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Anticommunism in the West and its Encounter with the Theory of Totalitarianism in the Early Cold War

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ANTICOMMUNISM IN THE WEST AND ITS ENCOUNTER WITH THE THEORY OF TOTALITARIANISM IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT: The interweaving of anticommunist/totalitarian patterns of thought in Greece with those formulated in other Western countries invites a crossnational pursuit without a comparative evaluation. Anticommunism was linked to nationalism during the Greek Civil War, while antitotalitarianism created an ethical and political space for those opposed to totalitarianism and the communist regimes. It also formulated a semasiological field around notions such as freedom of speech, the captive mind, intellectual enslavement, anticommunist martyrs and the antithesis between truth and ideology/fanaticism.

Historiographically viewed, the Cold War, as an ideological world system, could be studied in several phases. This article is concerned with the period after World War II and the use of the atomic bomb,[1] when the East–West divide emerged, the Eastern Bloc was formed and the two antagonistic ideological camps and military-political alliances were consolidated. Our scope here is neither to historicise the Cold War nor to assign it a central role in the periodisation of post-World War history.[2] This article argues that the new semantic field formulated in the early Cold War around the concept of totalitarianism elucidates the historical space opened up in that historical conjuncture. A plural concept, antitotalitarianism had a strong unifying capacity, incorporating different ideological trends and making the language of antitotalitarianism a space in which the experiences of US officials and nonstate associations in the West, Greek anticommunists, Soviet/East European dissidents, anti-Soviet liberals and conservatives found a convergence point. During that period, the Greek question was a central issue

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[1] For the two-year discussion from December 1945 to July 1947 of the Chicago Committee, formed after the use of atomic force, to draft a world constitution, a discussion that sheds light on the theoretical ideas on the visions of world order in the 1940s, see Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 168-69.

[2] On the historicisation of the Cold War, see Akira Iriye, "Historicizing the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 29 January 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199236961.013.0002.

in international affairs and mattered for the politics and ideologies of the West. The transnational and transatlantic intercrossing of concepts and patterns of thought[3] attests to the fact that the Cold War, as a globalised ideological and international system,[4] was not just a superpower rivalry. It was rather a complicity of all the actors involved in it, be they American, French, Italian, Polish or Czech. In the 1960s this common language was challenged by the civil rights movement, the non-alignment movement and new forms of international cooperation[5] and the "third world" as far as it implied the refusal of the people who had been enslaved by colonial politics "to be ruled by the superpowers and their ideologies",[6] the peace movement as a global social movement which campaigned against nuclear weapons, the Vietnam War and in the early 1980s by Cold War tensions.[7]

Totalitarianism as a concept has a long history that is in part independent of the Cold War. My interest in investigating it grew out of its use as a leading concept in the early Cold War when it became central to the elaboration of the ideologies of the West while functioning as an indicator of the changes at the international level. The semasiological field around the concept of totalitarianism included ideas and notions used not only by the elites but by other actors in society (an example of the democratisation of a concept).[8] In the 1960s the uniqueness of thought characterising both narratives seemed to be less convincing. The California-based magazine *Ramparts* published through the CIA's funding of institutions such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom

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[3] On this, see Despina Papadimitriou, "Nationalism and Communism go Global: The Ideology of 'Nationally minded' Greeks in the Early Cold War, 1947–1955," *National Identities* 24, no. 2 (2021): 1–2; on the intercrossing of concepts, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00347.x.

[4] Odde Arno Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 99.

[5] See Lorenz M. Lüthi, "The Non-Alignment Movement and the Cold War, 1961–1973," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 98–147, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00682; Westad, *Cold War*, 286.

[6] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

[7] See Holger Nehring, "Peace Movements," in *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey*, ed. Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 485–514.

[8] For the fourth working hypotheses concerning how the meanings, status and use of leading concepts changed during the Sattelzeit according to Reinhart Koselleck, see Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 171.

