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# Women and Femininity under the Metaxas Regime in Greece

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## Abstract

Authoritarian regimes place significant emphasis on gender roles as part of their ‘imagined communities’, where everyone has their place attributed through evocation of the nation’s ‘history’ and ‘mission’. By placing gender at the core of historical analysis, this article examines the antinomies related to the role of women, and the shifting perceptions of femininity, under the Metaxas regime. It examines the female branch of the National Youth Organisation (ΕΟΝ), a laboratory of a ‘new femininity’, analyses the regime’s discourses and idealised representations of femininity and masculinity, and offers critical exploration of affinities between the Metaxist understanding of womanhood and pre-existing aspects of Greek interwar feminism. The article interprets from these fields the oscillations and contradictions marking Metaxist ideology and practices via-à-vis the role of women, and in doing so sheds new light upon the character of the regime itself.

## Keywords

Greece – fascism – Metaxas regime (1936–1941) – women – femininity – masculinity – interwar period – feminism

On 4 August 1936, a new regime came into power in Greece by means of a military *coup-d'état* under the pretext of imminent communist danger and the generalised civil unrest. General Ioannis Metaxas, a marginal figure in politics who had taken his chances in the political arena beforehand with limited success,<sup>1</sup> imposed what many saw as a idiosyncratic regime that to a large extent followed a militaristic style and fascist rhetoric as well as many practices that were popularised and disseminated across Europe in the interwar years. The very nature of the regime raises many questions, such as: to what extent was this a 'real' fascist regime in comparison to Mussolini's Italy? How did it differ from the coterminous authoritarian regimes of Franco's in Spain and Salazar's in Portugal? And to what degree did it attempt and succeed to emulate the totalitarian character of Nazi Germany? Such questions have been long debated by the scholars of modern Greek history and students of the fascist phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> This is not the venue to discuss the theoretical and political features of fascism, its points of divergence and convergence with authoritarianism, or with totalitarianism for that matter. Suffice it to say that, as a starting point and despite local peculiarities, such as the

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- 1 In 1923 Ioannis Metaxas founded the party of *Eleftherofrones* [Free Thinkers], which had a fading trajectory in Greek elections, from 15,78% in 1926 to 3,90% in January 1936. A few months later, following the death of Prime Minister Konstantinos Demertzis in April 1936, Ioannis Metaxas was appointed vice-President of the government by King George II.
  - 2 Some of the classic studies on the phenomenon of the Metaxas regime, also known as the regime of the 4th of August, are the following: Y. Andrikopoulos, *The Origins of Greek Fascism: Politics and the Army* (Athens: Diogenis, 1977); A. Elefantis, *The Promise of the Impossible Revolution: The Greek Communist Party and the Bourgeoisie During the Interwar Years* (Athens: Themelio, 1999); Jon V. Kofas, *Authoritarianism in Greece: The Metaxas regime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); S. Linardatos, *The 4th of August* (Athens: Themelio, 1996); P. Noutsos, 'Ideological Components of the Regime of 4th of August,' in *Greece 1936–1941: Dictatorship, Occupation, Resistance* (Athens: Cultural Institute of the Agricole Bank of Greece, 1990), 59–69; N. Psyroukis, *Fascism and the 4th of August Regime* (Athens: Epikairota, 1977); K. Tsoukalas, *The Greek Tragedy* (Athens: Nea Synora, 1981). For a more contemporary approach, see Aristotle Kallis, 'Neither Fascist nor Authoritarian: The 4th of August Regime in Greece (1936–1941) and the Dynamics of Fascistisation in 1930s Europe,' *East Central Europe* 37, no. 2–3 (2010): 303–330; Aristotle A. Kallis, 'Fascism and Religion: The Metaxas Regime in Greece and the "Third Hellenic Civilisation": Some Theoretical Observations on "Fascism", "Political Religion" and "Clerical Fascism": *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (2007): 229–246; Manolis Koumas, *1936: Η επιβολή της δικτατορίας Μεταξά* [1936: The imposition of Metaxas's Dictatorship] (Athens: Metaixmio, 2022); Mogens Pelt, 'The Establishment and Development of the Metaxas Regime in the Context of Nazi Fascism, 1936–1941,' *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 2, no. 3 (2001): 143–172; George Souvlis, 'Towards an Anatomy of Metaxas's Fascist Experiment: Organic Intellectuals, Antiparliamentarian Discourse and Authoritarian State Building' (PhD diss., European University Institute, Florence, 2019).

role of the monarchy and the low degree of industrialisation in Greece at the time, the Metaxas regime attempted to impose a totalitarian notion of the state and society. Many of its institutional interventions, such as the National Youth Organisation (henceforth, ΕΟΝ) examined below, and the various corporatist groups and associations, were directly inspired by equivalent efforts in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. And as such, the Metaxas regime falls undoubtedly under the category of fascist regimes that plagued Europe in the interwar years.

