The Visual Politics of Fear:
Images of Anti-Communist Propaganda in Post-War Greece

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2 November 2017
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To set the talk in context, let me start by saying that this is part of a wider project I have been working on in relation to *Ethnikofrosyni* - the anticommunist discourse of the Greek state from 1944 to 1974 - which remains an understudied area of modern Greek history. In previous essays, I have approached *Ethnikofrosyni* from a perspective that seeks to bridge the gap between the subdisciplines of Cultural History and the History of Political Ideas. Among the main objectives of this approach has been to underline that post-war *Greek anticommunism was* not a peripheral phenomenon confined to the political battles between the far right and the communists, but *a central feature of mainstream Greek society and culture from 1944 to 1974*. Another core argument has been to question the virtually unanimous view in the historiography which sees *Ethnikofrosyni* as an ideology. Instead, I have treated it as *a loose umbrella discourse* that crossed ideological boundaries, especially the divisions between the right and liberal centre.

Let us take things from the start. From the outbreak of the Civil War in the mid-1940s to the fall of the Colonels' Dictatorship in 1974, *Ethnikofrosyni* developed a Manichean view of the world. On one hand, it spoke about the 'honourable' 'patriots', who believed in Greece as 'an eternal idea', and on the other hand, it attacked the communist 'traitors' (or 'miasma'), who were allegedly de-Hellenized through the influence of a 'foreign' ideology and, by implication, removed themselves from the body of the Greek nation. Despite the deep involvement of the US in Greek politics after the Truman Doctrine of 1947, recent research has shown that post-war Greek anticommunism *was largely constructed by local intellectuals of a liberal or moderate conservative persuasion*, with close connections to the state. Prominent among them were the Heidelberg-educated philosophy professors, Constantine Tsatsos, Panayiotis Kanellopoulos and Ioannis Theodorakopoulos and well-known literary figures like Stratis Myrivilis, Spyros Melas and others. These intellectuals devised a new hegemonic vocabulary that portrayed their communist opponents as 'barbaric', 'primitive' and 'oriental', while an extensive machine of state violence gave material substance to this discourse through executions, imprisonment, torture, forced exile and the detention of thousands of suspected communists in concentration camps.

Alongside this Orwellian state, from 1944 to 1967 Greece was ruled by 'a restricted democracy', a parliamentary system with pronounced authoritarian features, in which right-wing and centre parties, as well as the legal, but continuously harassed left-wing EDA, were allowed to compete in elections that were not always 'free and fair'. In this political context, anti-communist propaganda played the key role in keeping voters away from the Left and drawing them firmly within the *Ethnikofron* camp of liberal and conservative parties. After 1967, the Military Dictatorship kept *Ethnikofrosyni* as an official state discourse, but subjected it to important modifications to make it fit in with its far-right, authoritarian brand of politics. E.g. communism was no longer portrayed a threat to 'Democracy' and 'liberty', but as the antithesis of 'the Nation' and

‘Religion.’ With elections and parties banned, the Junta propagated its own version of *Ethnikofrosyni* partly to justify the suspension of parliamentary institutions as ostensibly an emergency anti-communist measure; and partly to justify its existence in the eyes of its American and NATO allies as a vigilant defender of Western interests in the context of the Cold War.

AIMS

This talk aims to show how *Ethnikofrosyni* used visual propaganda to construct and disseminate a mass culture of anti-communist fear. It specifically explores how images were used by the victors of the Greek Civil War *to develop a culture of demonization and terror toward the defeated Left and its supporters*. In so doing, the analysis will be drawing on the theoretical concepts and methodological techniques of the cultural history of emotions, iconographic analysis and critical propaganda theory.

The argument I shall be putting forward falls in three parts. It will:

