The Greek Civil War 1946–1949: Historiographical Perspectives, Political Culture, Collective Memory

Abstract

The Greek Civil War of 1946–1949 was the bloodiest conflict in the history of the modern Greek state and left a lasting impact on the political and social life of the country. This paper provides a brief overview of the events of the 40s and attempts to analyze the Civil War through an examination of how it was perceived in the post-war period. Specifically, it will discuss the perspectives that developed in the humanities (historiography, political science), but also the evolution of collective memory on the Civil War, in relation to the political shifts in the country throughout the second half of the 20th century (60s, Dictatorship, Metapolitefsi). The paper represents a multifaceted overview of Greek collective memory of the Civil War and its consequences from 1949 to the present day. Methodologically, it draws from the fields of the history of historiography, public history and memory studies.

Keywords

Civil War, communism/anti-communism, historiography, public history, memory
A timeline of bloodshed. The Greek Civil War, 1946–1949

The German troops occupying Greece withdrew in October 1944, leaving hundreds of thousands dead and incalculable damage in their wake. The most severe consequence of the four-year Occupation was the civil conflict, which had been raging since late 1943. This conflict (the “occupation civil war” as it has come to be known in the literature) involved armed clashes between the forces of the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the Greek People’s Liberation Army (ELAS), both controlled by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), and the other resistance forces operating in the country. EAM faced both non-communist resistance forces, such as the nationalist National Republican Greek League (EdES) and armed bands that collaborated with the Germans (the Security Battalions, the Gendarmerie, Security forces and various volunteer organizations). EAM-ELAS and KKE enjoyed rapid organizational development and widespread influence throughout society thanks to their radical discourse, which imbued their resistance efforts with characteristics of a social movement. Theirs was a movement that both fought against the Occupation forces and demanded radical changes to the state and political regime after the War. It was this latter aspect that rallied the opposing forces into an increasingly crystallized anti-communist coalition. The main player in this coalition was the Greek government in exile in Egypt, which had the full support of the British and was preparing to form a National Unity government once the Occupation was over.

By the summer of 1944, clashes between ELAS and the German-supported Security Battalions had escalated dangerously, with thousands of civilians involved in the bloodshed on either side. Despite the negotiations between EAM and the government in exile and the resultant Lebanon (June 1944) and Caserta (September 1944) agreements, the split between the communists and the other political forces seemed unbridgeable. The British played a crucial role in the affair, seeking to weaken ELAS and, in the long term, restore the Monarchy in Greece. The communist camp justifiably viewed the government-in-exile’s refusal to strongly condemn the collaborators of the Germans as an indication that an anti-communist front
was forming. Despite their fears that this front would attempt to restore the old political order after the Liberation, EAM officially signed all the agreements.

The National Unity government, led by the liberal politician and former minister Georgios Papandreou arrived in a free Athens in October. This government included six ministers belonging to EAM, four of whom were not members of the KKE. All armed resistance organizations, mainly ELAS and EDES, were placed under the command of British Brigadier General Ronald Scobie, who took over as supreme military commander in Greece. However, the government’s demands for disarmament of the guerrilla organizations led to turmoil and ultimately toppled it in early December. The Government (and the British) insisted on the immediate disarmament of the ELAS (and EDES) guerrillas while maintaining units of the Middle Eastern army (namely the Sacred Band and the III Mountain Brigade), which EAM considered “praetorian corps”, active. This led to a rupture, with EAM withdrawing its ministers from the government and calling for a mass demonstration on 3 December. Police forces cracked down on the event, leaving 20 dead and numerous wounded in their wake. In its aftermath, widespread fighting broke out throughout Athens between ELAS and government forces (Police, Gendarmerie, Rimini Brigade). The clashes went on for 33 days, eventually drawing the involvement of ELAS forces stationed in the countryside on the one hand and strong British infantry forces supported by artillery, tanks and aircraft on the other. British superiority eventually forced ELAS to admit defeat and withdraw its forces from Athens. The thousands killed and executed on both sides together with the British military intervention while Nazi Germany remained a threat, caused a deep divide in Greek society and contributed to the internationalization of the Greek division.