Women's position under the authoritarian regimes of the interwar years, be they fascist or Nazi, and especially propaganda on the role of women, have also attracted much interest among historians.<sup>3</sup> This article hopes to contribute to this debate by focusing on the role of women and the perceptions of femininity constructed and propagated by the Metaxas regime. Yet the article does not only aim to examine 'women' as simply another aspect of the regime's history, or of fascism's history in general. The goal here has an epistemological aspira-

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3 See for instance, Gisela Bock, 'Le nazisme: Politiques sexuées et vies des femmes en Allemagne,' in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, volume 5: Le xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Françoise Thébaud (Paris: Plon, 1992), 143–167; Gisela Bock, 'Racisme, stérilisation obligatoire et maternité sous le national-socialisme,' in *Femmes et fascismes*, ed. Rita Thalmann (n.p.: Tierce, 1986), 99–113; Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984); Victoria De Grazia, 'Le patriarcat fasciste: Mussolini et les Italiennes 1922–1940,' in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, volume 5: Le xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Françoise Thébaud (Paris: Plon, 1992), 115–141; Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1992); D. Detragiache, 'De la "mama" à la "nouvelle italienne": La presse des femmes fascistes de 1930 à 1942,' in *Entre émancipation et nationalisme: La presse féminine d'Europe 1914–1945*, ed. Rita Thalmann (Paris: Deux Temps Tierce, 1990), 139–166; Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain's Fascist Movement 1923–1945* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000); A.M. Houbedine-Gravaux, 'L'esthétisation dans l' "art nazi": des femmes, des images, du langage,' in *Féminismes et nazismes*, ed. Liliane Kandel (Paris: Publications de Université Paris, 1997), 169–191; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987); Annette Kuhn and Valentine Rothe, eds., *Frauen im deutschen Faschismus: Eine Quellensammlung mit fachwissenschaftlichen und fachdidaktischen Kommentaren* (Düsseldorf: Schwann-Bagel, 1982); L. Lazzarini-Matteucci, 'La donna nel regime fascista,' in *IDue Ventenni*, ed. Giorgia Almirante (Roma: Centro Editoriale Nazionale, 1968), 244–263; Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *La donna 'nera': 'Consenso' femminile e fascismo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1997); P. Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare. Ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Rimini and Firenze: Guaraldi, 1975); Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (London: Routledge, 1975); Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London: Croom Helm; Totowa NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1981); Rita Thalmann, *Etre femme sous le III<sup>e</sup> Reich* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1982); Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Fascism in Italy: Its Development and Influence* (London [etc.]: McMillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1969).

tion: it aims to employ gender as constitutive of the very fabric of the regime and not merely as an 'addition' that sits next to the 'big issues' such as ideology, the economy, foreign policy, and so on. Employing gender in this way does not simply mean historians inserting discussion on women into accounts of the Metaxas regime but rather entails asking how society was organised and imagined around sexual difference in the sense of the totalitarian social imaginary put forward by fascist regimes of the interwar period. Gender is perceived as a 'useful category of historical analysis', as Joan W. Scott famously put it in her seminal article,<sup>4</sup> and as such it is a pertinent vehicle to investigate the contradictions of the regime, as well as the social ramifications related to its ideology and political practices. Following Scott, gender is viewed as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and a primary way of signifying relationships of power. To put it differently, gender is a key field within which, or by means of which, power is articulated. Hence, the analysis in this article does not to examine women as an 'added value' to other accounts of the regime and of the historical period it involved but uses gender as a critical category to examine the Metaxas regime and its impact on Greek society. Therefore, this article is aligned with the tradition of gender history in the sense of dissecting social and political constructions of gender and uses the analytical category as a heuristic to illuminate the structure, contours, ideology and social imaginary of the Metaxas regime as a representative case of historical fascism.

