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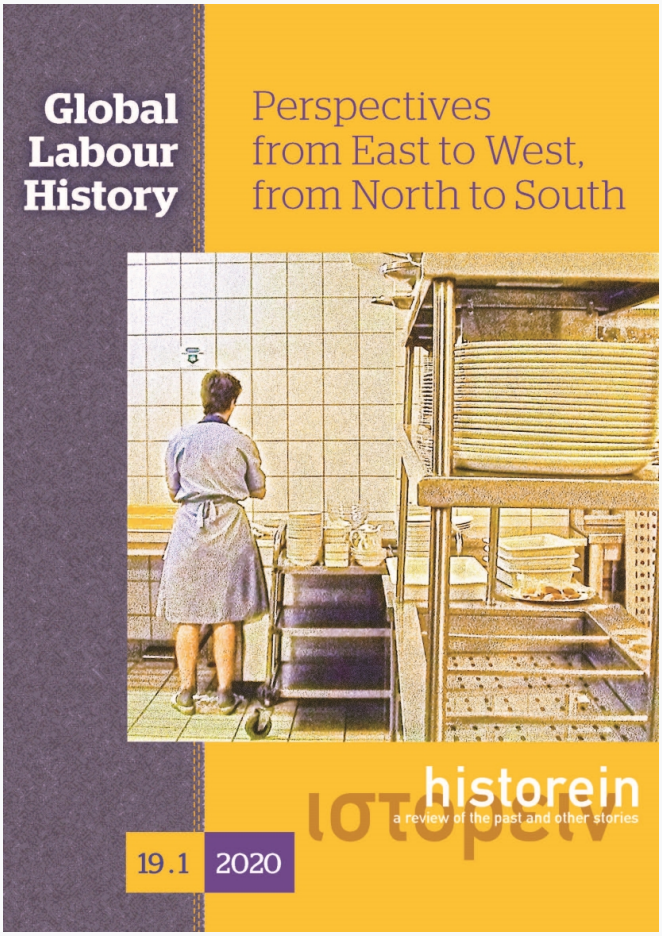

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Chrysanthos D. Tassis

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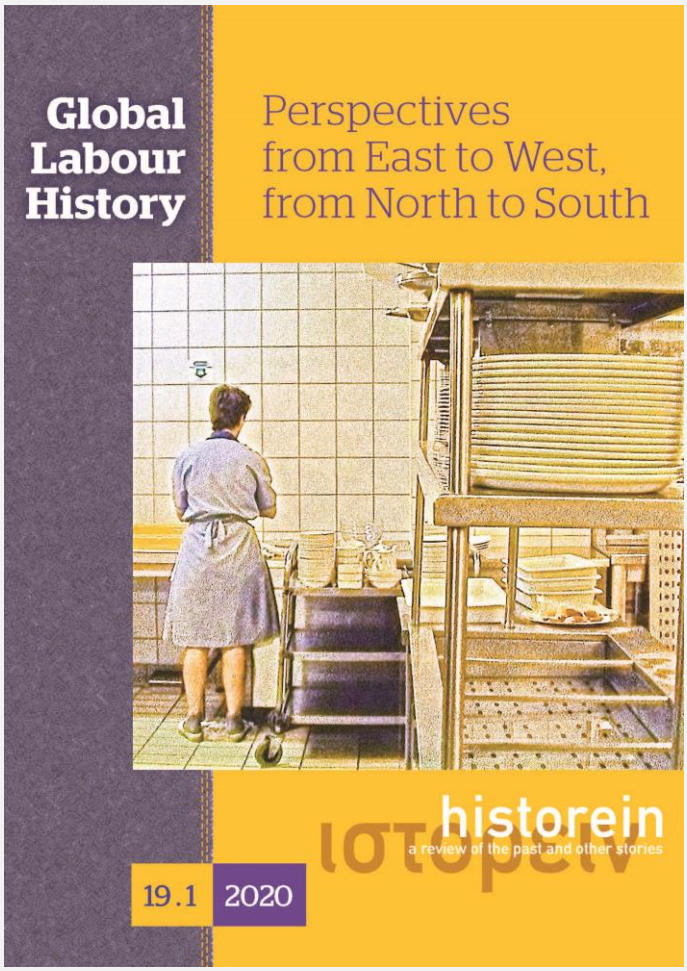

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Myrsini Zorba
Ανδρέας Παπανδρέου: Πολιτισμικό πορτρέτο
[Andreas Papandreou: cultural portrait]

Athens: Pedio, 2019. 192 pp.

