Book Review: Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia
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What is This?
calls, heavy physical labour, and other forms of punishment and excesses that were characteristic of the SS guards’ operation of the KZs remained exceptions in the Soviet camps. Neither is there proof of any Soviet plans equivalent to the Nazi scheme of ‘extermination through labour’ (108).

With these and other relevant issues adequately dealt with, Wippermann’s dense survey does a great service to the study of Nazism, and especially to an adequate, comparative interpretation of the Third Reich. His book is, moreover, meant to be a tool for schoolteachers of contemporary German history, study groups, and, above all, those involved in the operation, as well as visitors, of the memorials on the sites of the former Nazi concentration camps. It fulfils this purpose in an exemplary way, and should find a broad audience both within and outside Germany.

Notes


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This is an in-depth work by an eminent Greek historian on a crucial phase of the Macedonian question and on one of the heart-rending pages of modern Greek history. The book focuses on the period between the occupation of the Greek region of Macedonia by the Axis Powers in 1941, and the official, though not definitive, end of the Greek civil war in 1949. It is intriguing that Plundered Loyalties does not aspire so much to offer an assessment of the foreign and Greek policy-making apparatuses of the period, which became involved in the developments of the 1940s in Greece, as to investigate the impact of the decision-making of the Greek Communist
Party and the government protagonists of the period on the deeply fragmented society of Greek west Macedonia. The book is in effect divided into two parts, which follow the chronological division of the ‘two communist struggles’: the first against foreign oppressors (1941–4), the second against the legitimate power of the Greek government and its defenders (1945–9).

In his Foreword the author discusses a series of moral issues raised by the nature of his research. Oral testimony, which forms part of Koliopoulos’ historical narrative, was obtained with great effort. The anonymous villager of the region, ‘Slav, Greek, Vlach or Turkish-speaking’, was not always ready to recall and spell out the more obscure parts of the drama that he had been taught, over the course of half a century, to suppress. Nor could the surviving written material on the civil conflict, which was scattered and censored, always provide the historian with reliable information, either because it used to be assessed in a politically — and hence emotionally — charged way, or because it simply did not survive the stormy events of the period. At the same time, Koliopoulos stresses that it is difficult even for the Greek historian to give voice to the bitter memories that fill this account. In this way, he puts his finger on the sore point of contemporary Greek historiography.

Until recently, the question of the role of ideological commitments on both the communist and anti-communist sides has been treated as a taboo subject. The period examined by Koliopoulos to a great extent determined the ideological structures of post-war Greece in the first place because civil strife continued to poison Greek thought through the surviving partisans, the communist veterans and their declared enemies, and then because the anti-communist propaganda under the colonels’ régime (1967–74) exacerbated the division of Greek society into communist and anti-communist factions. By the time of the democratic restoration in 1974, such attitudes had taken the form of a dangerous mentalité, which dictated the exorcism of the views of those historians who dared to present in any favourable way the communist resistance organizations that were irreparably identified with the Greek Communist Party’s pursuits. Mainstream Greek historians often confined their work to criticisms of the communist resistance forces and the war they declared against their ideological opponents but without making serious attempts to find what these forces and their attitudes consisted of and if they were uniform in terms of motivation and aims. Greek historiography has only recently managed to escape from the rationale of this selective damnatio memoriae. Koliopoulos’ major contribution lies in the fact that he refuses to subscribe to this biased form of investigation. There is no doubt that a moral tone has infiltrated his work; but
Koliopoulos is in a privileged position to raise his own voice, not least because his regional identity is the same as that of the tormented Macedonian peasant. Having lived part of his childhood in the very same area which he made his research subject, Koliopoulos has seen part of the drama taking place inside his own family, which the civil war divided — as he explained lyrically in the original Greek version of this book: ‘If, however, a “view” did slip into the discussion of the various issues, it is certainly that of the silent peasant. I may not always have managed to question this view as rigorously as I tried to do with the views of “vocal” protagonists in the events,’ he wrote in Plundered Loyalties. Full awareness of how their identity shapes their work is as much as historians can have on such occasions.

A second, more careful, reading of this book shows that Koliopoulos questions the dominant narrative of ideological commitments of his silent protagonist, the peasant. Koliopoulos ultimately argues that those who thoughtlessly presented the peasant as an active member of the various resistance organizations, whether these were left- or right-wing, are making a terrible mistake. For him, the Macedonian peasant was often coerced into political phalanxes. The response of the villagers was, more often than not, submission, since refusal entailed brutal reprisals at the expense of their families. Such a thesis undermines the assumption that common people drove the political processes. Moreover, it makes communism as well as anti-communism in Greece, once regarded as coherent systems of thought, look like different forms of violence exercised over people by the parties (e.g. the government, EAM/ELAS and behind it the KKE) which wanted to gain absolute power control in the country.

