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The Metapolitefsi and its cultural mutations in Greece (1974-?...):

Dimitris Tziovas, *Greece from Junta to Crisis: Modernization, Transition and Diversity*, London: Bloomsbury 2021, 320 pp., ISBN 978-0755617449.

It was supposed to last for a few months-yet it is still with us, one way or another, almost five decades after its emergence. Not many Greeks even know that the 1974 *Metapolitefsi* which they have in mind as a landmark in their country's history is actually the second such phenomenon, preceded by that of 1843 (the first transition to a proper constitutional parliamentary democracy), the first time the definition was used to denote the transition to democratic rule. Nevertheless, if the 'original' use of the term '*Metapolitefsi*' has now fallen into oblivion, the modern one is still widely used and considered, covering such a wide spectrum of activities, mentalities and behaviours that one would think that Greece still lives in the 1970s. But this is not the case. Far from being a one-dimensional political phenomenon, *Metapolitefsi* has come to be a catch-all phrase for a series of political, economic and cultural transformations that characterize post-1974 Greece. How and why has this occurred, and what are its implications for the study of contemporary Greece?

The book of Dimitris Tziovas, Professor of Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham, tries to shed some light to the above question(s). As Professor Tziovas notes, after the radical political change of 1974, Greece shifted gradually from the field of politics to that of culture, moving in parallel from cultural homogeneity to heterogeneity and pluralism. For the author, *Metapolitefsi* means, above all, identities: it is about the way in which contemporary identities (ideological, political, racial, ethnic, national, religious, sexual and linguistic) are born and shaped, and begins by noting that Greece has repeatedly found itself trapped between divisive dichotomies since 1974, in binary oppositions which have left their marks on the country. Therefore the period that starts in 1974 (and extends up to the Greek crisis after 2008) is one characterised by a strong 'cultural hybridity': different cultural groups and minorities are increasingly recognized, diversity is accepted,

there is a clear transition that favours popular culture, as well as an ‘anti-systemic element’ in society. One of the core arguments of the author is that in Greece of the *Metapolitefsi* there has emerged a cultural diversity of many modernizations, and at the same time it is slowly moving from a centralized and homogenizing state towards the acceptance of the ‘other’ both on an ideological and legislative level.

These cultural transitions are also marked by an increased emphasis on identity elements and various identity politics. Such cultural diversity and coexistence essentially means that the cultural history of Greece in the post-1974 period is a history of transitions, which are never linear (i.e. there is no unidirectional proceeding from one cultural ideal to the next), but there exist numerous ‘reflections’ and different trajectories. The author rejects the narrative that wants the modernizing, pro-European and pro-Western culture to be superior and to displace a more obsolete, popular culture based on traditional, non-European models; emphasizing each time that there has not been and does not exist a single public in Greece that treats things, identities, and historical memory itself in a single, unified way. Rather, different publics emerge with different sensibilities and different ways of negotiating and perceiving cultural material (of any texture) and the historical memory/past of Greece and the Greeks. The author manages to offer the reader a vivid picture of a Greece that, in terms of culture, in every field, is in a liminal space/conversation between different discourses. It is, for example, a Greece that often combines the positions of the pro-European/modernist with the traditional or anti-Western/ethnocentric, the liberal/secular with orthodoxy, the aesthetically ‘high’ with the ‘popular’, the traditional politicization and interest in the public sphere with the non-partisan, the emphasis on the private sphere and the private way of life. There are various factors, such as anti-Americanism and pro/anti-European views, orthodoxy and religious scepticism, the connection with antiquity and the weaning from it, the strong presence in the modern Greek imaginary of the Civil War, Greek identity and the crisis brought about in it by immigration and globalisation, the relationship with the Other, the Turk or the Jew, the battles for the Greek language.

As for language, also a crucial issue of the post-independence period, the introduction of '*dimotiki*' (the commonly spoken idiom) put an end to a long and highly contentious dispute, nevertheless the *katharevousa* (the idiom of cultural, administrative and intellectual elites) left its scholarly mark on the standard Modern Greek, without, however, allaying fears of decadence, linguistic poverty and secularism, combined with the prolonged conflicts over the teaching of ancient Greek in schools. Furthermore, in the field of television, there was a transition from state monopoly to private plurality, but with multiple political, economic and vested interests' entanglements.

In terms of youth, gender and sexual culture in the post-independence period, students and youth movements abandoned, as the author claims, party dependence after 1974 in favour of self-organization, while the same was true for women's issues, with rights proliferating but the autonomy of women's organizations remaining in arrears, while the visibility of homosexual demands seems to have increased. Tziovas also stresses the fact that there has not been and does not exist a single public in Greece that treats historical memory itself in a single, unified way. Rather, different publics emerge with different sensibilities and different ways of negotiating and perceiving cultural material (of any texture) and the historical memory/past of the Greeks.

