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# *Does the Iliad need an Agamemnon Version? History, Politics and the Greek 1940s*

*The debate on communism  
smells of mothballs. Communism  
no longer exists either as a  
social or an economic practice  
or a political proposition or an  
ideological vision.*

— Stathis N. Kalyvas<sup>1</sup>

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## *History and politics after the end of the Cold War*

The epigram consists of two sentences that a historian could never have uttered, no matter what the challenge from his interlocutor might have been. The historian seeks to understand how the past weighs on the present; he highlights the historicity of the present, yet without weighing up his work on the basis of dubious political assessments which he posits axiomatically. Were he to do this, it would amount to an act of subversion not only of his own work but of the work of historiography *in toto* as a positive social value, or even more, it would be a violent political misappropriation of history. Since the late nineteenth century the gradual domination of mass democracy has created a functional split between the world of politics and the world of scholarship. Politics is based on value judgments and preceptive formulations. Historians, on the contrary, calibrate their mental activity so as to comprehend reality itself as much as possible. The rejection of the reification of the social world lies at the core of the historical vocation.<sup>2</sup> The historian shows that the things that surround us are traces of human activity in the past and therefore he seeks to animate those traces, to uncover and describe the faces that created them.<sup>3</sup> Empathy, not in the sense of identification but in the sense of a careful and meticulous observation, is the foremost and most binding condition in the historian's route. Although the retrospective view is a clearly insurmountable obstacle for the attainment of full empathy with the history he is trying to understand,

he never ceases to strive to that end. Besides, he needs a lengthy amount of time in order to carry out his research; hence he always places himself at a temporal instance from the timeliness that changes daily. The ungerminating language of “the end of” this or that or of whatever is of no concern to the historian, unless he has decided to change job and append himself profitably to his contemporary state of things.

One further problem which springs from the reification of the past is that it offers the observer the opportunity to make short work of concepts, philosophical currents and social and political movements, replacing them without hesitation with the political regimes which were supposed to represent them and now are extinct. After the fall of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, especially among less sophisticated scholarly communities, the tendency was widespread to dispose summarily not only of whatever had been associated with those regimes but also of everything that Marxism stood for, and especially its relation to the idea of revolution. This tendency stands at the opposite of the line of the Bloomsbury Set, which, in an era that was also turbulent and transitional, argued that “nothing mattered except states of mind, our own and other people’s of course, but chiefly our own . . . consisted of timeless, passionate states of contemplation and communion, largely unattached to ‘before’ and ‘after’”.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of contemporary approaches, “before” and “after” demarcate spaces that do not communicate with each other, and thus the student of history finds no reason to feel the splits and turning points and to interpret them; he finds it sufficient to ascertain and enhance them, to turn them into insurmountable barriers even for his own endeavour. In so doing, supporters of such undifferentiated generalisations in history or in the social sciences deliberately forgot that Marxism never insisted that it introduced a new philosophy or a new concept of man, since it derived its foundation from Hegel’s philosophy, which it aimed to turn into reality. If therefore one makes short work of Marxism, one should also do likewise with Hegel, with philosophy itself, and finally with the world as we have contemplated it. And yet, why has this point, which in the last few decades has been the strongest barrier to the postmodern, in the Greek case of the “new wave” historiography not been dealt with even as a *hint* of a problem? Why did the Greek “new wave” have such an easy ride in spreading itself?

### ***The ‘revival of history’ vs. ‘historical thinking’: introducing the Greek ‘new wave’***

For the past ten years or so, Greek historiography on the 1940s – a decade marked by war, defeat, occupation, resistance and civil war – has had to grapple with a new approach which calls itself the “new wave”. In an intellectual and epistemological juncture which naively claims that the only task of each era towards history is to rewrite it, in the case of contemporary Greek historiography the task is discharged through the renovation and restoration of older frameworks and interpretative schemes relating to the history of the pivotal 1940s. The chief agents of this

self-styled “new wave” are political scientists Stathis N. Kalyvas (Yale University) and Nikos Marantzidis (University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki). The venture began with a paper presented by Kalyvas at a conference on the Greek Civil War held at King’s College London in 1999,<sup>5</sup> and carried on with the publication of a book chapter entitled “Red Terror: Leftist Violence during the Occupation” in 2000,<sup>6</sup> and then took on the form of a ten-point manifesto published in the mass-circulation Athens daily newspaper *Ta Nea* in March 2004.<sup>7</sup> There followed three books which, according to political scientist and historian Ilias Nikolakopoulos, comprise the “trilogy of muddle”:<sup>8</sup> the first book deals with armed bands which mainly collaborated with the occupying powers during the Second World War;<sup>9</sup> the second book is the publication of a subsequently altered version (by the diarist himself) of the diary of a Communist Party notable, Dimitris Vlandas, covering the years 1947–1949;<sup>10</sup> and the third with the historiography of the Greek 1940s bearing the equivocal and unwarranted title *Η εποχή της σύγχυσης* [The age of muddle].<sup>11</sup>

The thrust of the new wave is deceptively simple. As the old rightwing narrative would have it, albeit more crudely, Greece in the 1940s had faced a dramatic groundswell of popular support for the National Liberation Front (EAM), created by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) in 1941; yet that support was founded mainly on the violence and terror which the communists had visited on opponents, waverers and bystanders. Greek history in that decade can be summed up in the “three rounds” of the determined communist attempt to seize power by force of arms in 1943–1944, in December 1944 and in 1946–1949. Although by 1949 the Left had lost the political and military struggle, subsequently it succeeded in establishing its own historiographical orthodoxy for nearly half a century, until the “new wave” came in to put things straight and obliterate those rosy leftist narratives about freedom-loving national liberation fighters. With few exceptions, the controversy generated by this “new” – or, as it also calls itself, “postrevisionist wave”<sup>12</sup> – has focused on the sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit ideological and political coordinates of the venture. In large part this is due to the fact that with a noteworthy frequency, the views of the “new wave” are buttressed by a regular shower of shorter pieces by Kalyvas and Marantzidis, published in the Sunday press, which offers good opportunities to charm the unsuspecting and enlist those ready to accept the “new” truth of the “new wave”.

