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On: 10 October 2014, At: 07:00

Publisher: Routledge

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International Journal of Cultural Policy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gcul20>

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Published online: 14 Sep 2009.

To cite this article: Myrsini Zorba (2009) Conceptualizing Greek cultural policy: the non-democratization of public culture, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15:3, 245-259, DOI: [10.1080/10286630802621522](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286630802621522)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286630802621522>

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Conceptualizing Greek cultural policy: the non-democratization of public culture

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This paper concentrates on several of the most significant moments of Greek cultural policy since World War II, together with its key concepts. It traces the cultural policy of the country, its main changes and its relationship with politics through a socio-cultural analysis and a look at the political and cultural events which occurred. The concepts of national identity, hegemony, civilizing mission, democratization, and cultural democracy are applicable in this framework. Despite various attempts at reforms, the country's cultural policy could be characterized as 'path dependent'; it connected unwaveringly to its two main objectives: heritage and the arts.

Keywords: national identity; hegemony; democratization; cultural democracy; cultural policy; cultural politics

Despite the range of consequences that the tenacious focus on this diptych of heritage and the arts had, which we will examine, it completely disregarded the democracy dimensions¹. This means cultural policy followed a narrow traditional model, leaving aside important courses of action and unaddressed challenges which arose from society's progress and needs: social welfare goals, cultural citizenship, cultural distinctions and hierarchies, inequities and discrimination regarding access and participation, social cohesion, diversity, decentralization, and other issues connected to the public sphere and the politics of culture (McGuigan 1996, 2004, Mangset *et al.* 2008).

The democratic institutionalization of cultural policy started in Greece in 1974, the day after the Colonels' junta collapsed. The Ministry of Culture, which had been founded in 1971 by the dictatorship as a propaganda instrument, only started from 1974 onwards to become involved with public cultural policy under the authority of a parliamentary democracy. Before then, public cultural life had undergone approximately three decades of tension since the end of World War II.² In contrast to other European countries that had a smooth transition to democratic life after World War II, cultural life in Greece showed an autarchic imposition of an official national culture, as well as the lack of freedom and democracy (Iatrides 1981, Hewison 1995, Poirrier 2006, Duelund 2008).

The post-war years: a reactionary cultural policy

For Greece, the end of World War II did not mean the end of belligerency because of the immediate commencement of the Civil War, which finally ended in 1949. Afterwards, the victors on the Right chose a model of exclusion of the Left, and not that of reconciliation

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between victors and vanquished (Mazower 2000). They invested more energy in suppression and humiliation of the former opponent than in dialog and the pursuit of hegemony (Gramsci 1952). Due to this choice, during the decade of the 1950s the State apparatus, together with those intellectuals who collaborated closely with it, used culture as a tool. Public culture was instrumentalized as a field for propaganda.

With the domination of an ideology of 'national law and order,' the governments of the Right tried to monopolize memory in order to conclusively influence the construction of the national identity, resolutely excluding and silencing any dialog with the broad progressive intelligentsia (Lampiri-Dimaki 2003, Nicolakopoulos 2003). Coercion, direct ideological control and the suppression of free cultural expression dominated the 1950s: dissidents were hounded with exile, imprisonment, and execution. The model was that of an autocratic, paternalistic State, based on a sickly democracy. Civil rights – including free artistic expression, freedom of language and religion, as well as freedom of speech – were under special restrictions until the early 1960s. Communist ideology was of course banned. Films, theatrical plays, and newspapers were under censorship by the government. Access to higher education or public sector employment had an ideological prerequisite: a 'Certificate of National-Mindedness'. Any progressive opinion was in danger of being labeled as 'communist' and thus being propelled to the sidelines, effectively marginalized. Cultural expression outside of the borders of the official culture was deemed conclusive of dissidence.

Thus, after the end of the Civil War, because of their ideological or political stance many artists and writers took the road to other countries. A significant number of youth who had participated in the Resistance against the Germans went to France, while many young people who had participated in the Civil War went to socialist countries (Boeschoten 2000, Andrikopoulou 2008). During those years the mechanism of the State systematically attempted to impose the official culture, which was based on a nationalist identity, the religious credo and ancient Greek heritage – as interpreted unilaterally by the conservative governments of that epoch.³

Overlying this as a framework, the first post-war State cultural structures were set up or re-established: the Athens Festival and the Epidaurus Festival (1954–1955), the State prizes for Literature (1956), the New Hellenic Center of the Athens Academy (1957), the Center of Historical Research of the National Research Foundation (1958), the Athens Center for Social Research (1959), the Week of Greek Cinema in Thessaloniki (1960), and the State Theater of Northern Greece (1961).

At that time, radio offered the most significant source of information, entertainment, cultural communication – and homogenization. Apart from its characteristic of clear propagandistic and manipulated culture, the State radio network offered an important service for the enrichment of daily life through arts, such as theatrical performances, musical programs, interviews with artists, etc. However, anyone reputed to be an anti-government intellectual was excluded from the programming, and a clientele system was established, which closely linked the right-wing intelligentsia with the cultural services of the State and the benefits, symbolic and material, which resulted from this relationship.