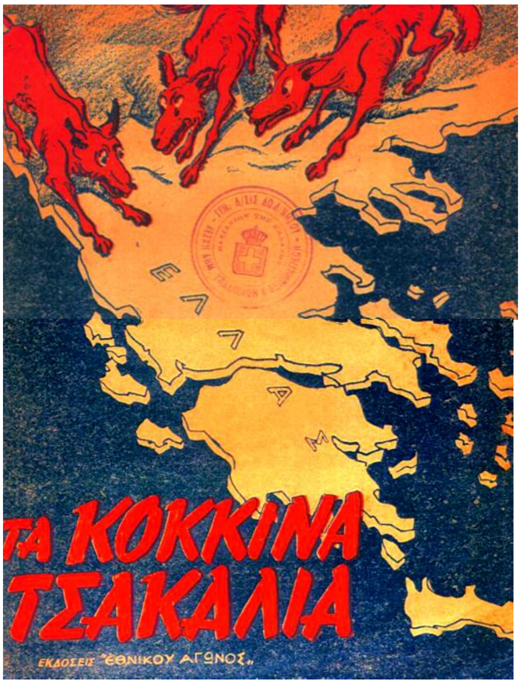
- Demonstrate that anti-communist imagery created and spread fear through patterning itself on older visual scripts of negative othering embedded in popular culture: anti-peasant stereotyping, islamophobia, orientalism, gynophobia and chauvinism.
- Argue that the pictorial rhetoric of this process of negative othering relied almost exclusively on symbolisms, metaphors and allusions that evoked the primordial fears of ‘animals’, ‘barbarians’, ‘Satan’, ‘the east’, ‘women’, ‘the Turks’ and ‘foreigners’.
- Show that this visual vocabulary emulated examples from other traditions of Western propaganda, linked to the red scare and the Cold War. In so doing, it will emphasize that this process of propaganda translation involved a considerable degree of cultural ‘domestication’, because both its producers and target audience were connected through a distinct historical experience defined by a local Civil War.

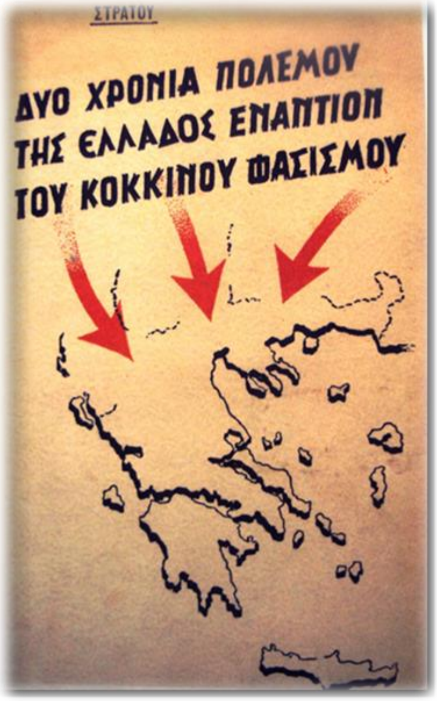
THE JACKALS

To begin our iconographic analysis, one image that encapsulates several of these key themes is the 1948 poster ‘The Red Jackals’. This propagandistic illustration, issued by the Greek government at the height of the Civil War, deploys at one level a fairly banal symbolism. The three red jackals descending from the north represent Greece’s three communist neighbours – Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania – while Greece itself is depicted as a territorial map, to underline the geopolitical nature of the threat facing it. At a deeper level, however, this image evokes a number of more subtle associations.

a) The representation of the communists as wild beasts was a standard propaganda theme whose immediate aim was to dehumanize them. The novelist Stratis Myrivilis, in a radio broadcast in 1949, spoke about “the pack of red wolves” and “the red werewolves of Slavic communism” that threatened Greece. Later, in the 1971 anticommunist movie *Grammos-Vitsi* (Directed by Ilias Machairas) the sister of the communist character Christos curses him using a similar language: ‘You have lost every sense of humanity. Go away, […] go find the jackals, your friends’.

b) The portrayal of the communists as jackals or wolves also served another symbolism referred to in psychoanalysis as the image of the treacherous enemy. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, animals are unpredictable and thereby associated with more dangerous forces. “The ambivalence attributed to animals appears even greater in that the gods assume many forms of animal incarnation”, he remarked. Consequently, the portrayal of the communist threat as an animal also provides it with a metaphysical dimension that renders its power totemic.