In such a short piece by Kalyvas from March 2009, wholly representative of the “new” paradigm and style, the self-referential narcissism of the “new wave” is encapsulated in the contention that in the domain of Greek historiography on the 1940s there have been only three “leaps” to the truth: the first was a collaborative volume edited by John O. Iatrides in 1981;<sup>13</sup> the second was Mark Mazower’s book on Greece during the Axis occupation, published in 1993;<sup>14</sup> the third “leap” is the emergence of the “new wave” which appeared in 1999–2000 and is going strong to this day. Numerous scholars who studied the Greek 1940s in between these great “leaps” have to this day been wasting themselves on “sterile questions which were more closely related to the metaphysical anxieties of the Left than with the demands of research” – the latter now being clearly stipulated by the “new wave” – with the result that “myths and clichés that from a scholarly point of view have been totally devalued are incessantly regurgitated”.<sup>15</sup> the reader is not privy to any information about how, when and by whom all that had gone on before has been “totally devalued”, unless the alert reader is expected to feel that the self-referential narcissism of the “new wave” offers the glaringly obvious answer; and it probably is, because, according to

Kalyvas, the research, publications and conferences of the “new wave” have set off its “dominant role ... in the formulation of the research agenda”.<sup>16</sup>

Still, persistence in a controversy that privileges the political or ideological or even stylistic features of the “new wave” discourse tends to cloud the fundamental weakness of the venture – its theoretical, methodological, analytical and normative practices which fundamentally subvert its scholarly credibility.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Politics and contested histories in Greece***

The political and intellectual juncture in which the “new wave” venture came to unfold its approach was instrumental in determining in large part the gravity with which its views were invested in the context of Greek historiography on the 1940s. Contemporary politics and contemporary history have been closely related, though in a nonlinear manner. The history of the 1940s was about the essence of politics, and the politics of the post-civil war period derived part of its content and legitimacy from that history of the 1940s. Until 1974 a rightwing version predominated, but a leftist rival did exist and did have its audience among leftist circles in Greece and in the communities of the Greek communists exiled in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after the end of the civil war in 1949.<sup>18</sup> The domination of the Right was more historiographical and less cultural. After the “*metapolitefsi*” (the “political changeover”) of 1974 and the fall of the military dictatorship which had been established seven years earlier, the Left was politically represented by three segments – the social-democratic Pasok, the orthodox Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the splinter KKE Esoterikou (Internal) which distanced itself from the pro-Moscow mother party. Each of the three leftist parties cherished and projected a rival version of the past. At first glance, the common thread among these three leftist versions was the rejection of the rightwing narrative of a triple attempt by the KKE to come to power by force of arms in the 1940s and offer the country as a prize to communist Slavdom and Joseph Stalin. The Pasok version condemned the deeds of the Right in the 1940s but also the “mistakes” of the communist leadership; the KKE Esoterikou version was similar to the Pasok rendition, the main difference being the dosage of communist leadership “mistakes”. As for the orthodox version of the KKE, it did vary according to national politics and innerparty politics, and at times de-emphasised the more divisive experience of the civil war of 1946–1949 in favour of the more “unifying” experience of the “national” resistance to the Axis occupiers in 1941–1944. This was especially the case with the KKE version of the 1980s; since the 1990s the party has gradually shifted towards stressing the national-liberation credentials of communist action in the 1940s not only in terms of the resistance but also in terms of the civil war, while currently it is veering towards a more revolutionary correct narrative.

After the end of the civil war in 1949, the Greek Left salvaged from the events of the 1940s a silent cultural narrative of heroism and defeat, while the victorious Right clenched the politically and socially dominant narrative of victory. Since the *metapolitefsi* of 1974 the Greek Right has found it increasingly difficult to uphold its narrative, as political and scholarly conditions became favourable to an academic study of the 1940s. For more than two decades such studies rendered

increasingly untenable the victor's narrative and established schemes of periodisation and interpretation that appeared more supportive of a "leftist" edifice. The "historians' debate" that was inaugurated with the publication of the "new wave" manifesto in March 2004 was an assault on the only thing that the Left had kept from the 1940s.

Yet, despite the charges of the "new wave", there was nothing odd or uncommon about the dominance of a leftist narrative on the Greek 1940s. Especially in the postwar era, the relationship between history and politics has been a complex adventure: the historical narrative was often forced to resort to temporary and unstable forms, albeit especially interesting, since it was dominated and almost repressed by restrictions dictated by politics. On the other hand, Marxism was a very flexible analytical tool when dealing with the concepts of revolution and history; hence Marxism was a tool friendly to the scholar who did not only want to ascertain "the end" of history and summarily entrench himself in his academic discipline. It was a flexible tool mainly to the extent that the concepts Marxism used for the interpretation of history were philosophically ambivalent. In his lectures at the École Nationale d'Administration, Raymond Aron used to say of Marxism that, on the one hand, there was revolution as a rationally necessary development and, on the other, there was revolution as the inescapable course of history.<sup>19</sup> This created possibilities for interpreting the facts in a manner that equated the credibility of Marxism with the credibility of history. In 1947 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his *Humanisme et Terreur*,<sup>20</sup> referred to Leon Trotsky's last thoughts on the question of the revolution. Trotsky believed that if after the Second World War the proletariat did not seize its destiny in its own hands, thereby realising a revolution that would be the prelude to the abolition of classes and of nations and the first step towards world socialism, then one would have to conclude that the Marxist proposition on the socialist revolution that would resolve the contradictions of capitalism was ultimately a proposition which history had belied. Merleau-Ponty, who wanted to continue to believe in Marxism, commented on Trotsky's views that it was history that had been wrong and that the only correct way to face history was through the prism of Marxism.<sup>21</sup> The non-Marxist Aron said of the revolution that did not happen that it would be equally valid to conclude that either history or Marxism had been wrong.<sup>22</sup>

