

# The novel of the Greek civil war in the twenty-first century: (post)memory and the weight of the past<sup>1</sup>

Vassiliki Kaisidou

University of Birmingham

[kaisidou.vas@gmail.com](mailto:kaisidou.vas@gmail.com)

*Between the years 2000 and 2015 novels on the Greek civil war (1946–9) flooded the Greek literary market. This raises important questions as to why the burden of the civil conflict weighs heavily upon generations with no experiential connection to these events. This article begins by offering an interpretation for the literary upsurge of the civil war since the 2000s. Then it uses Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory to illustrate the authors' ethical commitment to 'unsilence' and redress the past through the use of archival evidence and testimonies. The case studies of Thomas Skassis' Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο (2000), Nikos Davvetas' Λευκή πετσέτα στο ρινγκ (2006), and Sophia Nikolaidou's Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες (2012) serve to illustrate my argument.*

**Keywords:** Greek civil war; second-generation fiction; poetics of the archive; ethics of remembering; Nikos Davvetas; Thomas Skassis; Sophia Nikolaidou

## Introduction

Between the years 2000 and 2015 novels on the Greek civil war (1946–9) flooded the Greek literary market: they outnumber the novels produced between the outbreak of the civil unrest and the fall of the dictatorship of 21 April 1967 and they are in total two and a half times more than the novels published after the transition to democracy

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(known as *Metapolitefsi*)<sup>2</sup> in 1974.<sup>3</sup> The spectral resonance of the civil conflict in the 2000s raises important questions as to why the burden of the 1940s weighs heavily upon generations with no experiential connection to these events. It is the ethical underpinnings and the mediated nature of the remembrance of an un-lived past that constitute the focus of this article.

The Greek civil war remains one of the most hotly debated conflicts in Modern Greek history.<sup>4</sup> In military terms, I understand the civil war as the conflict between the Communist-backed Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) and people with Leftist allegiances on one side, and the US-supported monarchist National Army and ultra-Right-wing paramilitary gangs on the other between 1946 and 1949. The conflict concluded with the Democratic Army's defeat and its retreat across the Albanian border. In terms of its socio-political dynamics, pre-liberation local hostilities and the collapse of civil society caused outbreaks of armed conflict in rural areas prior to 1946.<sup>5</sup> Social polarization and the containment of Communism continued unabated during the post-war period of illiberal democracy (1949–67).<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, I find the

2 The *Metapolitefsi* denotes the period of democratization that followed the fall of the dictatorship of 1967–74. Older studies situated the end of the *Metapolitefsi* in 1989. For example, G. Voulgaris, *Η Ελλάδα της μεταπολίτευσης, 1974–1990. Σταθερή δημοκρατία σηματοδομένη από τη μεταπολεμική ιστορία* (Athens 2001) 215–16. However, an emerging body of recent literature identifies the end of the *Metapolitefsi* with the onset of the Greek debt crisis of 2009. For example, M. Avgeridis, E. Gazi and K. Kornetis (eds), *Μεταπολίτευση: Η Ελλάδα στο μεταίχμιο δύο αιώνων* (Athens 2015) 16–18. On the uses of the term *Metapolitefsi* see L. Kallivretakis, 'Μεταπολίτευση: οι περιπέτειες μιας λέξης', in *Δικτατορία και μεταπολίτευση* (Athens 2017) 201–22.

3 The publishing statistics regarding the number of Greek civil war novels published between 1946 and 2019 are as follows: a) 1946–73: twenty-eight, b) 1974–99: fifteen, c) 2000–15: forty-two. The publication of civil war novels has declined notably since 2016. In discussing the 'explosion' of civil war novels since the 2000s, I acknowledge that the increase of civil war publications is also due to changes in book publishing in Greece since the 1990s. These data are culled from a variety of sources: M. Nikolopoulou, 'Ο "τριακονταετής πόλεμος": η πεζογραφία με θέμα τον Εμφύλιο και η διαχείριση της μνήμης στο πεδίο της αφήγησης', in G. Antoniou and N. A. Marantzidis (eds), *Η εποχή της σύγχυσης: η δεκαετία του '40 και η ιστοριογραφία* (Athens 2008) 419–93; V. Apostolidou, *Τραύμα και μνήμη. Η πεζογραφία των πολιτικών προσφύγων* (Athens 2010); D. Raftopoulos, *Εμφύλιος και λογοτεχνία* (Athens 2012); I. Anyfantakis, 'Η παράσταση της εμφύλιας βίας (1940–1950) στη μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία', PhD dissertation, Athens 2015; also, my own research in recent publishing data available at *Biblionet*: < <http://www.biblionet.gr>>.

4 There is now a wealth of literature on the civil war that cannot be reviewed here. For an overview and the origins of the civil unrest, see the classic study by D. Close, *The Origins of the Greek Civil War* (London 1995). For bibliographical guidance see N. Koulouris, *Ελληνική βιβλιογραφία του εμφύλιου πολέμου 1945–1949* (Athens 2000); also, S. Dordanas and I. Michailidis, 'Κριτική θεώρηση της βιβλιογραφίας για τον Εμφύλιο Πόλεμο (1990–2006)', in I. Mourellos and I. Michailidis (eds), *Ο ελληνικός Εμφύλιος Πόλεμος: Μια αποτίμηση. Πολιτικές, ιδεολογικές, ιστοριογραφικές προεκτάσεις* (Athens 2007) 183–94.

5 Anthropological research attests to this: see R. van Boeschoten, *Περάσαμε πολλές μπόρες κορίτσι μου* (Athens 1999).

6 For example, R. Clogg, 'The legacy of the civil war 1950–74', in *A Concise History of Greece*, 3rd edn (Cambridge 2013 [1<sup>st</sup> edn 1992]) 142–65.

term ‘long civil war’ useful to describe the ruptures and continuities in practices of political violence and social exclusion from the 1940s until the fall of the dictatorship.<sup>7</sup>

Inspired by Hispanic Studies, I here use the concept of the ‘novel of the Greek civil war’ to describe novels that thematize histories of violence or injustice unfolding during the long civil war.<sup>8</sup> I also use it to encourage the study of the civil war novel in its own right, as a hybrid literary genre conversing with other media and official memory. Although a considerable number of studies have been devoted to the novels published before or during the *Metapolitefsi*,<sup>9</sup> post-2000s narratives remain vastly un(der)explored.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on the theoretical framework of ‘postmemory’, this article offers readings of contemporary civil war novels with a focus on the mediatedness and ethics of remembrance. A postmemorial reading of contemporary civil war novels is well worth undertaking as it deepens our understanding of how artistic forms mediate the transfer of difficult memories to the next generations.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, insights from civil war narratives can be extended to and juxtaposed with the recent crop of novels dramatizing the impact of troubling historical events on future generations.<sup>12</sup>

The following sections ask *why* authors memorialize the civil strife seventy years on and explore *how* they deal with inherited memories of violence and pain. First, I offer an

7 On the long civil war see R. van Boeschoten, ‘Enemies of the nation—a nation of enemies: the long Greek civil war’, in B. Kissane (ed.), *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe* (Philadelphia 2015) 93–120.

