



Images of the Balkans

The communist Balkans and the Greek leftist writers
Political Ideology and Images of the Other
Travel literature and the Balkan Regimes

Sixth Lesson
Lecturer: Petros Marazopoulos
petrosmarazopoulos@gmail.com

The historical context

- After the end of the Second World War, the period of **socialism** begins for the Balkan states (1945-1990)
- The regimes: **Enver Hoxha, Tito, Thodor Zhivkov** and **Nicolae Ceaușescu**
- Balkan **isolation**- Minimizing contacts with Western civilization and of course with Greece
- The '**iron curtain**' and a clear, dividing historical section with Europe
- Expanding the Balkan myth through Communism

The communist regimes



Communitistic Regimes and the relative Western perceptions

*The Balkans **disappeared from the Western** consciousness during the Cold War and the Iron Curtain cut southeastern Europe in two, **separating Greece from its communist neighbors**. Albania became almost **inaccessible**.. Tito's Yugoslavia became the idol of the American rulers and the New Left in Europe [...] Ceausescu's rule in Romania was better known for its strong anti-Sovietism than for the intolerable oppression of the local population. **Thus Greece became the edge of the 'West'**, while the other Balkan states became the **less studied part of communist Eastern Europe**.*

Mark Mazower

The Greek Word over the Balkan regimes- general remarks

- The **establishment** of socialist regimes, the **sealing** of the borders and the consequent **isolationism**, **arouse the curiosity** of both Greek writers and the Greek reading audience
- Consequences: 1. significant **increase of texts** that study and depict the Balkans 2. texts with **different viewpoints (political, social, economic...)** 3. Literature and **propaganda** 4. **Travel literature**
- Greek **fictional production declines** significantly (Elli Alexiou)
- The Greek prism of the Balkan states is **completely differentiated (Ideology, politics and the Other)**
- The *national discourse* of the previous period is fundamentally altered, giving way to a purely **ideological and political writing.**

Trauma and memory: the lives of political refugees in socialist countries

- Greek **political refugees** and the **traumatic experience** of the defeat in the Civil War
- *Narrating an experience or remaining silent?*
- **The trauma** of the civil war and the *denial to write about homeland*
- Understanding a new world: a painful and contradictory experience.
- **Trauma and memory**
- A **contradictory present**- A political dream into practice and a 'frustrating order'
- *Elli Alexiou* and the other Greek writers
- The novels of Elli Alexiou: ***homesickness, sense of isolation, feeling of gratitude, struggling to heal psychological and physical wounds, integration, the loyalty to the communist party and its ideas, the monotony of daily life***

Greek leftist and right writers- Contradictory discourses regarding the Communist Balkans



- Travel literature, ideology, propaganda and political views
- The image of the other and the relationship with **personal political ideologies**
- A tendency to compare- Greece, Europe, Balkans
- Narrating the present from **different political aspects** and views
- Which are the main topics under discussion?
- The Greek culture and a **clear dichotomy**

The Greek literary production about the Communist Balkans

- Which are the **main writers** of the period under examination?
- Why are they writing about Balkans?
- To which **audience** are the authors addressing?
- The **leftist writers**, the defeat in the civil war and socialism as **a different, hypothetical reality** in Greece
- The **right-wing** and centrist writers and the **ideological opposition to communism**
- The positive constructions of the left-wing and '**Homo Socialisticus**'
- The extremely negative perceptions of the Balkan regimes

Communism, Greece, the idea of Europe and the Balkans

- 'After Communism, **Balkans acquire a common historical destiny**' (Mark Mazower)
- Unifying the Balkans under '**the umbrella of socialism**'
- Greek writers **put aside the national interests** (Ideology prevails)
- The dominant literary genre of the period (travel impressions) and the reasons behind this selection
- **Communism as a separating factor between Greece and the Balkans, but also between Balkans and Europe**
- **Isolationism** and the creation of the '*Communist, exotic Other*'
- Greece's path towards **European integration**
- **Greece and the West** in the modern Greek imaginary
- Greek writers of the period visibly distanced themselves from the Balkan myth