The “Dekemvriana” ended with the Treaty of Varkiza (12 February 1945), which called for the disarmament of all armed resistance groups – essentially ELAS – and amnestied all political offenses committed since December 3, though the terms refrained from distinguishing political and criminal offenses. As a result, thousands of EAM and ELAS members were put on trial for murders and other violent acts going as far back as the Occupation. The treatment of
resistance fighters as common criminals was unprecedented for European standards and served to galvanize political passions. This was followed by a wave of persecution and reprisals against left-wing citizens and members of EAM-ELAS in villages and towns, tolerated, if not supported outright, by the centrist and right-wing governments of the time. Tens of thousands of individuals found themselves imprisoned, accused of crimes perpetrated during the Occupation and the Dekemvriana. Left-wing newspapers calculated that by spring 1946 over 1,200 individuals had been murdered by paramilitary organizations as part of the so-called White Terror. Concurrently, thousands of collaborators of the Germans began to be rehabilitated into public life, the army and the security forces. Groups of persecuted communists and former guerrillas started to organize self-defense networks, discreetly supported by the local organizations of the KKE, which had concealed beforehand a large part of the ELAS arsenal and dispatched thousands of trusted members and officers to friendly neighboring communist countries, primarily Yugoslavia.

The parliamentary elections of 31 March 1946, the first in the country since 1936, were a turning point. The KKE, led by Nikos Zachariadis, boycotted the entire election process and denounced what it viewed as conditions of extreme political terrorism. A right-wing coalition led by the People’s Party came to power while KKE’s policy gradually shifted towards armed struggle. On 1 September 1946, a referendum that many denounced as illegitimate restored the monarchy and King George II returned to Greece. In October, former ELAS members who had fled to the mountains under orders of the KKE established the “Democratic Army of Greece” (dSE), an organized guerilla force initially based and active in northern and northwestern Greece. The Grammos and Vitsi mountain ranges along the Greek-Albanian and Greek-Yugoslav borders respectively, were developed into strongholds from which the rebels launched increasingly more aggressive operations.

The conflict had escalated by 1947, spreading across the entire country. Armed groups also began to appear in southern and central Greece and the Peloponnese, where local Gendarmerie forces and paramilitary Rural Security Units (MAY) were forced to withdraw
to the major urban centers. The dSE even spread its operations to a number of islands, such as Crete, Samos, Ikaria and Lesvos. Greece’s Balkan neighbors, where communist regimes had been established, notably Tito’s Yugoslavia, began to support the dSE with large quantities of weapons and supplies through the northern border, while the government in Athens enjoyed the full backing of the USA, which provided extensive financial, technical and military support through the Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan. As the war went on, governments were reshuffled to achieve a broader coalition between centrist and conservative forces. In the wake of the major dSE assault on the border town of Konitsa in December 1947, the KKE and all leftist organizations, associations and newspapers were outlawed in accordance with Law 509, which stipulated harsh punishment— even the death sentence— for any person “aiming to apply ideas whose manifest is to overthrow the [...] ruling social system” or “disintegrate the state by violent means”. Thousands of citizens were imprisoned or exiled. In July 1948, the military operations of the reconstituted National Army culminated in heavy, lethal clashes in the regions surrounding Grammos and Vitsi. The rebels abandoned their main strongholds but nevertheless managed to survive and regroup, later invading and partially occupying towns such as Naousa, Karditsa and Karpenisi. However, by early 1949 the government’s numerical and arms superiority had become overwhelming. On 30 August 1949, after heavy fighting around Grammos-Vitsi, government forces obliged the majority of dSE forces and their commanders, general staff and wounded to retreat into Albanian territory. Tens of thousands of men and women thus found themselves in the people’s republics of Eastern Europe, with many ending up in faraway Tashkent in the People’s Republic of Uzbekistan. This was the end of the Civil War, or more precisely, of its military phase.