In an analytical framework equally fluid and with the Greek juncture of the 1940s bearing some of the hallmarks of a revolutionary period, the discourse of the Left on the civil war could unhurriedly invest in the fulfilment of the Marxist vision. The inevitability of revolution could not be put in doubt, therefore Marxism was ideologically and morally strengthened, while as a rationally necessary development, a Greek Civil War-cum-revolution absolved history from having been wrong. Depending on the standpoint of each observer, defeat could be ascribed as a mistake or as a failure or even as treason perpetrated by the historical agents; but whatever the exegesis, what was truly important had indeed occurred, history was innocent and the Marxist discourse on revolution had been fulfilled. In its Greek version, the post-Second World War juncture bore all the characteristics of a revolution that had failed<sup>23</sup> and historians could portray it with the "admirably equivocal" terms of Marxism.<sup>24</sup> The "revolution" came after disasters which augured salvation, disasters that were fertile and redemptive, disasters that affected equally devout Christians and university graduates, those who believed in the vengeance of the wretched and the poor and in the overthrowing of social values, but also those who believed that science and ra-

tional organisation could influence decisively the course of mankind. When the time was right, the Left could construct its narrative on the 1940s and make it dominant, because it located itself in a space where political defeat and political victory could have no other impact on it but to strengthen it, since political defeat and political victory were the dialectical opposites of a political act that *had* been undertaken.

Even so, the “new wave” claim that the leftist domination of the historiography on the 1940s is a Greek aberration was no accident. It was related to a juncture which, a decade after the collapse of the socialist order in Eastern Europe, sought the ironing out of all European exceptions, aberrations and irregularities in view of the intensification of a Europe-wide process of closer but ever utilitarian integration through leveling. It was more or less at the same time that French historiography settled its account with the history and the memory of Vichy,<sup>25</sup> and while simultaneously denouncing itself as the last Stalinist historiography in Europe, it took care to rid itself both from the national “founding myth” of the French Revolution and from the communist illusion. Thus the persistence on a “leftist” historiographical reading of the 1940s as a Greek aberration and the focus of the “new wave” on this feature came to respond to a social demand: a seemingly scholarly view of the past was needed to validate what the future would bring, without any footnotes about possibilities, missed opportunities or alternative choices and outcomes. In the “new wave” framework it was this problem that decided the balance – indeed, the dosage – between scholarly research and the satisfaction of the social demand. Research must be shaped in a manner that does not cast doubt on its scholarly credibility. This, in turn, corresponded to a modicum of veritable scholarly endeavour, since the very aim of scholarly credibility was served primarily by the academic titles and credentials of some of the architects of the “new wave”. These credentials and titles were repeatedly and ceremoniously screened by the mass media, while to some degree they were used by the “new wave” authors themselves in order to prop up the credibility of their propositions. Still within the same framework, scholarly activity should state its findings in a manner that does not simply respond to social questions but actually overpowers and abolishes them; and to do this it has had to attune itself to the cacophony of the mass media, to learn how to bypass memory, to minimise empirical evidence and ultimately to shrink theoretical contemplation.

### ***From ‘revisionism’ to ‘postrevisionism’ and ‘new histories’***

These practices have recently peaked in *Η εποχή της σύγχυσης* [The age of muddle], which so far is the most ambitious attempt of the “new” and “postrevisionist” “wave”. In the first instance, the use of the terms “postrevisionism/postrevisionists” both by those who embrace it and by some of their critics is mechanistic and ultimately misleading. Referring to the latter, Nikos Marantzidis correctly points out that the critics of the “new wave” often identify local history studies with “‘revisionism’ (which obviously recalls those who dismiss Nazi crimes) and with ‘postmodernism’”, to add, equally correctly, that if “this is not a case of extreme deviousness, it is [a mark of] deep ignorance and [of] an inability to understand the debate”.<sup>26</sup> It is largely the latter, but at this point it is essential to clarify a certain measure of ambiguity in the relationship between the modern and the postmodern.

In its later phase the postmodern has often sought refuge in a “new” modern, in a pattern that was familiar both to broader audiences as well as to academic tribes; it is a pattern that can more easily promote its vacuousness under a gloss of “progress”. The Greek “new wave” appears to have acceded to that version of the postmodern when in its manifesto it posits itself as “new” and, upon closer inspection and in relation to the history of postwar Greece, it is obliged to define as modern that which followed the defeat of the Left in the civil war. This assertion is explicitly made by Kalyvas, who celebrates the fact that

the entire Greek society escaped the pathology of underdevelopment which continues to plague the majority of the world’s population. Today it is obvious that the “grey years” of postwar Greece were the most crucial years of the country’s leap and, paradoxically and ironically, the defeat of the Left in the civil war was a prerequisite for that.<sup>27</sup>

This quotation illustrates the precipitate attempt of its author to uncover the terms of a new modernity in postwar Greek society. The defeat of the Left in the civil war is enlisted in a game of provocations and defiance which the “new wave” right from the outset was determined to play in order to climb up the ladder of Greek historiography. Yet the concept of the “grey years” of Greece’s “leap” is much more interesting with regard to the origins of the “new wave” itself. The concept is used to bring back the idea of the “modern” in the empty space created by the negation of modernisation, socialism and industrialisation (specifically with regard to heavy industry), in other words the negation of all those concepts that have lost their appeal since the late 1980s.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, they lost their appeal not only because they were associated with aspects of the Stalinist version of modernisation that was universally repudiated, but also because western thought took care to characterise *in toto* Marxism and socialism in their very nature as negative “Promethean” ideologies.<sup>29</sup> Yet because it is difficult to formulate an attractive political imperative after the “end of history”, and having excluded from one’s political thought the dimension of the future and of radical change (if not of progress itself), then a new “modern” instead of the suspect “postmodern” should be posited. The new “modern” in reality preserved only the external outline of what modernism had once been, so that the well-established western “paradigm” might continue to prevail.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the ambiguity of the concepts that permeate the vocabulary of the “new wave” extends also into epistemological issues. To cite one instance, it is at least a dubious minority view that the concepts of objectivity and interpretation are mutually contradictory or that “the modern historiographical tendencies” put the concept of “objectivity” into question;<sup>31</sup> a far more precise formulation would be that they tried to do so but failed, as John Lewis Gaddis, a neighbour of Kalyvas’ at the History Department of Yale University, argues convincingly.<sup>32</sup>