8 For example, the now classic study by G. Thomas, *The Novel of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1975)* (Cambridge 1990); A. Luengo, *La encrucijada de la memoria: la memoria colectiva de la Guerra Civil Española en la novela contemporánea* (Berlin 2004); on why the novel of the Spanish civil war should be considered a genre, see the introduction to D. Becerra Mayor, *La Guerra Civil como moda literaria* (Madrid 2015) 9–14. In *Modern Greek Studies*, Gerasimos Katsan nods in that direction, writing that ‘a subgenre of the historical novel is the political novel (or even the leftist novel) that deals expressly with the events of the civil war and its aftermath’: G. Katsan, *History and National Ideology in Greek Postmodernist Fiction* (Madison and Teaneck 2013) 8.

9 For example, G. Vasilakakos, *Ο ελληνικός εμφύλιος πόλεμος στην μεταπολεμική πεζογραφία (1946–1958)* (Athens 2000); Nikolopoulou, ‘Ο “τριακονταετής πόλεμος”’; Apostolidou, *Τραύμα και μνήμη*; Raftopoulos, *Εμφύλιος και λογοτεχνία*.

10 For example, M. Aretaki ‘Ανάμεσα στην οικογένεια και την Ιστορία: η αναζήτηση του εαυτού στο σύγχρονο ελληνικό μυθιστόρημα’, in K. Dimadis (ed.), *Proceedings of the 4th European Congress of Modern Greek Studies: Identities in the Greek world* (Granada 2010) 749–62; Anyfantakis, *Η παράσταση της εμφύλιας βίας*, 194–207. On the germane topic of the representations of armed violence in Greek and Italian literatures and their interweavement with cultural memory, see V. Petsa, *Όταν γράφει το μολύβι. Πολιτική βία και μνήμη στη σύγχρονη ελληνική και ιταλική λογοτεχνία* (Athens 2016).

11 The interplay of (post)memory, trauma, and art was first observed by Holocaust scholars. See M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York 2012). In Greek literature, Elias Maglinis’ 2007 novella *Η Ανάκριση* (translated into English as *The Interrogation* by Patricia Felisa Barbeito and published in 2013) fictionalizes how the trauma and torture experienced by a father during the military dictatorship are transmitted to his daughter and her transgressive performance art.

12 Cf. the recently published novels by M. Gavala, *Κόκκινος σταυρός* (Athens 2018); A. Papantonis, *Ρηχό νερό, σκιές* (Athens 2019); E. Maglinis, *Είμαι όσα έχω ξεχάσει: μια αληθινή ιστορία* (Athens 2019).

interpretation for the literary upsurge of the civil war since the 2000s and introduce Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. The article then moves on to a close reading of selected second-generation narratives. I argue that the characters' immersion in personal and cultural archives is triggered by the urgency to recover buried memories of the past while recognizing that forgetting and excluding are inevitably nested in practices of remembering. It is my intention to show that 'postmemorial writings'<sup>13</sup> of the Greek civil war are inflected by the ethical concerns of a new generation of authors, who strive to repair past wrongs and break with agendas of forgetting. In this sense, I intend to re-orientate the critical discussions about the cultural representations of the 1940s from the lexicon of (inherited) trauma to the notion of responsibility in the present. To make these points palpable, I explore three second-generation novels: *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* (2000) by Thomas Skassis, *Λευκή πετσέτα στο ρινγκ* (2006) by Nikos Davvetas and *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* (2012) by Sophia Nikolaidou.

### Explosion of civil war memories in the twenty-first century

The literary critic Vangelis Chatzivassileiou was the first to talk about a 'new round' in civil war fiction in the 2000s.<sup>14</sup> Other critics read contemporary civil war novels as historical fiction that looks backwards in order to understand the present and envision the future.<sup>15</sup> I maintain that a critical reading of twenty-first-century civil war fiction requires it to be contextualized within the Greek memory industry and the burgeoning international second-generation literature. Next, I suggest a reading of the novels through the lens of postmemory and express my reservations about the dubious conflation of postmemory and trauma.

First, Thanasis Valtinos' novel *Ορθοκωστά* (1994) should be considered as passing the baton to a new generation of writers.<sup>16</sup> *Ορθοκωστά* achieved notoriety for the memorialization of 'Red' (Left-wing) violence in Valtinos' native village in the Peloponnese in 1943–4, during the German Occupation. Valtinos' novel consists of a synthesis of childhood memories and co-villagers' narratives in what appears to be an arbitrary selection of documents from 'the working archive of an oral historian'.<sup>17</sup> In many ways Valtinos' ethnographic fieldwork was aligned with the 'social turn' of civil

13 Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

14 Cf. 'younger authors start approaching the civil war [...] as objectified history': V. Chatzivassileiou, 'Ο Εμφύλιος στοιχειώνει το μυθιστόρημα', *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 30 October 2010; more in V. Chatzivassileiou, *Η κίνηση του εκκρεμούς: Ατομο και κοινωνία στη νεότερη ελληνική πεζογραφία: 1974–2017* (Athens 2018) 751–806.

15 For example, O. Sella, 'Η πρόσφατη Ιστορία αγγίζει ξανά την πεζογραφία', *Καθημερινή*, 17 November 2012; E. Kotzia, 'Διακρίνοντας', *Καθημερινή*, 13 December 2009; and M. Droumbouki, 'Τι ψάχνει η σύγχρονη λογοτεχνία στην ιστορία;', *Ενθέματα*, 28 July 2013.

16 Chatzivassileiou, *Η κίνηση του εκκρεμούς*, 751.

17 P. Papailias, 'Reading (civil) war, the historical novel, and the left', in *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece* (New York 2005) 140.

war historiography in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Rather than claiming that memory and transmitted knowledge have truth-bearing qualities, *Ορθοκωστιά* brought attention to them as discursive constructs.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, by ‘giving voice to the Right’,<sup>20</sup> Valtinos challenged the authority of Left-wingers as the mainstream testimonial subjects, providing for a more inclusive ethics of memory of the 1940s, yet also provoking strong reactions. As I will go on to show, Valtinos’ techniques—the preoccupation with the legacies of political violence, the representation of ‘forgotten’ subjects, and archival poetics (involving some sort of investigation)—fundamentally influenced the new generations of writers.

