The Representation of the Greek Civil War in *Eleni* and *The Heroic Age*

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This paper examines comparatively the way in which the Greek Civil War is represented in the novels *Eleni* by Nicholas Gage and *The Heroic Age* by Stratis Haviaras. Due to the limited studies on the aforementioned novels my approach is based on close reading and critical comparison. In the first part of the paper I refer briefly to the reception of *Eleni* and *The Heroic Age* by the Greek and American readership as well as to the debate that emerged among the critics when *Eleni* was translated into Greek. In the second part I examine comparatively two topics indicative of the different stances that the aforesaid narratives take on the Greek Civil War. The first one explores the narrative representation of the ideological opponent, to whom I will refer as the “Other”. The second part discusses the representation of spaces associated with the narrator’s Civil War experiences which I have classified into two categories: utopian and dystopian spaces. In the third part of the paper, in order to illustrate the reasons why *Eleni* and *The Heroic Age* take different ideological viewpoints on the Civil War, I attempt to establish the correlation between trauma and narration.

In *The Heroic Age*¹ a group of young boys decided to leave Greece in order to escape from the atrocities committed during the Civil War. In their attempt to cross the borders the companions were captured by the communist guerrillas and fought on their side in Grammos. In the second part of the novel, the young fighters who survived the defeat of the communist Democratic Army² were transferred to a concentration camp on an uninhabited island of the Aegean Sea and were sent afterwards to the island of Kalamos.

In Gage’s novel³ the largest part of the narration describes Eleni’s struggles to

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¹ Stratis Haviaras’s novel was published in 1984 in the U.S.A. and translated into Greek in 1985.
² Henceforth as D.S.E. (Democratic Army of Greece).
³ Nicholas Gage’s *Eleni* was published in 1983 in the U.S.A. and translated the same year into Greek by Alexandros Kotzias.
plan the escape of her children from the guerrillas-occupied village and send them to their father in the U.S.A. Through his efforts to find the persecutors of his mother and by narrating Eleni’s life, Gage wishes to heal the trauma of his mother’s death and perpetuate her memory.

The first question one has to tackle is whether Eleni and The Heroic Age can be considered Greek narratives. It is generally admitted that language is perhaps the most determinant factor for a text to be included into or excluded from what is perceived as national literature, while some further critical questions one has to answer before drawing any conclusions are the following ones: To what extent can the nexus between national language and national literature be challenged and re-defined? Which are the factors that determine the choice of a Greek author to write in the lingua franca of his time? Does this choice have to do exclusively with the degree of “Greekness” of the narrative or is it also driven by other factors such as publishing policies and target-audience?

Both Eleni and The Heroic Age won rave reviews from the American critics at the time when the anti-communist sentiment in the U.S.A. during Reagan’s presidency was highly sharpened. Scholars have analysed extensively the way in which Eleni

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4 Yiorgos Kalogeras, “Ζώνες επαφής και μαρτυρίες μετάβασης: οι λογοτεχνικοί “κύκλοι” της ελληνικής μετανάστευσης,” in Σύγχρονη ελληνική πεζογραφία. Διεθνείς προσανατολισμοί και διασταυρώσεις, ed. A. Spyropoulou and Th. Tsimbouki (Athens: Alexandreia, 2002), 77. Kalogeras has argued that Eleni and The Heroic Age are “transitional” narratives since they were written in English and published in the U.S.A., while the plot takes place in Greece.

5 Some further questions that arise are the following ones: To what extent and under which conditions can Eleni and The Heroic Age be perceived as narratives of the Greek diaspora? What is the relationship between the diasporic periphery and the metropolitan centre as far as the intellectual production is concerned? How can the relationship between national language and national literature be defined and how strict are these definitions? Since the scope of this paper does not permit an extensive discussion on these topics, I shall confine myself to make reference to some studies that address these issues. See Dimitris Tziovas, ed., Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700: society, politics and culture (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); Yiorgos Veloudis, Γραμματολογία: θεωρία λογοτεχνίας (Athens: Dodoni, 1994), 276-95 and Kalogeras, “Ζώνες επαφής,” 69-85.

