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Re-imagining nationhood during the Second World War

Abstract

The paper discusses artistic representations of national history and nationhood in Second World War popular icons (λαϊκές εικόνες). Although they were primarily designed, produced and sold by private publishing houses and were not seen as direct means of propaganda and state ideology, popular icons had to operate under the rules and ideology of the Metaxist regime, side with and express official views. Employing Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism, the paper argues that popular icons are important examples of political art and media of mass communication that revive, express and develop pre-existing material of a nation's history, reflecting the regime's configurations of a repertoire of ethnic and religious myths in constructions of Greek nationhood at war time.

I

Popular icons originated from 'engraved prints' (χαρακτικά τυπώματα) with religious themes that first appeared in the 16th century and were circulated by the European monastic communities with the purpose of propagating faith and attracting pilgrimage.[1] In Greece, the production of these works flourished between 1840 and 1941 and Greek artists were inspired by the long tradition of Byzantine iconography enhanced by oriental and western influences.[2] Popular icons were lithographs, printed on cheap paper and reproduced in multiple copies and sold to a wider audi-

ence at low prices. They depicted current affairs and events from political and social life, aiming to arouse emotions and inform the masses, reaching even 'the mostly illiterate people in one way or another'[3]. Due to their origins, name and production by non-state institutions, popular icons (λαϊκές εικόνες) were not directly associated with propaganda or seen as means of state ideology.[4]

Greek popular icons used during the Greek-Italian war were lithographs, printed on cheap paper and reproduced in multiple copies by non-state institutions and sold to a wider audience at low prices. They depicted current affairs and events from political and social life, aiming to arouse emotions and inform the masses, and they were created primarily by academic artists collaborating with the individual publishing houses. They were circulated and displayed on the walls of coffee shops, barber shops, mini markets, and other busy places, but they were also sold in bookshops.[5] The willingness of the authoritarian Metaxist regime to allow their uncensored production suggests their importance as carriers of ideas supported by the state, which promoted and reconfigured the distinctive myths, traditions and religious beliefs of the Greek nation.

Despite their importance as cultural ephemera that should be valued for their contribution to the broader understanding of cultural belonging and nation building, they have been understudied. Beyond the collections of the Greek Historical and Ethnological Society, The Balkan Wars 1912-13 – Greek Popular Iconography and Popular Iconography – the Epic of 1940, which refer to selected texts held in the Hellenic National Historical Museum, and the Ministry of Cutlure's Pictorial Testimonies: Paintings and Etchings from the War, Occupation and Resistance, a collection of paintings, lithographs and engravings produced between 1940 and 1945,[6] popular icons primarily feature in a supportive role. Recent examples are Marina Petrakis' book on the role of propaganda in the Metaxist regime and Vangelis Angelis' work on various aspects of the Metaxas dictatorship's political ideology, propaganda and organizational structure.[7] They are also briefly mentioned in Eleni Machaira's study of official war photography used in propaganda publications produced by the Metaxist regime from 1936-1941,[8] whereas Spyros Karachristos' book Greek Posters includes a number of popular icons from the Greek-Italian war, juxtaposing them with commercial and tourist posters, echoing the view that outside museums and

academic institutions, popular icons are defined as ephemera, which convey ideas and persuade public opinion.[9]

This paper fills that void, examining popular icons from the collections of the Hellenic National Historical Museum as a primary source that needs to be studied in its own right. Employing Anthony D Smith's theory of ethno-symbolism, it discusses representations of nationhood in Second World War popular icons, exploring how popular icons become part of the regime's propaganda. According to Anthony D. Smith nations might be modern constructs, associated with the emergence of industrial society, technology and social organisation, but it is important to consider in their analysis elements from primordialist and perennialist theories that endorse the permanence of nations with a special focus on history and culture, kinship, religion and ethnicity.[10] For the analysis of pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of nations like Greece, Smith proposes a theoretical critique involving cultural and historical elements that enable us to understand nationalism. His theory, which is called ethno-symbolism, explores the ethnic basis of modern nations with an emphasis on the continuity of the cultural past of the dominant ethnie, 'a named human population with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity'.[11]