The author's project is theoretically combined with analyses of the characteristics of late globalizing capitalism, with post-structuralism and postmodernism, with postcolonial studies, with analyses of social rights movements or the condensation of private and public space, with the thesis of the changing nature of politicization. Tziovas concludes that this is an age of identities, as everything is converging in the search for personal and collective identifications and integrations, more fluid identifications and less absolute, binding allegiances. The old divisions and bipolarizations have not ceased to exist, but on the one hand their boundaries are constantly shifting, and on the other hand new fields are being rearranged. He sees a polycentrism, where diverse trends and cultural models coexist in a kind of hybridization, such that shows a Greece that is contradictory as well as multifaceted, heterogeneous as well as multidimensional.

From the point of view of a political scientist the author's analysis poses more questions than can be answered in the context of a book alone. Bypassing the (mostly unfruitful) debate on the end of the *Metapolitefsi* the main issue(s) have to do with the *political* culture of the Greeks during that time and how it was (re)shaped and transformed- and which factors contributed to that unique phenomenon.

While one can agree with the author that the *Metapolitefsi* has been a time of (multiple) identities, from a political viewpoint there are some factors challenging this image. To start, the political culture of the Greeks from 1974 onwards was largely shaped by anti- Americanism and anti-westernism, both products of a blame on the 'West' for the imposition of the dictatorship of the Colonels and for the tragedy of Cyprus. This has been amply and agilely supported by the rising PASOK and has, after its victory in 1981, become the dominant political discourse in Greece. The rise of PASOK (and of the left in more general terms) has been associated with populism, which has, in turn, largely contributed to the prevalence of an 'underdog' political culture in the country. Furthermore, the emergence of those various identities needs to be linked to the transformation of Greece to a typical society where post-material values and behaviors rise, as has been the case with other Western societies studied by political scientists in the 1960s and 1970s (typical of these works is the book of Ronald Inglehart *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics*).

The political and democratic modernization that came with the *Metapolitefsi* has also seen a paradox in the fact that, whereas stable and lasting democratic institutions have been taking root for the first time for such a long period in Greek politics, certain old-fashioned practices have survived that to a great extent cancel the benevolent effects of institutional modernization: political clientelism and nepotism never ceased to play a major role in the country. This, along with the persisting populist tendencies in both left and right, have contributed to what a famous Greek political scientist called 'the extra-institutional consensus to the Greek political system' (see Dimitris Haralambis, Πελατειακές Σχέσεις Και Λαϊκισμός. Η εξωθεσμική συναίνεση στο ελληνικό πολιτικό σύστημα).

The persistence of nepotism and clientelism would not be made possible without the distribution of resources, however. Thus, the funding of various professional and social groups has been a practice transcending the political system and has also been vital for the electoral victories of political parties-mainly of PASOK and New Democracy, the protagonists of the *Metapolitefsi*. This funding, in turn, has been achieved mainly by securing loans and European funds rather than by building a robust economy. At the same time, the country was being transformed into a consumerist society, a phenomenon also linked with the decline of ‘traditional’ politics and the rise of new political and social identities and attitudes.

It is along these lines than the collapse of the Greek political system in the early 2010s has occurred, with the striking of the bail-out agreements at the time and the new political cleavage of ‘pro- and anti- memorandum’ parties that took shape in the aftermath. This can be taken as marking the end (?) of *Metapolitefsi* as it was known until then (interestingly, the author considers the crisis as the end of that conjuncture too). This collapse has led to the emergence of a whole series of behaviours and mentalities that were latently spreading in Greek society in the years before the crisis erupted: an outburst of xenophobia, a questioning of the achievements of Greece in the European integration process, and even a challenge to democratic rules and practices, along with political extremism and violence from both the extreme right and the extreme left side of the political spectrum. At the same time the electoral decline of PASOK-the *par excellence* representative political force of the *Metapolitefsi*- as well as the rise of SYRIZA –originally a radical and alternative left party, as well as that of the Golden Dawn and the Greek version of alt- right- the ‘Independent Greeks’ a populist right wing formation, radically transformed the political scenery.

A series of other issues touched in the book of Dimitris Tziouvas can also form the basis of a political research and discussion-for instance, the issue of media has been in the core of debates on plurality of information and its discontents, as most of the owners of private television channels are also public contractors, something which has been spotted as an problem of transparency and actual freedom of

information in Greece from the 1990s onwards. Also, the relation with Greece's Balkan neighbors has been a politically sensitive issue, as since the breakup of Yugoslavia a wave of sympathy to the Serbs (viewed by many Greeks as fellow Orthodox Christians-victims of an 'anti-Orthodox Western conspiracy and aggression') and, in juxtaposition, a revival of old nationalist feelings (and insecurities) on the issue of Greek Macedonia (suffice to think of the massive rallies organized in Athens and Thessaloniki in 2018 against the agreement recognizing Foreign Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as North Macedonia).

To sum up, *Greece from Junta to Crisis* has what it takes to be considered a seminal work for the period it examines: not only does it offer a comprehensive and multi-faceted account of the transformations of the Greek culture(s) during the *Metapolitefsi* years, but it also calls for a productive dialogue with other disciplines (political science, history, sociology etc) on the complexities of a country which underwent, in less than a generation, a series of transformations that irreversibly changed the physiognomy of its people.

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