*Ορθοκωστιά* came to be intimately linked with the so-called ‘historiographical debate’ of the mid-2000s, which brings me to my second point, the profusion of civil war remembrance in scholarly debates and public fora. A Greek version of the *Historikerstreit*, the historiographical debate unfolded in the newspaper *Ta Néa* in 2004 and its polemics are better understood in the context of the memory politics that preceded it.<sup>21</sup> The divisive legacies of the 1940s were buried thrice under the politics of consensus and national reconciliation (in 1974 by New Democracy; in 1982 by PASOK; and in 1989 by the coalition government).<sup>22</sup> Since the 1990s and the withdrawal of political and institutional actors from civil war debates, historians and intellectual elites have sought, in fairly controversial ways, to undo the *Metapolitefsi*’s reparation policies which were based on silence.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, *The Greek Historikerstreit* made the civil war more public, more relevant, and more contested than before. At the same time, it carved out a space for the public representation of the defeated and the winners, albeit in an irreconcilable manner.

In light of the above, the 2000s saw the development of a prolific memory industry commodifying the civil war, in which the Greek book industry all too eagerly joined. Here, the example of Spain, where a similar trend developed earlier on, is instructive. Between 1989 and 2011, 181 novels using the Spanish civil war as their subject-matter

18 V. Calotychos, ‘Writing wrongs, (re)writing (hi)story? “Orthotita” and “ortho-graphia” in Thanassis Valtinos’s *Orthokosta*’, *Gamma: Journal of Theory and Criticism* 8 (2000) 151–67.

19 Papailias, ‘Reading (civil) war’, 150.

20 T. Politi, ‘Το βουβό πρόσωπο της ιστορίας: *Ορθοκωστιά*’, in *Συνομιλώντας με τα κείμενα* (Athens 1996) 229–45.

21 S. Kalyvas and N. Marantzidis, ‘Νέες τάσεις στη μελέτη του εμφύλιου’, *Ta Néa*, 20 March 2004. Self-defined as ‘New Wave’ (or New Historiography), the two scholars’ ten-point revisionist manifesto promised to bring about a paradigm shift in *Metapolitefsi* historiography of the civil war and liberate it from the chains of the ‘ideological hegemony of the Left’. The ‘New Wave’ approach can be found also in S. Kalyvas, ‘Εμφύλιος πόλεμος (1943–1949): το τέλος των μύθων και η στροφή προς το μαζικό επίπεδο’, *Επιστήμη και Κοινωνία* 11 (2003) 37–70.

22 P. Siani-Davies and S. Katsikas, ‘National reconciliation after civil war: the case of Greece’, *Journal of Peace Research* 46, 4 (2009) 559–75.

23 For a thorough presentation of Greek historiographic trends and public memory of the 1940s, including an extensive list of bibliographic references, see P. Voglis and I. Nioutsikos, ‘The Greek historiography of the 1940s: a reassessment’, *Südosteuropa* 65.2 (January 2017) 316–33.

were published in Spain. A considerable number of these were translated into English, went through different editions, and were adapted into film.<sup>24</sup> David Becerra Mayor observes that, although these novels were branded as novels of ‘historical memory’ (this term is used in Spain to refer to the memory of the Republic and Francoist repression), in many of them the Spanish civil war operates solely as an aesthetic backdrop. The Spanish case suggests that a literary trend may be a plausible explanation, *mutatis mutandis*, for the popularity and marketing of Greek civil war literature between the years 2000 and 2015. After the steep decline in publications about the civil war during 1974 and 1999, a large number of novels about the civil war were commercially successful, by Greek standards, although inaudible and inaccessible to non-Greek audiences.<sup>25</sup> What I’m suggesting here is a kind of civil war fatigue captured in the author Christos Asteriou’s 2019 interview characteristically entitled ‘I am not interested in writing about the civil war’.<sup>26</sup>

Although domestic public debates go some way towards explaining the recent rise in novels related to the civil war, it is my intention to show that Greek novels should be contextualized within the ‘emergence of memory as a key cultural and political concern in Western societies’ since the 1980s.<sup>27</sup> In particular, they are a belated response to the (trans)national literature concerned with the impact of traumatic historical events on the next generations.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most tangible difference between contemporary Greek civil war novels and Valtinos’ narrative is that they elide representation of the past in favour of representing its residue in the present. To address the ways in which second-generation novels deal with civil war suffering, I borrow Marianne Hirsch’s concept of ‘postmemory’. Hirsch is preoccupied with the ethics and aesthetics of the artistic production of the descendants of Holocaust survivors. In her most recent elaboration of the concept, she explains:

‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to the experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and

24 Becerra Mayor, *La Guerra Civil*, 191.

25 For example, Nikos Davvetas’ novel *Η Εβραία νόφη* (2009) has been reprinted three times to date (in 2014 and 2019). Thanassis Valtinos’ *Ορθοκωστά* (1994) has seen three re-editions (in 2000 and 2004), and in 2016 it was published in English translation by Jane Assimakopoulos and Stavros Deligiorgis with an instructive foreword by Stathis Kalyvas. Finally, Kalyvas’ and Marantzidis’ lay history book *Εμφύλια πάθη* (2015) became one of the best-selling historical books of the last decades (more than 25,000 copies sold to date).

26 Ch. Asteriou, ‘Δεν με ενδιαφέρει να γράψω για τον εμφύλιο’, interview in *Το Βήμα*, 24 February 2019.

27 A. Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford 2003) 11.

28 On literary and artistic works by the descendants of the Holocaust see M. Grimwood, *Holocaust Literature of the Second Generation* (New York 2007); also Hirsch, *The Generation*. For the intergenerational memory of Nazism, see C. Schaumann, *Memory Matters. Generational Responses to Germany’s Nazi Past in Recent Women’s Literature* (Berlin and New York 2008); on second-generation fiction of the Spanish civil war, see Ofelia Ferrán, *Working through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg 2007). The above is an indicative list and is not exhaustive.

behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation.<sup>29</sup>

There are three angles of Hirsch's theoretical framework that are relevant to my argument. First, postmemory is a 'structure of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge' to subsequent generations that yearn to reconnect with events that preceded their birth.<sup>30</sup> Although Hirsch is careful not to brand postmemory as traumatic or a real memory, but as a generational structure of remembrance, the use of words such as 'witness[ing] by adoption' and 'identification'<sup>31</sup> has raised various criticisms on the ethics of the transference of testimonial authority from the survivors to their descendants.<sup>32</sup> Secondly, postmemory entwines inter-generational (familial) and trans-generational (cultural and societal) transmission, and therefore the past becomes available to subsequent generations through acts of projection, empathy, and affiliation. Thirdly, a less discussed take on postmemory concerns its ethical relation to the oppressed or persecuted, as 'a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress'.<sup>33</sup> From this viewpoint, postmemory becomes a valuable tool for critical readings of second-generation civil war texts, not as appropriations of traumatic experiences, but as more or less productive projects of uncovering and representing formerly silenced histories so as to do justice to the ghosts of history.

