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*Becoming a Subject: Political Prisoners During the Greek Civil War*, by Polymeris Voglis

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among the military leaders of the army, navy, and air force—with tragic effect on weapons research, equipment procurement and production, and manpower mobilization. Generals and admirals took advantage of this situation and saved their positions by obeying and never taking full responsibility for their commands.

Knox compares the situation of the major powers and puts Italy last in terms of real capacity, industrial potential, and military expenditure. In his view, the military leadership tended to have all of the bad qualities of the stereotypical Italian (pp. 32–33). The author makes reference to the cleavages between the Catholic Church and the regime, the city and the countryside, southern Italy and the rest of the nation. He emphasizes amoral familism, limited popular identification with the state, and crippling parochialism.

But this brief attempt to synthesize social problems and political institutions is overly ambitious. Knox seems to accept certain clichés, as when, for example, he plays down the value of the “miraculous” (p. 172) Italian victory in 1918. His analysis of Italian society, politics, and regime is synthesized in seven pages, a short paragraph surprisingly without reference to the most recent work of Italian historians, such as Renzo De Felice’s biography of Mussolini.

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POLYMERIS VOGLIS. *Becoming a Subject: Political Prisoners during the Greek Civil War*. New York: Berghahn Books. 2002. Pp. x, 250. Cloth \$75.00, paper \$27.50.

The subject of this work is accurately defined in the subtitle. The title, on the other hand, indicates that the reader will be subjected to a postmodernist theoretical framework and the attendant jargon. Succinctly stated, this is a study of modernity and the politics of pain as remembered by those who suffered it. These subjects are examined in the light of half a century of political and historiographic development in Greece.

As with the American Civil War, the events in Greece in the late 1940s left a bitter legacy among the defeated, and the aftermath is being played out to this day. A couple of words from then and now illustrate this point. At the time of the civil war in Greece, the leftists were labeled “bandits” (*symmorites*) by their opponents, who in turn called themselves “national-minded” (*ethnikofronoi*). The rightist governments at the time did not even acknowledge that the leftists who were imprisoned were political prisoners; instead, they called them criminals. Today people speak of the “national resistance” as including those on the Left who fought the Axis forces. Thus the “voices” of the Left, silenced for years, can now be “heard” in accounts by participants.

Those who study the civil war era in Greece either emphasize the revolutionary intentions and communist domination of the Left or stress the progressive nature of the Left and the potential for new directions in the

country because of the war. Polymeris Voglis sides with the second group.

In structure, the book takes the form of a drama in three interrelated parts covering the political, psychological, and social experiences of the imprisoned leftists. In the first part, the author examines the politics of detention, beginning with a quick look at Western European countries in the nineteenth century. From “liberal” practices then—conditions in Eastern Europe are not discussed—he posits a negative turn after the Great War. Interwar governments in many European states, including Greece, became authoritarian. But the most significant development was the rise of mass-based, ideologically driven political movements. By the 1930s, politics turned on this point, and Greece was no exception. Political detention, including imprisonment and internal exile, was a reality.

From the practices and ideology of the Metaxas regime, Voglis proceeds to the civil war era in the mid-1940s, the political polarization that developed between the Left and the Right, the chaotic and bitter struggle that commenced in 1946 (one could easily move back the time to 1943), the efforts of the government to assert its authority in the countryside, and the setting up of internment camps and prisons for those accused of being antinational and summarily tried by various types of courts.

Part two examines the experience of being a political prisoner. The settings—internment camps, prisons, and exile—are all discussed. But the core idea is the breaking and the remaking of the individual. In this process, the leftists may be seen as a minority, similar to the ethnic minorities in Greece. The state’s purpose was to fashion a national unity out of heterodoxy. In the case of an ethnic minority, this entailed linguistic and cultural assimilation. When it came to the political prisoners, the process, in the author’s terminology, was to detach them from the body of the nation, to make individual objects of them, and then reshape their identities. Here the notorious but effective practice, at least in numbers, of getting the prisoners to sign declarations of repentance came into play. Voglis brings out well the multiple aspects of this process, which required prisoners to confess their political sins, ask for forgiveness, be absolved of their errors, and, finally, demonstrate their redemption by working on others. In this way, the author argues, the prisoners became “subjects”: that is, individuals from their own perspective as well as that of the prison authorities and their coprisoners, who represented a collectivity from within.