The Greek Civil War of 1946–1949 was the bloodiest conflict in modern Greek history. According to Georgios Margaritis (Margaritis, 2000, 2.a, p. 238):

The effort to identify absolute numbers of those involved, enlisted or conscripted, as well as casualties on either side shows that at least one in 14 Greeks (at a time when the country had a population of about
7,000,000) would have held a gun in their hands and participated in military operations. This number starkly demonstrates that the Civil War was the most wide-reaching military conflict the modern Greek state had ever experienced in its 120-year history. Even the major military experiences of the past, such as the Balkan Wars and the Asia Minor expedition, which involved the participation of 300,000 soldiers, paled in comparison to the military figures of the three-year guerilla conflict. Indeed, these figures represented the maximum possible exertion of forces for a country like Greece, which could produce about 25,000 combatants per draft age and faced severe recruitment problems due to demographic hemorrhage in the wake of World War II and the Occupation.

The consequences of the Civil War and its legacy until 1974

The total war that began (conventionally) in 1946 and concluded in 1949 left many geographic departments of the country in ruins. Forests and natural landscapes were destroyed. Hundreds of villages were evacuated over the course of military operations. A major part of the mountainous countryside, especially in Western and Central Macedonia and Thessaly, where the ESE had its primary strongholds, suffered population declines of 50% or more, the destruction of thousands of dwellings and total desolation. In places, the numerical disproportion between the victims of the War of 1940–1945 (executed, killed on the Albanian Front, dead resistance fighters and partisans) and the casualty figures of 1946–1949 is overwhelming. The Civil War also had a major impact on the demographics of Greek society. The Greek countryside never recovered from the destruction, while the wave of internal immigration to the primary urban centers, and especially Athens, radically shifted the social, economic and geographic situation. Greece rapidly shifted from the overtly agrarian society it had been at the start of the 1940s (when rural inhabitants represented 67% of the total population) to one with a surplus urban population. This violent and largely unplanned urbanization process resulted in a major transfer of wealth from the countryside to the urban centers, leading to the development of new situations in employment, housing, culture and education.
Greek society would be wracked by civil hatred for many decades. The communists accused the government of being “monarcho-fascists” and denounced the bourgeois parties as successors of the collaborationists and Nazi cooperators of the Occupation. The government, thanks to its control over the Press, was able to shape public opinion and was remarkably successful in delegitimizing its opponents, painting them as “communist bandits” and “agents of Slavism” and emphasizing the aid the guerillas had received from the neighboring communist states. The inclusion of several thousand Macedonian Slavic speakers in the ranks of the DSE together with the KKE’s positions on minority self-determination provided fuel for years of state propaganda regarding the alleged “anti-national” objectives of the Greek communists. In the same vein, the removal of 20–25,000 adolescents and children—primarily relatives of the guerillas—from the regions the rebels controlled and their relocation to Eastern Europe was seen as a “Paidomazoma” along the lines of the old Ottoman Devshirme and was considered an attempt to de-Hellenize Greek society. For their part, the victors were accused of acts of “cleansing” while they also applied systematic violence on islands such as Makronisos and Gyaros, which they had turned into incarceration camps where they sent tens of thousands of soldiers and citizens for “re-education”, and at “child towns” where the children of the displaced or of communist guerillas were sent (Baerentzen, 1987). Thousands of political prisoners, many of whom had had no involvement with the military operations, had been executed by 1954. While this was going on, a system of political and social exclusion based on political stance was being put in place. For many years after the end of military operations in 1949, institutional and legislative structures of oppression continued to exclude thousands of citizens from social and professional life, undermining social stability. The instability of Greek politics ultimately led to the coup d’état of 21 April 1967 and the Junta of the Colonels, with the resultant setbacks in the country’s development. Greek society, especially its rural elements, continued to experience a regime of ongoing persecution, fear and censorship until 1974.