Ethno-symbolism allows us to examine how modern state ideology interferes with and constructs gendered representations of the nation, and in particular, how the authoritarian regime of Metaxas[12] reinterpreted through war imagery representations of the Greek classical past, the religiosity of the Byzantine past and the regeneration of modern Greece, with reference to the Great Idea, 'the irredentist dream of unifying within one modern state, territories in the Balkans and Asia Minor which were perceived as culturally Greek'.[13] By interweaving heroism and myth, elements of ethnic origins and history, values and traditions, and aesthetic aspects of Byzantine icons,[14] it comes as no surprise that popular icons appealed to the Metaxist regime. The particular medium resonated with the dictator's attempts to find common ground with the masses, projecting the regime's focus on 'populism' and 'the soul of the people' (λαϊκή ψυχή),[15] especially as the artists interweave the mythical with the real, in visual representations of the war.

II

The Metaxist regime, censorship, the arts and popular icons

By September 1939, a successful mobilization plan of the armed forces had been put together, and by 28 October 1940 general conscription of Greek male citizens was announced.[16] General Metaxas had been in power since 4th August 1936, when a number of repressive measures were put in place, starting with the setting up of a network of key offices such as the strong Security network, the Censorship Committee, the Press Archive and the National Youth Organization (Εθνική Οργάνωση Νεολαίας - ΕΟΝ), all heavily supported by a large number of Reinforced Laws.[17] The Sub-Ministry of Press and Tourism, which came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, was also founded at the beginning of Metaxas' dictatorship in 1936, with Theologos Nikoloudis in charge.[18] The particular state institution was responsible for the control of propaganda with an emphasis on: the 'enlightenment' of the public through the daily Greek and foreign press, political conferences, theatre, radio, music, films, and the promotion of Greek tourism abroad. To further the control and propagation of the political ideas of the regime, stringent censorship was imposed on radio and press, with a series of laws demanding from their editors and publishers compliance with censorship rules and regulations prior to newspaper circulation.[19] The censorship laws in relation to the production and ratings of films were equally severe, and only the production of propaganda documentaries and journals (επίκαιρα) that highlighted 'Metaxas' tours around the countryside as the "Father of the Nation"' and 'the life and works' of the EON were supported by the regime.[20]

The arts, although not as tightly censored as radio and press, were controlled by the General Directorate of Letters and Fine Arts, initially a section of the Ministry of Education.[21] Metaxas was sympathetic to artistic freedom of expression and declined to alienate or exclude modern artists, or 'futurists', as they were called by the academic artists.[22] As he had characteristically mentioned, 'The Greek State will support art, not a specific aesthetic style. ... The arts need freedom to progress (Το Κράτος το Ελληνικόν, το σημερινόν, θα υποστηρίξη την τέχνην, όχι ορισμένη τεχνοτροπίαν... Η τέχνη δια να αναπτυχθή θέλει ελευθερίαν)'.[23] Kostis Bastias, who was in charge of the General Directorate of Letters and Fine Arts, Director of the National Theatre and close friend of Metaxas, support-

ed aesthetic modernism, provoking the outrage of the academic artists.[24] These academic artists who had studied in Germany (School of Munich) and France favored 'traditional Realism' and 'a superficial Impressionism' with choices of topics such as portraits, landscape, and nature, propagating the practising of 'a balanced and law-abiding art', as opposed to the works produced by 'disturbed futurists (ανισόρροπους φουτουριστές)'.[25] Their complaints, however, did not lead to the persecution of modernists, but instead Metaxas decided to organize the first Panhellenic Exhibition in 1938 where artists, both academic and modern, presented and were awarded for their works, regardless of arguments and debates.[26]

This lack of clarity in defining Greek art during the Metaxist period, left the artists and men of letters wondering how 'Greekness' can be best portrayed, inspired by influences from classical antiquity, Byzantium, academic painting and contemporary aesthetic modernism. At the Athens School of Fine Arts, Realism and Impressionism, Cubism and Expressionism shone in the 1930s and early 1940s, but it was not until the arrival of Konstantinos Parthenis (1878-1967), whose appointment as Director of the School in 1930 set the foundations for a Greek art with an autonomous character, allowing it to retain its variety of themes from allegory to myth, historical event and religious iconography.[27] At that time, 'the generation of the 1930s' was anxiously trying to answer questions about the cultural contribution of Greece to 'the cultural hegemony of Europe': should it be the strong oriental influence resulting from centuries of Ottoman occupation, a 'romantic ancestoritis', or something 'contemporary, unknown and neo-hellenic ... reminding Europeans that there is not only classical Greece but modern as well'.[28] An 'aesthetic nationalism' identified Greek landscape with the essence of Greece at every level: geographic, natural, mythological and heroic, traditional and religious.[29]