There are numerous, almost archetypical, thematic characteristics in contemporary Greek civil war narratives that resonate with Hirsch's theory and can be boiled down to the following template.<sup>34</sup> Mostly male characters with no direct experience of civil strife engage in relentless archival searches in response to family secrets and a sense of unsettledness triggered by an undetermined responsibility for past suffering. The bulk

29 Hirsch, *The Generation*, 5; italics in original.

30 *Op. cit.*; italics in original.

31 *Op. cit.*, 97.

32 For example, R. Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering postmemory: photography, the archive, and post-Holocaust memory in W. G. Sebald's Austerlitz', *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 37.4 (December 2004) 215–36; J. J. Long, 'Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*: photography, narrative, and the claims of post-memory', in A. Fuchs, M. Cosgrove, G. Grote (eds), *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester 2006) 147–65.

33 Hirsch, *The Generation*, 16.

34 For uses of postmemory in studies of novels of the Greek civil war see A. Anastasiadis, 'Transgenerational communication of traumatic experiences. Narrating the past from a postmemorial position', *Journal of Literary Theory*, 6.1 (2012); G. Gotsi, 'Το «τέρας» του οικείου παρελθόντος: ιστορία, τραύμα και μεταμνήμη στην *Εβραία νόφη*', *Νέα Εστία* 1842 (March 2011) 451–78; G. Van Steen, 'Of pretense and preservation of the self: theater, trauma, and (post)memory in *The Mother of the Dog* by Pavlos Matesis', *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 34 (2019) 86–106.

of these characters practise professions that provide for the formulation of different forms of inquiries (i.e. investigative journalists, students or researchers) without, however, adopting the authoritative agenda of the historian. The construction of characters as researchers echoes the generational position of authors with no experiential connection to the civil war.<sup>35</sup> For them, archival investigation is a conscious effort to offer correctives and to complement the silences of historical records.<sup>36</sup>

The analyses of the novels by Thomas Skassis, Nikos Davvetas and Sophia Nikolaidou serve to illustrate that the characters' postmemorial practices are propped up by archival searches, ultimately laying bare the descendants' urgency to mourn personal and collective losses, despite their inability to get to the bottom of a difficult past. I choose to discuss these three novels as they negotiate different forms of postmemory (familial postmemory in Skassis versus cultural transmission in Davvetas and Nikolaidou) and stretch evenly across the temporal spectrum of the civil war novels' circulation since 2000.

### What did *you* do in the civil war, Daddy? *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο*

The convoluted plot of *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* by Thomas Skassis (b. 1953) revolves around the ways in which familial memory is passed on to the next generation through cultural and archival refractions—a narrative trope that gains traction in novels published later in the 2000s. The protagonist's paternal quest lends a threefold structure to the novel, focusing attention not only on the workings of postmemory but also on the artificiality of the narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Part 1, entitled 'Across', broaches the character's 'archival impulse'.<sup>38</sup> It tells the story of Sotiris Sotiriou, an investigative journalist, whose life is turned upside down after he attends an academic conference on the intersections between history and fiction<sup>39</sup> and decides to search for the 'generation of the father'.<sup>40</sup> Part 2, entitled 'Down', records the outcomes of his painstaking research: a two-hundred-page torrent of historical entries and place-names gleaned from official archives. Part 3, entitled 'The Arsenal of the solver', comprises a wide range of private and official documents from Sotiris' family archive ranging from newspaper clippings and official reports to oral interviews with civil war survivors and excerpts from the narrator's diary. The

35 S. Nikolaidou, interview with the author, 13 December 2018. N. Davvetas, interview with the author, 23 December 2018.

36 On postmemory's 'archival turn', see Hirsch, *The Generation*, 227–49.

37 See V. Chatzivassileiou, 'Λογοτεχνικό σταυρόλεξο', *Ελευθεροτυπία*, 15 October 2000, 24.

38 H. Foster, 'An archival impulse', *October* 110 (Fall 2004) 3–22.

39 Here Skassis blurs the dividing line between fact and fiction, referring to the actual symposium 'Ιστορική πραγματικότητα και νεοελληνική πεζογραφία (1945–1995)' held at the Moraitis School, Athens, 7–8 April 1995.

40 T. Skassis, *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* (Athens 2000) 68.



fact that the muddled solution to his memory riddle comes from private archives suggests the pivotal role of familial postmemory in the text.<sup>41</sup>

Although the self-reflexivity and impenetrable archival accumulation in *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* has stirred scholarly interpretations of the novel as metafiction,<sup>42</sup> my approach here differs significantly. I want to reclaim the ethics of (post)memory in the protagonist's practices of assemblage, selection, and arrangement of archival material, in agreement with Hirsch's remark that postmemorial work relies on the archive to 'reclaim historical specificity and context, rather than jettisoning these in a familiar postmodern move'.<sup>43</sup> In this light, what on the surface appears as a labyrinthine archive acquires more concrete meaning through the protagonist's effort to reunite with his deceased father and, in so doing, to uncover stories of injustice covered under a thick veil of oblivion.

One has to reach the final pages of *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* to fully grasp the workings of postmemory in the novel, captured in the following lines:

He wanted to see the invisible father, so he sought History. He wanted to know the story, so he looked for the truth. He wanted to find the truth, so he strove to excavate memory from the well of oblivion. But the quest for old memory for whomever did not live, did not see, did not hear, is only the quest for language: the *language* of the father. And this language was the *same* as his: the same words, but with a different meaning. [my emphasis]<sup>44</sup>

As this quotation suggests, the narrator's urge to compensate for paternal loss takes the form of an arduous process of narrative reconstruction of the familial past ('quest for language'). Sotiris seeks to 'know' and establish affective connections with the 'invisible' father, as a result of growing up with two aunts, whose apprehension about passing on dangerous memories prevented them from talking about him.<sup>45</sup> In an important sense, the protagonist's amnesia of his childhood, his father, and pre-dictatorship Greece hints at the *Metapolitefsi's* politics of silencing the thorny aspects of recent history.