A similar problem is associated with the use of the terms “postrevisionism” and “postrevisionists”. These terms are derived from American – and certainly not British – historiography and denote something that is very specific: the interpretative paradigms of American historiography on the “Cold War”, which began with the “orthodox/traditionalist” school that blamed postwar developments on Soviet ideological and geostrategic expansionism; carried on with the “revisionists” who blamed it all on American economic imperialism; and then ended up with the large,



diffuse and diverse wave of “postrevisionists”, who include the full range from crypto-orthodox to crypto-revisionists plus all the intermediate nuances and varieties. It is therefore hard to duplicate in Greek historiography the original “postrevisionism”, for the real thing includes a wide spectrum of approaches, paradigms and interpretations, from Michael Hogan’s corporatism to Melvyn Leffler’s national security model, and from Michael Hunt’s ideology to Jessica Gienow-Hecht’s cultural transfer and Kristin Hoganson’s gender approach.<sup>33</sup> Greek “postrevisionism” seems to have a long way to go since at present it identifies only three common threads in its venture: the turn to the “mass level” and “the view *from below*”; interdisciplinarity with the pumping of working hypotheses and analytical tools from history, political science, cultural studies, sociology and social psychology; and the lack of any connection between these approaches and any “concrete ideology, faction or party”.<sup>34</sup>

As regards interdisciplinarity, surely “autonomy is not the same thing as exclusiveness or self-sufficiency”,<sup>35</sup> but this should not cancel the necessary approach to, and treatment of, history as an *autonomous discipline*. The uncritical obsession with interdisciplinarity relegates history to the level of a utilitarian database for the erection of the theoretical constructs of the social sciences, fundamentally misunderstanding “the integrity and importance of history as a study of man in society in the past”.<sup>36</sup> Then, the argument about the lack of any connection between these approaches and any “concrete ideology, faction or party” recalls Terry Eagleton’s broadside that “ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has”.<sup>37</sup> The critics of the “new wave” are “ideologically partisan scholars, accustomed to simplifying aphorisms”.<sup>38</sup>

The comparative method, which is prescribed as an antidote to Greek historiography’s self-centredness and parochialism, is supported by enlisting Claudio Pavone’s verdict on the Italian resistance as a civil war, just as the Italian Fascists used to call it for decades, as well as by reference to a book by an Italian journalist on “the civil war and the violence of the Communist Party” of Italy during the liberation period.<sup>39</sup> But the reason why this should be the case in the Greek context remains nebulous. History is defined in the main as “‘a discipline of context’. It deals with a *particular* problem and a *particular* set of actors at a *particular* time in a *particular* place.” The particular and its historical context cannot be ignored simply because the evidence must be placed under the seductively impressive dome of a social science model.<sup>40</sup> This syncretism is akin to the linguistic mechanism of metaphor, which is employed to find similarities among dissimilarities or, in the best of cases, to compare things that are similar but not identical.<sup>41</sup>

### ***The algorithm of violence***

One of the key analytical and methodological features of the “new wave” is the emphasis on the study of localities (the smaller, the better), the generalisations on the basis of temporal and spatial fragments, and a particularly vigilant eye on violence. According to the “new wave”, early works of local history appear to suffer from “an inability to generalise from their conclusions, though the researchers themselves did not seem to be particularly concerned with doing so”.<sup>42</sup> However, it is not clear how the works of the “new wave” allow that sort of generalisation, even though generalisation is stated as constituting its major concern. According to Marantzidis, Ka-

lyvas' research "focuses on the region of Argolis, but it attempts to draw conclusions that have a more general value",<sup>43</sup> though the reader is left at a loss as to precisely how this is attained. On the contrary, it is explicitly stated that local history can "contribute to a new synthesis of the whole picture, of the 'general scheme'".<sup>44</sup> When doubt is cast on the generalising potential of the partial and the local, it is admitted that generalisations have nothing to do with conclusions: "what can be generalised are the methodological prerequisites of scholarly research on the [Greek] civil war". One of these prerequisites is "the use on the one hand of new theoretical tools (violence is one such [tool], though not the only one) and on the other systematic and creative empirical research, with objectively measurable data".<sup>45</sup>

Yet the theorisation of violence and its elevation to the key tool obscures the fact that violence has been one of the essential building blocks of every political order, and that ideology may restrict or facilitate the pursuits of human beings but it does not predetermine them.<sup>46</sup> With the "theoretical tool" of violence serving as an algorithm,<sup>47</sup> reason and necessity are driven out of the narrative, and thereby the failures and mistakes and bloodshed perpetrated by the Left were not aberrations in an otherwise shining path (which is what "leftist" historiography claimed, according to the "new wave") but plain old communist crimes. Thus the trajectory from the heroic paradigm to the narrative of blood and terror conveniently bypasses the Greek Left's modernising project in the 1940s. Instead, the algorithm of violence and the "red terror" paradigm are posited as a complete, closed and self-referential system that is not open to question precisely because it is assumed as containing no ambivalent propositions: the numbers of those "slaughtered by the communists", in Greece and the world over, are thus the only empirical data in the history of science that do speak for themselves.