In November 1940, Metaxas approached Professor Yiannis Kefallinos (1894-1957) at the Athens School of Fine Arts, regarding the production of a number of artworks in relation to the war.[30] The School offered its support to the war effort by announcing a competition among the students of the Engravings Section, funding the printing of the first related artwork in 10,000 copies.[31] The idea was to create artworks, "διαφημιστικούς πινάκες εθνικής σκοπιμότητος", which would be reproduced as lithographs in multiple copies, promoting the spirit and sacrifice of Greek youth in the tradition of their heroic predecessors.[32]

The following five works were selected and produced in colored lithographs: Go Ahead Greeks, Heroines of 1940 in 1-2500 copies, Come and get it in 2500 – 5000 copies by Kostas Grammatopoulos, Have you given money? in 5000-7500 copies by Tasos Alevizos and For the soldiers in 7500-10,000 copies by Vasso Katrakis. Four of those were printed at the expense of the School, whereas 10,000 copies of the lithograph Go Ahead Greeks were reproduced by the Sub-ministry of the Press and Tourism.[33] These lithographs are the only recorded example of an 'official' collaboration between the government and the School of Fine Arts, possibly underlining Metaxas' trust in the School to produce 'typically Greek' artworks, in line with the official beliefs of his regime.

The majority of the popular icons produced during the war were created by painters and engravers from the Athens School of Fine Arts, but also by unknown artists collaborating with publication houses.[34] The artists aimed at creating works that should be bought by the public, using easily understood messages, vivid colours, well defined contrasts, powerful action,

Text 1 On the summit of Pindos, 28 October to 12 November 1940.
Reproduced from The Epic of '40: Popular Iconography, 37

and 'a meaningful separation between the good and the evil with always the dominance of the former'.[35] Their sizes varied from 37x55cm to 53x72cm and 100x69cm and shared similarities in content and style with icons from a previous conflict, the Balkan Wars (1912-13), when popular icons reached a peak in production. The Sub-ministry of Press and Tourism distributed large quantities of popular icons to the army barracks and other public service buildings, encouraging the individual artists and publishers to continue promoting nationalistic images of courage inspired by Greek history and current affairs.[36] Although they were produced by non-state institution and were for sale, the Metaxist government embraced their production and dissemination in public places, treating them as authentic expressions of the Greek authentic character, full of symbols, myths and memories of a unique ethnic past.

Ethnicity and the origins of the nation

The strong ethnic character of Greek nationalism is central in the representations of nationhood. Continuity in visual symbolism from past to present relies on myths, memories, values and traditions, which highlight the depiction of an ethnically homogenous population. As Metaxas characteristically mentioned in his speeches, the intention of his regime was to improve Greek civilisation, making it 'superior to those existing in Europe': 'we may not be able to move our (geographical) borders any further but concerning our civilization we still have a long way to go before reaching its borders'.[37] Metaxas' Third Hellenic Civilisation calls for a national awakening inspired by elements from ancient Greece and Byzantium.[38] He incorporated the emotive power of the nationalist vision of the Great Idea,[39] the autochthonous dream of recreating a large Greek empire, in his own nationalist project, the Third Hellenic Civilisation. However, for Metaxas, the focus on Greek civilisation's eternal and timeless 'spirituality' and the myth of a 'spiritual imperium' was different from the imperialistic territorial aspirations of totalitarian Germany and Italy.[40] He projected the 'cultural affinity' of the modern imagined community with its remote past, which, regardless of the changes it experienced, 'is still in some sense recognised as the "same" community'.[41]

Popular icons, as a means of propaganda, were persistently reminding to Greek citizens of their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, concentrating on a timeless national identity that does not need to ask 'who we are' or 'when we began'. This was expressed through allegory, myth and tradition, reinvented to suit current propagandist needs, as is depicted in text 1. The particular text shows an Evzona, a soldier of the light infantry kneeling down, while the goddess Nike offers protection and encouragement. She is also holding a wreath above his head, treating him as a hero or a victorious Olympian athlete after completing a marathon. The setting, somewhere on the Mount Olympus, the home of the twelve gods, establishes a connection with myths and memories of the nation, enhancing a sense of continuity between past and present.