41 For a detailed analysis of the paratextual documentation in the novel, see K. Danopoulos, 'Παραθεματικές τεχνικές στο μυθιστόρημα: το *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* του Θωμά Σκάσση', in *Η νεωτερικότητα στη νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία και κριτική του 19ου και του 20ού αιώνα. Πρακτικά της 18<sup>ης</sup> Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης του Τομέα Μεσαιωνικών και Νέων Ελληνικών Σπουδών αφιερωμένης στη μνήμη της Σοφίας Σκοπετέα* (Thessaloniki 2010) 685–701.

42 Cf. K. G. Papageorgiou, 'Πίσω από τη βιτρίνα της ιστορίας' *Ελευθεροτυπία*, Βιβλιοθήκη, 21 July 2000, 4; A. Sainis, 'Θωμάς Σκάσσης, *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο*', in G. Aristinos (ed.), *Νάρκισσος και Ιανός: η νεωτερική πεζογραφία στην Ελλάδα* (Athens 2007) 507–11; Danopoulos, 'Παραθεματικές τεχνικές'.

43 Hirsch, *The Generation*, 228.

44 Skassis, *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο*, 548.

45 Only passing references are made to Sotiris' mother Vassiliki, (including the interpolation of one letter of hers to Sotiris' father). Her motives for relinquishing her child remain obscure but seem somehow related to the difficulties posed by her gender and class to lone parenthood.

It is only after high school final exams that one of his aunts hands Sotiris a sealed folder with scant information about his father and very few of his belongings. At the time, he buries the folder in a chest of drawers, as he is reluctant to disclose family secrets or ask questions that would, presumably, not be answered in the oblivious post-dictatorial years. As noted earlier, it is not until his thirties that language evocative of the father awakens the dormant urge to look backwards. The narrator works meticulously as an archivist to categorize his father's papers so to make sense of his life-history. What can be gauged from the fragmented archival evidence and conflicting family stories is that his father fought with the Democratic Army and was subsequently imprisoned for political dissidence. He bought his release from prison with the help of his partner's Right-wing father in exchange for his 'disappearance' in socialist Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, postmemorial work can only partly recuperate the narrator's absent memory, as the family archive is mediated not only by family silences but also by cultural forgetting. Sotiris' diary entries describe postmemorial work as 'this seemingly incoherent interchange of primary memory images, which have been forged by the senses, and of transmitted ones, which have been entrusted by narratives' and clarifies that 'everything revolved around the same centre: [...] the quest for the father's history'.<sup>46</sup> This passage draws attention to postmemorial dynamics as the connecting thread of the 'seemingly incoherent' material in *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο*. Likewise, by the end of his archival search, Sotiris' recognizes that 'the shadow of the father had now formed a silhouette. He could feel it next to him, around him, everywhere and nowhere – like homeland'.<sup>47</sup> The father's omnipresence, spectral yet homely, brings home the emotionally powerful but also elusive connection between ancestors and descendants.

With this in mind, I want to establish *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο* as part of a genealogy of civil war novels that, inspired by Valtinos' archival poetics, digs up forgotten histories. Fairly early in the novel, Sotiris defends Skassis' literary agenda, noting that adhering to novelistic conventions would only lead him

to stitch together fragments of a story already written with all its bells and whistles by some and with a mournful march and whispering bitterness by others, and, in this way, to rehearse the ideology embedded in the standpoint of each writer. [...] the attribution of a great many events to the protagonists who, as it is said, 'marked' them [...] ignored the faceless majority of those who were taken by the winds but survived by preserving or relinquishing material goods, human relationships, faith and dignity.<sup>48</sup>

46 Skassis, *Ελληνικό σταυρόλεξο*, 490.

47 *Op. cit.*, 525.

48 *Op. cit.*, 106.

Here, Skassis' departure from traditional metanarratives of the 1940s that legitimize the views of the 'winners' or the 'vanquished' is grounded in his concern to represent the morally ambiguous 'faceless majority'. Near the end of the novel, Sotiris is faced with an attempt to blackmail him into stopping his journalistic investigation with the documentary evidence that his father was a repentee (δηλωσίας)<sup>49</sup> and a police informant. Sotiris has a hard time stomaching this unexpected news, yet readers are kept in the dark regarding his next steps; they only learn about his death in a fatal motorcycle accident, an open ending that leaves many questions unanswered. If anything, Sotiris' father's morally questionable identity has important implications for second-generation fiction's engagement with non-normative Left-wing subjects, the descendants' guilt for their ancestors' wrongs, and the mediation of postmemory through archival silences and omissions.

### On the battlefield of memory: *Λευκή πετσέτα στο ρινγκ*

A different angle of postmemorial work unfolds in *Λευκή πετσέτα στο ρινγκ* by Nikos Davvetas (b. 1960), the second part of his trilogy, that began with *Το θήραμα* (2004) and concluded with *Η Εβραία νόφη* (2009).<sup>50</sup> In all three novels, Davvetas concerns himself with second-generation male protagonists with dysfunctional familial relationships and fragile health. Their dives into the cultural archive reveal family secrets that force them to confront the impact of the 1940s on their personal histories.

*Λευκή πετσέτα* deals with the resonance of Left-wing violence in the life of an unnamed middle-aged journalist who prepares a tribute article for the fifty-fifth anniversary of the December 1944 Events (*Δεκεμβριανά*).<sup>51</sup> The narrator's research brings him to the Left-wing neighbourhood in Athens where he was brought up, and where Communist hardliners murdered two dissenting leftists of Asia Minor descent: a Trotskyist intellectual and a reputedly homosexual humanist doctor.<sup>52</sup> The narrator

49 The declaration of repentance [δήλωση μετανοίας] was used extensively from the Metaxas Dictatorship (1936–41) through the post-civil war period to force (real or suspected) Communists to recant their political views and the Communist Party. See P. Voglis, *Becoming a Subject: Political Prisoners During the Greek Civil War* (New York and Oxford 2002) 74–90.

50 N. Davvetas, *Το θήραμα* (Athens 2004); N. Davvetas, *Η Εβραία νόφη* (Athens 2009). *Η Εβραία νόφη* was awarded the 2010 Kostas and Eleni Ourani Prize by the Academy of Athens.

