

The Politics of Memory in the Fiction of Greek Political Exiles in Eastern Europe*

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Political exiles in Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) constitute an interesting research field where the Greek experience of Civil War and its consequences intersects with the East European experience of communist regimes. There, issues concerning the identity construction of political exiles are raised, a process which had to negotiate with the traumatic experiences of war and defeat as well as with the new experiences in the communist countries. This completely new way of life which they had to face, challenged their political and ideological beliefs, their national consciousness and their social and family roles. The community of Civil War political refugees is therefore a crucial part of the Greek Diaspora, although it is insufficiently studied in collected volumes on Diaspora, most probably because of the complicated ideological and archival problems involved in researching it.¹ During the 1950s and 1960s Greek political exiles produced a considerable number of literary and semi-literary texts which were published by the publishing house of the Communist Party of Greece. This corpus includes works by such well known writers as Dimitris Chatzis, Melpo Axioti, Elli Alexiou, Alki Zei, Mitsos Alexandropoulos, Giorgos Sevastikoglou and by lesser known figures outside

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¹ Richard Clogg (1999:) apologizes in his introduction to the volume *Greek Diaspora in Twentieth Century* for not including a chapter on the political refugees while Ioannis Hassiotis (1993: 148-9) writes that 'our information on that chapter of the history of Greek Diaspora is fragmental and often not accurate'. Today we have a collected volume on political refugees. (Voutira et al. 2005)

their own community of exiles, such as Apostolos Spilios, Takis Adamos, Kostas Bosis, Theodosios Pieridis, Alexis Parnis, Dimos Rendis.

This paper is part of a research project which aims to examine this literary production through a variety of theoretical lenses: as a literature of the exile, which it certainly is, but of a very 'soft' exile in the 'dream-land' of a regime which they fought about; as a literature of trauma, since it became among the means through which the survivors of the Civil War tried to negotiate the effects of their traumatic experiences and come to terms with their past; in the context of the construction of a collective memory about the Civil War, insofar as this literature offers an institutional basis for shaping, circulating and contesting the collective narratives of war memory as a complex hegemonic process. Another set of lenses concern the relationship between political engagement and literature, since the cultural production of the Civil War exiles was subjected to the Communist Party line through its publishing policy, censorship and the self-censorship of the authors themselves. Last but not least, it is also interesting to investigate the reception of this literature by mainstream criticism in Greece. It is worth mentioning here at least that the exiles themselves considered their work as being ideologically engaged, thematically narrow, linguistically poor and contaminated by bad lyricism and pompous rhetorical devices (Axioti 1955). Apart from a few exceptions, such as the works of Chatzis, Axioti, Alexiou and Alexandropoulos, most of this literary production remained completely unknown in Greece and was never reprinted later.

In a previous paper, I had focused on the texts of these writers which dealt directly with their life in exile (Apostolidou 2005). These include only a handful of novels and short stories portraying their own experience and adventures under communist regimes. Most of their prose, however, focuses on their past experience of

resistance against the Axis Occupation, the December 1944 riots in Athens, the period of anti-communist “white terror” in 1945-47, the Civil War in the mountains in 1946-49 and their imprisonment and exile in Greek islands. Some of it also goes back to the pre-war era in an effort to depict the social conditions that caused the Civil War, while another part deals with the post-war situation in Greece, although this was *terra incognita* for the refugees.² The reasons which led these writers to return to their historical experience of the 1940s and to avoid their contemporary life in Eastern Europe are fairly common to all exilic literature: as Michael Seidel put it (1986: x-xi), the task for the exiled artist is ‘to transform the figure of rupture back into a figure of connection [...]. [N]ative territory is the product of heightened and sharpened memory and imagination is, indeed, a special homecoming’. Additionally, the political exiles in question, following Marxist aesthetic theories, believed that the duty of a realist writer is to write about what he/she knows best and through it, to contribute to the social political struggle in his/her own country. In the communist countries where they lived, although comrades, they were also regarded as strangers and it was clearly very dangerous for a guest or stranger to talk about life under communism in the charged climate of the Cold War. At any rate, dealing with their mixed feelings about their lives in exile was not as important a priority to them as was the need to commemorate their struggles and to defend themselves against the fierce and bitter accusations of Greek state propaganda. Furthermore, this was also the view adopted by the official party line.

