

## Historein

Vol 14, No 2 (2014)

Historein 14/2 (2014)



**Review of Paraskevi Golia's Υμνώντας το έθνος. Ο ρόλος των σχολικών γιορτών στην εθνική και πολιτική διαπαιδαγώγηση, 1924-2010 [Praising the nation: The role of national day school commemorations in national and political-education policy, 1924-2010]**

*Zeta G. Papandreou*

doi: [10.12681/historein.246](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.246)

Copyright © 2015, Zeta G. Papandreou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Papandreou, Z. G. (2014). Review of Paraskevi Golia's Υμνώντας το έθνος. Ο ρόλος των σχολικών γιορτών στην εθνική και πολιτική διαπαιδαγώγηση, 1924-2010 [Praising the nation: The role of national day school commemorations in national and political-education policy, 1924-2010]. *Historein*, 14(2), 142–146. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.246>

radio programming produced by the Greek state for communities abroad, providing insight on how this policy was used to influence both the organisational structures and the ideologies of the diaspora. In the final chapter, Dimitris Christopoulos further investigates the constitutional framework pertaining to the potential political participation of the Greek diaspora in Greek political life: the systematic postponement of granting voting rights to those nationals living outside of Greece's borders clearly demonstrates the vast distance between the catchy promises of allegiance and the realist policies regarding the composition of the electorate.

An overview of the contents of this volume leads one to the hypothesis that the fate of the Greek nation beyond the state's borders bears great resemblance to the fate of other ethnic groups or individuals trapped within Greek borders. Policies pertaining to the real or imaginary ties with distant Greek diaspora communities are nothing more than the mirror images of the exclusionary policies for domestic minorities or recent immigrants. In the end, it's all about defining the Greek nation. Upon this realisation, the reason this volume was included as part of the KEMO series becomes crystal clear.

## NOTE

- 1 Opening line of *The Odyssey*: "Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy." *Homer. The Odyssey*, 2 vols, trans AT Murray (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1919).

### Paraskevi Golia

*Υμνώντας το έθνος. Ο ρόλος των σχολικών γιορτών στην εθνική και πολιτική διαπαιδαγώγηση 1924–2010*

**[Praising the nation: The role of national day school commemorations in national and political-education policy, 1924–2010]**

**Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2011. 445 pp.**

### Zeta Papandreou

PhD in history didactics

In this book, Paraskevi Golia makes an extremely important contribution to the study of the history of education in Greece as well as of the ways governmental practices internalise the dominant ideology. One of the book's stronger points is the originality of the research, spanning an extensive time period, in which primary sources, such as government circulars to schools on how to celebrate national days, are studied for the first time, from the educational reform of 1924, through to the Metaxas dictatorship, the period from 1940 to 1949, the post-civil war period from 1950 to 1966, the 1967–1974 dictatorship and the post-1974 democratic system. At the same time, it systematically deconstructs the associated rituals, while analysing Likert-type graded scale questionnaires regarding the views of sixth-grade students and primary-school teachers on the role of school celebrations.

As the author points out, "the research is based on a dialogue between the sociology of education, history and anthropology with semiotics" (29). From the anthropological perspective, participatory observation plays the dominant role in

this work, while from the sociology of education perspective circulars are examined according to the following parameters: the reconstitution of historical fact, the national self and the “other”, the typology of speech (national, religious, symbolic) and issues around school festivities (exhortations, rituals). The attempt to interpret educational circulars is performed methodically in accordance with national political developments and Greek social reality. The ideological parameters that emerge in the documents are recorded through an interesting taxonomy. Aptly, Golia observes that in spite of the shifts in the dominant ideology, their structures have hardly changed since they clearly refer to the deeply embedded national element in the Greek ideology.

In the qualitative analysis on the theme of the “Reconstitution of historical facts”, time is presumed to be linear and every historical event is embedded in this time sequence in a teleological context. The Greek nation is perceived as unchanged, with a long and uninterrupted history beginning in antiquity and with clear representations of the collective “we” over time. In this scheme, the “No” expressed on 28 October 1940 to the Italian ultimatum for Greece to surrender its national sovereignty, extends from the ancient battles against the Persians in Plataea, Marathon and Thermopylae, up to the revolutionary battles against the Turks in the 1820s at Alamana, the fortress walls of Mesolonghi and Kanaris’ torch. And from Skra, Bizani and Northern Epirus in 1912 up to the “martyred” Cyprus of 1974 (68–69).