The same setting is repeated in text 2, *The Liberators: Marathonomachos, Armatolos kai Evzonas*, but this time masculine physical strength and beauty draws strong associations between Olympian gods and modern heroes. The text combines the three facets of modern Greek history idealised by Metaxist propaganda. It defines national territory as an ancestral landscape with deep attachments for the community that inhabits it. It visually conveys

Text 2 The Liberators: Marathonomachos, Armatolos and Evzonas, 1940-41.
Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM.

Metaxas' belief in the need to create and/or recreate the Third Hellenic Civilisation, a modern national rebirth inspired by the cultural continuity of the three-fold continuum of Hellenic history, which refers to classical antiquity, the Orthodox Byzantium and the post-1830s secular state.[42]

The text also exalts the physical prowess of the Greek male, portraying three 'fighters' from different chronological periods of Greek history; on the right, a warrior *Marathonomachos* from the victorious battle of Marathon in 490 BC, on the left, a fighter *Armatolos* from the Greek War of Independence in 1821, and, in the middle, a modern day soldier, an Evzonas.

The Greek character is also reconfigured through the use of myths, such as the re-enactment of the story of the two mythological peoples who lived in Thessaly, the Lapiths and the Centaurs, in a modern context (text 3). According to the myth, the Lapiths had invited the Centaurs (half men half horses) to celebrate a Lapith wedding. The Centaurs got drunk, and unable to control their lust for the Lapith women, carried them off. A pitched battle took place, ending in favor of the Lapiths. The myth symbolises the struggle and consequently the victory of civilized over wild behavior, and it was also used allegorically by the Greek sculptor Phidias in his portrayal

ΜΑΧΗ ΚΕΝΤΑΥΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΛΑΠΙΘΩΝ:

Text 3 Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths, 46x48cm/ 53x72cm, 1940-41. Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM IEEE 4955/17Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM.

of the conflicts between the heroic Greeks and the barbaric Persians during the 5th century BC. The moral and cultural superiority of the Greeks draws associations with the democracy of the 5th century BC and presents a direct contrast to the barbarity of fascist Italians.

The artist, who is unknown, uses the myth in order to allegorically portray the Italians as the Centaurs, who came to mistreat the ancient Greek land. The title reads: *The Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths: The barbaric Centaurs attack the civilized Lapiths in antiquity but they are defeated and driven away from the Mountains of Pindos.* The humorous, caricature-like, popular icon depicts the lack of respect and disdain the Greeks had for their enemies, as it metaphorically links the name of the select 101st Italian Centauro (Centaurs) Armored Division with the Greek myth. The particular text praises the cultural superiority and refinement of the Greeks, as Lapiths, against the coarse and ill-mannered Italians, as Centaurs. The image shows the Italian Centaurs trying frantically to escape from the Greek Evzones, leaving behind musical instruments (guitar and mandolin), wine and food. The text depicts a battle scene with a density of figures and commotion within an action-packed frame. The colors are lively, varying from blue-green to olive and golden-brown. The written text is not within the image but underneath as a caption and a description that reminds the viewer about the mythical incident. The composition is quite flat spatially, adding to its comic quality.

It resembles caricature-like sketches and cartoons of Mussolini and the defeated Italians that featured in the highly censored Greek newspapers during the war, indicating that the government condoned comical representations and mockery of the enemy. Humour and political jokes, as German sociologist Hans Speier explains, become offensive weapons, either serving defensive purposes or making 'an opponent seem ridiculous'. In the particular case, humour is recruited as a propaganda technique, to bond a community of people who can understand, share and laugh, with representations of the enemy drawn from a common history and myths, but also as a means to release tension and help people deal with a difficult situation. The text emphasises the distinctiveness of the Greek people, using the enemy as the 'other' in order to create feelings of national belonging and give reasons why involvement in this war is necessary.