51 The term 'December Events' (December 1944–January 1945) refers to the outbreak of hostilities in Athens, following political disagreement over the demobilization of the guerrilla armies after Greece's liberation. The EAM-led demonstration of 3 December 1944 was fired on by the British-backed police, thus escalating into a bloody thirty-three-day confrontation known as the 'Battle of Athens' between ELAS combatants and a coalition of pro-government and British troops. See L. Baerentzen, 'The demonstration in Syntagma Square on Sunday the 3rd of December 1944', *Scandinavian Studies in Modern Greek* 2 (1978) 3–52; R. Clogg, *A Concise History*, 133–4.

52 On the background of the December Events in *Λευκή πετσέτα*, see D. Kourtovik, 'Το φάντασμα του Δεκέμβρη', *Τα Νέα*, 17 February 2007.

tapes thirteen eyewitness testimonies so as to elucidate the conditions of the murders, yet the deeper he delves into the case, the more impenetrable the past becomes, as his informants' guilty silence conceals key facts about the crime. Ultimately, a plot twist unveils the narrator's intimate connection to ostensibly distant wrongdoings and serves to destabilize the rigid categories of victim, perpetrator, and bystander. These points are inextricably linked and frame the remainder of this section.

The unnamed narrator undertakes this investigative project out of curiosity, galvanized by his informants' conflicting testimonies and the urgency to do justice to the two unknown victims of the December bloodshed. The memories of Resistance veterans pivot on the uniform narrative of martyrdom and heroic sacrifice and conceal unlawful or shameful acts of internecine violence. Some of them are presented as having used their anti-fascist credentials for political purposes during the *Metapolitefsi*, in line with the political culture that favoured the remembrance of a unified Resistance past.<sup>53</sup> Inspired by childhood memories and family stories,<sup>54</sup> Davvetas' novels create cracks in the shaky ground of the master narrative of the Resistance. In an important sense, *Λευκή πετσέτα* echoes revisionist historiography, insofar as it interrogates the ideological underpinnings of Left-wing violence and proposes that pre-existing enmities and personal interests also led to extreme atrocities. This becomes palpable in the editor-in-chief's words that '[a]s fights rage for the takeover of power, some decide to settle personal differences and kill those acquaintances whom they don't like [...] [i]n this confrontation ideology plays the least important role'.<sup>55</sup> I do not suggest that Davvetas co-opts historiographic agendas. Rather, he addresses the conditions that generated brutal ELAS violence and explores the plethora of positions that Left-wingers occupied in this spectrum of aggression, domination, and injustice.

The difficulty of making judgments about each side's political responsibility during the December Uprising is made palpable by the narrator's inability to reconstruct the past.<sup>56</sup> In his own words, 'I couldn't see any mural, just faded colours on the back of collapsed plaster, bullet holes, pieces of dried mud. How would all these form faces and facts?'<sup>57</sup> These words resound with Aris Alexandrou's novel *Το κιβώτιο* (1975), wherein the symbolic imagery of the unfinished jigsaw puzzle expresses the fragmentation of memory, the unreliability of archival material, and the inability to

53 See A. Liakos, 'Αντάρτες και συμμορίτες στα ακαδημαϊκά αμφιθέατρα' in H. Fleischer (ed.), *Η Ελλάδα '36–49. Από τη Δικτατορία στον Εμφύλιο. Τομές και συνέχειες* (Athens 2003) 28–9.

54 N. Davvetas, interview with the author, 23 December 2018.

55 N. Davvetas, *Λευκή πετσέτα στο ρινγκ* (Athens 2006) 82–3.

56 A careful reading of *Λευκή πετσέτα* as historiographic metafiction is offered in K. Jentsch-Mancor, 'Historiographic metafiction, historical culture and social memory in three novels by Matessis (1990), Davvetas (2006) and Fais (2010)', in A. Anastasiadis and U. Moennig (eds), *Trauma und Erinnerung. Narrative Versionen zum Bürgerkrieg in Griechenland* (Cologne 2018) 129–50.

57 Davvetas, *Λευκή πετσέτα*, 75.

acknowledge responsibility for past wrongs.<sup>58</sup> The suspense (and frustration) which build up as the protagonist dives deeper into the historical archive and tracks down several eyewitnesses to the murder (or their descendants) questions the purposes and significance of his belated investigation and knowledge production. As the narrator puts it close to the end of the novel, '[w]hat do I, ultimately, aim to achieve with this research? To do justice fifty-five years on? Is anyone interested in such a prospect nowadays? And who is so incorruptible [...] as to do it?'.<sup>59</sup> This passage raises important implications about the ways in which the second generation reckons with a difficult past and redresses historical injustices. It finds parallels in the literary treatment of inherited guilt by Skassis and Nikolaidou.

The meaning of the above questions is further clarified in the closure of the novel, in which the narrator's inherited implication comes into play. In an unsettling interview with his father-in-law, it transpires that the narrator's mother was tangentially involved in the Trotskyist's murder. Overwhelmed by this discovery, the protagonist immediately drops the investigation and the desire to write about the December Events, claiming that 'I did not care, after all, to find out who pulled the strings in this messy tangle of executions. I could not afford any more losses'.<sup>60</sup> This plot twist is crucial to the purposes of this section. The narrator's mother's involvement in the murder underscores that in civil strife, all subjects are implicated in and inhabit different locations of aggression, although they might not directly exert violence over each other.<sup>61</sup> From this viewpoint, *Λευκή πετσέτα*'s dramatization of a Left-wing woman's involvement in civil war violence converses with Alexandros Kotzias' novella *Ιαγούάρος*.<sup>62</sup> Unlike Kotzias' portrayal of the first-generation's gendered experience of the 1940s through the self-victimizing discourse of a Communist hardliner (Dimitra), Davvetas centres on the inheritance of responsibility by the descendants.

I do not agree with Kerstin Jentsch-Mancor that halting memory and archival research points to the narrator's refusal to 'face the darker aspects of the past of his own family history'.<sup>63</sup> It is true that Davvetas' protagonist does not confront his mother. The preservation of uncomfortable family silences seems to gesture to his recognition that some secrets of the 1940s cannot be understood by the descendants.

58 Cf. Aris Alexandrou's oft-quoted phrase 'but now [...] I've only got bits and pieces, the smashed fragments of the war, of the occupation, of the civil war, and above all, I haven't got an image before me which I must match...' A. Alexandrou, *Mission Box*, trans. R. Crist (Athens 1996) 179–80.

59 Davvetas, *Λευκή πετσέτα*, 175.

60 *Op. cit.*, 187.