It is obvious that through the circulars, as manifested in the speeches by teachers on national days, Greek national identity became the yardstick to evaluate not only the course of the nation but also that of other, neighbouring peoples. Through the centuries, the hostile “other” assumed a different representation. But in an

attempt to objectify history, the Greeks are portrayed as the saviours of Greece and Europe, such as “with the fall of the 300 of Leonidas at Thermopylae, Europe was saved from Asian barbarism”, and “with the fall of Greece in 1940, Europe was again saved from slavery under the Axis” (70). In contrast to the Greeks’ national “intelligence”, “bravery” and “superiority”, the Turks are presented as “barbaric and vindictive” while the Europeans at the time of ancient Greece are portrayed “as wild and dangerous tribes, beasts that lived and fed off roots, acorns and raw meat, an undisciplined horde, the world of Europe” (96). The “others” – the Ottomans, Italians, Germans (their soldiers being referred to as Teutons (64)) – and the Allies are presented as anti-Greek in a Manichaean way. With ironic expressions such as the “culture of the Huns”, the “barbarian hordes” and “Huns”, anti-German feeling is pervasive in commemoration speeches at all sites that suffered Nazi atrocities during wartime occupation. The only exceptions where “the other” is not clearly identified are the circulars relating to the commemoration of the 1973 Athens Polytechnic uprising against the military junta. As Giola writes, “many people try to use, for political reasons, the anniversary of the Polytechnic uprising as a means to divide the Greek people, even today, 30 years later” (166).

The authors of these circulars attempt to present the Greek people as a concrete reality, describing them as “indomitable”, “brave lads”, “optimistic”, “active”, “humanist” and “brave” (98). But in some circulars, the character of the Greeks is recognised as possessing some defects – the terms “bipolar” and “divided” are used – and therefore ineffective. To quote an example: “In the struggle of the Greeks against the Ottomans, the destructiveness of discord, which had also plagued the Greeks during other times when unity should have prevailed, unfortunately manifested itself” (92). “Greeks

believe that we are a free people who do not tolerate any yoke; unfortunately, that also means the one that is sometimes required by modern states: the discipline . . . necessary so as to correct our inherent faults" (92).

Myths, symbols, values and traditions are presented as evidence of a continuous, collective self-awareness, which in no way reflects the multiethnic composition of the Byzantine empire, as Golia correctly points out (70).

Through her extensive sociological research, Golia encourages a fruitful reflection on how teachers and students assess the role of national commemorations in schools. The author points out that ministerial circulars pay homage to ancestors (a signified concept) through the use of laurel wreaths, the erection of statues of heroes and holding a minute's silence (signifiers). In addition, the research reveals that students attach great importance to the commemorations and associated rituals, as they believe that this is how heroes are honoured and historical knowledge is attained. Teachers and students associate the role of national celebrations with national and political education. While many teachers argue that the commemoration speeches rely on outdated stereotypes, a large proportion believe that the celebrations are a necessary evil and an opportunity for a holiday. However, they do not express outright a clear opinion on whether they should be abolished. Regarding the parades that are almost always associated with the commemorations, statistically there is a significant difference of opinion according to gender: male educators are in favour of keeping them, while their female counterparts tend to agree with their abolition.

Mona Ozouf, a French pioneer in the study of the political interpretation and purpose of national celebrations, points out that besides the imposition of political considerations concerning the

content and consensus "on the limits" of the celebration, the manner in which it engages a disparate crowd of participants and observers is quite important.<sup>1</sup> Ozouf has contributed to the idea of "the emotional depth of the celebration", which rejects focusing on the national celebrations only from the perspective of the organisers and their intentions.<sup>2</sup> Historians Panagiotis Kimourtzis and Anna Mandylara believe that while the main elements of the celebrations are commemorative and serve political expediency, their organization is guided by the purposeful integration of the past, in both the memory strategies of the present as well as their projection in the future. They argue that the management of these three time periods (past, present, future) is implemented by the celebrations that a) "seek to embrace history, tightening the bonds of a distant time (the past) with the present", b) attempt to selectively interpret the present, justifying it and providing even more authority to the current dominant (state) interpretation that is "drawn from the historical depth of the approach (the present)", and c) "contribute reproductively to the strengthening of the social fabric (the future)".<sup>3</sup> Taking the above into account, Golia's proposal to examine national day commemorations in schools from the perspective of better understanding the relationship between the social and political forces that caused such historical events, and not through the one-dimensional narrative of political events, is quite to the point. This approach, about what one should do when teaching history or organising a school commemoration day, the author maintains, would allow for the redefinition of the identity and self-awareness of students.

The writer has kept the necessary balance between qualitative and quantitative research with great staidness and responsibility. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison point out, in historical studies most of the research is qualitative, as it concerns the examination of an object com-

posed of verbal material with much symbolism. However, it has been proven that quantitative content analysis is extremely useful in the examination of historical issues, for the transformation of the historical document into quantitative data.<sup>4</sup>

The study is marked by an eclectic use of theoretical and methodological tools that in substance contradict its theoretical consistency. While the knowledge and application of semiotic methods is apparent, the references to historical materialism and phenomenology are not adequately supported.

