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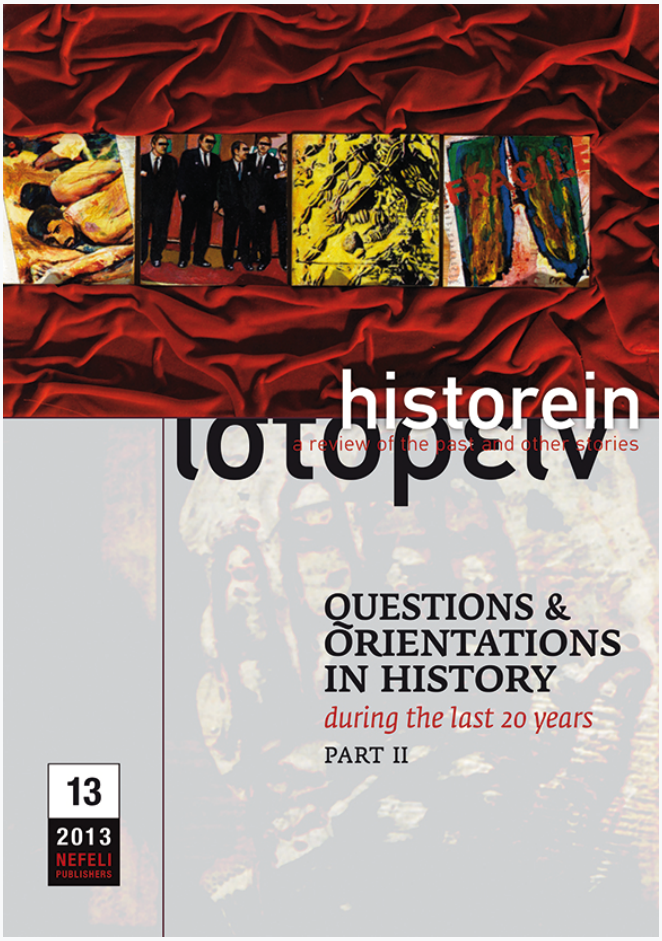

Review of Vicky Karafoulidou's Η γλώσσα του σοσιαλισμού: ταξική προοπτική και εθνική ιδεολογία στον ελληνικό 19ο αι. [The Language of Socialism: the Perspective of Class and National Ideology in the Greek 19th c.]

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Julia, Greekness], *Athensville* blog, 2 Aug 2010 [*athensville.blogspot.gr/2010/08/blog/blog-post.html*], accessed 31 Oct 2012.

2 Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization and the Institution of Modern Greece*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996, 267-82.

3 See *Greece is for Lovers* blog, [greeceisforlovers.com], accessed 31 Oct 2012.

4 See, for example, "Anna Goula: Galazio kai Leuko", *YouTube* [youtu.be/UQBX3iU1WiQ], accessed 31 Oct 2012.

Vicky Karafoulidou

Η γλώσσα του σοσιαλισμού: ταξική προοπτική και εθνική ιδεολογία στον ελληνικό 19ο αιώνα

[The language of socialism: the perspective of class and national ideology in the Greek 19th century]

Athens: Vivliorama, 2011. 476 pp.

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Visiting Athens in 1912, Avraam Benaroya, the Thessaloniki-based labour activist and ardent socialist, was astonished to see an image of Jesus Christ among the figureheads decorating the headquarters of the Socialist Party. This anecdotal incident seemed to encompass the gap between the interethnic, militant and radical Federation of Thessaloniki and the conservatism of socialists in the Greek state. For decades, Benaroya's scornful attitude characterised historiographical accounts of the Greek labour and socialist movement; groupings and organisations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were seen as peculiar offspring of a distorted ideological framework, while thinkers and leading figures as mere individualists with personal agendas.[1] This evaluative outlook reflected the fact that the study of socialism was confined to the movement itself, ousted from the conservative state institutions, while it corresponded to the popular tradition of discrediting "utopian" as compared to "scientific" socialism. Even though these simplistic dichotomies have been challenged,[2] the early world of "social critique" remains an issue on the margins of Greek historiography, since the nineteenth century is often perceived as a period of minimal class antagonism. One cannot but notice the connection between the

monotonous grievances of the nineteenth-century socialists when comparing the "developed" west with contemporary accounts that ascribe social antagonism to the number of industrial chimneys operating in a certain historical period.