Perhaps the longest-lasting legacy of the Civil War was the policy of oblivion imposed by the victors. Far from encompassing
reconciliation, this policy sought the utter de-legitimization of the losers and the crystallization of a distinct framework through which collective memory would view the events. Up until the fall of the Junta in 1974, the official discourse was dominated by overt anti-communist and ultranationalist sentiments peppered with ethnic and racial stereotypes. The 1946–1949 conflict was named the “symmoritopolemos” (bandit war), and the National Forces and the entire “nationalist” faction were presented as fighting against “anarchists” and “brigands”. This discourse framed the conflict not as a civil war but as an “insurgency”, instigated by the KKE to bring Greece into the communist sphere of influence. People with communist or leftist sympathies were seen as “unclean”, in need of re-education. The victors of the Civil War also constructed interpretations that fit their narrative for the previous period, 1941–1944. In contrast to all the other western European countries, where after 1945 all resistance organizations regardless of ideology were commemorated, in Greece the Resistance and its significance were distorted and downplayed as a result of the civil conflict (Chandrinos, 2015). In the midst of this polarization and especially after 1947 and the outlawing of the KKE, EAM-ELAS was practically erased from the memory of the War and the Occupation. In the post-civil-war years the decade was remembered as one of civil strife. “The ‘three rounds’ theory sidelined the Resistance and viewed the period 1940–1949 through a monolithic perspective, as successive attempts to impose a communist dictatorship and dismember Greece in collaboration with the country’s communist neighbors” (Voglis, 2008, p. 77). Anti-communist propaganda remained as strong as ever through the ‘50s and ‘60s, reinforced by the divisions of the Cold War and the efforts of Greece’s political system to contain the electorally ascendant Left and its political representatives, the United Democratic Left (EδΑ) party. This distortion culminated during the Junta (1967–1974) with Law 179/69 “On the National Resistance”, which declared the “struggle against the communists of EAM” an act of resistance and included collaborationists and Civil War paramilitary organizations among the protagonists of the “National Resistance” (Fytili et. al., 2022).
Collective memory and historiographical perspectives from 1974 to 1989

After democracy was restored in July 1974, the next step in the normalization of politics was the legalization of the KKE and the abolishment of most Civil-War legislation (such as the infamous Law 375 “On Espionage”). The restoration of parliament and the re-introduction of democratic freedoms shifted the political balance and completely reframed perceptions of the recent past. Publishing houses began to issue autobiographies of former guerrillas, officers and members of the KKE en masse, finally providing the repressed Left a voice which, in the wake of the Dictatorship, proved especially popular with the younger generations. It is noteworthy that while 63% of books published in Greece between 1945 and 1974 had anti-communist or, at the very least, anti-EAM sentiments, 79% of those published from 1974 to 2003 had left-wing or pro-EAM content (Antoniou and Marantzidis, 2008, p. 31). This wave of publications was notably diverse but nevertheless shared certain hallmarks: discussion of the defeat and concurrent efforts to legitimize, both morally and socially, the political struggle of the Greek communists, who “had never received any institutional allowance that would give them the opportunity to reflect, [as] their defeat was sealed and completed by a silence which made it last for decades to come” (Panagiotopoulos, 1997, p. 148).

Upon its rise to power, PASOK issued a law in 1982 officially recognizing the role of EAM-ELAS and the other organizations belonging to EAM in the unified National Resistance. This law was one of the most crucial legislative efforts of the Third Hellenic Republic and constituted the most substantial institutional break from the post-war regime. The effort came to a successful conclusion seven years later, in January 1989, with the enactment of the Law “On the lifting of the consequences of the Civil War”, which abolished all criminal convictions or pending cases and officially replaced the term “Symmoritopolemos” with “Civil War”. In the ’80s, amidst a wider atmosphere of democratic idealism and the development of a “national-populist discourse” (Voglis, 2008, p. 79), society began to discover the version of recent events that had been repressed by
successive Right-wing governments; the struggles of EAM-ELAS, which had been rehabilitated as struggles for national independence and popular sovereignty. The Resistance was now viewed as a part of Greece’s national history in a similar vein to that of other European countries, where the struggle against fascism had formed the foundation for the post-war democratic consensus (Liakos, 2003). Greece’s civic and political culture found it expedient to focus on the National Resistance as a means of overcoming the divisiveness of the Civil War, for which the existing discourse “was narrated, if at all, in terms that framed it as a tragic error, a historical anomaly in which the intervention of foreign powers played the crucial role” (Angelidis, 2016).