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The purpose of Myrsini Zorba's book is to analyse the cultural identity of Andreas Papandreou, not along a linear course but through his identity crises occasioned by political and cultural events, which eventually led to a change in his self-determination. "The first change took place during the summer from the fifth to sixth grade of elementary school, something which indicates his ability to reconstruct his cultural identity at a very young age" (23).

This first change took place during the interwar period in Greece and was the result of the influence of political culture on his personal life, mainly based on the effect of the political actions of his father, Georgios Papandreou. His personality and his charismatic course seem, according to the author, to be built on and mainly due to this first cultural shift, coupled with the dominance of the influence of politics. The contradictory and turbulent events of the time led him to indifference towards his school lessons and to his first cultural crisis, from which he would emerge as the best student and with a strong interest in politics.

His meetings with his father's friends, who mainly belonged to the leftwing of Eleftherios Venizelos' party, marked his interest in socialist ideas, especially Trotsky's doctrine; but he kept his distance from the Leninist organisational structure of the Communist Party. Thus, in 1934, while still a student, he published, with other classmates, the magazine *Xekinima* (Beginning), for which he risked expulsion from Athens College. His political involvement finally led to his arrest by the Metaxas dictatorship as a communist and Trotskyist in 1939. "The arrest, the beating and the declaration of repentance he signed brought him face to face with a political reality that overwhelmed him … as questions and doubts arose whether his social position provided security" (36). This development marked his second cultural crisis, an identity crisis that pushed him to flee to the US and to have strong second thoughts about his involvement in politics.

This process seems to have reached completion with the third cultural crisis, which was his decision to commit himself to his academic studies. His journey to US was the result of this evolution, combined with his desire to break away from his "old" political past.

The move was also the result of his personal defeat in 1939–40. As the author writes, this meant “no more ideological readings and illegal activism. He should move on to a safer life, one institutionally vested that would protect him from danger (47–48).

In the US, Papandreou faced another identity crisis over whether he would succeed in his studies. An important event in this process was the long distance separating the US from the events of Europe, but also his decision to change his academic field, from law to economics. Overcoming this new identity crisis would involve commitment and continuous engagement with his studies and reading. In this way, he managed to acquire a master’s degree and a PhD in economics, receive American citizenship, join the US military and, after the end of the war, pursue a very successful academic career in US universities.

Despite his new priorities, in academia and his family life, his interest in politics did not disappear. However, the US political scene did not favour radical politics, as it is dominated by the anti-communist hysteria of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Consequently, “for someone who felt exposed by his ‘communist’ past and sought the safety of a normal family and professional life, he needed to be prudent and to engage in actions that could not, under any circumstance, be accused of being against the system. This security was provided by the American progressive liberalism cultivated by the Democratic Party” (67). In this context, Papandreou’s involvement with the Democrats began, his first contact taking place in the 1952 elections, when he actively supported and participated in the presidential campaign of Adlai Stevenson. This demonstrates that in Papandreou’s identity, “The old political elements coexisted with the new academic ones; however, the old ones were suspended from active service” (68). Therefore, despite the fact that his current interests seemed to lie far from Greek political events, at the same time he was influenced by the liberal spirit of the US within the Democratic Party, but also by the neo-Marxist approach of dependence theory, which was based around the *Monthly Review* journal. Dependence theory’s understanding of the world through the divisive relationship of metropolis–periphery echoed Papandreou’s old radicalism.