In this context, Vicky Karafoulidou has gone against many popular tides of thought in her study of nineteenth-century "socialism"; the theme of her book, which is based on her thesis, is the historical construction of the concept of "socialism" within the Greek social and cultural environment; its goal is to highlight the multiple meanings of the "language of socialism". Therefore, this is not the typical analysis of a social movement; on the contrary, the author clarifies that the emphasis is on the conceptualisations of "socialism" as reflected in translational preferences and subsequent connotations. The perceptive and detailed analysis, based on careful and thorough research, offers a remarkably stimulating result, while presenting an excellent paradigm of conceptual history – following the recent revival of interest in this field.[2] Yet, this methodological preference comes at a price: the narration misses, naturally, fascinating aspects of the development of revolutionary thought, the adventurous lives of intellectuals, their never-ending confrontations, conspiratorial activities and conditions of isolation and persecution. The author is aware of this price, as is evident in her sensitivity and recognition of the "subtle thrill" that one feels when approaching the world of "dreamers, schemers, anarchists and secret agents".[3]

Nonetheless the book is not devoid of "thrill". Karafoulidou presents an ever-expanding world of texts and individuals engaged in lively debate; known authors and intellectuals, friends and foes of "socialism", journals and newspapers, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, pamphlets and translations. This systematic documentation enriches pre-existing bibliographical accounts of socialist thought while revealing a close and perceptive reading that highlights the following topics: the reception and translation of "socialism", the contesting meanings, the variations of "class", the interplay between the Greek social and intellectual setting with that of the "West", the transformations of language interrelated with social transformations and challenges. Karafoulidou studies the transformations of "socialism" from the first translational attempts in the aftermath of the Greek revolution of 1821 to the public debate generated around the "social question" in the years preceding the Balkan wars. This follows a main argument regarding the "narrowing" of the concept of socialism from the moral fulfilment of the Enlightenment triptych of liberty–equality–fraternity to a demand for radical political and social change. Yet this does not resemble the dichotomies of "utopian" and "scientific" socialism, but focuses on the contradictions, local variations and dominant position of national ideology in shaping the concept of "socialism" and "class".

The first part of the book (1833–1856) refers to the initial appearances of "socialism" in the translational form of *koinonismos.* Emphasis is given to certain intellectuals who retained ties with the French environment and the interplay of Enlightenment traditions with the challenges of the postrevolutionary Greek state. This reading brings to light interesting networks and influences, as in the case of Charles Fourier, while the translational flexibility regarding "socialism" demonstrates its adaptation within the Greek setting. This is used to construct a pivotal argument of the book: that the "creative adjustments" of "socialism" corresponded to the "immaturity" of social conditions in Greece. In this context, *koinonismos*, in contrast to French socialism of the

period, did not condemn individualistic financial practices since they were not dominant in the "premodern" economy of the newly founded state. In this line of thought, the subsequent implementation of *sosialismos* reflected the synchronisation with the contemporary conceptualisations of socialism.

In the second part (1848–1870), these primary assumptions gain impetus since the focus shifts from isolated intellectuals to the debate within Ionian Island radicalism and the parallel appearance of anarchist-oriented groups on the Greek mainland. These are enjoyable chapters to read; one feels the "power of words" when abstract concepts are interrelated with the questions of politics, ranging from the anarchist-minded republicans of Patras to the "extremists" of Ionian radicalism. In this period, Karafoulidou attests how the implementation of *sosialismos* went hand-in-hand with the clarification of "socialism" as the equivalent of the demand for radical political change. In this transformation, the echo of international events played a significant role; this is demonstrated in the antiradical, antisocialist rhetoric within Ionian radicalism, but also in the interplay of the European 1848 with the intellectual atmosphere merging democracy, equality and change under the auspices of the "people", a dominant concept that seemed to embody collective will.

The predominance of "people" over "class" defined *sosialismos* as a demand for political changes that did not describe class antagonism but mostly the dichotomy between "people" and "power". Within this framework, the third part of the book, referring to the turn of the century (1885–1907), stands out, since two interwoven shifts took place. "Socialism" appeared much more associated with "class", while "workers" replaced "people", giving impetus to a new type of polarisation between the world of capital and the world of wage labour. Karafoulidou relates these transformations to the economic and social crisis that followed a short period of industrialisation and urbanisation, but mainly presents two figureheads of Greek socialism: Stavros Kallergis and Platon Drakoulis. In their writings, one can detect the "narrowing" of "socialism" and the implementation of a language of social differentiation, where the dominant dichotomy is not between power/people, but capital/labour. In this context, "socialism" was established as an autonomous political force, as attested by the foundation of socialist organisations in Athens and elsewhere. By the end of the century, translational experimentalisms had ended and *sosialismos* was recognised by friends and foes alike.