The left-wing writers

- Resistance against the German occupation and exile
- They have visited the Balkan countries, they are **communists**- some have been hosted by Balkan socialist regimes
- **Anti-dictatorial attitude**/ anti-Stalinist before
- Vassos Georgiou, Lambros Malamas , Themis Kornaros, George Sarras
- **Positive representations, admiration about the system and propaganda**
- Texts- **hymns to communism** (not mentioning cruelty/ extreme policing etc)
- Constructing the image of **ideal political and social systems**
- ***Ideology and Imagology***

Motifs and recurrent ideas

- Individual **freedom, progress** and the scientific sector
- Industrial sector and general **education**
- **Homo Socialisticus**- a new type of man, free of defects (morally and ethically)
- Praising the leaders
- The historically proven problems (*tortures, persecutions, imprisonments, violations of freedoms*) and the narrations under examination
- **Idealized states** full of **happy** people, constantly aiming on progress
- The extremely positive depictions and some doubts
- **Intellectual developments, ideal societies, organization and order, emphasis on culture, prosperity of the societies, harmonius governance**

Motifs and recurrent ideas

- States that care about the citizens, **social welfare**, **high medical standards**
- **Gender equality and the women's position in society**
- Development of **sports culture**
- **Freedom**, no human rights violation, citizen-friendly police forces, high medical standards
- **The social acceptance of the regimes**
- Images of the '**Homo Socialisticus**': *happy, high standard of living, ,educated, morally shaped. pacifist, lack of egoism*

Why do the Greek writers provide such images?

- Propaganda
- **Ideological and political prisms:** perceiving progress through socialism
- Which was the image that **the regimes was showing to the foreigners?**
- **Comparing socialist Balkans with Greece**
- The idea of **Greek superiority** and the Left-wing authors

Themos Kornaros and the progress of Bulgaria

The village has **nothing to envy comparing to a state** [...] **Boredom is a distant past** for the Bulgarian village, which today only complains because time passes quickly.

What else is **happiness**?

And this happiness can be seen in **the smiling faces, in the cheerful chatter, in the passion for work**. Their **industry** is moving forward. Great factories[...] Among them, there is the factory restaurant. You get dizzy. You can't see the end of the hall. Hundreds of tables with spotless tablecloths and flowers. Each person is served alone, no crowding or running back and forth. I've never **seen such order** in any of the countries I've been to. [...]

A whole floor of the factory library. Ten thousand bound volumes [...] I could not see to **the end the miracle of activity** in today's Bulgaria.

Kostas Birkas- Defying 'Western Propaganda'

*For ten whole months I went back to Bucharest, and on so many other journeys within Romania, completely alone, **without anyone ever asking me for identification** or asking **me who I am or who I am not.** [...]*

*And I truly wondered **where this Police and the 'secret surveillance of foreigners'** by the state of the famous **'iron curtain'**, which I had **read so much about in the Greek press,** and so much noise and so much printing ink was spent **outside.***

*And let the reader not think that I was being watched without understanding that.. **For I have some experience of this thing from the old and present years in our country"***

Κώστας Μπίρκας, Ρουμανία, Αθήνα, Κέδρος, 1963

Themis Kornaros: The woman's position in the socialist regimes and the definition of morality

But the **liberation** and **participation** of this woman **in social and political life** was accompanied by a **refinement her relationships with the man**, but also with the creation **of a new moral and emotional life**. [...]

Thus in today's Romania I **did not see men teasing and attacking women**, at least in the way we are familiar with. But **neither did women shout insults at men and argue in the streets**. [...] But neither is there this wave of wild sexual hunger here, which is roaming the streets in Greece"

Θέμις Κορνάρου, *Οδός Προμηθέως*, Αθήνα, Χρόνος, 1975

Vassos Georgiou: The life of Greek minority in Hoxha's Albania

The first thing I must say is that in this friendly **there is no discrimination against the Greek minority**. The Greek minority occupies an **equal position** in all forms of production and organisation and in **all levels of power**. Moreover, it is **encouraged, not only to keep its language and traditions**, but also to strengthen its unique culture.

The vivid image you get when you enter the region [...] is that you are **dealing with free people** and conscious producers, **who talk to you honestly and without fear** about their present and past lives and who feel what they truly are: equal **Albanian citizens of a socialist country**.

Βάσος Γεωργίου, Η Αλβανία σήμερα, Αθήνα, Σύγχρονη Εποχή, 1981



Πέτρος Μαραζόπουλος
petrosmarazopoulos@gmail.com
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