Papandreou returned from the US to Greece in 1959, nineteen years after he left it. The main reason for his return did not seem to be related to politics, but was mainly personal, to get in touch with his father and to meet him as an adult. On his return trip to the US, he decided to abandon his academic career there and to return permanently to Greece. This decision marked Papandreou’s fifth conversion. “It was a life change but also a laborious and longer lasting process of revitalising his political identity” (87). Thus, in January 1961 he returned to Greece and undertook the establishment of Economic Research Centre (now the Centre of Planning and Economic Research, KEPE). This was when his technocratic orientation would be reconnected to his former interest in politics, coinciding with the elections that, in the history of Greek electoral sociology, bear the name of “the elections of violence and fraud”. The refusal of the civil war victors – who had built a

regime of “cachectic democracy” – to accept the possibility of an electoral predominance even of a party with a centrist political orientation such as the Centre Union, led by his father, shocked Papandreou. Within this framework, he understood that in the Greek case social change and modernisation of could not be accomplished through the academic process, but only through active politics. Thus, he participated actively in the “unrelenting struggle” and in the “1-1-4” movement. Moreover he was strongly influenced by the assassination of United Democratic Left (EDA) MP Grigoris Lambrakis. The result of these evolutions is that in the 1964 elections he stood for parliament in the Achaia constituency, which marked the shift from his academic to his political identity. As the author writes, “unlike other cultural turns … this decision was taken slowly and painfully, as it had the character not only of his estrangement but of the definitive separation from what had interested him in the previous 20 years in US. Academic identity cannot easily be surrendered to politics. The safety and social prestige that it offers, the life with no unexpected twists, the comfortable conditions of a daily routine in an important university, the scientific aspirations, cannot be exchanged without consideration for a political identity that promises intense thrills and tremendous uncertainty” (97).

Within this framework, Papandreou started his political career through open speeches and open gatherings. Public meetings were the new style of political mobilisation introduced to the Greek party system by the Centre Union. This practice was an important evolution in Greek party politics, as during the period of cachectic democracy the dominant ideology opposed such practices as they preferred a nonparticipatory political process. Moreover, this process would dominate the Greek political scene under the Third Greek Republic, which commenced after the collapse of the dictatorship in 1974. Therefore, Papandreou came into direct contact with citizens but also with the reactions of the regime (army, palace, police), strengthening his belief in the necessity to change the cachectic democracy. Thus, in 1964, when the Centre Union managed to form a majority government, Papandreou became a minister. One major priority of the new government was to reduce the interference of foreign players in the country’s politics. Within this framework, he abolished the “cultural” radio programmes of the UK, France and US, which propagandised positions on the Cyprus issue that were contrary to those of the Greek government. Another aim was to reduce the intervention of the army, palace and police in politics and society. To implement this policy, Papandreou did not turn to the elite but mainly to society and he tried to build networks, especially among the party youth, in order to establish a party structure, based on mass party politics. It was the era in Greek politics when the social base of the Centre Union met the social base of the leftwing EDA.

This process of building of a centre-left social and political alliance with the purpose to end the cachectic democracy regime and to modernise both Greek society and politics, finally will lead to the July crisis (*Iouliana*), to the fall of the Centre Union government and to the dictatorship of 21 April 1967. This crucial period marked Papandreou’s ideological and political radicalisation. He adopted the theoretical framework of dependency theory, spoke

out against the establishment, created the Democratic League in a first attempt to create a mass party and his opposition to the Centre Union's decision to support a vote of confidence in the Paraskevopoulos government in January 1967 after the agreement between his father and Panagiotis Kanellopoulos. This stance resulted in a political break with his father and, later, the Centre Union.

During the dictatorship, Papandreou was arrested by the regime and imprisoned for eight months. Upon his release, at Christmas 1967, he left for the US, where he sought support for the overthrow of the Greek junta. However, with the exception of Robert Kennedy, he found no allies among the Democratic Party for his cause. In fact, the situation was aggravated by Kennedy's assassination. Thus, Papandreou moved to Stockholm, where he established the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK). During this period, Papandreou, despite being on the radical left, maintained a political distance from the communist left as he criticised the role of the USSR. The result of these choices was that during *metapolitefsi* (the period after the dictatorship), he established Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok), the first socialist mass party in Greek party system, adopted a strong anti-American discourse based on dependency theory and emphasised a socialist perspective.

The chapter titled "Basic Political Texts" refers to the role of Pasok's cultural policy from 1974 to 1981. Papandreou's prevailing view on the role of intellectuals, according to the author, focused on "their operation politically not through a particular role but as politicised individuals, as ordinary citizens. In other words, he required them to participate through mobilisation and commitment, thus to take part with no identity, specialisation, role" (146).