During that period, for the cultivated upper class – the courtiers of the power elite, the palace and the governmental cadres, together with conservative intellectuals – the concept of culture was restricted to the ancient Greek cultural heritage on the one hand, and selectively, to modern and contemporary arts on the other. Education and esthetics meant communication with Europe, learning foreign languages (predominantly French), classical music, elegant style, and good manners: such values were oriented towards the retention of the *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1977, 1979) that was the cultural capital of the 'bourgeoisie'.

Thus an ethnocentric cultural model was reinforced, conservative and elitist, in contrast to the general lifestyle of the common people.

This model served a top-down approach to 'culture' and promoted more than a vision of enlightenment. It promoted an internal civilizing mission (Elias 1939/1994) with disdain for the working class, demonstrating superiority and arrogance towards them. This disdain and the emotional and esthetic gap exacerbated the fresh wounds from World War II and the Civil War and underscored the social divides and the lack of cultural parity. At the same time, it impeded the osmosis and the dialog between the elite and the popular culture, as well as the 'democracy dimensions' that were promoted in other European countries within the framework of the welfare state (Vestheim 2007). The National Theater and the Odeon of Herodes Atticus (a venue for ancient drama performances) provided diversion and amusement with social distinction, for the upper class and the elites. On the other hand, the disadvantaged lower classes – workers and farmers – were clearly pushing their claim to free, democratic schooling, which would ensure not only education, but also the legitimization of their popular culture. This tension affected the emerging student movement, and the politicized students' unions were at the forefront of all the political struggles which began in the 1950s and which continued throughout the decade.

But independently of the esthetic or socio-cultural choices of the citizens, the State authorities subordinated culture to its immediate economic goals. The model for the economic development of the country upheld the instrumentalization of Greece's cultural heritage as well as the unrestrained exploitation of the natural environment. Both policies had one basic goal: the attraction of tourism (Mallouhou-Tufano 1998, Gray 2007). It is significant that State attention to tourism started very early, in 1914, and that the establishment of the Greek Tourism Foundation dates back to 1951, pre-dating the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1971 by more than two decades (Hewison 1987).

The early 1960s: a cultural springtime

As the 1960s begun, there were massive political protests and demonstrations for more democracy and the suppressive political climate gradually became more liberal. In 1963, a government of the Center (Union of the Center) brought with it a brief cultural springtime. The two short years of this Center government (1963–1965) were dense with political activity and rich with cultural experiences, especially for the youth. The government democratized the State apparatus and tried to abolish specific mechanisms of oppression. The relative liberalization which was attained showed how necessary it was that Greek society escape from the authoritarian control of the State. Freed from the political limitations which had been imposed during the previous decade, public culture began to develop widely, enthusiastically. This liberalization had an enormous impact: with freedom of expression and increased social access and participation came creativity, diversity, and pluralism.

The doors opened: literature, poetry, music, the theater, criticism of visual and performing arts, literary criticism – the sudden evolution of all these new ideas attracted and charmed many, especially the youth. It created a new public cultural space. A circle of intellectuals with fresh ideas, a critical eye and inspiration came to the fore (Liakos 2007, Sokka and Kangas 2007). The progressive politicized culture was invigorated and united by two important democratic demands: respect for the Constitution by the King and the right-wing circles, and an increase in the State budget for public education. Both demands formed a strong alliance based on widespread popular feelings which endowed the political practitioners with extra energy and created a cultural spill-over.

In literature and the arts, within the various streams which arose, e.g., modernism, artistic militancy, surrealism or criticism, a new relationship of politics with culture arose (Belfiore and Bennett 2007). In this new atmosphere, new cultural practices were quickly cultivated. Pupil and student initiatives, revamped associations, new publications, new literature, an increased number of scholarly and theoretical journals, the advent of societies engaged in socio-political brainstorming, public debates, peace marches and demonstrations, the new wave of music in the *boites* – these were some of the resultant trappings of this intense cultural movement.

This breath of freedom on the political, social, and cultural level led to an unprecedented creativity, full of energy and optimism. The country lived at a fevered pitch trying to regain the lost time which had, in comparison with other European countries, caused a two-decade delay in the shift from protracted war towards peace, from rural to urban life, from economic insufficiency towards prosperity.

The major institutional reform – establishing obligatory and free public education – reinforced this atmosphere of cultural ‘springtime’ as soon as it was implemented. The government of the Center also applied more objective and less discriminatory criteria for entrance to higher education. At the same time, propaganda in schools was reduced, the demotic Greek language was institutionalized, and the ‘Certificate of National-Mindedness’ was abolished as a prerequisite to higher education. During this period, more women began to enter the university, and the socio-economic status of the students began to diversify as the new measures gave children from farms and remote villages as well as from the urban working class the opportunity to enter institutions of higher education.