To do so, the article addresses the characteristics and significance of the EON, the regime's National Youth Organisation. In particular, it examines its female branch as the mechanism *par excellence* charged with the production and implementation of the regime's ideology expressing women's role in the new totalitarian 'imagined community' envisioned by Metaxas. Then it draws a portrait of the Metaxist 'new woman' while also juxtaposing the Metaxist constructs of masculinity and femininity via the categories of 'modernity' contrasted with 'tradition', an analytical binary which allows further clarification of the contradictions involved in these conceptualisations under the Metaxas regime. The article then turns to the origins of the contradictory ideology put forward by the regime vis-à-vis the role of women by examining the specific affinities between aspects of interwar feminism and the feminine ideal produced by the Metaxist propaganda, and addresses this unintended, yet paradoxical, convergence. Finally, the article concludes by offering some thoughts

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4 J.W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075; see also Scott's revisit of the concept in 'Gender: Still A Useful Category of Analysis?' *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (2010): 7–14.

on physiognomy of the Metaxas regime, and possibly of other fascist regimes of the interwar years, as it appears when employing gender as an entry point for the examination of its political nature.

### EON as a Laboratory of New Femininity

Seizing power via military rule, rather than electoral success, the Metaxas regime quickly became aware of the urgent need to create a sense of popular legitimacy that it lacked at the time. Following the logic and practices of similar regimes in Europe, the regime gasped early on not only the importance of a robust propaganda apparatus but also the necessity of ‘educating’ the youth in the ideals of the regime, seeking both immediate legitimacy among the masses as well as long-term hegemony. The creation of National Youth Organisation, an unprecedented attempt to create a ‘new consciousness’ among the population, was not only a reflection of the corporatist nature of the regime, but also a systematised effort to bring the population into mass politics, albeit via coercion and only in the politics of the nationalist variety. EON was established with the goal of ‘mental and ideological education, as well as physical education of the Greek youth in accordance with the moral, social and political directions of the State as it has been formed since August 4, 1936, as well as their military training’.<sup>5</sup> It encompassed both young women and men, aged eight to twenty-five years old. Originally proposed on a voluntary basis that counted on spontaneous attendance of the youth, a hope that was quickly dashed,<sup>6</sup> EON assumed in 1938 a compulsory character for primary and secondary school students, while remaining optional for university students.<sup>7</sup> The failure to implant the institution in environments outside schools, both in urban areas and in the

5 Excerpt from EON Internal Service Organisation, Chapter 1, Administration-Organisation, Article 2, in P. Petridis, ed., *EON: Η φασιστική Νεολαία Μεταξά* [EON: The fascist youth of Metaxas] (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2002), 33.

6 It is, naturally, debatable whether the participation was really ‘voluntary’ even during the first phase, since it was not always easy to avoid participation. Pressure and fear of sanctions create mobilisation, even if mobilisation cannot be attributed solely to these factors. Nonetheless, even the risk of sanctions failed to mobilise the youth en masse, as indicated by the fact that participation in EON eventually became compulsory.

7 Two additional measures were subsequently taken in order to ensure that the principles associated with EON were embedded and that it prevailed over rival formations: the replacement of school activities by those of EON every Wednesday afternoon (circular of the Ministry of Education, 10 November 1939) and the abolition of all youth organisations with similar aim to those of EON (Law 1789/1939).

countryside, was a constant source of worry for the regime, as shown in the archival records of EON.<sup>8</sup>

The main aim of EON was, in short, the indoctrination of young people to the ideals and expectations of the regime firstly through the overall management of their time, and secondly by implementing a comprehensive form of socialisation with a strong egalitarian component. The first entailed the complete appropriation of the youth's social time, i.e., the time invested in school education and family activities. The second referred to the mass and homogenising character of EON, which included students as well as young working people, boys as well as girls, and was impactful in urban as well as rural areas. Therefore, the key aspects of EON which are of interest to the analysis in this article were its mandatory character, its special focus on women, and its aim to reform the participants' character according to the propaganda of the regime. In other words, EON was a totalitarian institution, employing totalitarian practices to serve a totalitarian project, which aspired to shape the overall physiognomy of the future promised society.