This paper will discuss a number of novels and short stories dealing with the experience of war back home, namely resistance against the Axis Occupation and Civil War. These works will be specifically examined in the context of trauma

² Exile affects the work of those writers in many different ways even when their themes are completely irrelevant. See Balta 2003, Tziouvas 2003.

literature and I shall be posing in particular the question of how the political decisions and aspirations of the Communist Party influenced the memory paths of these writers in exile and how it interfered with the elaboration process of their traumatic experiences.

Trauma, now most commonly defined in medical terms as ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’, refers to a range of distressing emotional, psychological and bodily responses to terror and helplessness caused by a shocking event or circumstance, out of the range of ordinary human experience, in which one’s life or the lives of one’s family are endangered. The effects of trauma are identified as an ‘entrapment’ in a reality which eludes grasping and assimilation, but is relived as a ‘haunting’ memory in ceaseless repetitions and reenactments. If the survivor is to undo the entrapment and reclaim both his life and his past, a social process of story telling is necessary: that is a process of constructing a narrative, shaping the traumatic event into narrative form, integrating it into their world of meaning. This is necessary to enable the survivor to reassert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into his/her present day life (Dawson 2005:156, 168, Liakos 2007).

It goes without saying that literary narrative can play this comforting role (Kopf 2005); moreover, literature as an institution, does not only supply such narrative devices, but operates as a ‘socio-political space’ or ‘social arena’ (Dawson 2005: 154) where individual memories transcend their private circle and secure a more extensive public recognition. On the other hand, precisely because literature, as an institution, is linked with other social institutions, this process is never spontaneous or free from restrictions. Memory adapts itself to the conventions (usage, customs, values, stereotypes, etc.) of the group of people as well as of the narrative genre that constructs this memory.

Civil wars, more than national wars, produce literature that can be called literature of trauma.³ Civil war is a situation of extreme social division, violent armed conflict, family dissolution, governed by feelings of shame, frustration and despair. Exile, prison, social and economic oppression are the consequences for the defeated, while the winners feel neither proud nor secure about their victory, as the enemy is still inside the country. The aftermath of a civil war forms a situation in which one's one trauma is tied up with the trauma of a significant other who may be brother, friend or neighbour. Trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility of listening to another's wound (Caruth 1996: 8). This causes interesting complications in the trauma elaboration process which will be discussed at the end of the paper. At the moment, we have to keep in mind that the exiled writers in Eastern Europe are survivors of the Greek Civil War and their identity as authors is inseparable from their identity as trauma survivors.

Before we proceed to their texts, a point of clarification about the operation of Communist Party's publishing house is required. Thanks to the valuable book of Anna Mattheou and Popi Polemi (2003), we now have a complete bibliography of the books of Greek authors published in Eastern Europe from 1947 to 1968 as well as ample information (unpublished reports and reviews, fragments of newspaper articles) about the cultural life of political refugees. Decisions for the publishing policy of the House, as far as the literary works are concerned, were made by the so-called 'Literary Circle' which was part of the party's Commissariat of Enlightenment. The Circle used to thoroughly scrutinize the authors' manuscripts and proposed corrections and alterations which can be certainly characterized as a form of censorship. Criticism however, did not end with publication. This, in fact, became

³ Similar historical events that have produced literature of trauma are the Holocaust and the Vietnam war. Of course trauma literature has to do also with private life's events as rape or incest (Tal 1991).

even stricter when the books were published and appeared in the official party review, *Neos Kosmos (New World)*. Broadly speaking, everyone there criticized everyone else. If we take into account that the members of the Literary Circle were writers themselves, we can safely assume that the exiled authors operated as a small community within which writing was a painful job: away from their home and language, politically defeated, obsessed by traumatic memories and deprived of new books published in the West, they were skeptical guests in countries where the political utopia, in which they believed and fought for, was supposed to have come true. At the same time they were subjected to the power of the party, which, although defeated and illegal in Greece, was like government in the so called ‘refuge land’.