In introducing the complex history of Macedonia, Koliopoulos rightly argues that under Turkish rule it came to exist less as an administrative unit and more and more as the ‘hypothetical country’ of the foreign traveller and diplomat. Exchange of populations, immigration and emigration, brigandage and irredentism, were the inevitable consequences of various conflicts, such as the Balkan and the First World Wars, that shaped and re-shaped the demographic features of the region during the first two decades of the twentieth century. As a result of these developments, the national identity of the inhabitants of the country was presented in as many versions as there were sections, parties and countries that claimed possession of Macedonia in one way or another.

However, Koliopoulos’ main concern is with what happened to the most controversial of all the groups of the region, the ‘Slav Macedonians’, as they were termed. The end of the devastating Second World War and the conclusive defeat of the Greek communist party (KKE) and its resistance wing (EAM) found anti-
communism running high in the region. Tito's involvement in the Greek civil war of 1946–9, however, had contributed to the identification of the ‘Slav Macedonians’ with Yugoslav-inspired communism. The physical oppression of, or propaganda attacks on, those populations by the anti-communist forces that held power and controlled the media were underpinned by the uncertain ethnic identity of the ‘Slav Macedonian’. Greek nationalist forces saw in that figure 'the agent of a foreign and hostile power scheming against Greek territorial integrity' and tried repeatedly through a relentless campaign to reduce his significance in terms of numbers and influence. The communist response was the reverse: exaggeration of census figures. Koliopoulos argues that the result of nationalist and politically driven hostility impelled many Slav Macedonians to abandon the country and migrate to Bulgaria or to the Yugoslav People’s Republic of Macedonia to avoid punishment for real or imaginary crimes. Those who stayed in large part moved to the towns, where they were assimilated linguistically with the dominant Greek element. The story of the Macedonian Slav is then for Koliopoulos that of the gradual disintegration of the mountain communities of Macedonia. In the end, most of the Macedonian villages were turned into ghost-like places.

In the Preface of *Plundered Loyalties*, by the historian C.M. Woodhouse, the debate upon the identity of the Slav Macedonian is tacitly connected with contemporary Greek problems. It is striking though that, unlike Woodhouse, Koliopoulos himself tries to avoid emotionally charged references to the emergence of the FYROM after the collapse of Yugoslavia and its claim to uniqueness in a Macedonian identity. Koliopoulos’ approach is that of delving into the records of the Greek Communist Party’s resolution on the way it should present the profile of Greek Macedonia. Although after the First World War the Comintern imposed on all communist parties in the Balkans its decision concerning the foundation of an independent Macedonian state, the KKE, being in need of popular support during the Second World War, found itself supporting the line that Greek Macedonia was unquestionably Hellenic. That introduced a schizophrenic attitude in KKE policy, since the party at the same time had to please Tito. The birth of FYROM, or MACEDONIA of today is detected in that nanosecond of the Macedonian question, for Tito had already initiated the programme that would bring together the ‘Southern Slavs’ and establish them as a shadowy imagined community in the Balkans.

Fully to appreciate *Plundered Loyalties*, one has to read it as a book of our time: a study of the many-faceted modern Greek identity. The question of transforming the geographical name
'Macedonia' into a non-Greek, political–administrative entity in the neighbourhood of Greece has been a major issue in Greek politics of the past decade. Rightly or wrongly, such connections rekindle the — partially justified — fear concerning the threat of new Balkan eruptions and Greek anxieties over the plundering of Greekness within the framework of political changes and re-alignments, and the creation of new 'nations' in the Balkan peninsula. Perhaps it is healthier for Koliopoulos’ reader to appreciate this work as a study on the formation of identities. Unfortunately, Woodhouse is right to suspect that a historical project on such a controversial issue has a deeply political nature — which can easily be used for propaganda. Koliopoulos himself refuses to act as a political analyst — a species that thrives in the Greece of 2000. Undoubtedly, the political nature of such an ambitious and well-executed venture into history invites even the reviewer to suggest that Plundered Loyalties, though a scholarly work, deserves a readership broader than that of historians. The question that remains to be answered is whether the reader sees either beyond or in the book the harsh Balkan reality of today.

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Peter Grieder, The East German Leadership 1946–1973: Conflict and Crisis, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1999; x + 243 pp.; 0719054982, £40

This is the book that all those who worked on the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling Communist Party before 1989, have been waiting for. It is a delight to read and is full of surprises. It is meticulously researched, makes crisp judgements and is enormously informative. Grieder has had access to the archives of the Ministry of State Security (Stasi), the central party archive, cadre files on many party members, the Nachlässe (private correspondence, speeches, policy statements, communiqués and other working documents), and party secretariat material. Besides this, he interviewed members of the Politburo and others. As he points out, the East German archives are only one half of the story, the other is in Moscow. So far the Russian archives have yielded little which is conclusive. Another source, not used by the author, are the archives in the other East European communist countries. For instance, the Hungarians monitored the situation in East Berlin very closely and were very astute observers of the GDR in the 1980s.