It is very likely that it was this educational reform of 1964 which produced the most meaningful institutional change in public culture. Education was perceived by all as being closely entwined with civilization and culture. Cultural life had emerged from the freezer, and the presentation of the individual self joined with the sense of community belonging, contributing to greater self-assurance and aspirations for the future. Cultural analysis and theories filled the pages of the literary reviews and art journals, with intense ideological debates on issues such as the role of art, the avant-garde, abstract art, socialist realism, etc. The esthetic choices of the elite upper classes remained largely with ballet and classical music performed by Greek and international companies in addition to performances of classic Greek dramas. This underscored their cosmopolitanism and ties with Europe and the world outside Greece.

However, it was clearly evident that the blossoms from this cultural ‘springtime’ were sprouting in the gardens of popular culture: in periodicals, popular song, the cinema, and the theatrical reviews. This popular culture comprised the expressions and lifestyles of large parts of the population and also reflected the political life incorporated in the rhythms of the street, the student demonstrations and the acclaimed performances of the well-known composer Mikis Theodorakis, who often used the lyrics of renowned poets. This politicized and spirited culture was widely prevalent, asserting its difference and its hegemony towards the ‘academic bourgeois,’ sophisticated culture. Popular culture – democratic, progressive and qualitatively rich – claimed center stage in the life of the country demanding innovation. The Greek cinema as well as classical drama and the theater evidenced analogous attempts to recast themselves in a progressive mantle.

Nevertheless, the acceptance of several sides of the popular culture was not all-inclusive. There were gradations, not only by the conservative intellectuals but also by the progressive. The leftist critics and intellectuals regarded with elitist skepticism the ‘mass’ culture as leading to disorientation and as the Trojan horse of an ‘introduced-from-abroad American way-of-life’. At this point, one can remark on the deep division between the

enlightenment and the internal ‘civilizing mission’ on the one hand, and the democratization and the egalitarian element on the other. The dividing line, that at the epoch of the ‘short cultural spring’ seemed to search for its own transcendence, remained over the next decades as the central axis around which cultural policy developed. This meant also that the dominant conception of culture remained immutable – and, subsequently, that it influenced cultural policy itself (Lewis and Miller 2003).

The junta 1967–1974

However, the political system did not bear the pressure for further democratization by the progressive forces and the process was abruptly ended with the imposition of the dictatorship of the Colonels on 21 April 1967. The junta proclaimed martial law and the abrogation of political freedoms for entire seven years, until its collapse in 1974. Together with the opportunity of political democratization, all the vital elements of cultural democratization which had bloomed, giving rise to such great expectations, were abruptly lost.

The Colonels used as their basic slogan ‘Greece of Greek Christians’ inventing as the cultural identity of the country an unhistorical combination of devotion to ancient Greece blended with Christian belief, which bordered on the ludicrous. The junta enforced an asphyxiating political and cultural control: imprisoning and exiling politicians and citizens suspected of resistance, isolating the country from the world outside, imposing censorship on the press and other mass media, banning books and songs of left-wing writers and composers. It attempted to construct a formal culture based on spirited militaristic ethics, and to this end deployed strong propagandist mechanisms, the apogee of which was the foundation of the Ministry of Culture in 1971. Together with the political parties and organizations, all the cultural entities were summarily abolished, with the result that overnight the country found itself without political and cultural structures. To replace what had been dismissed, the junta tried to establish an identity which was a mixture of nationalism, anti-communism, xenophobia, a return to ancient roots and isolationism. This had a strong didactic element and ‘Greek-Christian Civilization’ became a reference point for the supreme value: the cultural superiority of the Greek nation and civilization.

Posited against this imaginary were social resistance movements which formed an underground progressive democratic sub-culture. An entire body of writing, music from the previous democratic ‘springtime’ as well as important new songs written in exile by Mikis Theodorakis, the translation of foreign books which spoke of freedom and democracy – all of these began to circulate illegally, chiefly among the students. This formed an alternative network of information and passive resistance below the apparent immobility of cultural life. On the surface, nothing happened anymore, at least until 1970. It was after this that the resistance of the artists and the intellectuals slowly became more visible, and then as time went by the students began to openly rebel against the junta, organizing sit-ins where they chanted pro-democracy and freedom slogans.

After 1974: renaissance for democracy – but not for cultural policy

In 1974, the downfall of the Colonels’ dictatorship marked the return to a normal parliamentary government and a democratic life. The process of democratization was applied to the Ministry of Culture as well to the entire State apparatus. From that time onwards, the Ministry of Culture has assumed the task of organizing public culture and fostering cultural policy under the rules of parliamentary democracy. Cultural integration with the rest of Europe began then, with a stable democratic parliamentary life accompanied by economic

development and the return to the process of accession to the European Community as well as membership in the Council of Europe, from which Greece had been expelled due to the dictatorship. The autarchic instrumentalization of culture, which had been built steadily for four decades, began to be deconstructed under the pressures of liberalism, the installation of democratic processes and the removal of the junta's collaborators from public administration. The changes which pertained to the cultural field had to do with the fundamental determinants of the public culture, which ceased to defer to the criterion of national-mindedness and to the academic bourgeois conservatives. Civil society and public sphere as a whole has been invigorated (Habermas 1987, 1989).