I have composed a corpus of eight texts to discuss here. They all deal with the experiences of the 1940s and are written by prominent authors of the exiled community of writers mainly in Romania and USSR; evidently it is not accidental that these writers held key positions in the party hierarchy. The corpus consists of: Kostas Bosis, *Εμείς θα νικήσουμε (We Shall Win)*, 1953. Giorgis Grivas, *Καινούριοι άνθρωποι (New People)*, 1954 and *Οργισμένα χρόνια (Angry Years)*, 1956. Kostas Bosis, *Δύσκολες μέρες (Hard Days)*, v. A’ 1956 (published), and v. B’ 1957 (rejected). Takis Adamos, *Απλοί άνθρωποι (Simple People)*, 1957. Mitsos Alexandropoulos, *Νύχτες και αυγές (Nights and Dawns)*, v. A’ *The city*, 1961 and v. B’ *The mountains*, 1963. Dimos Rendis, *Ο δρομάκος με την πιπεριά (The Street with the Pepper Tree)*, 1964. Elli Alexiou, *Και ούτω καθεξής (And So Forth)*, 1965.

Among the above, Kostas Bosis (pen name of Kostas Pournaras) and Takis Adamos held, in turn, the post of Head of the Literary Circle for several years each, while Mitsos Alexandropoulos, Dimos Rendis and Elli Alexiou were members of that Circle (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 82, 124). Their novels were discussed both before

and after their publication, mainly in connection to the party's positions on political matters and they were selected here precisely because they made an impression at the time. Of course, there were many more novels, short stories and memoirs reflecting on the same experiences that were published by the party's publishing house, but these cannot be discussed here.

I divide the corpus into three sets: The first three novels are marked by the influence of Nicos Zachariadis's leadership of the party and reflect the earlier reactions to defeat in the Civil War. The next two appeared as a response to the party's policy change after the Sixth Central Committee Plenary in 1956, in which Zachariadis was deposed following criticisms of his autocratic and Stalinist leadership methods. The third set consists of the last three novels which were relatively free from direct political engagement.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, a general tendency began to grow among writers of the Left to write down what had happened in that conflict. Everyone, including both the Party leadership and the former partisans, wanted to narrate their glorious acts of heroism during the Resistance and the Civil War, each for their own reasons. The party, represented by intellectuals such as Takis Adamos, Kostas Bosis, Apostolos Spilios tried to show through articles in *Neos Kosmos* that the struggle had not yet ceased and that resistance had to continue, now against the American 'occupation' of Greece. In this respect, texts about the Resistance and the Democratic Army's heroic battles in the Civil War should reflect the continuing spirit of defiance and optimism about the final victory of the party which would surely come in the end (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 82-3). The former partisans on the other hand, most of them barely literate, felt a need and also a sense of duty to commemorate their experiences and construct around them a personal myth. As Kali Tal (1991: 230) put

it, in reference to the Vietnam War literature, 'each of these authors articulates the belief that he or she is a story-teller with a mission; their responsibility as survivors is to bare the tale'. One of them, Menelaos Moustos, wrote in the preface of his memoir:

I am not a writer and I don't have the ambition to become one. I am fascinated by the glory of the soldiers of the Democratic Army and I feel the duty towards the party and the people to write those lines hoping that this would be of some help. The tough and bloody struggle of the Democratic Army to free our country needs to be well known everywhere and we will succeed in this only if each one of us wrote down what he has lived. (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 88)