6 Haviaras for instance wonders whether he would have been able to find an American publisher had he written his novels in Greek. See Stratis Haviaras, “Το ελληνικό μυθιστόρημα και οι προοπτικές του στο εξωτερικό,” in Σύγχρονη ελληνική πεζογραφία. Διεθνείς προσανατολισμοί και διασταυρώσεις, ed. A. Spyropoulou and Th. Tsimbouki (Athens: Alexandreia, 2002), 331.

has contributed to the fabrication of ethnic and ideological identities for the Greek-American community and they have pointed out that *Eleni* was utilised by Reagan’s regime in order to legitimise the governmental foreign policy in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

In Greece during the ’80s the Civil War was still ongoing in terms of manipulation and exploitation of the collective memory by the political parties. In the early ’80s the socialist party PA.SO.K rose to power bringing to the political forefront the historical events of the ’40s. The party’s electoral victories in the ’80s are attributed by political scientists to the fact that PA.SO.K manipulated the collective memory of the ’40s equating the Right with those who had collaborated with the occupier.

On its part, the right-wing party opposed the request of oblivion in the name of national reconciliation and the Greek Civil War was perceived as a result of the Anglo-American involvement in the country. This polarisation between the Left and the Right resulted in what some scholars define as “divided memory”: the supporters of the political parties adopted different versions regarding the causes and events of the Civil War according to the interpretation given by the political faction with which one had aligned.

Within this ideological and political context the translation of *Eleni* caused a storm of reactions. Few months after *Eleni* was published in Greece, *The Heroic Age* was also translated from English. Haviaras’s novel though went almost unnoticed by the Greek critics. It is not without interest that the few critics who wrote reviews on *The Heroic Age* hailed the novel as the “Left answer” to *Eleni*.

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9 Kalogerias, “Ζώνες επαφής,” 75.


12 For a comprehensive list of the articles and books published against Gage and *Eleni* see Kalogerias, “Ζώνες επαφής,” 84 and Angelos Elefantis, Μας πήραν την Αθήνα... Ξαναδιαβάζοντας μερικά σημεία της ιστορίας 1949-1959 (Athens: Vivliorama, 2002), 268.

13 Kalogerias, “Ζώνες επαφής,” 75.
The representation of the “Other”

Before I proceed to the comparative examination of the representation of the “Other” in *The Heroic Age* and *Eleni*, it would be worth commenting upon the terms *Andartes* and communist guerrillas that Haviaras and Gage respectively adopted to refer to the fighters of the communist D.S.E., for this linguistic choice is indicative of the ideological disparities between the two novels. Haviaras refers to the fighters of the D.S.E. using almost exclusively the term *Andartes* which is mostly attributed to the partisans that fought against the foreign invaders who occupied Greece during World War II. Gage uses the word guerrillas and occasionally the term bandits. Given the above, one could argue that the term *Andartes* that Haviaras adopts vindicates in the consciousness of the reader the fight of the partisans of the D.S.E. as fair resistance against the right-wing royalist and foreign forces that, after their victory in the Civil War, determined the political fate of Greece for many decades. On the contrary, the term guerrillas and especially the term bandits used by Gage suggest that the communist partisans fought against the interests of their own country.