### ***The 'new wave' as an unstructured 'scientific revolution'***

The "new wave" launched itself on a platform of provocation, defiance and arrogance that would have befitted a version of the *Iliad* written by Agamemnon, since the "epic" of the 1940s had in its view been written by the vanquished Trojans. Invoking the outlook of the poet of the real *Iliad* is illuminating both in terms of repelling the challenge and in terms of its initial formulation by the "new wave". There is a fundamental difference between the Trojan War and the war of the *Iliad*, which Aristotle had already discerned:<sup>48</sup> "the Trojan War is eventful, horizontal and victorious; the war of the *Iliad* is tragic, vertical, with no victor."<sup>49</sup> The real war is that of the *Iliad*, which "refutes the traditional end of the ten-year long Trojan War or at least places it under poetic dispute":<sup>50</sup> whether written by the victors or the vanquished, the Trojan War is simply myth-making. The poet of the *Iliad* resolved the challenge by dividing his sympathies equitably between the Achaeans and the Trojans, though with a tinge of empathy towards the latter.<sup>51</sup>

The "epic" of the Greek 1940s has proved rather more intractable to handle. The challenge of the "new wave" has brought to the fore inadequacies and shortfalls among Greek historians at large, and more so among those studying that particular period. In both cases they seem to have taken the bait of the provocation, sometimes with the humility of a painful but not particularly effective self-criticism, and sometimes with the sort of political riposte which, even when

it is not parochial, it is never systematic enough to stop feeding a sterile cycle of argument and counter-argument.<sup>52</sup> No doubt, in the course of the past decade the representatives of the “new wave” have exposed themselves in manifold ways, epistemologically as well as politically. But their audacity has never been particularly risky since it has been supported by a strong media nexus which excels in the practice of political paternalism. Still, this audacity was one of the few positive offspring of the “new wave” endeavour, and it could be replicated with a view to re-invigorating academic debate, systematising historiographical criticism in Greece and affording the group of specialists on modern Greek history the opportunity to chisel out the features of a distinctive scholarly identity. This observation is deliberately intended here to indicate primarily the general dysfunctions of the Greek academic system, and less to betray the real intent on the part of the authors of this article to absolve themselves of any responsibility for a dynamic that ultimately did not fulfil itself.

If there is a benefit from the relaunch of conservative historiography in the guise of the “new wave”, it is that it clearly demonstrates the deadlock of all kinds of attempts to canonise particular methodological, analytical and interpretative approaches and priorities. The normative discourse of the “new wave” aims to impose its own methodological and interpretative doctrine, in turn rejecting and promoting research priorities in a manner that is both arbitrary and arrogant: for instance, questions such as “what was the cause of the end result”, that is, what were the causes of the particular outcome of a particular historical phenomenon, or “what was the ‘real’ strategy of the KKE in 1944 or in 1946 . . . were often related to metaphysical matters of limited or no real content which served expediences that are now unrealistic”.<sup>53</sup>

If one excludes the traces of audacity and daring embedded in the challenge of the “new wave”, historians are left with an off-putting remainder. The rationale which the “new wave” put forward to justify its onslaught on the historiography of the 1940s has largely obscured the other terms of its presence, its real scholarly gravitas and a few potentially interesting research initiatives. All went down under the dominant theme song: we are the “new” because we assert something that is different from the dominant historiographical model and we are free of ideology because we are not lefties. Apart from the logical gaps endemic in them, what is startling in these statements is a quasi-prohibition of alternative ways of reading historical facts which envelops them like a mist threatening not so much the historical tribe but Greek society itself. This might well signify the passage from the times of ideological debates and arguments, when each point of view fortified itself behind its own propositional barricades but at the same time recognised the manifest importance of debating rival political points of view, to a time when the camera, instead of rising to include other things too, is irredeemably sinking into a single angle to the exclusion of all rivals.

Indeed, energised by the assumption that the dominant “leftist” narrative had moulded the particular segment of the past into a single true story, the “new wave” came and fragmented the segment into numerous and largely incongruous pieces and at the same time imposed on it the unity of the old 1943–49 rightwing narrative of the “three rounds”. In so doing it recycled old stuff through the fragmentation of space and the unification of time. Developments that are spatial and temporal – i.e., occurring at a fragment of space and during a fragment of time – are pro-

jected across time and across space as having universal applicability and, thereby, validity and explanatory power.

The impressive contrapuntal self-definition of the “new wave” was projected by way of a manifesto and banished, without much ado or expert knowledge, the preceding Greek historiography on the 1940s to the margins of international historiographical production, while at the same time it isolated the Greek Civil War from the international context of the origins of the Cold War; paradoxically, the “new wave” was supposed, on its own assertion, to have come with a view to blunt such rough edges. Yet how could it do so when, according to its architects, Greek historiography appeared to be just throwing away its mothballs and coming out of the closet after a heavy winter that had lasted for decades, whereas the Greek Civil War popped up almost as a peculiarly Greek aberration at considerable distance from analogous cases in Europe and elsewhere?

Inconsistencies such as these, but also the broader internal contradictions of its attempt to rejuvenate Greek historiography on the 1940s, have not only aggravated the credibility of the “new wave” in the context of the scholarly debate but have also affected adversely the formulation and the appeal of the response. In the main, they prevented “leftist” historiography from focusing on a clear and accurate critical stand. When the endeavour suffers from manifold and obvious weaknesses, it is usually difficult to find the ends of the thread and to uncover the aim behind the haphazard treatment of the evidence, especially when the agents of the critical response are diverse and clearly fragmented by their own internal arguments and conflicts. “In a word,” as Marc Bloch used to say, “the fallacy is clear, and it is only necessary to formulate it in order to destroy it.”<sup>54</sup> The Left in this connection has not formulated the fallacy clearly enough; therefore during the ten years that the “new wave” has hit on Greek historiography, its contradictions and the black-out over the traces of its twisted historical reading have often worked in its favour, strengthening its presence and scattering and disorienting the critique which at first seemed manifestly obvious.