Scholarly approaches were coordinated with these efforts: revisionist studies began to be published, drawing from the 60s already and bolstered by the declassification of the communist archives on the initiative of historians who belonged to the Renewing Left (KKE, Interior) as well as the works of foreign historians (Hagen Fleischer, John Iatrides, Ole Smith, Lars Baerentzen) who focused on the British and American diplomatic archives. In the late 70s a new political historiography began to develop which sought to identify the reasons why EAM, i.e. the Left, had been defeated, with particular focus on foreign intervention and the bipolar world of the Cold War (Liakos, 2003). Concurrently, throughout the 80s social anthropologists began to shed light on the local dimension of the Civil War as well as the ideological terms under which the “common” people enlisted to fight. Much of this research was spurred by the pervasive silence surrounding the Civil War, which had left its mark on entire communities, and the effort to grasp a wound with intergenerational, familial terms. This, as Riki van Boeschoten has aptly noted, resulted in a paradox, as “the historiographical fact, the documentation of memories of the Civil War, preceded actual knowledge of the facts”, itself leading to “the memory of written and oral accounts determining historiography” (Boeschoten et. al., 2008, pp. 29, 30). Shedding light on how localities digested national/generalized contradictions became crucial to research questions and remains so in the present day, as the Civil War began to be understood “as the entirety of experiences of non-protagonists, as a part
of life for certain individuals and not as a political event completely uninfluenced by the common people, who enlisted or were forced to enlist be one of the two sides” (Marantzidis, 2008, p. 177).

The end of communism in 1989 did not have a direct political impact on Greece, but it nevertheless played a role in the formation of the country’s collective memory. In its wake, Greece experienced a crisis in political consciousness, a depoliticization expressed in myriad different ways. Their unifying thread was the disillusionment with the communist Left and its goals, a decline in interest for “big history” and the ideological camps of the Cold War with a concurrent shift in focus to the internal causes of the civil conflict. After 1989, the Greek Civil War gradually became part of the national history and ceased to be a simple reflection of the divides evident in the bipolar post-war world. These trends are starkly depicted in contemporary public opinion polls: In a poll conducted in and around Athens in 1985 on the topic of which side bore the greatest responsibility for the Civil War, 35% of those asked laid the blame at the Left’s feet while 46% considered the Right and the bourgeois parties responsible. The figures in 1989 were 14% and 23% respectively, while a large percentage of respondents (22%) considered both sides as sharing equally in the blame. When asked whether the country’s fortunes would be better had the left prevailed, 33% replied positively in 1985 and 17% in 1989. Fully 51% of respondents in 1989 believed that Greece would be worse off had the KKE taken power (Fleischer, 2007, p. 38).

In a recent (2023) assessment, Polymeris Voglis (2023) argues that:

The ideological hegemony of the Left began to decline in the 1990s [spurred by] the collapse of the communist regimes and the adoption of neoliberalism as the new doctrine. The discourse had now shifted to overcoming the Left-Right divide in the search for the Center, while technocratic and sound management became the holy grail.

The collapse of “Real Socialism” and its after-effects in the Balkans added yet another dimension to interpretations of the Civil War in the 90s. A crucial aspect of the Civil War was the involvement of Greece’s neighbors (Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria) and other communist countries where political refugees found themselves. In this light, the
Balkan dimension of the whole affair was prominent throughout the conflict and afterwards, with the victors deliberately underlining the “foreign” character of the DSE and the material aid it received from across the border. In 1994–95, Ioannis Koliopoulos, a professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, published his two-volume work Λεηλασία Φρονημάτων [Convictions Despoiled], with the subtitles: Το Μακεδονικό Ζήτημα στην κατεχόμενη Δυτική Μακεδονία 1941–1944 [The Macedonian Question in occupied Western Macedonia 1941–1944] and Το Μακεδονικό Ζήτημα στην περίοδο του Εμφυλίου Πολέμου (1945–1949) στη Δυτική Μακεδονία [The Macedonian Question during the Civil War (1945–1949) in Western Macedonia]. His work deals with the attitudes of the Slavic Macedonian populations of Western Macedonia in the period 1941–1949 and constitutes the first historical treatment of the Macedonian Question. This issue had a decisive impact on the Civil War and had returned to the fore of public debate, after decades of silence and one-sided views, due to the diplomatic disputes regarding the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 1992–93. The Balkan and wider international dimensions of the Civil War were further explored by other authors, such as Vasilis Kontis and Spyros Sfetas, who delved into the Yugoslav and Bulgarian state archives to research their involvement in the affair. The publishing geography of these works (Thessaloniki) is indicative of the comparatively greater interest -which continues unabated- of historians in Northern Greece for the local/Balkan dimension of the events of the 40s.