The first appearance of the “Other” in *The Heroic Age* takes place when Jim, Panagis’s uncle who had immigrated to the U.S.A., returned to Greece as a member of an American charity mission to distribute flour to the Greeks affected by the Civil War. Jim, following the suggestions of the American mission, discriminated against the left-wing civilians, giving to the sympathisers of the Left adulterated rye and saving the flour for the supporters of the “right” side: ‘the left side is the wrong side—always the wrong side’.14 In my opinion this scene constitutes an implicit comment on the involvement of the U.S.A. in the Greek Civil War anticipating the beneficial treatment of the loyalists and the subsequent persecution of the leftists by the post-Civil War regimes: ‘[Americans came] to save Greece from the Greeks’.15

At the concentration camp Ensign Tsakalos and Petty Officer Palioras wreak terror and fear among the young prisoners:

Palioras was a type that I had seen before: pretentious because

15 The diametrically opposed ideological stances that the two narratives take on the Anglo-American involvement in the Greek Civil War can be further designated when the narrator’s words ‘the Americans came to save Greece from the Greeks’ in *The Heroic Age* are read in comparison with Eleni’s thoughts for the departure of the British soldiers from Lia: ‘She hoped that the British might curb the brutality and internecine fighting off the guerrillas, and now she feared their departure would mean that more Greeks would die at Greek hands’. Nicholas Gage, *Eleni* (London: Collins, 1983), 110.
ignorant, vicious because pretentious, he trusted neither his words nor the sound of his own voice, and he ended up using silence to solicit respect, if not fear.\textsuperscript{16}

Shortly afterwards, Lieutenant Muller was appointed commander of the concentration camp. Although royalist and ideologically opposed to Panagis’s companions, Muller is portrayed as more compassionate. When Fotis, one of the young prisoners, admitted to Lieutenant Muller that he has espoused the communist ideology, Muller responded with understanding by respecting Fotis’s political opinions. Furthermore, not only did Lieutenant Muller not coerce Fotis to recant his ideology but he also arranged the boys’ transferring to the island of Kalamos giving them back their much desired freedom.

In contrast to \textit{Eleni}, in \textit{The Heroic Age} the “Other” is presented with a more humane aspect. The reasons for this can be elucidated through the examination of the correlation between healing the Civil-War trauma and narrating a Civil-War story which shall be discussed further on.

In \textit{Eleni} the “Other” is represented by the communist guerrillas who are depicted as ‘satanic, dirt-streaked, bearded faces’.\textsuperscript{17} Gage ascribes an almost metaphysical dimension to the behavioural change of the villagers who embraced the communist ideology and aligned themselves with the rebels: “‘He used to be a polite, shy boy,” Eleni said. “Blushing every time someone spoke to him. Now he’s like a wild man!’”.\textsuperscript{18} The author does not present the “Other” as the class enemy of Eleni who, according to the indictment drawn up by the communist judge Katis: ‘[…] is the daughter of a known fascist and the wife of an American capitalist’.\textsuperscript{19} In the narrative the “Other” is portrayed as a vicious individual who derives pleasure from others’ suffering. The following example is characteristic: the children in Lia are divided into communist guerrillas and national soldiers while playing. Gage, who at first wanted to join the group of the children who pretended to be the guerrillas, realised that:

To be thought like Niko Mitros and the guerillas he impersonated meant taking pleasures in the sufferings of someone weaker, but Nikola [Gage] could not make himself stop feeling the pain of the victim. One thing was clear- his chances of being chosen for the guerilla team were ruined. He

\textsuperscript{16} Haviaras, \textit{Heroic Age}, 195.
\textsuperscript{17} Gage, \textit{Eleni}, 256.
\textsuperscript{18} Gage, \textit{Eleni}, 74.
\textsuperscript{19} Gage, \textit{Eleni}, 368.
wasn’t sure he was sorry.  

The description of Sotiris, Gage’s co-villager who was a victim of the pedomasoma, could also be interpreted as an aspect of the representation of the “Other self”, what Gage would have become had it not been for his mother’s sacrifice: ‘[Sotiris] appeared years older than I did, and as I studied him I realized that I was looking at what my fate would have been if my mother hadn’t saved us from the pedomasoma’.