With the creation of the “subject,” the book moves to the third and higher level of the drama, treating the social domain of the prisons and camps and the individual within the group. It covers the efforts of the prisoners to assert their humanity in often inhuman circumstances, by participating in holidays, bringing culture and education into their domain, and establishing contact with the outside community. The resistance to the authorities, individual and collective, of those

who saw themselves as the national resistance before being arrested is also examined. Finally, Voglis treats the politics of communist power within the prison camps, the benefits of coordinated life as well as the price paid by those who did not fit in to the “comradely” group.

In many ways, the experience of the leftist political prisoners in Greece in the late 1940s and early 1950s parallels that of prisoners in other countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. This work is a welcome contribution to the comparative history of the subject. As for Greek history, this is a compelling story in need of examination. Indeed, this book is part of the ongoing dialogue over the significance and meaning of the civil war era in modern Greek history. That it is a live issue is indicated by the author in the epilogue. In mentioning the numerous remembrances that have appeared recently, Voglis raises key issues. How ought the history of that era be rewritten, by whom, and to what purpose? And what role does memory play versus contemporary evidence in understanding the experience of those who lived through that time?

Note must be made of two things that detract from this scholarly account. First, there are numerous grammatical, syntactical, and typographical errors. Second, the author moves back and forth between the present tense mode of social science argumentation and commentary and the past tense of the historical drama he portrays. The former mode, unfortunately, often intrudes upon and weighs down the text, making for less than lively reading on an important subject.

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SORIN MITU. *National Identity of Romanians in Transylvania*. Budapest and New York: Central European University Press. 2001. Pp. 314. \$55.95.

The Romanian community of Transylvania lacked formal political representation during the early modern period. The 1438 union of three political “nations” of Transylvania—Hungarian nobles, German towns, and militarized Szeklers—excluded any Romanian or other popular representation from the diet until 1848. These constitutional arrangements remained in place despite increasing pressure from Romanians for inclusion within the political framework of Transylvania, marked above all by the *Supplex libellus Valachorum* (1791), which petitioned for Romanians to be recognized as a fourth political nation. While Romanians formed a considerable proportion of Transylvania’s population, the failure of efforts to change their constitutional position provides the context for Sorin Mitu’s account of the self-perception of Transylvania’s Romanians during the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Mitu’s work brings to the attention of Western readers the aspirations and writings of a range of Romanian writers and political activists, reveals the ways in which national identity

could be articulated in Eastern European societies, and identifies the characteristics ascribed to Romanians as they pressed for a share of political power in Transylvania.

Mitu’s book is not a study of the politics of that period but sets out the ideas expressed about the Romanian nation by clerics, intellectuals, and writers in Transylvania. Mitu’s analysis also partly considers some of the opinions expressed by the other ethnic and linguistic communities of Transylvania about the Romanian nation. He argues that the self-image developed by Romanians in Transylvania during this period was often constructed in response to the hostile observations of outside observers. The translation of Mitu’s work renders this outside perspective as the view of “foreigners,” a particularly unfortunate choice as it leaves the impression that he accepts the view that the Hungarians and Germans of Transylvania are in some sense foreigners within their own homeland. Such outsiders were widely seen by Romanian writers as envious of the Roman ethnic origins and Latin language of the Romanian people, and as intending to form a generalized coalition to victimize and destroy the Romanian nation. There was, at the same time, a strongly held view that the descendants of the Romans had become the laughingstock of the barbarians they had once subjugated, which was also at the heart of Romanian self-definition.

Mitu describes such ambiguities in Romanians’ perception of their national identity as an inextricable mixture of inferiority and superiority complexes. Romanians certainly seem to have had a passion for self-denigration, which formed “an essential component of the Romanian self-image.” The Romanian intellectual elite, informed by Enlightenment values, found many ordinary people to be illiterate and with only a frail grasp of higher culture. They believed that Romanians had fallen behind all other European nations in an obsessively imagined hierarchy of nations, as considered by Timotei Cipariu and others. While Romanians saw themselves as a numerous, compact ethnic bloc in Transylvania whose members had continuously occupied the same geographical space, they also felt vulnerable to dilution of their ethnic purity through mixed marriages and “magyarization” among their elites.

Mitu charts a growing self-confidence among Romanian writers in the ability of their people to catch up and compete with other nations, which he traces in quotations from a wide variety of texts. Romanian histories were composed by Petru Maior and others as bulwarks against those who denied Romanians’ rights in Transylvania. There was also a great deal of attention given to the Romanian language as a key, distinctive feature of national identity. In a sea of Slavonic speakers, Romanians, Germans, and Hungarians in Transylvania all found ideas about linguistic community to be as powerful as those of ethnic solidarity in forming a basis for appeals to national unity. Romanian writers such as Samuil Micu had confidence in