After 1974 public life expanded and cultural activities took place in a democratic consensual atmosphere of freedom of expression. Artists, journalists, publishers of books and magazines, and other cultural actors formed the first important hub for a network of cultural dissemination. Cultural policy began to take shape progressively, with priority being given to the support of public foundations and institutions. The first step was to remove the adherents of the autarchic ideology and mechanism of the dictatorship from the official staff of the State machinery, from the State monopoly of radio and television as well as from the cultural entities themselves. The dominant discourse was that of the enlightenment and the internal civilizing mission, promoting 'a more civilized way of life' and 'civilized attitudes'. The philosophy which reigned followed the policy line of the cultural elite, which became acceptable to the wide spectrum of the intelligentsia and to the majority of those involved in cultural affairs, independent of their political placement. The trauma of the junta's populism and autocracy led to the civilizing mission as a safe haven of elite culture.

It seems a paradox that political democratization was not followed by the discourse of cultural democratization and an egalitarian project on the part of the progressive intellectuals. These intellectuals, educated with the (both political and esthetic) ideology of the avant-garde, had no confidence in the common people's discrimination and taste, and they remained connected more to the enlightenment and less to democratization. In any case, the transformation of the discourse of the civilizing mission into a policy of democratization would have taken quite a few years more of maturation. The political intent for the general climate of change began in 1981 with Melina Mercouri. However, even then it was not based on cultural analysis but merely on instinctive policy, and the more influential intellectuals, independently of their political placement, kept their distance. The democratization of culture was for them neither required nor feasible. To the extent that they considered their role to be guardians of the quality of works of art and guardians of Culture they could not realize democratization to be anything more than populism. Adopting as a basic axiom that communication with high art requires the education of the common people, they asked that it be furnished by the State, and not by policy convergence, increased access and participation. In a few words, they were committed to the service of Civilization and Culture, in capitals, denigrating the anthropological concept of culture, the cultural practices and the popular culture (Williams 1981, Burke 2004).

Society was therefore caught up in the disruption and the intense energy of the unprecedented reforms which free expression and communication offered. From 1974 until 1981, when a new period marked with the rise of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) to power began, alternative cultural expression flourished, demanding democratically apportioned expression in the public space. This was led to a great extent by the leftist artists as well as the social movements at the time (feminist, youth, and homosexual) which imparted their own hue and demands for the legitimization of diversity and the plurality of identities in cultural life. Within such a climate of liberation from the strictures of dictatorship and autarchy, the opportunity arose for all the blossoms to open and to find room to

spread. Deprived and isolated for seven years, society sought to regain its lost ground as quickly as possible (Voulgaris 2003).

Cultural production and the market began to modernize as industries and to show the first signs of dynamism and cultural development (Girard 1972). The wave of translations of fiction and essays which had manifested itself after 1970, surged, and Greek literary output intensified with the appearance of many new writers (Kotzia and Hatzivasileiou 2003). The movement of ideas which was reflected in book publishing as well as in theater, music (Panayiotopoulos 2003) and plastic arts (Hristofoglou 2003a,b) together with the currents of the underground culture was potent (Spathis 2003, Tsampras 2003, Varopoulou 2003). The New Greek Cinema, which had appeared briefly in the 1970s with new directors and fresh cinematic vision and themes, now turned to the contemporary and the historical aspects of Greek society. By experimenting with new esthetic pursuits it distanced itself from commercial films and attempted to decipher social realities in the search for a new identity (Lamprinos 2003). In the immediate climate of societal exploration, the prior cultural practices were renewed, producing a fermentation with rich ingredients – as well as anxious questions concerning the newly changing cultural identities.

Melina Mercouri: artist and politician

At the beginning of the 1980s, the cultural approach of PASOK attempted to address these anxious questions, and its approach to culture found expression in the person of Melina Mercouri. For the first time the national component merged with democratization and became transformed into a new patriotism, the popular element was lauded and became accepted without snobbism, and the newly ascendant petite-bourgeois strata found the means to express their emotional burden. This emotional wave of the petite-bourgeoisie's ascendancy brought into light a culture which over the years would continuously try to balance between democratization and populism.