The Civil War and its memory from 2000 to the present day

Thanks to all the above and together with the introduction of a new generation of scholars, research on the Civil War further developed in the 90s. On the occasion of the fifty-year anniversary of the end of the War in 1999, numerous studies were written, conferences were organized and four collective volumes were published with crucial contributions from Greek and foreign scholars, who produced conclusions ad proposed new perspectives.¹ An initial, wider conclusion of this

¹ David Close (ed.), The Greek Civil War, 1943–1950: Studies of Polarization; Lars Bearentzen, John O. Iatrides, Ole L. Smith (eds.), Μελέτες για τον Εμφύλιο
historiographical “flourishing” in the first half of the 2000s is that in the 40s Greece suffered through not one but several consecutive or concurrent civil wars (ΕΑΜ against the non-communist resistance forces, ΕΑΜ against the collaborationists, the ΚΚΕ against bourgeois society, English-backed against Soviet-backed forces, government forces against communist insurgents) all with rather fluid and not readily discernible timelines. The work of the political scientist Stathis Kalyvas on the “Red Terror” perpetrated by ΕΑΜ in the Argolis in 1943–44 was exceptionally influential in this frame. In his study, Kalyvas posited that while the communists were notably brutal, the topic is not discussed due to the overall positive light in which collective memory views the Left (Kalyvas, 2000). These arguments laid the foundation for a new, “revisionist” school (named as such by its detractors, for the most part) and gave rise to spirited debate around the dimensions and nature of civil war violence. This debate evolved through a series of articles in the daily Press and left a long-term impact on historiography, enriching both its methodology and its research questions. A meaningful conclusion produced by this “Discourse on History” or “Historians’ Debate” as the discussion came to be known, was that Greece is an exception to the rule according to which “civil war” is to be studied through the perspective of the transformations brought about throughout Europe by the events of World War II and the Nazi occupation. Instead and contrary to its European counterparts, in Greece the opposite appears to hold true: it was the Greek Civil War which determined the discussion on World War II and not vice versa, distorting interpretations of a civil-war conflict the origins of which lie in the German Occupation (Rutar, 2017, pp. 199, 200).

Understanding of the events increased dramatically over the next twenty years thanks to a number of general or specialized

studies that focused on the Civil War of 1946–49 as an integral part of the social and political dynamics that developed during the Occupation (1941–1944), and how these were connected to phenomena that stretched throughout the first half of the 20th century (National Schism, Asia Minor Disaster, Interwar economic and political crisis, Metaxas dictatorship) or even further back, to the beginnings of the modern Greek state. The studies produced over the last twenty years share a number of hallmarks: the decentralization of perspectives, increased focus on the local dimension, treatment of archival material and further investigation of how the Civil War was represented, in a multifaceted way no less, with memory being studied both in its historical dimension and as a piece in the puzzle of a collective (political) identity. Another aspect of these studies is an often counterproductive emphasis on the “colors” of violence (red, black) to designate the ideological bent of its perpetrators. The argument regarding “violence” is often viewed in isolation and reproduces -in many cases under the pretext of breaking silences and debunking myths- patterns of the civil-war and post-civil-war era. This is especially evident in attempts to highlight how the KKE instrumentalized violence at the political level and concurrently to downplay the ideological motives of violence at the micro level, or in the emphasis on victim statistics rather than on the overall social situation.

