study provides an insight into a case of alterations and neglect of memorializing materiality, alongside contestations related to the use of space, investigating the way that places of memory can reflect the evolving conception of the nation over time.

In the last chapter, we concentrated on digital media and the notion of digitally mediated collective memory. Drawing from the theoretical framework of post-memory (Hirsch, 2012), the study explores the significances of digital media, in shaping collective memory, via what appears to be a bottom-up process. We explored themes that emerged from users' engagement (comments) and contribution to the formation of public discourse. The aim was to make sense of this process as a site of politics of memory and open the discussion on reflecting what such sites of contention mean for the concept of public sphere and insert a seed of questioning form and content regarding the medium (Birkner & Donk, 2020; Hoskins, 2009).

The study explored YouTube as a platform that promotes social interaction, while at the same time shapes the discourse and frames among the digital online community. The analysis included more than 800 online comments of the most popular video regarding the Varkiza Treaty (view count/Synthiki tis Varkizas). The data were analyzed focusing on the production of mediated collective memory online and the articulation of a discussion regarding the affordances of digital media, in shaping the historical understanding and remembrance of the Greek Civil War. Starting from the notion of digitally mediated memory, as a form of post-memory, this chapter provides an insight into the context and the examined example, before situating it in the context of historical revisionism.