Melina Mercouri was the first Minister of Culture to give definition to the democratic parameters of culture: creating bridges with the leftist intelligentsia, with international and European artists, and at the same time searching for ways to attract the public and to amplify their access and participation. She also gave expression to popular, and repressed, emotions. In this way, she played an important role in the construction and promotion of a 'progressive popular national patriotic identity' in contrast to the 'conservative national bourgeois tradition'. Around this nucleus, she added: European and international cultural diplomacy, such as the institution of 'The Cultural Capital of Europe' or speeches to UNESCO Conferences, claims of national prestige such as the return of the Parthenon Marbles to their homeland; developmental perspectives (like tourism and culture); decentralization, such as regional theaters and municipal concerts – depending on the occasion.

For the PASOK government of Andreas Papandreou, Melina Mercouri personified the depiction of Greek culture both nationally and internationally. A Minister from the first PASOK government of 1981, she remained through 16 cabinet shuffles, institutionally representing the cultural policy of the country. The presence of 'Melina' in the Ministry of Culture transformed it rapidly from a combined archeological service and propaganda machine, which it had been heretofore, to a place of fermentation, exploration, and experimentation.

The materials the Ministry of Culture used to construct this new cultural policy did not consist of a social-democratic concept of cultural theory and analysis, but mostly, simple progressive common sense. Primarily, there was a 'dowry' of cultural capital that came with Melina and her close circle, which had been woven on the canvas of the film industry, on relations with international artists and political personages, on her internationally

well-known name which opened doors, on her connections with the American left-wing intelligentsia which resisted McCarthyism, and even on the touristic Greece she had promoted as an actress. This was all spun and held together with her personal singular characteristic of aristocratic popularity which, as was evident, could move not only the voters of her constituency in a run-down neighborhood of Piraeus, but all of Greece – and abroad as well. She followed her infallible instinct which directed her to the recognition of what people were asking for, and that was the reason she pursued democratization of culture regardless of the criticism.

Another part of the cultural capital of this Ministry was its scientifically coordinated archeological service, the main corps of civil servants of the Ministry, with purpose, tradition, method, and prestige. These were civil servants who identified with the cultural heritage of the country, who were its loyal and true guardians, interpreting it ideologically, sustaining it technically, and defending it against each negligent and often somehow ignorant political leadership (Brown and Hamilakis 2003, Peckham 2003, Plantzos 2008).

The third bit of cultural capital was an agglomeration of heteroclitic cultural components: artists, requests, cultural associations, intervention of party people and local authorities, trade unionists, propositions and ideas for the arts. It was a cataclysm, resulting after the chronic exclusion of the progressive intellectuals from the State initiatives was rectified. A traditional left-wing cultural view, together with the neophyte aspirations which had come to light with the ascendancy of PASOK, tried to construct the main axes of cultural policy. Where was the juncture between all these different sources and textures which made up the whole cultural capital of the Ministry of Culture during the 1980s? Given the weakness of the political and ideological impetus, as well as that of the State and ideological structures, the point of concurrence was in the person of Melina Mercouri herself: 'But since Reagan is in politics, why not me – who am the better actor?' she once asked. Indeed, Mercouri managed to successfully blend the different expectations and requirements within the breadth of her own role – which gratified most palates.

The intimates of PASOK aired their claims on either a personal or on a collective level, as a national association, as a branch of a party organization, as a local authority. Mercouri was receptive to creative people and supervised their corresponding requests. She was liberal with regard to the leftist artists, open to the people, the citizens' indeterminate but thirsty desire for culture both in the city and in the countryside. She responded to everything. Under these conditions, the only thing she could not do alone was to formalize a consistent cultural policy. In order for her to be able to accomplish that she would have had to rely upon the assistance of an important group of intellectuals. And for this the distance she had kept from the intelligentsia was too great. As she herself admitted: 'I don't get along well with the sophisticates. I didn't get along with them since I was a child. My skin doesn't want them.'

Amidst all this re-orientation after the explosion of the PASOK ascendancy, at the very core of this new cultural system, was a dominant view which identified cultural policy as primarily meaning generous State grants to artists. Another dominant view identified culture with ancient Greek civilization itself, giving it absolute and even exclusive precedence. In time, there were other additions to the above sentiments, such as: economy is the main enemy to an art work; popular appreciation of 'higher' culture is impossible; culture is equal with 'the arts'; State enlightenment is necessary to make the people understand beauty. All these axioms seemed to spin subject to a centrifugal force, while the political will remained incapable of competently formulating an efficient cultural policy which would address the new needs as well as the new cultural practices.

The consistent problem: the political culture of the past

Quite on purpose, to transcend the problem, Mercouri acted mainly by instinct. From the beginning she preferred international communication, practicing a distinctive cultural diplomacy which was based on her cosmopolitan social contacts, and which took place beneath the lights of the public eye, with personages such as Jacques Lang, Olaf Palme, Felipe Gonzales, the Pope, Indira Gandhi, Francois Mitterand. This communication helped her to launch well-timed projects, exhibitions, declarations, and to successfully deal, through media promotion, with the internal discomfiture and the criticism which was coming from many directions. In a 1985 photograph, when Athens was celebrating itself as the first Cultural Capital of Europe, she can be seen, radiant, between Papandreou and Mitterand.

