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Review of Yannis Skalidakis', Η ελεύθερη Ελλάδα: Η εξουσία του ΕΑΜ στα χρόνια της κατοχής (1943-1944) [Free Greece: The power of EAM in the occupation years, 1943–44]

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Yannis Skalidakis

Η ελεύθερη Ελλάδα: Η εξουσία του ΕΑΜ στα χρόνια της κατοχής (1943–1944)

[Free Greece: EAM rule during German occupation, 1943–44]

Athens: Asini, 2014. 416 pp.

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This book, a revised version of Yannis Skalidakis' doctoral dissertation that he defended at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, is part of a larger body of studies produced by young Greek historians who endeavour to reexamine the turbulent 1940s by employing contemporary methodologies and highlighting questions that have not received attention, or are mistakenly perceived as having been answered.

In this work, Skalidakis examines the economic, administrative and political functions of "Free Greece". This was the extensive part of Greek territory that the National Liberation Front (EAM) wrested from the control of the occupying forces through armed resistance and in which it gradually created a parallel state structure.

The book is divided in two parts. In the first, the author examines the processes which created the space for Free Greece. The unprecedented political vacuum that emerged after the Greek government and the king fled the country in 1941, in conjunction with the economy collapsing as a result of the occupying forces plundering crops and other valuable resources, constituted a shocking reversal of the usual conditions that ordered people's daily lives. Im-

mediately after the country was taken over, the citizens were left to their own devices to face the harsh consequences of the military occupation. The organised resistance undertook to fill this vacuum; initially by creating free pockets within which it could minimise the negative consequences of the occupation and, subsequently, by organising life in the liberated areas on the basis of a new administrative model.

The provisioning crisis that broke out in the winter of 1941–42 switched the balance between the rural and urban spaces: for the first time life, in the cities became worse than in the villages. The efforts of the first occupation government to collect the agricultural output constituted a direct threat to the rural population. The peasants' struggle to retain their crops was the convergence point for the EAM resistance, which gave political character to the activities around the control and management of agricultural production and became the basis for the growth of the resistance in the countryside.

Consequently, and this is a very important point that the author emphasises, the clash between the resistance and the occupation forces for control of the land, its people and its resources took place on the shifting borders of two territories – free and occupied Greece.

The central role of territoriality is demonstrated in the way in which the occupation government made "effective" use of foreign humanitarian aid to hurt the mountain populations they could not control. Using the distribution of humanitarian aid as tool for reinforcing their rule in the cities and the rural plains, the occupation government excluded mountain ranges from the relief distribution with the purpose of stemming the dynamic growth of the partisan Greek People's Liberation Army (ELAS). The economic and administrative isolation of the mountain areas eventually reduced their pro-

ductive capacity, which in turn led to the weakening of the partisan forces that relied on these areas.

The appearance of ELAS forces in the mountain ranges of central Greece led to the gradual coalescence of the rural population around the new, developing government. According to the author, the coalition of partisans and rural populations against the common enemy was the blockaded countryside's answer to the policies of the occupying powers. So, in the early months of 1943, two territories were constituted on the basis of two different economic models. That is, the large cities and the plains, where the power of the occupation government was consolidated mainly due to its control over the distribution of foreign humanitarian aid; and the mountain ranges of Free Greece, where EAM's power was based on the management of domestic crop and farm animal production.

By describing step-by-step the establishment of EAM institutions in Free Greece, Skalidakis reveals a nodal factor that had gone unnoticed in existing research: that the development of administrative structures by EAM was not based on a predetermined plan but rather took shape as a necessity of the experience of resistance itself. In other words, while in the first stages of the resistance movement, the administrative mechanisms of EAM-ELAS could substitute for absent government structures (harvest protection, justice, social welfare), the expansion of liberated territories made the creation of a governing infrastructure to support the resistance and organise the life of the liberated populations absolutely necessary. EAM used local government and popular justice as the main means of intervention in introducing a new administrative model for consolidating its power and organising life in liberated Greece.

The creation of government structures was one of the factors behind the escalation of EAM's clashes not only with the occupation powers but with the British allies as well. According to the author, the economic dimension took centre stage once more. The extensive German counterresistance operations of 1943 were aimed, among other things, at the destruction of the productive infrastructure of Free Greece, from which ELAS was provisioned. At the same time, the beginning of civil strife between ELAS and the National Republican Greek League (EDES) in autumn 1943 exacerbated the political conflict with the British. In this case, too, the economic factor was decisive. Skalidakis introduces, beyond the discontinuation of British military and economic aid to ELAS, which was highly damaging to the organisation, further dimensions of the economic conflict with Free Greece at the centre. Aiming to increase their respective political influence, each side took up actions in support of the embattled rural population: EAM developed welfare mechanisms and the British supplied money in the form of gold sovereigns through the creation of committees for the distribution of economic aid in hundreds of villages.

Whereas the first part of the book examines EAM's activities in Free Greece mainly from the perspective of the war economy, the second focuses on the political developments that contributed to the creation of the Mountain Government in 1944 and the role of the latter in shaping the political balance prior to the liberation of the country. Moving through the Free Greece–Athens–Cairo triangle, Skalidakis investigates the constantly shifting and highly strained relations between EAM, the British, the Greek government-in-exile in Egypt and the collaborationist Greek authorities, in search of the political objectives of each side and how these led to the creation of the Moun-

tain Government, initially, and of the National Unity government shortly, afterwards.