(CCF) and Radio Free Europe. Scott Lucas' *Freedom's War* and Frances Stonor Saunders's *Who Paid the Piper* show how politics, propaganda and culture intersected.[9]

The Shift from the National to Transnational

In the 1940s anticommunism became resignified through its encounter with antitotalitarianism. This latter introduced a new temporality through a break with traditional anticommunism. The continuities, however, are evident and traceable. Elements concerning themes such as communism as a crime, as moral decadence, as a threat to the nation, to religion and family bonds, pass from one temporality to another. Anticommunism, therefore, as a system of thought, has a genealogy that can be traced from its origins in the historical context of the Great War and the October Revolution to its modes of transformation in time. During the civil conflicts of the occupation and liberation periods, Greek anticommunism became intertwined with nationalism, and a centre-right consensus was formed around the urgency of the communist danger in 1947. The shift from national to transnational and transatlantic history reached its peak at the juncture of the early Cold War, when national sovereignty in Europe was dealt a severe blow. In transnational history, events that are local in origin "metamorphosed into manifestations of a global struggle".[10] In contrast to international history, which privileges diplomatic history, transnational history reconceptualises and unearths new identities. There is no "central actor" for the transnational historian: any individual, community, fellowship, attitude and account that constitutes itself in communication with other agents, institutions or practices is worthy of the term, as is any individual, community or memory that concerns the war, its changing circumstances or its manifold repercussions.[11]

The American policy of "global leadership" and global anticommunist patriotism formed the "nation of the West". On a theoretical level, the old idea that freedom was a "fighting faith" which had to be defended on a worldwide scale was a generally accepted view, as evidenced in NSC-68, a review of foreign policy challenges requested by President Truman in the early 1950s.

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[9] Tony Shaw, "The Politics of Cold War Culture," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 3, no. 3 (2021): 61–62.

[10] Westad, *Cold War*, 99.

[11] For a well-structured transnational methodology, see Jay Winter, ed., *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Despina Papadimitriou, review of *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, by Jay Winter, ed., *Historein* 17, no. 1 (2018), https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.10398.

The main argument that sustained this view was that "the assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and … a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere". Within the rhetorical forms used in the context of America's relationship with the world, the missionary imperative is linked to the "conception of global interdependence".[12] At that moment, the opposition to totalitarianism becomes a universal and holistic ideology, since it determines the official policy of the countries of the West, shaping together with its opponent the terms of the global confrontation and giving content to the ideology of the West. In particular, the West acquires its contemporary historical meaning in this period. During World War I, "Western Powers" was a descriptive term for the two countries that participated in the Entente with Russia. If references to the West can be traced back to Western Europe before the 1910s, the popularity of the term in the aftermath of World War II and the early Cold War can be linked to the fundamental antithetical pair of the West opposing totalitarian regimes. The latter represented the negation of the political and moral ideals of the West.[13]

To return to the Greek case, the subsumption of Greek anticommunism and nationalism into the grammar of a transnational nation is not historically comprehensible outside the context of the global division. The national frontier became the boundary of the *free world*. The national enemy was transformed into a universal enemy with the support of the leading power of the global communist camp; the civilian character of the conflict was silenced in favour of the concept-idea of the West's war against Asian despotism. Greek border guards were loyal to the nation and to liberty at the same time, fighting against Slavs and communists. They carried the tradition of the Akritai, the units that protected the Byzantine Empire's eastern border. Also, the term civil war as a form of war brought some kind of legitimacy to the two warring armies. Invasion, on the contrary, represented as a concept an act that could not claim any right or legitimacy. The perception of the enemy in terms of foreign invasion can be found in many national histories and anticommunist discourses. During the Cold War it was a popular theme in the United States (books, movies and games).[14]

Communism as a Global Menace

In April 1947, *Καθημερινή* – one of the leading anticommunist dailies – published an article entitled "In the Cities", a seminal text for the new consensus that was

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[12] John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 16–17.