She may be best remembered for prioritizing ancient Greek culture, with the high point being the demand for the return of the Parthenon Marbles from the British Museum. She introduced the claim for the first time in July 1982, at the UNESCO International Conference of Ministers of Culture in Mexico:

You must understand what the Parthenon Marbles mean to us. They are our glory. They are our sacrifice. They are the supreme symbol of respect. They are our obligation of honor to the philosophy of democracy. They are our ambition and our name. They are the essence of being Greek.

The symbolic level which she was referring to, this firm 'Great Idea' which drove her during the entire duration of her time as Minister, contained the elements which made up 'Greekness', as she understood it to be. This 'Greekness' was a cultural identity with a large dose of ancient Greek civilization (hellenicity), together with Greek honor and manliness, conviviality and Mediterranean temperament, pride-set and touristic folklore, all expressively charged with social sensitivity, emotion, the complaint of the small country against injustice, as well as the development of a phobic syndrome.

What was the conductive thread of all this? Looking at the public culture of that period, one can observe that the long-inhibited social culture which was manifest the day after the fall of the dictatorship was in fact established in 1981 as governmental cultural policy. However, being newly freed, that policy could not immediately mature, embrace new tasks, and autonomously change the existing conditions. It remained captive to the past and to the matrix that bore it, according to the new institutional theory that recognizes often in public policy a path dependency (Muller and Surel 2002, Tsakatika 2004). In this way, the new progressive cultural policy of PASOK swapped subordination for domination, not for hegemony. It also traded the lack of democracy and authoritarianism for a civilizing mission, but not for the democratization of culture and an egalitarian project (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, Venn 2007). And as policy it had to respond to the waves of disturbance provoked by the European Community in the face of Greece's ambivalent attitude about participation in the EEC – which among other things had to do with the dilemma of the southern or eastern national identity, a dilemma that still remains active despite the steps of modernization the country achieved during the 1990s (Dallas 2008).

But it is interesting to go even further with the problem of hegemony. The deconstruction of the tradition of the long undemocratic past, the lack of freedom and the nationalistic domination on the one hand, and the need for the establishing a modernized public culture and policy on the other hand, brought a great deal of vying for hegemony. The page had turned, but the struggle for the redistribution of the cultural capital under the new conditions, had just begun.

This was evident in cultural politics. Issues which concerned Greek national identity or which were perceived as such provoked fanaticism, culture wars, and political conflict

within society before and after the Mercouri years. Clashes occurred about the official adoption of the commonly spoken vernacular (demotic Greek) and abolishment of the erudite 'pure' grammar (katharevousa Greek) from education and public administration; about implementing educational reform allowing a simplified orthography which expunged the complex aspirant and stress marks; about equality of women; the separation of church and State; civil marriage; immigration rights and diversity; the right of top students of Albanian nationality to carry the Greek flag at parades and school pageants; about abolishing the specification of religion on the national identity cards; about the content of scholastic history books and many other similar questions of public politics which to a greater or lesser extent consistently divided public opinion.

Conversely, at the level of cultural policy which was exercised during the last quarter of the twentieth century by the Ministry of Culture, the controversies had more to do with the narrow sense of cultural policy, that is, cultural heritage and State support of arts and letters. The issues revolved around the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, subsidies for the arts, financial support for cultural associations and foundations, the efficiency and transparency of committees within the Ministry of Culture, the modernization and the expansion of museums, and of course the budget of the Ministry of Culture.

This distance between cultural politics and cultural policy was never bridged – and not only because of the political decision of the Ministry of Culture to remain within the narrower sense of cultural policy. The mentality of the Greek intellectuals that influenced the whole society also contributed to this. They were consistently oriented towards 'high' culture and therefore could not hold the concepts of cultural rights, cultural citizenship or the egalitarian project to be important tasks in the framework of the welfare state, as it was practiced in the second half of the twentieth century in many European countries. Thus, cultural discourse remained attached to twin axes, the diptych of the continuity of ancient heritage with the national identity, and to the arts. Popular culture, diversity, democratization, social cohesion, unequal access or participation had in their minds nothing to do with the notion of Culture which was for them synonymous to civilization. In this context, national prestige, State patronage of 'high-quality' arts, and elitism easily dominated.

Accordingly, although with regard to social policy the ruptures of the socialist governments with the past were audacious, in cultural policy not only their discourse but their political projections and agenda stayed attached to a conservative matrix. The cultural policy was never embedded socially (Kiwani 2007). It was not the social but the national that dictated the agenda: the patriotism of the left and the right, the love of antiquity of the left and the right, the elitism of the left and the right, contended with each other as two sides of the same coin. Etatism and populism prevailed, consistently ignoring emerging practices, representations and clash of identities which combined with politics as well as the messages that had to be delivered and elaborated from that in favor of public consciousness. This ensured that cultural policy was removed from any operative reality of socio-cultural conflict, leading in turn to a series of culture wars, the expansion of discrimination, new hierarchies and real social exclusion.