For instance, the “new wave” propagates a shift from the elite to the mass level, and it does so by forgetting that what happened in the past, and what we make of it in the present, depends on human interaction and agency – what people chose, how they judged, what they did, and what ideas they entertained about themselves, the world and others. Instead, the “new wave” founded its endeavour largely on criticising other people’s views, steadfastly refusing to budge from the temporal and ephemeral assessments of its present. Thus, in historical terms, it seems to have never heard of the fundamental choices available to people in most of the world for at least 15 or 20 years after 1935: fascist or antifascist, in favour of resistance or collaboration, with the communists and their allies or with the capitalists, with the “West” or with the “East”. This weakness, which is nothing less than a refusal to look at the past on the past’s own terms, stems from a fundamental confusion on the part of the “new wave” between moralising, on the one hand, and the assessment of the moral and ideological choices that people made in the past, on the other.<sup>55</sup> Driven by a desire to avoid the former, the “new wave” ultimately rejected the latter, which is nonetheless a task for historical scholarship *par excellence*. As for the reason why it wanted to avoid the former, it was perhaps an attempt not to appear to be associated with any “concrete ideology, faction or party”; but it was an attempt undermined by the very contrapuntal self-definition of the “new wave” historiography: since the entire project to rejuvenate the field was

based on the rejection of the “leftist” version,<sup>56</sup> on the negation of leftist morality and ideology, would it not be logical to assume that the “new wave” was simply its rightwing mirror-image?

This assumption is perfectly valid and legitimate, though it contradicts the claims of the “new wave” itself. But the main difficulty is not to be found in the foundational inconsistencies of the “new wave”. The negation of the “leftist” narrative sets out from the present to anchor itself in the past in a manner that is unabashedly ideological, thereby delegitimising the historical perspective and outlook. In the case of postwar history the tone is set for the historian by two poles which are usually, during the course of writing up, mutually exclusive. The first is that of the international postwar dynamics which forms the ideal environment for the emotional and ideological involvement of the historian. The second is the pole of the Cold War, which, although it temporally appears as the immediate outcome of the postwar juncture, analytically exhibits major discontinuities with the preceding period. In the broader canvass of postwar history, the years of the Greek Civil War were a transitional period, when history passed from one form of dispute to another, when defeated enemies came back to haunt their victors and their victims and old friends became foes.

The historian constantly seeks to synthesise realism and ideology in a coherent and cohesive narrative which interprets history rather than vindicates it with a lethal overdose of hindsight. Scholarly history is in a constant state of argument with the diffuse “collective memory”. Therefore the historian needs to be able at any moment to control and overcome the intellectual ties created between the “we–them” of conventional wisdom and the scholarly historical community.<sup>57</sup> There is, of course, another solution, and it is an easy one, since it can be put to use immediately when the historian decides not to address the difficult problem of the relationship between history and politics, but instead decides to abolish it and devote himself to his own universe, thereby speeding up the end not of politics but of history. A third solution for the vexing issue of postwar history is the one selected by the “new wave”: to scuttle history into an unrelenting political reality and leave on the surface only those fractals of memory which politics can manipulate.

### ***Determinism<sup>58</sup> and teleology<sup>59</sup> as scholarly wisdom***

Epistemologically, part of Greek historiography has been nurtured and raised on a diet of deterministic certainties purporting to be of Marxist stock. There should be no need to recount here the rejection by Marx and Engels themselves of the mechanistic and simplistic applications of their ideas. The dignity of possibilities needs to be restored to the study of history just as it has long ago been restored to the study of the natural world. Physicist Richard Feynman may be of use to some historians when he claims that “Nature permits us to calculate only probabilities. Yet science has not collapsed.”<sup>60</sup> History, in particular, should be written forwards, not backwards,<sup>61</sup> for the simple reasons that (a) it may be told backwards but it is lived forwards;<sup>62</sup> and (b) it “is determined only *as it happens*”.<sup>63</sup>

Deterministic and teleological interpretations stem from the *use* (not the abuse; use, in this case, is abuse) of hindsight. Yet, in contrast to the effortless and cost-free “wisdom” and “perspicacity” of writers and readers, who are *ex officio* “blessed” with knowing the end of days, in the perfect-

ly real world of the past “the picture was more uncertain, and other possibilities seemed more likely”.<sup>64</sup> Even if it was A.J.P. Taylor’s love of provocation that led him to taunt that “in real life the inevitable rarely happens”,<sup>65</sup> it remains true that what is seen as “inevitable” exists only retrospectively as a tool of interpretation rather than one of prognostication.<sup>66</sup> In a sense, everything is determined, “but it might as well not be, because we can never know what is determined”.<sup>67</sup> Pretending otherwise means that hindsight makes the narration of the past a “selective, partisan, anthropocentric and mediated undertaking”, as historical questions which are raised *a posteriori* tend to preempt “a future which had not then been written but one which we insist upon seeing as preordained . . . If truth by definition encompasses that which might have happened but did not, it is also valid that we cannot in any case know what might have happened. And therefore we do not have the right either to fear it or feel nostalgic for it.”<sup>68</sup>

Possibility, in other words, is inherently connected with reality. “Possibility,” Antonio Gramsci wrote, “is not reality: but it is in itself a reality. Whether a man can or cannot do a thing has its importance in evaluating what is done in reality. Possibility means ‘freedom’.”<sup>69</sup>