III

Religious beliefs and practices: the continuum of Orthodoxy and Byzantium

The Third Civilisation's continuum of Hellenic history paid tribute to religiosity and devotion to Christianity, using the religious element to reinforce Greek ethnic identity. This is manifested through a special focus on the education and indoctrination of the Greek youth of EON, regularly reminded of its duties to pray on a daily basis and attend church services.[45] The EON's propagandist publication *Neolaia* featured articles on "Religion: the basis for our national regeneration" or "Christianity is indispensable for Hellenism";[46] whereas one of the EON flyers reminded children that 'whatever I am today I owe it to my Leader, the God-inspired and his best and most Greek (το 'Ελληνικώτερο) creation, the EON'.[47] The intention of the state was to educate and train both male and female individuals spiritually and physically, so as to become 'self-disciplined, respectful of themselves, others and the State'.[48] Additionally, Metaxas considered the Church as a valuable means of propaganda for the dissemination of the ideas of the regime, and in particular for 'the regeneration and education

Text 4 The cowardly torpedoing of our glorious cruiser Elli, N. Neiros, 47x66/49x69cm, 1940 Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM/IEEE 4955/8

of the Hellenic and Christian collective conscience'.[49] However, he did not hesitate to dissolve the Holy Synod in 1938, appointing a new one in full support of the regime, displaying his complete control on political matters. The Church, a state institution, was 'deployed' by the regime to keep religion alive,[50] underlining the importance of traditional Orthodoxy in the definition of national identity.

Text 4, *The cowardly torpedoing of the glorious cruiser Elli*, shows how popular icons conveyed state propaganda in relation to the religious element. The island of Tinos is renowned for the Church of the Annunciation, which owes its fame to the miraculous holy icon, and on the particular day pilgrims, members of the armed forces, ships of the Greek navy anchored in the harbour are gathered to celebrate the Dormition of the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary and the procession of Her icon, which is carried from the church to the harbour.[51] The particular text refers to the torpedoing of the cruiser *Elli* at the port of the island of Tinos on 15th August 1940, by the Italian submarine Delfino. The artist, N. Neiros, has inserted four images at the corners of the popular icon, offering information about the island, the church and the actions of those who were present. On the top left hand side, there is an image of the Church of the Annunciation, whereas on the right hand side, there is a postcard-like image showing a panoramic view of the island and the harbour.

Text 4 gives a valid depiction of the scene, showing that following the terrible explosions and loss of lives on Elli, the two ships Esperos and further back Artene approach to offer assistance.[52] The two inserts on the bottom left and right show the immediate response of the people on the shore. On the left, members of the National Youth Organisation are shown in the role of stretcher-bearers, carrying the wounded sailors, whereas on the right, the pilgrims also offer their help. Although the text does not show or refer to the culprit, as Metaxas was not willing, at this stage, to enter into war with Italy, there is an intense propagandist message in this text. The popular icon encourages an identification of religion with EON membership, and possibly citizenship, promoting a sense of historical (religious) continuity from past to present and constructing a distinctive Greek national identity.[53] The emphasis is on essential values and beliefs that combine religion with patriotism, especially for the education and training of youth: 'the army of the youth of Greece, the future fighting army, which forms and shapes the souls and bodies of male and female Greeks (Έλληνες και Ελληνίδες)'.[54]

However impressed Metaxas might have been by the fascist way of orchestrating mass events with wide appeal for the public, he was neither interested nor able to introduce "'a new political religion" at the heart of his regime', which lacked support from the masses.[55] Unlike Mussolini and Hitler, he does not pursue the organisation of the masses and their collective indoctrination through fascist rituals and festivals that will 'transform permanently the occasional crowds of civil events into the liturgical masses of the political cult'.[56] Instead, he draws attention to the importance of faith (πίστη), truth and 'social duty (κοινωνικό καθήκον)', as characteristics of Greek national identity.[57]

Text 5 Victory, freedom. The Virgin Mary be with him, Giorgos Gounaropoulos, 100x69cm, 1940. Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM.