Modernization, EU Funds, and the Olympic Games

In the middle of the 1990s, a new sensibility arose: the modernization of the country in the framework of European integration and the process of expanded globalization. With the assistance of the EU Structural Funds, the re-elected socialist government of PASOK made modernization of the country's structures its main goal. Between 1994 and 2006, cultural projects were supported by an impressive €1.7 billion economic investment. Never once in

the past did the country have such an opportunity to invest in culture through a long, well-elaborated plan.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the EU Structural Funds Operational Program for Culture strengthened the long-standing traditional political view of culture. Ambitious economic objectives translated in reality into modest tasks with regard to the socio-cultural vision of a cultural democracy. The political agenda continued to give priority to the old values of the dominant culture, ignoring the needs of the new generation, ignoring popular culture, immigrants, community culture, minority culture, urban regeneration, and many other vital issues. The political choice was to enhance the prestige of the nation-state on the basis of the promotion of heritage, and at the expense of functionality, equal opportunities and participation.

The allocation of the budget was characteristic: 90% of the budget for the 2nd Operational Program for Culture was spent on the protection and display of Greece's ancient cultural heritage and only the remaining 10% on contemporary culture. In the 3rd Operational Program for Culture, the split was 64.6%, with 32.4% directed at the development of modern culture. This was for support to the infrastructure for major cultural communication events and for the completion of metropolitan conference and cultural centers. Culture continued to be perceived only in an extremely narrow sense, provocatively giving priority to the past instead of the present, to the elite instead of the popular, to the culture of display instead of participation. As a result modernization meant the reinforcement of the elite pyramid and the construction of new hierarchies. Neither better access for the public nor increased participation was stimulated. Recent research shows that the majority of Athenians have never visited the National Archaeological Museum (73%), the National Gallery (77%) or the Athens Concert Hall (83%).⁴ In conclusion, it must be recognized that in this case diversity, pluralism, and cultural democratization did not find fertile ground in the European Funds. In the name of cultural heritage only a few contemporary, large infrastructures were completed, aimed solely at the cultivated upper and middle classes – the economically stable, socially favored audiences – the same audiences that take advantage of government-subsidized tickets for the public and private artistic events of highly prestigious foundations.

As a corollary of the above, two questions attracted the general interest of Greek society and achieved a broad consensus in the 1990s. These were the claim on the Parthenon Marbles against the British Museum and the Olympic Games of 2004. Both of these functioned as a 'Great Idea' which related the past to the future in a critical way. The demand for the Marbles, an idea of Melina Mercouri's, has been an obligatory course for every subsequent Minister of Culture. It involved the symbolic question of acknowledging equality between a small country and a more powerful one, and the fulfillment of a feeling of national prestige. The Olympic Games, again, instigated intensive activity towards the completion of essential public works. In the name of modernization, cultural policy was summoned to submit to the ambitious demands for designing and implementing infrastructure, renovating museums and archeological sites, organizing international artistic exhibitions and big events (the Cultural Olympiad). All of these steered cultural policy through path dependence: mainly, to culture as display instead of the democratization and the socio-cultural shift which Greek society had never enjoyed.

After 2004 the new conservative government of ND (New Democracy) put the accent on the economic aspect of culture, with economic growth and priority for private sponsorship of the arts. A new law was passed by the Greek Parliament to encourage private patrons and companies to act as sponsors by granting them tax exemptions, although the mechanisms of the Ministry continue to retain central control and have the last word on

which institution would be sponsored. The political control of the budget for culture in this way was not only applied to the public sector but amplified to include the private one.

An enormous scandal about the distribution of public money, with erotic implications, erupted during the last days of 2007, driving the Secretary General of the Ministry of Culture to attempt suicide and spinning the Government into a crisis. The result was the cessation of a large part of Ministry's activities together with the Minister's declaration that the Ministry will be re-structured, with new principles and rules. This still remains to be seen.

Conclusions

As the above analysis shows, in the post-war period both Greek cultural policy and public culture were dependent on the specific political circumstances of the time. Until the late 1970s democratization was understood to be synonymous with political and civil freedoms and, in the cultural field, free expression. The construction of the national identity under conditions of weak and unstable democratic structures set up constraints and barriers in the development of the culture of the society and delayed the process of modernization (Sotiropoulos 2006). Barriers in the discourse connected to cultural democracy were set up to the same extent.