During the 1970s, Pasok's main approach to culture was based on the principle that culture should not be oriented to the market but mainly to the needs of society. In this context, the role of the creator should not be determined far from society or from the guidance of the state. Moreover, Pasok considered that only through the socialist self-management policy could the "freedom of the artist be achieved with the simultaneous interconnection with workers' problems" (149). Furthermore, an important point of Papandreou's cultural policy was his concern about the spread of mass American culture and the deterioration of the country's cultural identity. On this point, the author criticises him as she considers that it is curious that someone "who spent two decades of his life in a foreign country participating in two cultures and gaining much from this creative interaction narrowed his horizon at national borders, expressed himself in a xenophobic and hostile manner to a foreign culture and sought refuge in origin and tradition, as one would do with extreme conservative views" (152). Here the author seems to ignore the singularity of each country and its own cultural development. Furthermore, it was precisely during his time in the US that Papandreou developed the sense that he managed to complete his studies and

to teach at some of the best universities. Along with the adoption of dependency theory, this lead him not to accept the hegemony of the cultural model of US but to emphasise the autonomous development of civilisation in Greece.

In the chapter titled “Political decisions with broader cultural significance”, the author emphasises Pasok’s governmental policies in particular during its first term in government. Thus, the effective abolition of the results of the civil war with the recognition of the national resistance, the return of political refugees, together with basic modernisation changes, such as the law on trade unions, on higher education and on family-related law, “pulled the cultural identity of large groups of the population away from fear and isolation, contributing to greater communication, expression, participation” (164).

In the chapter titled “Melina–Ministry of Culture”, the author analyses key aspects of Pasok cultural policy, as Melina Mercouri was the most stable minister in Papandreou’s cabinets. With her personality, Mercouri could combine her international radiance as an actor with her active involvement in the resistance movement against the dictatorship. The combination of the US-left intellectual approach with the popular element is reflected in her decision to join Pasok and to run for Parliament in the second constituency of Piraeus, a predominately poor and working-class constituency. Mercouri’s popular appeal is regarded as distinct from relationship with intellectuals. As a minister, her ministry’s central policy focused on the “perception that matched cultural policy above all with generous state subsidies. Another common perception also matched culture with ancient Greek civilisation, giving it an absolute and largely unique priority” (171). Despite the fact that Pasok’s cultural policy had set great goals for the emergence of Greek cultural identity such as the Greek Film Centre, the institution of municipal district theatres (DIPETHE), the institution of the Cultural Capital, the Acropolis Museum and the unification of archaeological sites, nevertheless it could not give a boost to the development of Greek culture. As the author aptly observes, “despite the undeniable good intentions, initiatives and great mobility, the country’s cultural policy remained all these years captive to a conservative framework that moved between the glorious past and tourist priorities” (175).

In the last chapter, “Public culture and structure of perception”, the author analyses Papandreou’s public culture. The main argument that emerges from the overall analysis of the book focuses on his cultural turns, which, every time, created a new cultural identity. Papandreou’s basic emphasis was an imaginary situation that combined the notion of Hellenism, which is nevertheless a part of the dependency theory and emerges as visionary through the basic principles of Pasok’s founding declaration: national independence, popular sovereignty and social liberation. And it is this imaginary, but also its political element, coupled with his emphasis on the masses, that would differentiate him from other leaders in the Greek party system, as it “provided the basic dividing line set by Andreas Papandreou between himself and the hegemonic political culture, namely the dominant civil culture of the time” (181). Thus, the fusion of socialism with the national element offered Papandreou the possibility to essentially differentiate himself and also to transcend the

forces of the nationalistic right and the communist internationalist left, in a model of a party and leader that would dominate politically, electorally and in the imaginary. Thus, Papandreou left behind the usual standards of leadership and emerged as the symbolic leader, a symbol of the people, a symbol of the nation, as the author characteristically points out, citing his return from Harefield hospital, his stance on the Supreme Special Court, and as the final act his presence in the Onassis Cardiac Surgery Centre.

In conclusion, Myrsini Zorba's book is an original analysis that avoids the "traditional" fields of analysis either of Pasok policy or that of Andreas Papandreou. It is a meeting of the author with a politician, where the latter, despite not having close political contacts with nor being in the same political party, makes a rational and very useful assessment of his cultural course and identity.