In an attempt to fully appropriate and exclusively manage young people's time, EON essentially sought to undertake both the primary and secondary socialisation of young people and to replace a significant part of social functions taking place within the family or in school. From this perspective, the establishment of EON was unprecedented in Greek society and reflected a common practice of authoritarian and fascist regimes of the time, which sought to reform existing citizens and create an idealised vision of society through the education of future generations. The very creation of such an institution, as well as its *modus operandi*, brought about a substantial break between the regime and one of the main institutions it purported to defend: the family. Its motto was 'Homeland, Religion, Family', yet from early on the abrupt and forced

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8 Several documents from the EON archive record both the regime's interest to create a truly comprehensive organisation that would encompass all youth as well as the difficulty to achieve this goal. This indicates that EON was a predominantly school-based and urban phenomenon, as the difficulties in attracting out-of-school youth were similar to those encountered in the countryside. See related Report of Proceedings, 27 January 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Ioannina, File 1, EON Archive, General State Archives (henceforth GAK); Report of Activities, 11 August 1939, Regional Administration of Women of Preveza, File 1, EON Archive, GAK; Regional Administration of Women of Ilia, File 2, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Activities, October 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Achaia, File 3, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings (n.d.), Regional Administration of Women of Drama, File 9, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 7 March 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Thessaloniki, File 11, EON Archive, GAK; Karamanou Report (Director of the Political Enlightenment of the Central Administration), (n.d.), File 13, EON Archive, GAK.

shift with regards to the conditions of socialisation of youth caused significant tensions between the regime and one of the fundamental sources for its self-legitimation.

The reaction on behalf of Greek families was particularly strong and the regime jeopardised its popularity by supporting the EON and its practices, especially with regards to young women, the main point of friction between the regime and the population. EON not only challenged, but in practice undercut, the power of the parent over the child, which remained the main avenue of socialisation in Greek society at the time.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, however, EON constructed new frameworks, unimaginable within most quarters of the Greek interwar society, for the socialisation of girls and young women.

It was not only the case that socialisation was henceforth carried out outside the house or church, as far as the lower social strata were concerned, or in women's associations and via charitable activities, as far as the most affluent social classes were concerned. Such socialisation now also involved a set of activities and attitudes enabled by the very existence of EON that redefined socialisation per se and neutralised the traditional authority of dominant bodies of social control. The new activities proposed and implemented by EON covered a wide range of phenomena: girls' and young women's attire, sports and military training, excursions and holiday camps, the direct exercise of power via the autonomy granted to the female branch of EON, and controversial socialising between female and male members, a practice favoured by the

9 On the negative reception of the institution of EON by Greek families, see G. Andrikopoulou, *Οι ρίζες του ελληνικού φασισμού: Στρατός και πολιτική* [The roots of Greek fascism: Army and politics] (Athens: Diogenis, 1977), 89–95 but also the 'Λόγος κατά το Α' Συνέδριον της Εθνικής Οργανώσεως Νεολαίας [Speech at the First Conference of the National Youth Organisation,' in Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις* [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 2: 1939–1941 (Athens: Govostis, 1969), 13–15 (5 January 1939). Specifically with regards to the parents' reactions against the participation of female family members in EON, see Report of Proceedings, first half of 1939, Regional Administration of Women of Arcadia, File 3, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings (n.d.), Regional Administration of Halkidiki, File 10, EON Archive, GAK; Report for the first semester of 1939 and 30 March 1940, Regional Administration of Lakonia, File 3, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, December 1940, Regional Administration of Fthiotidofokida, File 4, EON Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 11 August 1939, Preveza Regional Administration, File 1, EON Archive, GAK. On the determination of the EON administration to impose the Metaxian, modern perception of woman by having recourse to all possible means (pressure, persuasion, secret meetings with young women), see Report of Proceedings, 11 August 1939, Female Regional Administration of Preveza, File 1, EON Archive, GAK. For the parents' reaction against the socialisation of different social classes within the same organisation, see Report for the first semester of 1939, Regional Administration of Women of Lakonia, EON Archive, GAK; for the so-called 'aristocratic reaction' to EON see also Metaxas, [Speeches and thoughts], vol. 2: 1939–1941, 13.

regime. In short, the new practices negotiated and reorganised female public presence as a whole: attire, entertainment, the redefinition of morality via the 'pure and naive interaction between the two sexes'.<sup>10</sup> They also allowed for the symbolic and practical appropriation of male attributes and privileges, which generated both resentment on behalf of Greek families and led to attempts to undermine the autonomy of the female branch of ΕΟΝ on behalf of their male colleagues.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, despite risking the already questionable popularity of ΕΟΝ, the regime stuck to its position of autonomy and self-governance of female branches.<sup>12</sup> At this point two questions must be addressed: what were the reasons for the regime's intense and persistent interest in the women's issue? And what was the feminine ideal that the regime promoted and imposed via ΕΟΝ? Or to put it another way, who was the 'new woman' of the totalitarian community imagined by the Metaxas regime?