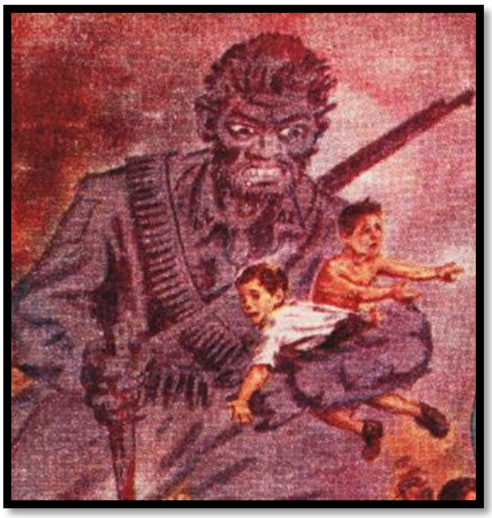


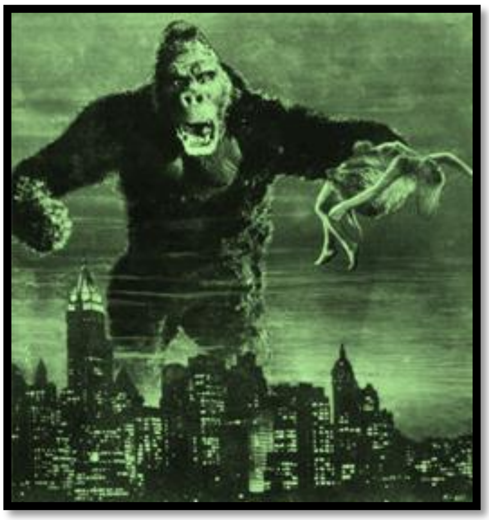


c) Another important visual effect in this poster is the subtle management of light. The sea is dark and at the top of the poster the shadows are long, thus implying that the wild animals are moving against Greece as the night descends, when everyone is going to sleep and the country at its most vulnerable. Light is also used metaphorically to suggest that communism is falling like a dark shadow over a bright and peaceful Greece. That light is managed to convey this symbolism can be inferred from the use of the same metaphor in the 1969 anti-communist movie, *The Escapees of Boulkes*, in which two repentant communists who flee Yugoslavia to return to Greece say: ‘[We are] going to the light, to the sun, to freedom’.

DEVSHIRME

Another iconic image from 1949 comes from an illustration about the so-called ‘abduction of children’ issue. In 1948, the communist rebels evacuated an estimated 25,000 children across the border, leading Queen Frederica to launch a national campaign calling for their return. The motives behind this policy were complex, as many children were evacuated from conflict zones for their safety, while others were Slav-speaking who feared persecution by the Greek Army and others even departed with their parents’ consent. Nevertheless, this 1949 propaganda illustration simplifies the issue, portraying it as nothing other than a vindictive policy of forced proselytization by the rebels aimed at creating a future communist Greek army across the Iron Curtain. Direct associations were also made with the 16th-17th c. Ottoman policy of Devshirme, whereby boys from across the Balkans were abducted and Islamized to form the elite regiment of the Janissaries.



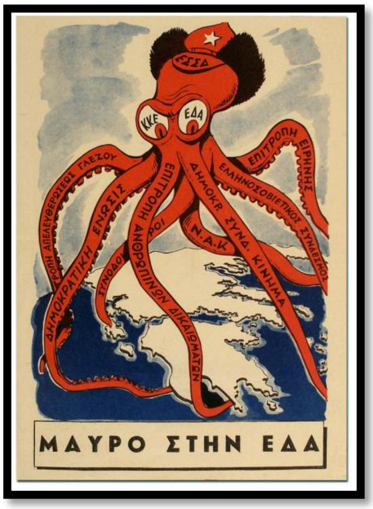


The official dubbing of the issue as ‘paidomázoma’ or ‘Second Devshirme’ enabled Greek anti-communist propaganda not only to portray their communist foes as foreign, but in so doing, to orientalize them as the contemporary equivalent of the traditional Turkish enemy from the East. Although never studied to date, orientalism and Islamophobia were prominent themes in *Ethnikofrosyni*. In his important anticommunist pamphlet *Greece as an Idea* (1945), the leading philosophy professor Ioannis Theodorakopoulos attacked the intellectuals of the left ‘who embraced Mohammed’s theory and gave to one hand of young people Marx’s tract and to the other a revolver’.

THE OCTOPUS

Spreading anti-communist fear through real or mythical animals and beasts continued in later years. In a 1958 election poster calling on citizens to ‘Downvote EDA’, the legal left-wing party of the post-Civil War years, communism was portrayed as an octopus. The political metaphor of the octopus, like that of multiheaded monsters in ancient mythology, such as the medusa and the hydra, alludes to omnipresence, unpredictability and the danger of entrapment. In an influential paper titled *The Morphology of a Symbol: The Octopus* (1956), Jacques Schnier used a psychoanalytic perspective to argue that the octopus, like the medusa, is a ‘fearful symbol’ in classical civilization representing the fantasy of a scheming polyphallic female. Indeed, since at least the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-78, we find the octopus as a dominant theme in several propaganda posters representing ‘the threat’ of Russian imperialism, a cliché extended to the USSR throughout the Cold War.