[13] See Arthur Koestler, "The Trial of the Dinosaur," *Encounter*, no. 20 (May 1955): 5.

[14] David Crowley, *Posters of the Cold War* (London: V & A Publishing, 2008), 8.

emerging between the right and the center-right on the priority of the communist threat. According to it, anywhere and at any time, but now especially in Greece, Slavs were the enemies of the Greeks. The deeper causes of the bloody tragedy in the country, another daily of the Right opined in the same period, were exposed through the role played by Stalin in controlling Slavism and the "communist gang".

The local press in Macedonia and Epirus clearly emphasised the international character of the war and the resistance of the "wonderful and heroic Greek people" to the onslaught of "Slavic barbarism". It was a *moral struggle against the enemies of human civilisation*. This escalation of the struggle from the local and national to the global had its own representations. Konitsa thus became "the bastion of culture, the epiphany of humanity, the rock on which the waves of the communist storm crashed, the bastion of the irresistible ideal of freedom". *Τα Νέα*, a centrist evening newspaper, quoted an article by the Washington *Evening Star* that argued that "the victory of Konitsa was not going to diminish the Kremlin's efforts to maintain through its satellite the turbulent situation in the Balkans". The language of polarisation had already been formed. The enemy for the West was not exclusively racial or linguistic, but was first and foremost political; it was in the Western perception the epitome of a threat to the freedom of thought and civilisation that came not only from the Soviet regime and its satellites, but also from parties and movements friendly to it within the Western states. It was, in other words, a common experience of the peoples of the West. The link between communism and Nazism or fascism – which began to emerge in the 1920s and was of major importance to the process of building the theory of totalitarianism, further politicised the threat.

For the liberal intellectuals who differentiated themselves from the fervent anticommunists, the opposition of *free thought* to *Stalinist ideology* did not mean convergence with an anticommunism akin to that of Franco and the neo-Nazis, wrote the French magazine *Preuves*,[15] citing Albert Camus' recent book and Salvador de Madariaga: "fascism is the reflection of communism in the muddy waters of fear". The magazine thus introduced the concept of enlightened anticommunism (*anticommunisme lucide*). Camus had already stated in the 7 October 1944 issue of *Combat* that anticommunism was the beginning of dictatorship. Although we do not agree with the philosophy of communism and its moral practice, we reject political anticommunism because we know its origins and its unstated aims, he wrote.

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[15] For the publications of the CCF, see Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte A. Lerg, eds., *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2017),7; Pierre Grémion, *Intelligence de l'Anticommunisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).

The overall plan, for both sides, envisaged the invention of the Western man or the communist believer in the "homeland of socialism", both within and outside the walls. The totalitarian enemy is therefore a holistic concept-idea, which survives in its purely political uses thanks to its ability to orchestrate its diverse uses that capture partial experiences. Thus, Greek MP Panagiotis Kanellopoulos in 1950 raised the issue of the Greek children who, during the civil war of 1946–1949, had been "forcibly abducted from their homes and were still undergoing the inhuman totalitarian distortion of their soul and spirit".[16] In this context, he linked the supposed dehellenisation (the enterprise of instructing Greek children to deny the basic tenets of Greek culture and to oppose Greek national identity and heritage) of the children evacuated from their homes in northern Greece with the theme of totalitarian indoctrination. In general, fears were expressed that children relocated to the countries of the Eastern Bloc would subsequently become foes of their own families. This evoked the ominous imagery of the abduction by the Ottomans of Christian-born children, whom they would raise as janissaries. Greek education was therefore presented as preventing the spread of totalitarianism. The propaganda texts of Greek diplomacy, moreover, often stated that the minors who had been removed from their homes were to receive an education in communist fanaticism, the fruits of which they would carry back to Greece. The political objective of these "mass kidnappings" was compared to the harshest methods of enforcing Nazi power.

