

REVIEW

Dimitris Tziouvas, *Greece from Junta to Crisis: Modernization, Transition and Diversity*, London: I.B. Tauris 2021. Pp. viii + 309
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The economic and political crises that have assailed Greece since 2008 have offered a new perspective on the *metapolitefsi*, the period during which democracy was restored in post-Junta Greece. The five decades that followed the 1974 fall of the Junta stand in stark contrast to the five decades of draconian political repression that preceded. Thus, it makes sense to treat the period as a single age/epoch/historical unit, as Dimitris Tziouvas convincingly argues in the Introduction to the present volume. The period in question can be seen as a ‘new beginning’, with positive developments in democratization and modernization, increasing prosperity, and improvements to public health and education systems alongside more problematic factors such as clientelism and corruption, excessive expansion of the state, and, towards the end of the period under discussion, renewed poverty and democratic deficit. A defining characteristic of the era is the European integration of Greece, which can be classified as positive and problematic, depending on one’s viewpoint.

In the Introduction Tz. argues that unlike earlier eras in Greek history, which were dominated by political conflict and patriotism, the post-Junta period can be seen as an ‘age of identities’ (p. 1), in which political beliefs have made way for cultural symbols or categories such as the European, conflicting versions of the past, religion, migration, language, and gender.

Through a wide range of such cultural perspectives, the book examines developments in Greek society from the 1970s to 2020. Tz.’s main argument is that, in the course of these five decades, Greece has shifted from being a homogeneous, traditional society towards greater diversity and hybridity; he also affirms that at last ‘Greece [has] developed into a tolerant society’ (p. 1), something which is not convincingly confirmed in the chapters that follow, with their focus on the variety (hybridity) of narratives and self-definitions expressed in the cultural sphere. Despite huge advances in many areas towards greater diversity and the increasing visibility of minority groups, I am not so sure that Greek society as a whole has become more tolerant. On the contrary, the influx of migrants that Tz. also notes has, if anything, increased intolerance and led to a normalization of racist discourses. The same applies to tolerance in the areas of blasphemy, language change, ID cards, and the disputed

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name of the Republic of North Macedonia, on which reactionary voices have dominated, as Tz. charts in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Greek society has become more diverse as a result of migration, globalization, Europeanization and developments in media and communications, but does this kind of diversity also lead to the ‘embracing of otherness’ as in the subtitle of chapter 4? Such generalizations about tolerance, however, are not representative of the book as a whole, which provides a thorough examination of the dominant cultural debates of the past five decades.

However, this book is not a sociological study of the entire Greek population. Most of the chapters refer to debates or trends among a smaller elite of intellectuals or among minority groups, which albeit gaining more visibility, remain on the margins of mainstream culture and society. The book’s strength is that it presents a range of transitions ‘as complex and ambivalent phenomena’ and as ‘multidirectional and fluctuating trajectories, involving forward and backward movements, adjustments, shifts, uncertainties and blurred boundaries’ (p. 17). Hence, the statement ‘Greece [has] developed into a tolerant society’ is contextualized by references to intolerance, conservatism, and racism.

In Chapter 1, Tz. reflects on the concept of modernization and the theoretical tradition of cultural dualism so characteristic of earlier analyses of Greek culture. Though he is critical of simplifying binary models, Tz. refers to two main ‘dreams of the metapolitefsi’ (p. 19), modernization and consumerism, and two cultural reactions to these: an anti-Western traditionalist stance and a westernized consumer-individualistic attitude. However, he argues that none of these categories can be seen as absolute and that proponents of one or the other often overlap. It should also be said that any cultural analysis depends on the definition of culture, whether it is the ordinary or the ideal, the artistic or the popular, humanist/elitist or anthropological/lifestyle (pp. 30-31). Tz. appears to be arguing that in the post-Junta era consumerism has come to dominate the cultural scene in Greece – as it has all over the Western world – thus more than ever marginalizing high culture, which had formerly enjoyed a high degree of popular propagation, e.g. through music, TV, and cinema (Chapters 6, 7, and 8). Tz. concludes that the earlier sense of a homogeneous Greek culture has given way to the ‘increasing prominence of materiality, diversity, otherness, popular culture and anti-systemic forces’ and that ‘cultural differences are now more widely tolerated and accepted than ever before’ (p. 40). Rather than finding tolerance at the centre of all this, I consider Tz.’s second conclusion, that it is ‘an era of increasing cultural tension and diversity’ and ‘one of the most dynamic periods of Greek culture’ (p. 41) a more apt appraisal of the topics and debates examined in the book. That said, Chapter 1 offers a rich and thoughtful overview of the theoretical debates on cultural analysis and the tradition of binary approaches to Greek culture.

Chapters 2 to 9 present cultural phenomena as diverse as Europeanization, antiquity and historical consciousness, identity, religion, migration, language debates, literary trends, the changing media landscape, cinematic allegories, and feminist and queer

movements in Greece from the 1970s to 2020, giving the non-Greek reader a broad and in-depth introduction to less well-known sides of Greek society and culture. Some of the chapters might seem too detailed for the uninitiated and one can lose the thread, especially in e.g. Chapter 6 on literary trends, where a plethora of Greek names can disrupt the coherence of the text. At other times, the book seems to expect the reader to be fully acquainted with Greek (intellectual) history, e.g. in Chapter 4, where a reference to ‘the legacy of Paparrigopoulos’ (p. 105) will leave uninitiated non-Greek readers puzzled.

Chapter 10 deals exclusively with the relationship between Greece and its Western (primarily, European) partners during the economic crisis. This chapter differs markedly in that it focuses more on the Western gaze on Greece than on developments within Greek society, except for some examples of Greek reactions to the allegedly neo-colonizing attitudes of EU-institutions, international media, or cultural institutions. It is telling that a book on cultural developments in Greece ends by returning the agency and evaluation of Greek culture to outsiders such as CNN, documenta 14 and *Der Spiegel*, just as the foundations of Greek national culture were created from European expectations of the new nation.

Different chapters will appeal to different readers. The book’s strength is that each chapter is a well-rounded entity that can be read independently. Chapter 3, for example, on contested pasts, is not just a study of Greek cultural history but an important examination of developments in the theoretical literature on historiography and memory culture that may engage readers with a broader interest in cultural politics, modernization, and social change. Even so, most of the chapters require a certain interest in Greek culture and society because of the detailed reviews of cultural phenomena and debates involving Greek public figures mostly unknown outside Greece. This book provides an impressive breadth and in-depth cultural analysis of post-authoritarian, pre-crisis, and crisis-ridden Greece which should become a standard work for anyone within as well as beyond academia who wishes to understand Greece today.

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