Evidently, the process of shaping this collective narrative starts immediately after the end of the war, because the survivors are already organized as a community. Unlike those trauma survivors who perceive themselves as suffering alone, who have no sense of belonging to a community of victims and remain silent, imagining that their pain has no relevance to the rest of society (Tal 1991: 235), Greek political exiles live in a well organized community which is more than willing to listen, witness and share the burden of their pain (Dawson 2005:168). While the challenge for the ordinary partisans was just to tell their story, the community's expectations from the established writers in exile were much higher. The titles of the first three novels are telling. Bosis's novel *We Shall Win* (1953) follows the main hero from his childhood years in a poor village before the war, thus taking the opportunity to depict the miserable life of the peasants, their poverty and repression by the local teachers, priests, policemen and landowners. The underlying aim here is to show the social causes of the Civil War. Not surprisingly, the hero joins the party and becomes a Democratic Army fighter. The main emphasis in depicting the Civil War lies in: the cruelty of the enemy (especially in such acts as the forcible removal of children), the traitors and the enemy's spies who pretended to be communist partisans, the personality cult of Stalin. The hero survives the major battle of Grammos and,

although the enemy prevails, he nevertheless exclaims at the end of the novel: ‘We shall win!’

Grivas’s *New People* (1954) treats the struggle of the Democratic Army in a similar tone. Nevertheless, the novel apparently went beyond the party’s expectations; the Commissariat of Enlightenment in a letter to the author criticized the novel for attributing excessive cruelty to the enemy (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 551- 2). His next novel *Angry Years* (1956) is a more promising work, situated in the first years of the Axis Occupation, which narrates the founding process of the resistance organization EAM (National Liberation Front) and its military wing ELAS (Greek Liberation Army). It suggests that EAM - ELAS were created exclusively by communists whose aim was strictly the country’s liberation. The novel was written shortly before the 6th Plenary of the Communist Party. In an unpublished review written straight after the 6th Plenary, the novel was criticized for neglecting the social dimension of the Resistance (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 334). In another review by Antonis Vogiazos in *Neos Kosmos* it was argued that until that time there had been no good literary works on the Resistance because the interpretation of this period given by Zachariadis, the deposed leader, was wrong (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 334).

How are we to interpret the role of this first set of texts from the perspective of collective memory construction? Fundamentally, I think that all three represent a clear case of distorted collective memory. According to Baumeister and Hastings (1997: 277) ‘most groups, like most individuals, try to maintain a positive image of the self. Because the reality of events does not always fit that desired image, it is necessary to choose between revising the image and revising the meaning of events. The latter choice is the one of self-deception’. Among the dominant patterns of distortion of collective memory is the blaming the enemy. By focusing on the actual

or presumed misdeeds committed by one's enemies to the extent of minimizing one's own misdeeds as mere responses to them, one runs the risk of attributing even their own misdeeds to the enemy. Bosis and Grivas, for example, in their effort to cope with the memory of violence and to find some form of justification for the violence of the partisans, stress that of the enemy, whereas, at the same time, praise the national role of the Communist Party as the chief organizer of the anti-Nazi resistance. Both narrative strategies, that is, the nationalization of communist action and the blaming the enemy, mark the first set of works in our corpus.

As already noted, the 6th Plenary Session of 1956 was a turning point in the literary production as well as virtually every other activity overseen by the party. Yet, the new party line was so deeply ridden with contradictions and ambiguities that it would be difficult to conclude what was really being expected now from the writers. It is not surprising, for example, that the two most prominent party authors, Bosis and Adamos, responded to the policy change almost automatically, with two new books which form the second set of our corpus. Bosis's first volume of *Hard Days* (1956) was probably written shortly before the 6th Party Plenary, whereas the second volume written in 1957, despite its obvious attempt to incorporate the new political line, was rejected by the Commissariat of Enlightenment as vulgar and dangerous. The reasons behind the rejection of the second volume, as presented by two prominent party members, Giorgos Athanasiadis and Lefteris Apostolou, are interesting. Both criticise Bosis's characters who, although communists, are shown to be torn by psychological contradictions and doubts about their actions, and one woman, even, is shown as having suicidal thoughts. The novel also depicts painful situations such as mistakes, conspiracies within the party or the desperate position of those sections of the Democratic Army which were cut off and left behind by their comrades. Apostolou,