This black propaganda image was used to depict EDA as part of a global communist conspiracy. Each tentacle represents a progressive or left-wing civil society organization (e.g. the Democratic Trade Union Movement, the Peace Committee, the Human Rights Commission, the Greek-Soviet Association, etc) while the eyes of the animal show that the legal EDA is the twin sister of the illegal KKE. The head above them is none other than the Soviet Union itself, looking authentically foreign under Khrushchev’s ushanka hat. The portrayal of communism as a multiheaded monster was a common *Ethnikofron* theme. The octopus appears regularly as an illustration in the fiercely anti-communist journal *Sovietology* edited in the early 1960s by the future theoretician of the Military Dictatorship, George Georgalas. Similarly, in Machairas's previously mentioned movie *Grammos-Vitsi* (1971), there is an anachronistic sequence showing the First Captain of ELAS, Aris Velouchiotis, miraculously alive in 1946 (in real life he died in 1945) and there we hear him scream with the voice of a psychopath: "They will find out that we are: a Lernean hydra. The more they cut off our heads, the more heads we produce".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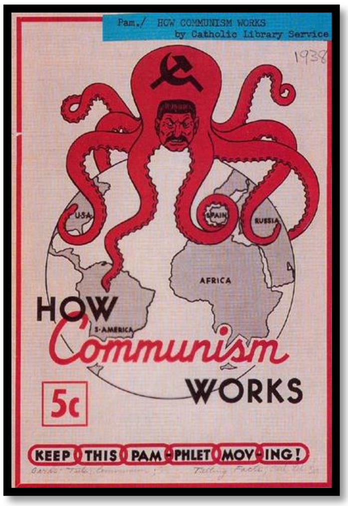
Pam./ HOW COMMUNISM WORKS
by Catholic Library Service
1938
U.S.A.
SPAIN
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HOW Communism WORKS
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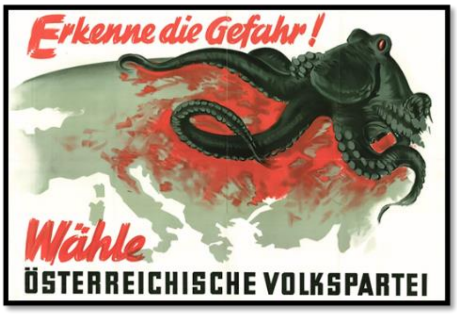
KEEP THIS PAM-PHLET MOV-ING!


Erkenne die Gefahr!
Wähle
ÖSTERREICHISCHE VOLKSPARTEI

SATAN THE ACCUSER

The cultural practice of negative othering is also extended to the portrayal of the communists as 'barbarian' and 'Satanic'. In the aforementioned 1969 movie *The Escapees of Boulkes*, the cliché narrative of the 'abduction of children' covers a hearing by a people's court, in which a communist captain, surrounded by two young female rebels, accuses a priest of having hidden away eight boys. When he is about to read a note incriminating the *Ethnikofron* priest, the communist captain passes it on quietly to one of the young women because he is illiterate. The allusion here is to the original sense of the term 'barbarian' in antiquity, as anyone who cannot read Greek.

Furthermore, when the communist captain is cursed by the priest, he produces a loud sardonic laughter which echoes the Biblical 'laughter of Satan'. Indeed, the whole scene recalls Satan 'the accuser of the brethren' from John's *Apocalypse* 12:10, and the communist captain is therefore portrayed as the Helleno-Christian embodiment of evil: a barbarian and a devil or, a barbarian-devil. The presence of young female rebels next to him, rehearses a wider gynophobic theme (that runs throughout the movie) whereby communist women are represented as ‘having lost their honour’ because the party has taught them how to practice free extramarital sex.

ON THE BORDERS OF TREASON

Most of the previous themes reappear in modified form in the landmark 1968 movie *On the Borders of Treason* (Dir. Dimis Dadiras). This picture was produced in the first year of the Dictatorship by Jim Paris, the famous Greek-American former ‘20th Century Fox’ employee. Although the movie was a private production, (like *Grammos-Vitsi* and *The Escapees of Boulkes*) it was provided with extras, costumes, weapons and technical advice by the Greek armed forces. The crew was given privileged access to the Ministry of Defence HQ and the building of the then banned Parliament, which features chillingly as the courthouse where the dramatic closing sequence of the military trial is shot. State support gave the movie 5 awards at the Thessaloniki Film Festival that year and its box office sales came to the phenomenal figure of 711,000 tickets (the 4th highest in the history of Greek cinema).