In the book there are, unfortunately, some points that are not in line with the author's extensive and systematic research. The fact that one of Greece's national celebrations commemorates 28 October 1940, marking the brave resistance to totalitarian challenges, is interpreted by the author as a sign of a "global" alliance of peoples (312).<sup>5</sup> The reason why Greece celebrates its entry into the war and not the end of it (12 October 1944 for Greece, or 8 May 1945 for Europe), as one would expect, is linked to the civil war that followed the world war.<sup>6</sup> The historical events were highly traumatic, and it became impossible to define an anniversary chronologically close to the December events in Athens and the civil war that followed. In addition, during the analysis of national day speeches in regard to the evaluation and impact of historical events in Greece, the reader is left confused as the author's reflections are not explained clearly (79). Also of particular interest, and one requiring further investigation, is a reference to a 1949 circular where it appears that, in the midst of the civil war and widespread persecution and deportations to faraway islands, some teachers, possibly in villages, avoided making speeches on the March 25 national day marking the start of the revolution against the Turks in 1821.<sup>7</sup>

By studying the circulars, we understand how educators became conveyors of ideological values and shapers of collective memory and historical consciousness. Golia reveals the Greek obsession to see the nation as an unbroken continuum without internal heterogeneities. According to historian George Kokkinos, "Ancient Greek culture [and its symbolisms] are perceived by most as a given regulatory model, as the literal 'place' according to which we can make sense of nineteenth-century and modern Greece."<sup>8</sup> The purpose of a modernist school historian is not to challenge our identity but, rather, the existence of collective myths. The author investigates her subject thoroughly, systematically and critically, identifying key points and deconstructing in a comprehensive way multiple inputs that are included in the educational circulars and refer to school speeches on national or political anniversaries; school celebrations; rituals through semiotic analysis; and social perceptions on the role of school celebrations. The book's basic finding is that Greek educational policy has never deviated from the intense Greek-centred and national reading of Greek history.

#### NOTES

- 1 The content of festivities "must declare a particular meaning as predominant over other conflicting meanings". Mona Ozouf, "Festivities during the time of the French revolution," in *Το έργο της ιστορίας* [The work of history], vol. 3, ed. Nora G. Le Goff, trans. Klairi Mitsotaki (Athens: Kedros/Rappas, 1988), 249, quoted in Panagiotis Kimourtzis and Anna Mandylara, «Εορτές και τελετές στο ελληνικό βασίλειο (1830–1862). Συμβολική εξουσία, συγκρότηση κράτους, εκπαιδευτικοί θεσμοί» [Feasts and rituals in the Greek kingdom (1830–1862): Symbolic power, state-building, educational institutions], in *Για μια ποιητική του εκπαιδευτικού τοπίου. Δέκα χρόνια μετά...: Χαριστήριο στον Ιωσήφ Σολομών* [For the poetry of the education-

- al landscape. Ten years on..., Farewell to Iosif Solomon], vol. 1, ed. Yiorgos Stamelos (Athens: Alexandria, 2011), 191–192.
- 2 Panagiotis Kimourtzis and Anna Mandylara, «Δημόσιες εορτές στην Ελλάδα, 1830–1860. Γένεση του κρατικού συμβολισμού» [Public festivities in Greece, 1830–1860. The genesis of state symbolism], *Dodoni: Scientific Annals of the Philosophy School of the University of Ioannina* (forthcoming).
  - 3 Kimourtzis and Mandylara, «Εορτές και τελετές», 191.
  - 4 Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison, *Μεθοδολογία εκπαιδευτικής έρευνας* [Educational Research Methodology] (Athens: Metaichmio, 2008), 281–282.
  - 5 The circulars quoted by Golia establishing 28 October as a national day of celebration in the first year of the German occupation are very interesting. Golia, *Υμνώντας το έθνος*, 176.
  - 6 On this subject, see the analysis given by Christina Koulouri in a 1995 speech given in Komotini entitled “Μύθοι και σύμβολα μιας εθνικής επετείου. Πανηγυρικός στον επίσημο εορτασμό της 25ης Μαρτίου” [Myths and symbols of a national celebration: Speech delivered on the official commemoration of the March 25 celebration]. [http://lesxianagnosiskor.blogspot.com/2009/12/blogspot\\_08.html](http://lesxianagnosiskor.blogspot.com/2009/12/blogspot_08.html) (accessed 19 September 2012).
  - 7 According to the education minister, Theodoros Tourkouvelis, education “has come to a state of national and religious decay, because teachers did not dare to utter a patriotic word publicly on March 25, as they were immediately placed in disfavour. And many, without being leftists, pretended to be, lest they be prosecuted. Nobody dared to oppose.” Golia, *Υμνώντας το έθνος*, 22.
  - 8 As mentioned in George Kokkinos, Sophia Vouri, Panagiotis Gatsotis, Petros Trantas and Efstathios Stefanos, *Ιστορική κουλτούρα και συνείδηση. Απόψεις και στάσεις μαθητών και εκπαιδευτικών της Πρωτοβάθμιας Εκπαίδευσης για την Ιστορία* [Historical culture and
- consciousness: Opinions and attitudes of primary-level pupils and teachers on history] (Athens: Noogramma, 2005), 129.