moreover, thinks that the author was indeed inspired by the questions raised at the 6th Plenary regarding party's errors in the Civil War, but thought that these were treated in a very superficial way. Interestingly, therefore, he rejects the novel on mainly literary grounds: if the writers were to apply the spirit of the 6th Plenary in their texts, they must above all write good literature. This will also enable them to appeal to a wider reading public in Greece and to contribute to the formation of a patriotic front, the reconciliation of the Greek people and peaceful social change (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 605-9).

Adamos's *Simple People* (1957) was considered much more successful in embodying the spirit of the 6th Plenary. This is a collection of seven short stories each dealing with a different period of the leftist movement, arranged in chronological order: the first discusses the purges of the left by the Metaxas Dictatorship in the late 1930s and the political awakening of a worker, who prepares for the political struggles of the 1940s. The second story deals with the armed anti-Nazi resistance, stressing also the minor British contribution to that struggle. The story ends with the exclamation: 'Who shall be responsible for these dead people? Who shall justify their sacrifice'? From an unpublished review (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 352) we know that this exclamation was interpreted by former partisans as referring to the crucial question: So much blood, so many sacrifices, so many heroic acts and yet we are defeated. Why? Whose fault was it? The next four stories deal respectively with the "white terror" of 1945-1947, the Grammos battles, the friendship between a Slav Macedonian partisan and a Greek party commissioner, women fighters, while the last exalts the courage of a soldier who, although severely injured, manages to come back to his comrades. The book is free from violent scenes and shows that the soldiers of the National Army were also workers with families who were waiting for them to

return. Although it was received enthusiastically at first by ordinary readers, the official decision of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 585) issued later maintained that questions like ‘Who is held responsible for the dead people?’ reinforced the Greek state propaganda that communists were to be blamed. In the name of the 6th Plenary, the Commissariat objected against these questions about the responsibility for the defeat.

In the same decision by the Commissariat of Enlightenment in 1957, written by Kostas Bosis, authors were called upon to reflect the party line in their work. They were specifically asked to convey the social changes taking place in Greece and to stay close to Greek themes. Themes deriving from the Civil War were not forbidden, but these now had to be represented in the spirit of the 6th Plenary (Mattheou & Polemi 2003: 585). However, what was exactly that spirit after all?

The political change brought about by the 6th Plenary put the Greek writers in exile in a very difficult position. While it proclaimed to be supportive of self-criticism and scepticism towards the mistakes of the party leadership during Civil War, the traumatic experience of the partisans and persistent questions about the causes of defeat were not allowed to be expressed on the grounds that they would play in the hands of Greek state propaganda. Violent scenes were also not recommended because they might offend the reading public in Greece and would thus undermine the formation of a broad patriotic front. Last, but not least, the new party line urged writers to talk about the contemporary situation in Greece, which was unknown to them and, as far as the Civil War was concerned, to set it aside in favour of the Resistance themes. Consequently, although the 6th Plenary appeared to be allowing for some freedom of expression, what it really did was to set a more complex set of restrictions to the way in which the traumatic experience and memory of the Civil

War would have to be elaborated. How could therefore one talk about the Civil War in the new spirit of reconciliation? ⁴