On the Borders of Treason tells the story of a KGB-trained Greek spy, George, who is arrested after entering Greece to gather vital intelligence. During his trial at the end of the movie, it transpires that he was among the abducted children of the Civil War and, on this account, he receives a light sentence that will later enable him to marry the sister of a model officer, with whom he fell in love during his spying mission. Both the use of the word ‘borders’ in the movie’s title and the images of George watching from a mountainous terrain through his binoculars, reaffirm the centrality of the communist threat as primarily territorial and military. The depiction of George with a black outfit, moving like a wild animal in the forest to spy, recalls the clichéd image of the communist threat as a jackal or a wolf.

The animalization of the communist characters, which is sometimes blurred with their portrayal as ‘low peasants’ and/or members of an underclass of gangsters and pimps, is achieved through the character of Yangos, the local communist boss who assists George’s Soviet spying mission. Yangos uses Mirela, a nightclub dancer, as a high-class prostitute to extract military secrets from senior NATO officers and, of course, mistreats her and abuses her. In the end, after failing to rape her, he kills her.

The apex of the drama, however, is a 10-minute sepia footage which recalls the abduction of children affair during the Civil War 20 years earlier. This comes as a flashback of a suppressed trauma during George’s trial and provides the movie’s main dramatic twist. The sequence portrays the communist rebels as angry and barbaric peasants, who spread terror in the countryside and vindictively abduct children shortly before their imminent defeat. Recalling the Ottoman *devshirme*, the communist rebels are, once again, orientalised. In the movie, this is done not only by showing them raiding George village on horseback, but through a subtle technique in a number of fast action scenes, *they are made to wear a Turkish fez, while all the abducted children are shown to be boys*, (thus implying that the sole aim of the act was to create a modern regiment of communist Janissaries).

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, we can now draw three main conclusions, both in relation to the discourse of *Ethnikofrosyni* itself and the central role of images in its construction.

First, although the early works by Tsoukalas, Alivizatos and Elefantis have hardly mentioned it, the visual politics of *Ethnikofrosyni* has recently began to attract some scholarly attention (see Bournazos, 2009). However, what remains hitherto unacknowledged is that the visual propaganda of *Ethnikofrosyni* was not simply an illustrative add-on to a political ideology whose basis was supposedly chiefly textual. A core argument, which differentiates my reading this evening from the rest of the scholarship, is that *Ethnikofrosyni* (and all other forms of anticommunism, for that matter) should not be approached as a political ideology, but rather a power discourse. Precisely because it is not an ideology, but rather a loose set of old stereotypes, the significance of visual metaphors in this discourse has been essential and profound. As we already know, images are malleable and visceral and can evoke strong emotions. They also enjoy a special place in modern mass culture insofar as they can be more readily consumed than texts and can reach larger audiences at a short space of time.

Second, reliance on visual language, which – to quote Fernande Saint-Martin – is 'semi-abstract' and 'enshrouded in a mysterious aura', enables a political discourse like *Ethnikofrosyni* to speak against communism chiefly in metaphorical terms. Another point which the relevant scholarship has never emphasized is that *Ethnikofrosyni* is not a discourse that is simply hostile to communism. Like all other forms of anticommunism, it is above all a discourse that never intended to provide an ideological critique of Marxism-Leninism. Its express aim was to smear communism without ever engaging with it intellectually. Consequently, its primary function was to displace public attention from any debate associated with a reasoned critique of communism. To do so, it connected communism to other primordial fears and then invested all its efforts to attack those other fears. In other words, communism had to be rejected its analytical categories were false, but because all communists were deemed to be 'animals', 'barbarians', 'satanic', determined to 'take our land', 'burn our villages', 'abduct our children' and 'help foreign agents'. All these accusations, however, could apply to any enemy or hostile other, from the Ancient Persians to the modern-day Turks. There is nothing in them that constitutes a specific critique of communism.

c) The third conclusion concerns the relationship between images and power. Since Hobbes we have known that the constitution of state power is inexorably linked with the creation of a specific emotional regime: fear, as a means of controlling social anger and popular revolt. The state cannot provide security for its citizens, Hobbes insisted, 'when there is no *visible Power* to keep them in awe' (italics added). At the same time, as Hobbes remarked in the less celebrated chapters of *Leviathan* on 'Dreams' and 'Visions and Apparitions', a cultural regime of fear cannot be constituted through violence alone. It must always deploy, in addition, the symbolic and metaphoric language of images to magnify and disseminate *the fear of violence* on a mass scale. *Ethnikofrosyni* understood the importance of visual discourse in the construction of a fearful political authority during and after the Civil War; in this process, it used images methodically to render state power totemic.