Text 5, Victory, Freedom: The Virgin Mary be with him, shows a Greek soldier lovingly embraced by a motherly religious icon, the Virgin Mary or the All Holy (Panagia - Παναγία). The popular icon is based on a painting by Giorgos Gounaropoulos (1889-1977), one of the artists of the Athens School of Fine Arts, who had moved to Paris, furthered his art studies and found success and recognition. His personal style was influenced by cubism and surrealism, creating an imaginary, poetic and dream-like world accentuated by plain lines and dark blue, yellow to red colours. In this particular text the presence of the sacred is recreated through the figure of the Virgin Mary, who becomes the spiritual guide of the soldier by supporting and protecting his 'holy' mission. Reminiscent of Byzantine art that shows the Virgin Mary nursing or 'suckling' her child,[58] the female figure protects the disproportionately smaller soldier, putting her arm around him. His fragility and physicality comes in direct contrast to Her powerful spirituality. Gounaropoulos is evidently influenced by the identity of the Virgin Mary as Hodegetria, "She who shows the way (Οδηγήτρια)". The religious icon depicts the Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus with her left arm, with her right hand gently pointing to Him as the source of salvation.[59] The sketchy figures and the plain background of the popular icon (text 5) also create the illusion that the figures are floating in a timeless vacant space, similar to religious icons. Yannis Hamilakis and Eleana Yalouri note that 'given the prominent and central role of Christianity within Byzantine institutions, the incorporation of the Byzantine past within the main body of the national narrative promoted further the fusion between Orthodoxy and Hellenic national identity'.[60]

The image of the Virgin Mary was first introduced in the Second World War popular icons, as those produced during the Balkan Wars were restricted to depictions of clergy on the battlefield.[61] This addition reflects the attempts of the state to promote the role of women as valuable members of Greek society in its propaganda imagery, but also the importance of earlier ethnic configurations, such as the Byzantine Imperial Orthodoxy, in the expression of Greek nationalism. The widespread use of the female figure of the Virgin Mary, however, comes in direct contrast with the complete absence of Byzantine male warrior saints in military costumes standing or on horseback. At first glance it seems surprising that there is not even a single popular icon with a male warrior saint, inspired by hagiographers, portray-

ing St George performing 'miracles with military associations' and protecting the Byzantines against conquerors.[62] Two possible explanations for this absence in Second World War popular icons derive from Christopher Walter's claims that information about warrior saints like Sts Efstathios, Phanourios and George was fictitious, making it 'usually impossible to control the historical authenticity of what the texts tell us', but also that the warrior saints were martyrs who were executed for their Christian faith.[63] The element of martyrdom was problematic within western nationalist representations and in particular in texts aiming to encourage citizens to contribute to the war effort and return home as heroes. Male saints were replaced by male (mortal) soldiers that emphasised the heroic and the sacrificial in the representations of the deeds of the Greek army. Additionally, Greek texts needed an easily recognised religious persona to embody Christianity and to comply with the ideals of the Metaxist regime. The identity of the Virgin Mary could not be mistaken. Her image signified motherhood, as the mother of Christ or every Greek mother whose son was fighting at the front line; it personified the nation and it indirectly echoed the regime's message about the most important role of Greek women as mothers of heroic sons.

Text 6 The sinking of the Italian convoy by the legendary Papanikolis, N. Neiros, 43x58cm, 1940-41. Source: reproduced with permission from the HNHM IEEE, no. 4957/24

Text 6 depicts the sinking of the Italian ships *Liguria* and *Lombardia* by the Greek submarine *Papanikolis*, following closely information published in the daily press.[64] In a similar way to the legendary battleship *Georgios Averof* in the popular icons of the Balkan Wars, *Papanikolis*, the submarine on the left hand side of the text, featured in a number of texts that described in detail its successes against the Italian navy during the war.[65] Neiros has placed the Greek navy, air force and the Virgin Mary on the left hand side of the text, whereas the destroyed Italian ships, the smoke and the enemy bodies in the sea, on the right hand side, create an invisible line between the '(victorious) good' and the '(defeated) evil'. The Virgin Mary at the top left hand side of the text, with the vision of the destroyer *Elli* by her side, indicates a just and divine intervention, clearly articulated through the written text in the small box below: *With the protection of Megalochari, the Greek navy avenged the cowardly torpedoing of the warship Elli in the holy waters of Tinos.*

Her leading role symbolically expands definitions of womanhood beyond the traditional roles assigned to them by marriage and motherhood. In this instance, religion offers an opportunity to women, who may be socially subject to men, to be part of 'a brotherhood', 'grant[ing] them an identical immortal soul'[66] and accepting them, at least symbolically, as equals. As Margaret Poulos points out, Metaxas 'brought women into the centre-stage of political life and national discourse by creating a cult of Mother Worship'.[67] This meant that despite the lack of aesthetic modernism in women's representations in popular icons, Greek women were recognised as pivotal members of the national family, destiny and collective solidarity.