Nevertheless, these texts and especially Adamos's *Simple People*, represent a further step in the process of commemoration. As the years went on, there was a higher cognitive and emotional distancing from the collective catastrophe coupled with the growth of an ambivalent view of the event and a deeper interest in knowing its real causes.⁵ While the new texts continued to build on the comforting myth of the brave partisan with the just cause versus the violent enemy, a new tendency emerged which was critical towards certain decisions by the leadership, sympathetic towards the mixed feelings of the characters and more willing to acknowledge the suffering of the Other. These characteristics might have served to produce works that were richer in emotions, stronger in reflection and clearer in enabling the reader to identify with their characters, as their enthusiastic reception suggests. At the same time, however, they still fell short of meeting the official party expectations. In fact, they appear to have rather posed a certain threat to the latter by their critical tendencies. Their authors were quite clearly torn between the need to search deeper into their traumatic experiences and sense of frustration which they themselves and their community obviously felt, and the party's demands to change their subjects and abandon the Civil War altogether in favour of the Resistance. ⁶

The last set of texts in our corpus includes the most noteworthy novels from a literary viewpoint. All, to an extent, are fairly successful in providing a broader portrayal of the life and adventures of their leftist heroes, whilst avoiding the subject of the Civil War in a way that followed in general the new party line. For example,

⁴ It is impressive that the Communist Party of Spain adopted a reconciliation policy in 1956 as well, which initiated a production of a series of novels and films in that spirit (Fernandez 2005:162).

⁵ The same happened in the literature of the Spanish Civil War (Igartua & Paez 1997: 97).

⁶ We have to remind here that the political claim of the refugees for amnesty and repatriation was behind the direction to abandon the literary representation of the Civil War.

Alexandropoulos's novel *Nights and Dawns* (1961-63) and Rendis's *The Street With the Pepper Tree* (1964) start their narrative at the beginning of the German occupation and end it in 1945, shortly after the December riots in Athens. On the other hand, Alexiou's autobiographical novel *And So Forth* (1965) starts on the eve of the Metaxas dictatorship (1936), and though it ends in 1952, it avoids the Civil War since the main character, who is a teacher and probably the persona of Alexiou herself, leaves Greece for Paris along with other young leftist intellectuals immediately after the December troubles. The novel is written in an antiheroic spirit but is highly descriptive and superficial, clearly the weakest of the three.

The other two novels are more nuanced and well structured. Alexandropoulos's *Nights and Dawns* attempts an ambitious synthesis of the complex realities of the Resistance. Kosmas, the hero, is a poor young man who arrives in Athens to study at university in the first year of the German occupation. We follow his adventures in a dangerous city where he meets all types of people such as Nazi collaborators, black-marketers, young bourgeois men and women who support the collaborationist Security Battalions. Kosmas then decides to join the National Liberation Front (EAM), becomes politically active in its ranks and gets arrested and tortured, but manages to escape. The second volume starts with Kosmas on the mountains, fighting with the ELAS partisans. Through him, we follow their lives, their disputes with the British and their fighting with nationalist resistance rebels. There Kosmas loses his arm and later works as a journalist and interpreter for the British. After the liberation in October 1944, he and his wife return to Athens where we follow the build up to the December Riots. When his pregnant wife is murdered by the Security Battalions, he follows the party's command to retreat from Athens and return to the mountains, but gets arrested again, although this time, as the narrator informs us, he spends the next

18 years in prison. In a review by Dimitris Chatzis (1962) where the book is praised as a sort of reply to Nikos Kasdaglis's *Τα δόντια της μωλόπετρας* (*The Teeth of the Millstone*), (1955) it is contended that the psychological process through which the hero decides to join the left is unclear. Chatzis says that he would have liked a more inward looking and, through narrative, better justified explanation of Kosmas's political engagement. While these points are partly valid, I think the second volume is more successful in this regard, although generally, the novel is rather long, with several repetitions and a fairly predictable plot. In many ways it falls almost entirely within the boundaries of what the party considered as politically correct at that time.