61 My thoughts on implication are inspired by M. Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford 2019).

62 It is worth noting that the title of *Το θήραμα* (*The Prey*) gestures to and reverses Kotzias' allegorical title *Ιαγούάρος*. Kotzias' title equates the notoriously opportunistic predator (*Jaguar*) with the ruthlessly manipulative Dimitra. On Davvetas' literary indebtedness to Kotzias see G. Paganos, 'Νίκος Δαββέτας: η τριλογία του και η "προβληματική" Εβραία νύφη', *Εντευκτήριο* 89 (April–June 2010) 139–40.

63 Jentsch-Mancor, 'Historiographic metafiction', 44.

However, dropping his journalistic project is not proof of moral evasion but a refusal to deliver to the readers a definite verdict of guilt or acquittal. This moral stance stems from two intricately linked factors analysed in this section: on the one hand, the fact that the survivors' testimonies reveal different shades of culpability; on the other, the painful knowledge of maternal complicity and, concomitantly, his own links with past violence and suffering.

### The Polk connection: *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες*

In the last part of my argument, I will discuss *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* by Sophia Nikolaidou (b. 1968). The novel offers a reflection on uncomfortable historical events that linger on in the next generations.<sup>64</sup> *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* (2012) is the second part of a trilogy that consists of *Απόψε δεν έχουμε φίλους* (2010; awarded the Athens Prize for Literature in 2011) and *Στο τέλος νικάω εγώ* (2017). The novels are concerned with the imprint of divisive pasts—collaborationism during the Axis Occupation,<sup>65</sup> the Greek civil war, and the National Schism (Εθνικός Διχασμός)<sup>66</sup> respectively—on the lives of recurring characters inhabiting late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Thessaloniki.<sup>67</sup>

*Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* follows the story of a high-school student, Minas, whose teenage rebellion kicks off with his refusal to sit the Greek university entrance exams. Instead, he takes a term essay in history, under the supervision of the old-fashioned teacher Soukiouoglou (referred to by his nickname, Souk). An ordinary assignment develops into a full-on investigation of an unsolved case of the 1940s: the notorious assassination of the American journalist George Polk in May 1948. As John Iatrides notes in a recent article, 'Polk's reporting on developments in Greece was highly critical of the Greek authorities, whom he regarded as incompetent and corrupt, and of the U.S. government for supporting a repressive regime'.<sup>68</sup> The absence of 'hard facts' and the country's heavy reliance on U.S. military and humanitarian aid led to the arrest and false conviction of the journalist Grigoris Staktopoulos.

64 The novel has been published in English translation: S. Nikolaidou, *The Scapegoat*, trans. K. Emmerich (Brooklyn and London 2015). The English title of the novel, however, does not quite carry the same connotations about sovereign power and the oppressed as the Greek title, which makes a play on Minas' father's favourite saying: 'when elephants dance, the ants always pay the price'.

65 The triple Axis occupation of Greece began in April 1941, after the end of the Greco-Italian War (1940–1). Greece was divided into three occupation zones: Italian (1941–3), German (1941–4), and Bulgarian (1941–4).

66 The National Schism (Εθνικός Διχασμός) arose over two interrelated questions: whether Greece should enter the First World War and on whose side it should do so. Greece was divided into two rival camps, the Venizelists, who supported Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos and the anti-Venizelists, who supported King Constantine I. See Clogg, 73–93.

67 S. Nikolaidou, *Απόψε δεν έχουμε φίλους* (Athens 2010); S. Nikolaidou, *Στο τέλος νικάω εγώ* (Athens 2017).

68 J. O. Iatrides, 'Assassination and judicial misconduct in Cold War Greece: The Polk/Staktopoulos case in retrospect', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 20, 4 (2018) 124. Cf. also the study by E. Keeley, *The Salonika Bay Murder: Cold War Politics and the Polk Affair* (Princeton 1990).

In *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες*, Polk is referred to as Jack Talas and Staktopoulos as Manolis Gris. The ‘Gris case’ unfolds through a miscellany of key testimonies: the members of Gris’ family, the corrupt Thessaloniki Chief of Police, and a U.S. Foreign Office investigator. In an interview, Nikolaidou notes:

I was really interested in putting together two different ages of Modern Greek history. I wanted to capture the historical adventure of my country. Some things change, because circumstances around us have changed as well. Other things remain hidden and unpunished – they poison everything. Some are carried from one generation to the next. We think that we have left our past behind. *Alas, we always find it ahead.* [my emphasis]<sup>69</sup>

Taking my cue from Nikolaidou’s words, I read Minas’ confrontation with his ancestors’ collective responsibility and the exclusionary logics of the archive as a tale of the commitment on the part of the next generations (the grandchildren in particular) to repair historical injustice and social forgetting. His postmemorial work involves intellectual labour together with acts of imagination and affiliation with the past.

Similarly to Davvetas’ unnamed protagonist, Minas’ research does not seek to unmask the perpetrator behind this blurry episode of the civil war. Instead, Minas’ historical research is an exercise in the recognition of ‘the multiple versions of reality’.<sup>70</sup> According to one of his informants, absolute knowledge of the past is prejudiced by the function of historical archives as sites of loss, destruction, and deliberate fabrication:

Reality is the ultimate construction—just ask the lawyers and journalists, whose careers rest on that construction. Other people have trouble understanding that [...] The dictatorship of the truth. The tyranny of good intentions. There’s nothing more dangerous for a family or a country. Historians show up after the fact. They rummage through the locked drawers, discover forgotten papers, conduct their research, pass judgement. [...] It would surprise you how easily a piece of evidence can disappear, a signature can be forgotten.<sup>71</sup>

Here, grandfather Dinopoulos, who acted as Gris’ lawyer in the 1940s, raises the issue of the politics of the archive, and, in particular, the vested interests of archive-makers (historians and journalists) in authenticating specific (hi)stories and erasing others. Gris’ unfair trial and elimination from Greek collective memory expose to the young

69 ‘Reading Greece: Sophia Nikolaidou on the representation of Greece’s political past in contemporary literature, the prospects of the Greek educational system and literature as a human learning experience’, *Greek News Agenda* (6 September 2016) < <http://www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/interviews/reading-greece/6116-reading-greece-sophia-nikolaidou-on-the-representation-of-greece-s-political-past-in-contemporary-literature,-the-prospects-of-the-greek-educational-system-and-literature-as-a-human-learning-experience> > [accessed 3 January 2019].

70 Nikolaidou, *The Scapegoat*, 127.

71 *Op. cit.*, 208.

Minas the sordid underbelly of official archives as sources of professional opportunism and political authority. It is because of this acknowledgement that the next generation's sense of responsibility towards the preservation of the cultural memory of the 1940s emerges so powerfully.