IV

Conclusion

The paper discussed the use of concepts of continuity, tradition and religion in selected representations of Second World War popular icons. During the Greek-Italian War the majority of popular icons were produced by non-state institutions. The Metaxist regime allowed private publishing houses to be actively involved in the production and supported the dissemination of the texts, as they echoed the regime's beliefs and values in relation to classical antiquity, Byzantium and Orthodoxy.

It argued that popular icons were not political posters produced for specific war campaigns, but cultural artefacts with a long tradition, dating back to earlier centuries, and consequently, indirect media of visual propaganda.

The analysis has shown that representations of Greek national history reinvent the glory of the ancient and Byzantine past, aiming to inspire the re-birth of the nation, the Third Hellenic Civilization. They do not need to prove the homogeneity or ethnic purity of the nation, which is taken for granted. Greek texts seem to recruit the nation by requesting from the citizens to participate in the 'making' of history, re-discovering and re-inventing distinctive characteristics of national identity. Popular icons project a strong sense of national history, myths and heroic deeds, building on an 'immemorial and ancestrally-based community', stimulating emotions and feelings that boost national pride and encourage the citizens' involvement in the war effort. They reveal that the Metaxist project employs elements of the shared culture of the ethnic group with a special focus on the continuity of ancestry, language and religion. The recruiting of the citizens through these texts was implemented by the tendency to 'authenticate the past, to select from all that has gone before that which is distinctive, unique and "truly ours", and thereby to mark out a unique shared destiny'.

Notes

1 *The Balkan Wars 1912-13: Popular Iconography (Οι Βαλκανικοί Πόλεμοι 1912-13: λαϊκή εικονογραφία)* (Athens: IEEE, 1999), 39; Eugenia Drakopoulou,"The Itineraries of the Orthodox Painters in the Eighteenth Century: the common aesthetics in South-East Europe," *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 5 (2008): 21-38.

2 Dimitris Stamelos, *Neo-Hellenic Popular Art (Νεοελληνική Λαϊκή Τέχνη)* (Athens: Gutenburg, 1993), 120-121, 128.

3 Ibid., 9-10.

4 For Greek art critic Ioannis Meletopoulos, popular icons were 'creations of private initiative that did not have propagandist intentions and were not controlled by the state'. Ioannis Meletopoulos, *The History of Modern Greece in Popular Iconography (Η Ιστορία της Νεότερης Ελλάδος εις την Λαϊκή Εικονογραφία)* (Athens: IEEE, 1968), 10.

5 Ioannis Meletopoulos, *The History of Modern Greece in Popular Iconography* (Athens: H.E.S.G, 1968), 9.

6 *The Balkan Wars 1912-13 – Greek Popular Iconography (Athens: H.E.S.G., 1992, 1999); The Epic of '40: Popular iconography* (Athens: H.E.S.G., 1987); Asantour Bacharian and Petros Antaios, *Pictorial Testimonies: Paintings and Etchings from War, Occupation and Resistance* (Athens: Ministry of Culture, 1985).

7 Marina Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth. Dictatorship and Propaganda in Greece* (Athens: Oceanida 2006); Vangelis Angelis, *Why Are People Happy and Smiling, Father ...* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2006).

8 Eleni Machaira, *The Youth of 4th August: Photo-graphes* (Athens, 1987).

9 Spyros Karachristos, *Greek Posters* (Athens: Kedros, 1984).

10 See John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretations of Cultures* (London: Fontana, 1973); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

11 Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 32.

12 General Ioannis Metaxas, who was 'appointed by the King as minister-president in 1936, run the state based on an authoritarian/dictatorial model with total control of the ministries of war, air, marine and foreign affairs, security police and tight censorship of the mass media. See Harry Cliadakis, "The Political and Diplomatic Background to the Metaxas Dictatorship, 1935-36," *Journal of Contemporary History* 14 (1979): 117-138.

13 Keith S. Brown and Yannis Hamilakis, *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 15. See also Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1978), 17-27.

14 Dimitris Stamelos, *Neo-Hellenic Popular Art*, 119-122.

15 Vangelis Angelis, *Why Are People Happy and Smiling Father?* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2006), 52.

16 *General Army Staff: History of the Greek Army 1821-1997* (Athens: Section of Army History Press, 1997), 214-215.

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