From what discussed above it can be asserted that in Haviaras’s novel the “Other” is represented by the loyalist soldiers and the foreign forces that got involved in the Greek Civil War. Contrary to the description of the guerrillas as malicious and dogmatic communists in Eleni, in The Heroic Age they are portrayed as young and valiant rebels who fight for a just cause. The impression that the leader of the partisans made to the narrator when they first met is indicative: ‘I wondered what he might look like in the daylight. Herakles? Ajax? Cyclops?’.

In Eleni the “Other” has a clear ideological, political and ethnic identity. The “Other” is the communist guerrillas who brought the Civil War to Lia and condemned Eleni Gatzoyianni to death. It would be legitimate to argue that in Eleni the “Other” also represents the political ideology of communism as this was implemented in Lia and the socialist countries of the former Eastern Bloc, in juxtaposition to the capitalist U.S.A. where Gage was culturally and ideologically naturalised.

**Utopian and dystopian spaces**

In The Heroic Age the boundaries between utopian and dystopian spaces are often indiscernible and in some cases a utopian space turns gradually into a dystopian and vice versa. As such example one could consider the mountain of Grammos where the narrator fought with his companions on the side of the guerrillas. As Panagis climbs the mountain, the surrounding landscape as well as the vibrancy of the rebels enraptures him and he exclaims: ‘People were so free on the mountains, they could be gods’. At the guerrilla camp in Grammos life is difficult for the young fighters and the narrator wonders whether it would have been better if they had transferred into

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20 Gage, Eleni, 228.

21 Pedomasoma is a term that refers to the recruitment of young boys by the Ottoman Empire and is also used in reference to the recruitment of child-soldiers by the guerrillas of the D.S.E. during the Greek Civil War.

22 Gage, Eleni, 453.

23 Haviaras, Heroic Age, 116.

24 Haviaras, Heroic Age, 113.
one of the Queen’s child cities. Despite the adversities Panagis falls in love with a young comrade, strong friendships are developed among the guerrillas and shortly before the last battle of Grammos, Panagis and his companions, confident that the rebels fight for a just cause, ask to fight on their side: “‘We’ll fight to the end,’” they said, and they mean it.  

The ship that carries Panagis and his friends to the island of exile could be considered as an example of a dystopian space. The prisoners were travelling for days under adverse circumstances without knowing where they were going or what would happen to them.

On the barren island of Antikalamos, where Panagis and his friends were exiled after the defeat of the D.S.E, the detention conditions were inhuman. It could be argued that the barbed wires around the concentration camp divided the island into two spaces: the dystopian space where the political prisoners were restricted to and the utopian, which is depicted to be surrounded by the boundless sea, the endless sky and the infinite horizon.

Furthermore, it could be suggested that even the narrator’s memory constitutes a dystopian space. Panagis’s memory of the last battles in Grammos as well as his memories of the months he spent hiding along with other guerrillas in a cave is gradually and painfully retrieved. His comrades refuse to answer his questions and help him fill in his memory gaps, as the process of remembering is particularly afflictive: ‘Avramakis may well have known something about remembering that I did not’.  

In *Eleni* the description of Gage’s house, the village Lia in Epirus, Greece and the village Beloyiannis in Hungary in which the fighters of the D.S.E took refuge after they were defeated in the Civil War could be interpreted as examples of dystopian spaces. On the contrary, the U.S.A. seems to represent the utopian space par excellence.

More specifically, when Gage visited his house in Lia, three decades after the Civil War was over, he found himself unable to recall any happy moments of his childhood. Although Gage did not witness his mother being tortured, in his consciousness his family house had turned from a utopian space highly associated with the maternal figure into a dystopian space in which Eleni was imprisoned, tortured and condemned to death by the guerrillas.