Starting from the early 1980s, cultural policy actively converged with that of the other European countries, gradually overcoming its prior introversion and a certain mistrust of the European Union. However, despite the democratization rhetoric, the agenda for cultural policy remained in the end more attached to the excellence rationale than to the access rationale, not unlike in other European countries (Looseley 2008). Favored by the lack of research and data on cultural practices, a simplified reasoning prevailed, based on different components (the 'indifference' of the public at large to the arts, the lack of education, the Mediterranean spirit) that were used to explain cultural asymmetries as natural. The public cultural debate was constrained by cultural pessimism and elitist snobbism. The Frankfurt school's theory was used by the majority of the intellectuals as the main theoretical tool to interpret the existing situation. Cultural industry and popular culture (called without any distinction 'mass culture') consistently became the exclusive targets of the critique. The prevailing rationale addressed the war of the authentic against the false, the qualitative against the common, the singular against the mass product.

For ordinary people, there was little room for creativity and artistic self-expression to develop. If cultural democratization was, in the ears of the many, a socialist or a populist invention, then cultural democracy, diversity, cultural rights, and citizenship seemed a project of idealization.

In the Greek cultural policy discourse a fundamental unease and unfamiliarity about the meaning of the democracy dimension in the public cultural field remains. Cultural participation seems to be a choice rather than a chance which depends on different parameters. It is also characteristic of the discourse that the difficulties of conceptualization are reflected in the use of the words themselves. For example, the word 'culture' is rarely used in the Greek language. It is replaced by the word 'civilization.' The term 'popular culture' is usually interchanged with 'mass culture.' All this makes the translation of texts from other languages difficult. In addition, policy-makers are uncomfortable facing issues related to diversity, emergent cultures, urban cultures, alternative cultures or hybrid cultural activities. Moreover, the new creative forms, practices, methods, and institutions which have emerged in the post-modern era are little understood.

Under these conditions, the question that arises is whether it is still relevant in the twenty-first century in the realm of consumer sovereignty to talk of the democracy dimension in public culture? As far as cultural policy in Greece is concerned, I suggest that the democracy dimension does indeed retain its relevance. My hypothesis is that the democracy dimension, in its various and conflicting forms, implicit or explicit, is one of the main drivers of cultural policy affirmation and thus still remains valid. The solid grounding of cultural democracy in policy discourse is important to face both the old problems and new ones, like diversity, pluralism, participation, intercultural dialog, discrimination, culture wars, to name a few. Democracy dimension is even more important for a cultural policy that aspires to contribute to the redistribution of the cultural capital in a more just way, affirming meaning and communication in the public sphere, and serving the public interest.

The main reason for this is that the discriminatory allocation of symbolic and economic resources is blatant: lack of transparency in the policy-making process, appointed rather than elected administrators in the cultural entities; unequal opportunities of access and participation; unequal distribution of public resources; regional inequities; gender, racial, ethnic, generational discrimination; social exclusion. Cultural phenomena and the confrontations surrounding them (e.g., xenophobia, racism, nationalistic identity or nationalism – but also hooliganism or sexism) also need a policy intervention.

Yet how could these problems be translated into the practical tasks of cultural policy? How could a cultural policy be able to intervene in the broad cultural sphere and the conflicts therein generated? Who are the conductors who can funnel into the previously narrow bed of cultural policy the wider clashes for hegemony? How could one formulate a public cultural policy that does not merely have to do with the past (the excavations, the museums) and the high arts but which would draw material from the collision of ideas, the attitudes, and the cultural practices of the citizens? All these and other questions need to be answered in the framework of public dialog, driving the agenda of a new cultural policy. Cultural analysis and research could contribute to this process, offering reflection and critique as its service (Bennett *et al.* 2008).

Notes

1. This paper uses four distinct concepts regarding the relation between culture and democracy: enlightenment as a general discourse of top-down approach; civilizing mission as an operational concept embedding symbolic colonial discourse and practice inside a society, as an internal top-down process; democratization as the policy of diffusion of high culture to the citizenry together with educational programs promoting an 'ascending civilized cultural level of the people'; and cultural democracy as the result of the acceptance of diversity, plurality and equal opportunities in an environment where State intervention attempts to marginalize cultural inequities and discrimination, deconstructing the boundaries between elitism and popular culture. For various discourses based on these concepts see Elias (1939); Mercer (2002); Bennett *et al.* (2005); Kangas (2006); Mennell (2006); Vestheim (2007).
2. Specifically, World War II and the Resistance to fascism (1940–1944), the Civil War (1946–1949), then a period of parliamentary governance (1950–1966). But even this last was not smooth, as it had the clear stamp of political tension and was characterized by severe social and political clashes, rigged elections and the arbitrary intervention of the King in the democratic institutions. To this must be added the impact of the pre-war dictatorial regime of the 4th of August of Ioannis Metaxas (1936–1940), a period of martial law and censorship.
3. This national identity was called national-mindedness (*Εθνικοφροσύνη*): nationalism mixed with loyalty to the ruling party and discrimination according to ideology and political beliefs. This identity had to be proved by a 'Certificate of National-Mindedness' which was necessary for employment in the public sector and for entering higher education.
4. Metron Analysis, 2005. The cultural practices of the Greeks. *Highlights*, 19, 1–53.

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