Rendis's novel *The Street with the Pepper Tree* shares the same aims with *Nights and Dawns*, but it is a more complex text. It is situated in an Athenian neighborhood, with some action in the nearby villages. It has a central character but what characterizes the novel is the wide range of characters and types of people: leftist and right-wing, rich and poor, men and women, active and retired, opportunists and idealists, Resistance fighters and collaborators. Its emphasis is laid on the intersection between the public and the private; at the centre of the plot also stands a very adventurous love affair which remains vivid until the end, despite the misfortunes and the final imprisonment of the hero. The novel shows moreover the effects of the major events of the 1940s on the lives of individuals, beginning with the Greek–Italian war of 1940–41 and continuing with the Occupation, Resistance and the December Riots. It constructs a narrative about continuous poverty, pain and bitterness. Although there is no programmatic optimism in the book, the prevalent feeling nevertheless is that, ultimately, life will go on. From a political standpoint, *The Street with the Pepper Tree* approaches the making of history from below, thus allowing space for the rethinking and criticism of decisions and commands issued

from the top down. Especially with regard to the December Riots, it projects the contradictory orders of the Communist Party leadership and the impasse to which they led the party members, including the objections against the Varkiza Pact of February 1945. It is rather surprising that a novel of such high literary standards, by an author well established in the community of the Civil War refugees was not, to the best of my knowledge, discussed or reviewed at the time.

The most obvious conclusion arising from the last set of novels in our corpus is that leftist authors in exile began to abandon, temporarily at least, the literary elaboration of the Civil War. Their narrative stops at the December Riots because that event, although a dress rehearsal of the Civil War, was politically justified from the point of view of the left as a defensive war against British military intervention. One could therefore argue that in this case the guidelines of the Commissariat of Enlightenment had been followed by the authors. On the other hand, the last set of texts and especially Rendis's novel, by setting human suffering in a historical continuum, manages to insert some meaning to the past and offer some clues about the sociopolitical causes of the traumatic events that led to Civil War. All three are mature works in the sense that they manage to stand at a critical distance from the collective catastrophe. The fact that they appeared more than ten years after the event, confirms with near mathematical accuracy Kali Tal's view (1991:236) that 'survival literature tends to appear at least a decade after the traumatic experience in question. As the immediacy of the event fades into memory, the natural process of revision begins to occur in the mind of the survivor'.

Greek political refugees in Eastern Europe form a unique memory community which, although devastated from defeat and exile, possessed from the outset many of the requirements for constructing a collective memory of their traumatic experiences,

namely a community organization which fostered their sense of belonging and gave them the means (e.g. publishing institutions) to shape and circulate a narrative. In contrast to the defeated forces of the Spanish or the Finnish civil wars, who remained silent for a long time (Igartua & Paez 1997, Heimo & Peltonen 2003), Greek political exiles very soon began to tell their story in a 'public arena'. However, these privileges might have been at the same time serious obstacles when this memory community was subjected to the complexities of official party policy which had to take into account the political struggle in Greece and the usage of the refugee question as a key issue in the agenda of the Cold War.

Literature as a commemorative practice, in this context, proved to be mostly affected by official party policy; however, while it submitted to political priorities, at the same time it succeeded in finding ways of widening and deepening the elaboration of the traumatic experience, both for authors and for readers as well; and this is doubtless a political act in itself. To have a clearer idea about the function that this exilic literature had in the overall literature on the Greek Civil War, comparisons should be made with texts written and published inside the (other) memory community of those survivors who lived in Greece and faced very different constraints and oppressions. What I can say for the time being, at least, is that both memory communities, for quite different political reasons, were trapped in a rather similar politics of suffering. This type of politics favours a dominant narrative about the past which recognises and appreciates only the trauma of the self and neglects the trauma of the other. However, as long as the trauma of the other is not recognized, polarisation continues and critical approaches, as well as the process of reconciliation with the past, become indefinitely postponed (Van Boeschoten 2008: 146-147). No matter the quality and quantity of texts about the Civil War, in Greek literature this

recognition took a very long time to come; that is, if we assume that it ever happened at all.

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