The advent of "socialism" in the national political arena is the main topic of the last part of the book, devoted to the early part of the twentieth century (1907–1912). This development is presented as being intertwined with the elevation of the "social question" as a major issue of public debate. Consensus regarding the necessity of a radical change in the aftermath of the "disastrous" Greek–Turkish war of 1897 legitimised "socialism" as a plausible answer. But according to Karafoulidou, the hegemonic presence of nationalism defined the boundaries of *sosialismos*: the language of socialism emphasised the necessity of a national revival within the context of modernisation. This interpretation offers a valuable framework for our understanding of the stance of Greek socialists towards the Balkan wars and the politics of Venizelos. In a way, the 1907–1912 period signalled a return to the pre-1885 conceptualisations of "socialism" as a demand for political change in favour of the "people" and against those "in power". According to Karafoulidou's main argument, this proves the inability of "socialism" to challenge the dominant ideological

climate of nationalism; socialism appeared, with noticeable exceptions, not as an antithetical force, but mainly as a populist critique of the failures of national desires. In this context, the Balkan wars are seen as a landmark in the demise of the nineteenth-century climate, allowing the reader to suggest that the postwar formation of socialism must be studied in relative autonomy.

Karafoulidou offers thus a detailed and perceptive analysis of "socialism" in the Greek nineteenth century through an innovative perspective: the interest in translational experimentalism, the importance given to the devoted polemics of "foreign" ideas, the linking of *koinonismos/sosialismos* – and other variations of "socialism" – and the parallel discussion of "socialism" and "class". Therefore it contributes towards the understanding of the Greek nineteenth century and, more importantly, it challenges our certainties as regards the multiple meanings of "socialism" by illuminating the connotations and linkages between them. These linkages, though, often remain introverted and Greek society remains a distant background, somewhat irrelevant to the foreground of intellectual thought. In this regard, there are short intervals devoted to the main tendencies of each period that are not interwoven with the main narrative. The same is true for the nature and itinerary of socialist groups; references to them are parenthetical, while the spotlight is directed towards the individuals and their writings – this is also reflected in the index. From this methodological preference, transformations are ascribed to general social trends, when certain developments could contribute towards a more coherent argumentation. This is particularly true in the case of the transition from the Kallergis and Drakoulis era to the early twentieth century; the role, for instance, of state persecution against "radical socialists" in the heated summer of 1894 and the parallel appraisal of the "nationally minded" Drakoulis could contribute to our understanding of the "retreat" that Karafoulidou rightly detects in the early twentieth century.

Of course, one can easily understand the difficulties of combining such an introspective reading of the conceptualisation of "socialism" with an analogous detailed history of socialist practice, or even more of the particular social conditions of each given period. On the other hand though, Karafoulidou's innovative and creative outlook as regards the concept of "socialism" diminishes when she refers to the Greek nineteenth century as a whole. There, the author resorts to a traditional reading of the period that emphasises the "autonomy of the political sphere from the social structure". Karafoulidou appears to accept this position, even though her empirical evidence indicates a more perplexed picture; social antagonism – if we agree that it does not correspond to a clash of organised armies – underpinned the debates of the Ionian Island radicals, the perceived fears of "socialism" and the multiple answers to the "social question". In the same context, the repeated references in the book to the "backwardness" and "immaturity" of Greek society compared to the west reflect a belief that there are ideal social settings for "socialism" to be "developed". This might underestimate the adaptive and eclectic nature of socialist and revolutionary thought throughout the nineteenth century. What more, it contributes, even though Karafoulidou does not seem to have such intentions, to the reproduction of the idea of a Greek exceptionalism: Greek social conditions defined the belated appearance of socialist organisations and the limited appeal of socialist ideas. Such an outlook does not take into account parallel developments – it is interesting to notice that in the early 1890s socialist parties were formed in most Balkan countries – and undervalues the

multiple expressions of social antagonism in settings with minimal industrialisation (see, for instance, "backward" nineteenth-century Russia). In 1906 Werner Sombart asked "why is there no socialism in the United States"; in a way his question, referring to the most advanced and industrialised country of the world, highlights the nonexistence of an archetypical "socialism" and the limitations of "socialist exceptionalism".

NOTES

1 For a typical example of this tendency, see Yiannis Kordatos, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού εργατικού κινήματος* [History of the Greek labour movement], Athens: Karavakos, 1956 [multiple editions]

2 For the most important contribution, see Panayiotis Noutsos, *Η σοσιαλιστική σκέψη στην Ελλάδα, από το 1875 ώς το 1974: τ. Α': οι σοσιαλιστές διανοούμενοι και η πολιτική λειτουργία της πρώιμης κοινωνικής κριτικής (1875–1907)* [Socialist thought in Greece from 1875 to 1974, vol. I: socialist intellectuals and the political function of the early social critique, 1875–1907], Athens: Gnosi, 1990.

3 See Alphonse Dupront, *Ιστορία των εννοιών: διαδρομές της ευρωπαϊκής ιστοριογραφίας* [History of concepts: paths of European historiography], Athens: Mnimon, 1996 [in Greek].

4 Alex Butterworth, *The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents*, London: Vintage Books, 2011.