The founding of the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA) in March 1944 came at a key point in the contest over the postliberation future of the country between the prewar political forces and the new ones that emerged from the resistance struggle and were represented mainly by EAM. The creation of the National Unity government after the Lebanon Agreement placed the political contest under new conditions. The creation of the PEEA was a way to channel political pressure from the EAM side towards achieving the latter's basic political goals within the framework of the National Unity government. These goals were reflected in the PEEA's 14 points, the main one of which was about preventing the return of King George II before a free referendum on the monarchy could be held.

Herein is another important contribution of the book to the literature. The PEEA was as much a creature of conjuncture as of the necessity for the administrative organisation of EAM-liberated territory through a state apparatus that would serve the resistance struggle while upholding certain key structural features of the new order promoted by EAM.

After the elections of 23 April 1944 for the formation of the National Council (the Mountain Parliament), there emerged in its formal configuration a new nucleus of power, in addition to the regime in occupied Athens and the Greek government-in-exile in Cairo. The author puts forth detailed evidence on the social composition of the National Council, the geographic distribution of its members and the representatives of different political orientations that coexisted within its ranks. The book's appendix includes short biographies of the council members.

The establishment of the PEEA marked the administrative maturity of the procedures developed by ELAS and the political organisations of EAM in Free Greece. Key policies promoted by the PEEA in an effort to foster a grassroots social dynamic included the appointment of representatives within each province, and the encouragement of local self-government and popular justice (through a series of measures for the implementation of public works, forest preservation, healthcare and price controls to combat the black market).

The effort to build a governmental apparatus took place under conditions of extraordinary military and economic pressure. To solve these problems, the PEEA implemented a series of fiscal measures such as a progressive tax on production, a levy on the transport of goods and the issuing of national bonds using wheat as the unit of exchange. Skalidakis also examines some aspects of PEEA social policy, which involved the redistribution of resources, the housing of refugees, measures to protect crops and labour (a characteristic example being the famous "battle of the harvest") as well as the introduction of collective bargaining.

Skalidakis presents the framework in which developments took place and the large degree of reciprocal influence between domestic and international politics. The barrage of developments that followed the founding of the PEEA (the mutiny in the Greek Army in the Middle East, the murder of Colonel Dimitrios Psarros by ELAS men, the Lebanon conference) put EAM on the defensive at an extremely critical phase in the formation of the postwar political equilibrium. EAM's decision to participate in the National Unity government was the beginning of the end for the EAMist government endeavour. A few days after the liberation, on 5 November 1944, the PEEA dissolved itself.

The author inserts PEEA's endeavour into the broader effort by EAM to change the political balance of forces, upsetting the prewar political setting through the abolition of the monarchy and putting pressure on its Greek and British political opponents to negotiate in the new situation. The weakest points in this logic were EAM's total lack of international alliances and its failure to predict that the British would go as far as fighting militarily their own allies in EAM even before the war against Nazi Germany was over.

This book fills an important gap in the research concerning the development of the armed resistance movement in Free Greece. In a compact narrative, it demonstrates how this armed resistance movement came together and functioned in the mountainous interior and how the liberation of entire areas created a need for the formation of a governmental-administrative apparatus that would organise social, economic and political life. Indeed, Skalidakis takes the trouble to study something that we often take for granted and move past, what we describe as the *avtáptiko* (partisan war). He shows the enormous effort made not only in the frontline of battle against the occupiers, but mainly in the rear where thousands of people had to work to support a fighting army and, at the same time, create a new power structure capable of fulfilling both the needs of the national liberation struggle and the vision for a different postwar society. The creation of Free Greece, the PEEA and the National Council becomes understandable for what it was: a process that materialised on the basis of emerging conditions and the needs of the resistance struggle where plan and action were realised almost simultaneously.

Nikolaos Papadogiannis

Militant around the Clock? Left-Wing Youth Politics, Leisure, and Sexuality in Post-Dictatorship Greece, 1974–1981

New York: Berghahn, 2015. x + 329 pp.

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In his recent feature film *Notias* (2016), acclaimed director Tassos Boulmetis focuses on young radicals in post-junta Greece, portraying them in a nostalgic but caricaturising manner. Beyond the colourful appearance of his protagonists, the various collectivities parading throughout the film, and the obligatory openness in sexual encounters, the viewer is left wondering whether there were any real political issues that motivated those youngsters. This book by Nikolaos Papadogiannis acts precisely as a guide to the very complex ideological prerogatives that informed these youthful identities, politicising both their recreational and their private life. The book offers an impressive panorama of radicalised youth (sub)cultures of the left in postauthoritarian Greece, during the early stages of the *Metapolitefsi*, that is, the transition to democracy that started on 24 July 1974. The author – an accomplished historian received his training in Greece, the UK and Germany – manages to convey both the organisational outlook of this dense microcosm and the lived experience of young radicals, at a time when Greece was undergoing a rapid transformation. He, thus, skilfully historicises the transitional moment in which young “subjects in motion” acted as a metaphor for change, demonstrating, at the same time, the remarkable continuities in protest culture before and after 1974.