### ***Epilogue: Do beans grow upside down?***

Critical historiography reminds those who follow it that their ways were made possible by those who came before and walked on paths that were different.<sup>70</sup> A product of some of those who followed was a variety of self-styled “new histories” which emerged in the 1950s and the 1960s and had as a major characteristic the study of the multitudes as opposed to the numerically microscopic but economically and politically powerful elites whose actions and writings had until then been the almost exclusive preoccupation of historians.<sup>71</sup> The outcome was that social-science history, microhistory and local history may have rescued the “masses” and the “anonymous” ones from what E.P. Thompson dismissed as “the enormous condescension of posterity”, but they often ended up reducing “every human being to a statistic, a social type, or the mouthpiece of a collective discourse”.<sup>72</sup> But it was from Max Weber as well as from Antonio Gramsci that historians learnt that ideas, institutions and culture are not simply “the superstructure”; whereas on the question of the relationship between history and the “social sciences”, it is worth recalling Lawrence Stone’s exhortation that

it might be time for the historical rats to leave rather than to scramble aboard the social scientific ship which seems to be leaking and undergoing major repair. History has always been social, and it was attracted by the siren songs of the social sciences because it thought – perhaps somewhat mistakenly, it now appears – that they were also scientific.<sup>73</sup>

In the case of the Greek “new wave”, the triumphalist self-assertion of its brand of “new history” creates the illusion of a neutral and value-free approach and the reality of a new doctrinaire and scholastic discourse. Yet the “new” and the “old” are not subject to self-determination, while the incitement to enrich the inquiry and the affirmation of the new paradigm are materialising in such a manner that “the ‘common’ interpretation of the recent past is . . . composed of the manifold fragments of separate pasts, each of them . . . marked by its own distinctive and assertive victimhood.”<sup>74</sup>

The assertion of victimhood is in itself a form of instrumentalising the past as part of the attempt to shape collective political and social memory through the manipulation of knowledge and academic power; and in that game, the demon that haunts Greek historiography, according to the “new wave”, is the same demon that is held accountable for the events of December – not of December 1944 in Athens but the riots of December 2008 in Athens; it is “the ideology of the ‘*metapolitefsi*’ generation’ which discovered its utopia in the romantic construction of the 1940s: in the heroism it sought, the revolution it fantasised, the youth it lost, but also in the convenient alibi for the prosaic present it administered.”<sup>75</sup>

It would be hard to disagree with regard to the fantasies and the political insolvency of that generation. But the historiographical post-1974 generation does not write *en masse* books dedicated to “the ghosts of [their] adolescent years” nor is it ignorant of the institutional and practical meaning of the term “secretary of state”.<sup>76</sup>

It is essential to follow systematically the recent historiography on the history of the Cold War – to which the Greek history of the 1940s forms an integral part – in order to grasp that the methodological, analytical and interpretative rigidities and obsessions that are inherent in any canonisation attempt widen the gap between home-grown and home-consumed historiography and international production. One instance might serve as an allusive postscript: on the art of body-counting the “victims of communism” at large and in the Soviet Union in particular, and on the acrobatics of western Kremlinologists, Moshe Lewin counters that anticommunism is not an analytical tool for the study of Soviet history, much in the same way that the attempt to “Stalinise” the entire Soviet phenomenon, as if the USSR had been a vast gulag from 1917 right down to 1991, is unrealistically bizarre.<sup>77</sup> By analogy, nor is anticommunism a scholarly tool for the study of Greek history in the 1940s, much in the same way that the communists and their friends then had not been members of a mass-murder syndicate or a terrorist mass organisation.

The political implications of the Greek historiographical “new wave” cannot be ignored and will continue to generate debates for as long as history and politics are locked in a never-ending battle for supremacy, legitimacy and meaning. But politics is one thing. Accuracy is another:

You would not fulminate quite so much, if you had had my many wild-goose chases after facts stated by men not trained to scientific accuracy. I often vow to myself that I will utterly disregard every statement made by any man who has not shown the world he can observe accurately. I wish I had space to tell you a curious History, which I was fool enough to investigate on almost universal testimony of Beans growing this year upside down. – I firmly believe that accuracy is the most difficult quality to acquire. – I did not, however, intend to say all this.<sup>78</sup>

Nor should we.

## NOTES

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- 2 Gérard Noiriel, *Introduction à la socio-histoire*, Paris: La Découverte, 2006, 3.
- 3 Antonis Liakos assesses the relationship forged between the traces of the past and the historian as a perpetual dialogue that connects the constructor/narrator with the presentism of his hyper-ego. See Antonis Liakos, *Πώς το παρελθόν γίνεται ιστορία*; [How the past is turned into history?], Athens: Polis, 2007, 284–285.
- 4 John Maynard Keynes, *Two Memoirs*, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949, 83.
- 5 Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Aspects of the Civil War during the Occupation: The Argolid, 1943–44", unpublished paper presented at the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College, London, 18–20 Apr 1999.
- 6 Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Red Terror: Leftist Violence during the Occupation", in Mark Mazower (ed.), *After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation, and State in Greece, 1943–1960*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000, 142–183.
- 7 Stathis N. Kalyvas and Nikos Marantzidis, "Νέες τάσεις στη μελέτη του εμφυλίου πολέμου" [New trends in the study of the civil war], *Ta Nea/Vivliodromio*, 20–21 Mar 2004. Also, Mark Mazower, "Κανένας από τους μύθους δεν αντέχει πλέον . . ." [None of the myths holds out any longer . . .], *Ta Nea/Vivliodromio*, 20–21 Mar 2004.
- 8 Ilias Nikolakopoulos, "Το 'νέο κύμα' και η τριλογία της σύγχυσης" [The "new wave" and the trilogy of muddle], *Ta Nea/Vivliodromio*, 7–8 Feb 2009.
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- 10 Dimitris Vlantas, *Ημερολόγιο 1947–1949* [Diary, 1947–1949], eds Yiorgos Antoniou and Nikos Marantzidis, Athens: Estia, 2007. On reactions and the debate sparked by this publication, see Ioanna Papathanasiou, "Χρήσεις και καταχρήσεις των πηγών ή η ιστορία ως εντύπωση" [Uses and abuses of sources or history as a sensation], *Ta Istorika* 25/47 (2007), 457–473; Nikos Marantzidis and Yiorgos Antoniou, "Για τη (χαμένη): τιμή της ιστοριογραφίας: το 'χαμένο' ημερολόγιο του Δημήτρη Βλαντά" [On the (lost?) dignity of historiography: the "lost" diary of Dimitris Vlandas], *Nea Estia* 163/1811 (2008), 965–983; Ioanna Papathanasiou, "Χρήσεις και καταχρήσεις των πηγών ή η ιστορία ως εντύπωση II: λίγα ακόμη λόγια για τη σκόνη των παραποιήσεων" [Uses and abuses of sources or history as a sensation II: a few more words on the dust of distortions], *Ta Istorika* 25/49 (2008), 472–480; Nikos Marantzidis and Yiorgos Antoniou, "Ο δεύτερος θάνατος του Δημήτρη Βλαντά: η κομμουνιστική ηγεσία και οι μνήμες του Εμφυλίου σήμερα" [The second death of Dimitris Vlandas: the communist leadership and the memories of the civil war today], *Ta Istorika* 26/50 (2009), 226–230; Ioanna Papathanasiou, "Χρήσεις και καταχρήσεις των πηγών ή η ιστορία ως εντύπωση III: δέκα σημεία που δεν περιμένουν απάντηση" [Uses and abuses of sources or history as a sensation III: ten points that await no response], *Ta Istorika* 26/50 (2009), 230–232.
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- 21 Ibid., 104–105.
- 22 Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie politique*, 169.
- 23 "The victorious revolution that was lost" is the title of the memoir-cum-narrative by the communist Thanasis Hantzis, first secretary of the central committee of the National Liberation Front from 1941 to 1944; see Thanasis Hantzis, *Η νικηφόρα επανάσταση που χάθηκε (1941–1945)* [The victorious revo-lution that was lost 1941–1945], 3 vols, Athens: Papazisis, 1977–1979.
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- 42 Marantzidis, “Η τοπική διάσταση”, 175, 178.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 181.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 182–183, 184.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 46 Arno Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000, 4, 9, 71, 75. Geoff Eley reminds his readers that “in Europe, democracy did not result from natural evolution or economic prosperity. It certainly did not emerge as an inevitable byproduct of individualism or the market. It developed because masses of people organised collectively to demand it.” See Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002, 4.
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321.