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- 10 'The pure and naive interaction of the two sexes under the vigilant surveillance of the leaders of the Organisation has refined to an incredible degree our primitive morals which originate in the times of slavery' in V.P. Papadakis, 'Απολογισμός τριετίας,' [Three-year report] *To Neon Kratos*, no. 19 (August 1939): 539. Cf., 'The issue will be addressed through the most frequent contact between boys and girls, with the organisation of various common holidays .... It is only through such contact that our children will stop being savages, will learn to address their peers of the opposite sex as colleagues and [it is only through such contact] that the various aberrations that are taking place today will be kept to the minimum, since they are but a natural reaction against the prevailing unnatural spirit of isolation' in G.D. Gizis, 'Σκέψεις για την ΕΟΝ: Προς νέα μονοπάτια,' [Thoughts on ΕΟΝ: Towards new paths] *Nea Politiki*, no. 8 (August 1939): 1007–1008.
- 11 On the tensions in the relations between the male and female branches of the organisation and the formers' attempts to undermine the latter, see Confidential Report, 27 January 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Ioannina, File 1, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 11 August 1939, Regional Administration of Women of Preveza, File 1, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 22 April 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Messinia, File 2, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 21 August 1939, Female Regional Administration of Lesvos, File 8, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK; Report of Proceedings, 3 December 1940, Regional Administration of Women of Thessaloniki, File 11, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK.
- 12 'Autonomy of the female branches and definitely local separation from the male branches' in Remarks and Opinions about the operation of ΕΟΝ, Office III-Enlightenment, Piraeus, 22 March 1938, File 13, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK; Cf. Report of Proceedings 20 December 1940, Male Regional Administration of Kozan; and 8 and 11 January 1941, Regional Administration of Women of Kozani, File 11, ΕΟΝ Archive, GAK, which emphasises the Central Administrations unwavering position for the pursuit of an uninterrupted cooperation between the local, autonomous male and female branches.

### Femininity between Tradition and Modernity

Although the nature and position of women had been the focus of theoretical elaborations, as well as a field of controversy, in the decades predating the Metaxas regime,<sup>13</sup> the issue of gender roles became a major issue with the rise of totalitarian regimes in the interwar period. These introduced for the first time a strategy and an apparatus for the production and dissemination of an ideology that addressed the role of women, such as that found in EON. The new type of woman was an expression of the totalitarian nature of the regime and the utopian society envisioned in which everyone would have a functional position and, therefore, existing social roles and identities were submitted to re-evaluation and reformulation. From this perspective, women had multiple and complex roles related either to their 'traditional' tasks of house-keeping and child-raising or to 'modern' roles of the dynamic working woman, of the woman-soldier<sup>14</sup> and woman-citizen.<sup>15</sup> The Metaxist discourses on femininity was marked by contradictory references and conflicting expectations, that oscillated between tendencies that we could describe 'traditional' or 'conservative' and others that we could describe as 'modern' or 'progressive'. The introduction of this binary, namely of tradition versus modernity, can illuminate the contradictory nature of gender constructs devised by the regime and sheds light to the regime's overall physiognomy.

The Metaxist discourse on gender calls, on the one hand, for a return to ideals that were thought of as purely 'Greek' and 'traditional'. Motherhood and the family played a dominant role in this scheme. Furthermore, the Metaxist discourse also called for women to assume the role of a 'conscious educator' who

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- 13 On the dominant conceptions of female nature and position and the related controversies as well as the education of women during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see E. Fourmaraki, *Εκπαίδευση και αγωγή των κοριτσιών: ελληνικοί προβληματισμοί (1830–1910)–Ένα ανθολόγιο* [Education and upbringing of girls: Greek Reflections (1830–1910): An anthology] (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth, 1987); A. Bakalaki and E. Elegmitou, *Η εκπαίδευση 'εις τα του οίκου' και τα γυναικεία καθήκοντα* ['Domestic' economy and women's duties: From the founding of the Greek state to the educational reform of 1929] (Athens: Historical Archive of Greek Youth, 1987). On the positions of the proponents of the Enlightenment on female nature but also the first female public voices in modern Greece, see Paschalis M. Kitromilides, 'The Enlightenment and Womanhood: Cultural Change and the Politics of Exclusion,' in *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe* (Aldershot [etc.]: Variorum, 1994), 39–61.
- 14 S. (itsa) Kar. (aiskaki), 'Στη σκοπιά μας,' [On our Watch] *I Neolaia* [The Youth], no. 6/109 (9 November 1940).
- 15 S. (itsa) Kar. (aiskaki), 'Τα νειάτα,' [The Youth] *I Neolaia*, no. 7/110 (27 January 1940).