Another theme enduring in Western thought is that of political fugitives from the East or intellectual exiles from the communist experience. From the Greek deserter of the Ottoman labour battalions (Amele Taburları) to the fugitive from the Eastern Bloc or from the communist experience, personal history and testimony weigh heavily in all these cases. These narratives transcend national histories through the universalisation of individual experience. In the Cold War period, all instances of confrontation with the individual would enjoy a status of a paradigm focused on the individual paths of the transition to communism and the return to democracy, or otherwise, on moving from utopia to reality. Another idea that enjoyed broad international use in the early Cold War period was that of the totalitarian infiltration of the individual. In the introduction to *The God that Failed*, a book in which six intellectuals described "the journey into communism, and the return", British Labour MP Richard Crossman argued that the "emotional appeal of Communism lay precisely in the sacrifices – both material and spiritual – which it demanded of the convert". Explaining the state of being a communist,

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[16] Loring M. Danforth and Riki van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Crossman argued that intellectuals who converted to communism felt a release from the demands of being freethinkers, from the burden of serving spiritual freedom and of being a conscientious and free objector.[17] Patterns of experience exemplified by communist dissidents, converts or defectors took centre stage in the antitotalitarian press. The columns of Greek right-wing and centrist newspapers contained accounts on the formulation of Western values by important political and literary figures such as Manès Sperber (*Καθημερινή*, 12 April 1962), Ignazio Silone (*Ελευθερία*, 24 January 1950), Albert Camus (*Εστία*, 15 December 1949), Arthur Koestler (*Καθημερινή*, 20 May 1962) and Victor Serge (*Εστία*, 4 and 16 January 1950). Western intellectuals, politicians and journalists saw some of the most influential notions in the conceptual articulation of holistic systems such as ideology as synonymous with fanaticism, dogmatism and evil, pervaded by the principle of infallibility, as expressed through the all-powerful leader, the all-powerful party, the theory of history.

Among the most influential notions in the conceptual articulation of totalitarianism was that of the *captive mind*, which entered the Western semasiological field with Czesław Miłosz's book, published two years after his defection to the West from Poland in 1951.[18] Karl Jaspers, in his preface to the French edition, argued that it contained neither an aggressive fanaticism nor a sense of totalitarianism in reverse. Indeed, Miłosz explicitly emphasised the fact that those who felt attracted to the "New Faith" paid their debt to the old European tradition, exemplified in the Wars of Religion. It was something more than constraint by material force. Tony Judt wrote that *The Captive Mind* is memorable for the "Pill of Murti-Bing" image which Miłosz reproduced from *Insatiability* (1927), an "obscure novel" by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz. In this story, central Europeans encountering the invasion by unidentified Asiatic hordes swallowed a little pill, which relieved them of fear and anxiety, but also made them accept their new rulers, making them happy to receive them.[19] This iconography was a classic metaphor of intellectual enslavement. The Greek liberal novelist Angelos Terzakis discusses the mind of the crowd under dictatorships, using similar notions such as that of the *expropriated mind* (*Καθημερινή*, 18 April 1962).

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[17] Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed* (London: Bantam Books), 5–6.

[18] Czeslaw Miłosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953) and in French *La pensée captive: Essai sur les logocraties populaires*, trans. Czeslaw Miłosz and André Prudhommeau, preface Karl Jaspers (Paris: Gallimard, 1953).

[19] Tony Judt, "Captive Minds, Then and Now," *New York Review of Books*, 13 July 2010, https://www.nybooks.com/online/2010/07/13/captive-minds-then-and-now/.

Greek anticommunism was internalised in the public discourse of the 1960s; it was perceived not only as a foreign invasion but as an internal threat to democracy and moral values. The organisation of anticommunist propaganda at the end of the 1950s and the international connections are worth mentioning. One such network was, for example, that of the Institute for Eastern Europe, which was founded at the University of Freiburg in 1958. In Greece in the same period, the right-wing government officially organised anticommunist propaganda, and its meaning was internalised after the popular disappointment over Atlantic policies on the Cyprus issue and the rise of the Left (United Democratic Left) in the May 1958 national elections.

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