The village of Lia is depicted as a primitive place, isolated from the civilised urban society. Its inhabitants are superstitious and envious of their fellow villagers’

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26 Haviaras, *Heroic Age*, 183.

prosperity while the value of the woman is dependent on her dowry and the number of males she gives birth to. Lia becomes nightmarish when the guerrillas occupy it and put communism into practice: ‘The dream of revolution and freedom painted by the Skevis brothers had turned into a nightmare, and fear settled over the village’. The communist partisans commandeered the houses of the civilians, tortured many of them on suspicion alone that someone sympathised with the Right and recruited their children. In sharp contrast with the guerrillas-occupied Lia, Gage’s father was living in the capitalist and conservative U.S.A. which is described as a ‘sane and logical world’.

Another space whose description has dystopian qualities is Greece in the ’70s. During his visit to the country, Gage was indignant to find that the fall of the Junta and the legalisation of the Communist Party led to the resurgence of the communist ideology in Greece.

In his efforts to discover Eleni’s persecutors Gage visited the village Beloyiannis in which many of his fellow villagers had taken refuge. Gage realised that the dream of the communist utopia had turned into a dystopian nightmare for the supporters of communism; a dystopian nightmare from which he managed to escape thanks to his immigrating to the country of utopia.

America is depicted as a utopian space in which the dreams of economic prosperity, educational and professional excellence and social recognition can be realised. After immigrating to the U.S.A. Gage’s family as well as the rest of the members of the Greek community in the U.S.A. renounced their peasant habits and embraced virtues that the author identifies as American:

He quickly assimilated the American virtues of cleanliness, honesty and industry.

The Greeks seemed to absorb the Calvinistic work ethic with their first step on American soil. They abandoned afternoon siestas and long, lay hours in the coffee shops to work fourteen-hour days [...] .

It has been pointed out the way in which Gage through his books managed to fabricate

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29 Gage, *Eleni*, 34.
31 Gage, *Eleni*, 452.
an American ethnic identity by portraying himself as a politically conservative and loyalist citizen, in a time when ideological allegiance with the Reagan regime was much appreciated. In *Eleni*, the capitalist and politically conservative U.S.A. is presented as a utopian space whilst the guerrillas-occupied Lia, Greece and the socialist countries of the former Eastern Bloc are presented as dystopias, as the ideological “Other”.

**Trauma and narration**

From what I discussed above it can be argued that *The Heroic Age* and *Eleni* take diametrically different stances as far as the representation of the Greek Civil War is concerned. There is, however, one last question to be answered: to what extent could the correlation between trauma and narration be associated with the different viewpoints on the Greek Civil War?

According to Venetia Apostolidou, the narrative treatment of the trauma is completed only when the trauma of the “Other” is acknowledged and the representation of the “Self” as victim is exceeded. As I have illustrated, in Haviaras’s novel the “Other” is represented with a more humane touch, something that could be interpreted as a step towards the acknowledgment of the trauma of the “Other”. In the last pages of *The Heroic Age* Panagis has reconciled with the traumatic past:

> I saw everything clearly now. It made sense to me that we had lost the war, that we had fed the fire, that our bodies had fertilized the cracks in the bedrock. It made sense that the enemy had triumphed. Better that way. Had we won, we’d be the enemy now.

Few pages later, Panagis’s painful memories of the Civil War and the figures of his dead comrades ‘drifted off as light as a breath of air, leaving no sense of sadness’.

For Gage the trauma of Eleni’s death is still fresh. Gage seeks to avenge his mother’s execution, he is surprised to see the villagers of Lia discussing peacefully despite having been enemies during the civil-war years and he is disappointed to find

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36 Haviaras, *Heroic Age*, 346.
37 Haviaras, *Heroic Age*, 350.
that the relatives of those who had been condemned by the guerillas do not share his desire for revenge.\textsuperscript{38} When he is finally given the opportunity to kill the former guerrilla Katis who condemned Eleni to death, Gage decides to let him live not because he has overcome the past hatreds of the Civil War, but mainly because of ‘the understanding of my mother that I had gained in my examination of her life’.\textsuperscript{39}

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\textsuperscript{38} Gage, *Eleni*, 18.

\textsuperscript{39} Gage, *Eleni*, 469.