Partly in response to the revisionist school, recent studies have utilized a social history approach to interpret the Civil War as part of a wider-reaching challenge to the political system that had begun in the 30s and reached its apex during the Occupation. According to these views, the Civil War should be understood as a failed revolution and thus, like all revolutions -and by extension, civil wars- “not the outcome of the decisions and actions of groups of fanatics, but instead the result of complex processes and relations in a period of severe, multifaceted crisis” (Voglis, 2014, p. 34). Among other issues, Voglis has discussed the crisis of the state as one of the factors that shaped the revolutionary situation, recalling the dialectic relationship between political legitimization and territoriality that found its expression in the Greek Civil War through the marked contrast between the urban and rural environments.
The Civil War in political discourse and public memory

Today, more than seven decades after the clashes at Grammos and Vitsi ended, Greek society continues to exhibit the after-effects of the civil division, which are often brought back to the fore through political news and public discourse. According to our current understanding, the sense that the political system after 1974 and especially after 1981 achieved the long-sought “national reconciliation” does not reflect the actual situation. The emergence in the 80s of new social demands, which found their political expression in PASOK, resulted in the overcoming of divisions at least at the institutional level, but the new perception of national memory that became dominant was no less divisive than the one that had come before. The Left was credited, both politically and morally, as the patriotic force which conducted most of the Resistance, while the Right was painted in a collaborationist and therefore treasonous light. The Center, for its part, was completely sidelined. This was an approach in line with the populist, anti-western and nationalist views of PASOK and the wider Greek center-left.

Far from being abandoned, civil-war rhetoric was weaponized to undermine the opponent within the framework established by the two-party (PASOK-ND) system that was dominant until 2010. ND, the center-right party, was often the recipient of this rhetoric, in discourse that deliberately identified it with the negative ideological traditions of the Civil-War Right (Rori, 2008, p. 306). In fact, there was an effort to replace the interpretative approach established by the victors of the civil war (nationalists/anti-communists – non-nationalists/communists) with that of resistance – collaborationists. This approach also influenced perceptions of the Dekemvriana, which modern scholars view as a continuation of Occupation-era divisions and not as the prelude to the subsequent conflict, in accordance with the traditional reading of events.

Barring a few periods of -mostly symbolic- consensus, far from fading, the civil-war tinged political and party confrontations only grew stronger from 2010 onwards in light of the financial crisis and the shocks it caused to Greece’s system of political values. The “betrayal” of the political elites and their role in Greece’s bankruptcy
were intrinsically linked with the dominant narratives surrounding the Civil War, according to which Greece had always been subservient and financially dependent on foreign actors from whose influence the country had, supposedly, never been freed. Such rhetoric was produced almost automatically, through the perpetual re-updating of terms belonging to an ideologically loaded historical vocabulary (“collaborationists”, “germanotsoliades”, “Tsolakoglou”). More than ever, the Civil War was used as a means of legitimizing largely negative ideological self-determinations. As it stands, public discourse, including academic research and education, appears to be dominated by “anti-right” and “anti-left” positions rather than their positive counterparts (left / right).

This dynamic re-appropriation of the Civil War and the resurgence of the associated rhetoric may be explained if we examine the change in pursuits of modern Greek society: Historical references to the Civil War began to take center stage, as the memory of the National Resistance presented an insufficient political argument. As a result, “[the civil war] was brought back into public discourse because, thanks to its nature as a divisive event, it helps reinforce a political identity looking to antagonize the current socio-political system and also re-affirms the revolutionary past while aligning it with its modern radical rhetoric” (Voglis, 2008, p. 80). Over the past decade, the KKE has organized numerous events, material exhibitions and commemorations for the DSE in an effort to establish it as the leading manifestation of class struggle in Greece. This polarizing re-examination of the past also gave birth to opposing forces among the Right/Center-right, the traditional voice of the victors in the Civil War. A new anti-communist rhetoric began to gain traction as part of the fierce condemnation of what came to be known as the “ideological hegemony of the Left”, whether in its political-institutional dimension (the political system in place since 1974) or in its ideological framework, the one-sided “leftist” view it had imposed over the events of the 40s and the post-war years. This position seems to signify a mnemonic paradigm shift in institutional political memory, being expressed even by ND ministers and government officials (from 2019 to the present day), many of whom also refer directly to places of commemoration of the Civil War or
even reject the resistance efforts of ΕΑΜ as constituting a civil-war, and thus unwanted, legacy. Whether as an explanatory figure for the malaise of modern Greek society or as a memory of a political identity perpetually focused on questioning political order or social structure, the Civil War continues to be viewed as the synecdoche of all those events which transpired in the 40s, as a deterministic re-examination of a thorny past no longer limited to the search for its causes but instead relied on to interpret a correspondingly thorny political and social present.

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