51 Ibid., 322.

52 A representative sample of the Greek historians' debate on the 1940s, as fought out in the domain of public history, can be found in a special supplement of the Athens daily newspaper *Ta Nea*, published in December 2004 under the title "Διάλογος για την Ιστορία: 18 ειδικοί συζητούν για τη βία στον Ελληνικό Εμφύλιο" [Debate on history: 18 experts on violence in the Greek Civil War].

53 Stathis Kalyvas, "Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος (1943–1949): Το τέλος των μύθων και η στροφή προς το μαζικό επίπεδο" [Civil war, 1943–1949: The end of myths and the turn towards the mass level], *Epistimi kai koinonia* 11 (2003), 41; idem and Nikos Marantzidis, "Νέες τάσεις στη μελέτη του εμφυλίου πολέμου" [New trends in the study of the civil war].

54 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, 6th ed., Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1967, 43; English translation: Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1954, 41.

55 Kalyvas, "Συλλογική μνήμη", 207.

56 There is of course no single 'leftist' version, but it is true that "outsiders tend to see uniformity in other groups and fine distinctions within their own". See Stefan Collini's "Introduction", in C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, [1959, 1964] 1998, lv.

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59 "Teleology" is used here to denote "the philosophical doctrine that all nature, or at least intentional agents, are goal-directed or functionally organised". "External teleology" asserts that "human beings can anticipate the future and behave in ways calculated to realise their intentions". "Internal teleology", on the other hand, ascribes to nature itself a telos in the sense of a final destination. See Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 905–906.

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63 Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, 141. Emphasis in original.

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66 Michael Scriven, "Truisms as Grounds for Historical Explanations", in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, London: Collier Macmillan, 1959, 470.

67 Stephen W. Hawking, *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays*, London: Bantam, 1993, 126. Emphasis added.

68 Konstantinos Tsoukalas, "Το λευκό και το άλικο" [The white and the scarlet], review of Grigoris Farakos,

- Ο ΕΛΑΣ και η εξουσία* [ELAS and power] (2 vols. Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2000), *To Vima/Vivlia*, 17 Dec 2000.
- 69 Antonio Gramsci, "The Philosophy of Praxis", in Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence and Wishart, [1973] 2005, 360.
- 70 Michael Bentley, *Modernising England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, 232.
- 71 Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited*, 22.
- 72 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Penguin, [1963] 1980, 12; Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, 2nd ed., London: Granta, 2001, 189.
- 73 Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited*, 31–32. Stone made this exhortation in 1987.
- 74 Tony Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century*, London: Vintage, 2009, 4.
- 75 Kalyvas, "Συλλογική μνήμη", 246. See also the following three newspaper articles by Kalyvas: "Η κουλτούρα της μεταπολίτευσης" [The metapolitefsi culture], *Kathimerini*, 14 Dec 2008; "Γιατί η Αθήνα καίγεται" [Why Athens is ablaze], *To Vima*, 14 Dec 2008; "Μια δεκαετία ερευνητικής ανανέωσης: Η έρευνα και οι αντιδράσεις" [A decade of renewing research: Research and reactions], *To Vima*, 18 Oct 2009.
- 76 See Thanasis D. Sfikas, "Ο ναρκισσισμός των μικρών πραγμάτων: περί σύγχισης, ιστοριογραφίας και άλλων δαιμόνων" [The narcissism of small things: of muddle, historiography and other demons], *O Mnimon* 30 (2009), 335 and passim.
- 77 Moshe Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, London: Verso, 2005, 4, 98–126, 378, 397–402.
- 78 Extract from a letter by Charles Darwin to an unknown correspondent, published in full by Stephen Jay Gould's editor Leslie Meredith in his "note to the reader" in Stephen Jay Gould, *The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox: Mending and Minding the Misconceived Gap Between Science and the Humanities*, London: Vintage, 2003, x.