What ethics of remembrance does *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* subscribe to? The novel is brought to an end with a number of counterfactual speculations about 'all that might have been, if Greece were a country where silence was not hereditary, like genetic material'.<sup>72</sup> The point I want to make here is that Minas' investigative (post)memorial work is illustrative of the new generation's need to break with its ancestors' silence and fear. For example, Minas' father made considerable progress with his journalistic investigation of the Gris case during the *Metapolitefsi*. However, his mentor at the newspaper, a networker with important political ties, urged him to halt the investigation, as '*resolving that case wasn't among the newspaper's immediate priorities, much less those of the country*'.<sup>73</sup> Minas' father agreed to bury his personal archive and this decision granted him a promotion the following year.

In this sense, Minas' father's hand-over of the sealed cardboard boxes of archive material to his son is a legacy of shamefully buried memories that summons the third generation to publicly represent historical wrongs.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Minas' presentation of his findings departs from the language of martyrdom or demonization that constructs innocent victims or evil perpetrators and concludes that:

the situation was created by friends and enemies both. Right or wrong, the result is the same: an innocent man went to jail. Case closed. [...] Minas had come to realize that justice is an abstract concept. Perfect on paper. But in practice, riddled with qualifications, asterisks, interpretations, clashes of opinion.<sup>75</sup>

For Minas, the just remembrance of Gris' unjust conviction amounts to making known the numerous alternative scenarios that 'might have been', to borrow Nikolaidou's words cited earlier in this section. Minas seeks to reveal the multiplicity of individuals, practices, and personal interests that converged to render Gris a victim of whitewash and enduring injustice.

Ultimately, Nikolaidou demonstrates how the inheritance of histories of violence and injustice is refracted through the horizons of socio-political havoc.<sup>76</sup> Specifically, she uses the memories of Greece's subjugation to global financial and political powers (such as U.S. Foreign Aid) during the civil war as uncomfortable reverberations of the

72 *Op. cit.*, 236.

73 *Op. cit.*, 214; italics in original.

74 On the ethico-political significance of this novel, see K. Schina, 'H Ελλάδα και η σιωπή', *the books' journal* 27 (January 2013) 71.

75 Nikolaidou, *The Scapegoat*, 203.

76 Nikolaidou is aligned with a group of writers who recognize a stable ground of violence, political injustice, and oppression between the 1940s and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century financial crisis. To mention but a few, V. Raptopoulos, *Η πιο κρυφή πληγή* (Athens 2012); E. Chouzouri, *Δνο φορές αθώα* (Athens 2013); M. Douka, *Έλα να πούμε γέματα* (Athens 2014); D. Fyssas, *Η Νιλουφέρ στα χρόνια της κρίσης* (Athens 2015).



neo-colonial and protectionist narratives that served to legitimize the implementation of austerity measures during the Greek crisis.<sup>77</sup> The narrative flashbacks between past (1948) and present (2010–11) enable Minas' belated affiliation with the unjustly convicted man, while Gris is re-imagined as the objectified alter-ego of Greek society in the wake of the crisis.<sup>78</sup> Seen from this angle, Minas' initial disgust at the Greek educational system and his opposition to the formalization of history-learning through standardized testing strike home how the new generation seeks to form living, intimate connections with the past. As I have shown, Minas' postmemorial work challenges the idea of history as universal knowledge and reclaims the affective attachments and plural postmemories through which later generations reckon with past wrongs.

## Conclusion

My reading of these three novels by Skassis, Davvetas, and Nikolaidou has focused on the transmitted knowledge of the civil war to the subsequent generations and, in so doing, has addressed the continued relevance and commodification of the civil conflict in the twentieth-first-century Greek memory industry. By steering clear of the concept of trauma, so intimately woven with critical discussions of postmemory, this article has approached contemporary Greek novelists as 'a generation of historical consciousness in society'<sup>79</sup> whose narrative choices are responsible for the recovery or exclusion of histories from the cultural archive.

I have sought to establish that in all three novels postmemorial practices drive the characters to relentless searches in private and official archives as a response to family secrets that 'have roots in the past and reverberations in the present'.<sup>80</sup> Family secrets are intimately linked with collective amnesias, much as personal unsettledness marks the reverberation of a violent past in the present. Skassis' text fictionalizes familial postmemory punctuated with archival fragments of public and historical narratives. In the novels by Davvetas and Nikolaidou, the characters affiliate with the victims of the civil war through eyewitness testimony and archival research; their family links to the 1940s surface later in the text. Additionally, I illustrated that postmemorial practices

77 A detailed discussion of the 'past presence' of the civil war in the Greek crisis cannot be addressed within the short confines of this article. For a discussion of *Χορεύουν οι ελέφαντες* as a 'crisis narrative', see G. Katsan, 'The anxieties of history: Greek fiction in crisis', in T. S. Willert and G. Katsan (eds), *Retelling the Past in Contemporary Greek Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (London 2018) 117–32.

78 It is instructive to note Nikolaidou's pun on the victim's name. Gris echoes Greece, implying that Greek people are also oppressed because of the crisis. Also, Gris (meaning grey) creates a pun with Staktopoulos, the first part of whose surname (στακτής) means 'ash grey'.

79 S. O'Donoghue, 'Postmemory as trauma? Some theoretical problems and their consequences for contemporary literary criticism', *Politika* (26 June 2018) par. 16. <<https://www.politika.io/en/notice/postmemory-as-trauma-some-theoretical-problems-and-their-consequences-for-contemporary>> [accessed 3 January 2019]

80 A. Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London and New York 2000) 5.

do not hinge upon definite closures or hasty moral judgments. Davvetas' and Nikolaidou's protagonists underscore the moral ambiguity of political violence. In all three novels, the characters acknowledge their failure to complete their investigative journey, because they are dependent on untrustworthy records and social forgetting. The characters' shared responsibility (and at times guilt) for past wrongdoings is illustrative of an ethical commitment to the past on the part of contemporary Greek writers—a timely response to a divisive war whose public memory has been so heavily burdened by polarized interpretations.

*Vassiliki Kaisidou is a PhD candidate in the Centre for Byzantine, Ottoman and Modern Greek Studies at the University of Birmingham. Her doctoral project explores how the Greek civil war of 1946 to 1949 is remembered and represented in autobiographical and fictional writings over three generations. She holds a BA (2015) in Greek Language and Literature from the University of Athens and an MA in Modern Greek from the University of Oxford (2016). Her research interests include modern Greek history and literature, Mediterranean studies and memory studies.*