would shape the future soldiers and citizens of both sexes in accord with the Metaxist utopia to come. In the same supposedly 'traditional' orientation, the Metaxas regime addressed the issue of women's education. The regime's main concern vis-à-vis education was to make girls 'real Greeks'. This translated into separate, specialised education based on the principles of domestic economy.<sup>16</sup> The latter did not simply refer to the nature of the body, or the performance of practical tasks, but it was also dedicated to the formation of consciousness, to the formation of the 'heart'. Indeed, it was mainly focused on 'hearts', since according to principles propagated by ΕΟΝ, the 'heart' corresponded to girls' nature while the 'brain' corresponded to boys' nature, thus making the education of girls a question of 'feelings' and that of boys a question of 'reasoning'. Education was the domain in which the Metaxist gender ideology manifested itself in a more or less unequivocal way: it aimed at directing girls to the patriotic, conscious performance of their tasks as mothers, housekeepers, and educators of children. In other words, its objective was to constrain women within the realm of their traditional functions. On the other hand, the discourse on paid work for women was probably the area where the regime's intention to modernise the status of women became most clearly manifest and where its modernist ideas were most opposed the conservatism of Greek society. To support women's unconditional access to salaried employment, the Metaxist discourse resorted to quasi-feminist argumentation,<sup>17</sup> which eventually caused a rift between its own pragmatic trends favouring modernisation and its conservative elements, which were, in that respect, the most unrealistic, evoking a return to a romanticised and unambiguous past where women did not work. Aiming at creating an economically powerful state based on national autarchy, the regime strongly encouraged women's participation in the sphere of salaried labour. As such, it would be wrong to read Greek fascism, that is the Metaxas regime, as merely ultra-traditionalist, since it was interested both in the preservation of national traditions as well as distancing itself from these same traditions; hence, the continuous tension and oscillation between the preservation and the 'renewal' of women's status.

16 On the value that the regime attributes to domestic economy, see, for instance, V. Vassiliadou, 'Η οικοκυρική: Η σημασία της διδασκαλίας της στα σχολεία μας,' [Housekeeping: The importance of its teaching in our schools] *I Neolaia*, no. 17 (5 February 1939); S. (itsa) Kar. (aiskaki), 'Η γυναίκα πηγή της λαϊκής ζωής,' [The woman is the source of life of the people] *I Neolaia*, no. 8 (3 December 1938).

17 Ch. Avgerinos, 'Πρέπει να αναγνωρίσωμεν εις την Ελληνίδαν πλήρη ελευθερία εις την εργασίαν,' [Must we grant to Greek women full freedom in their choice of field of work?] *Nea Politiki*, no. 1 (January 1940): 25–29.

### 'Modern' Women versus 'Traditional' Men?

Following the theoretical perspective proposed in the introduction, gender history is not simply synonymous with women's history, since 'women and men [are] defined in terms of one another, and no understanding of either [can] be achieved by entirely separate study'.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, the contrasting perceptions of femininity and masculinity allow for a more complete examination of the oftentimes contradictory representations of gender roles, of the normative perceptions which determine the understanding of those roles and, finally, the formation of gender identities. As such, to throw in stark relief the centrality but also complexity of women's role in the imagined Metaxist society, it is pertinent to juxtapose Metaxist perceptions of femininity to its views of masculinity. The fascist conception of masculinity and femininity is both essentialist, in the sense of coagulating around a feature that defines the core of masculinity or femininity, and normative, in the sense of masculinity shaping what men ought to be and femininity shaping what women ought to be. Masculinity as a concept that crystallises specific ideas of a male sex role can be seen in earlier, nineteenth century debates about sex difference and then linked to 'scientific' doctrines of innate sex difference that emerged as a response to women's emancipation.<sup>19</sup> Its core characteristics, such as will power, honour, and courage, changed very little,<sup>20</sup> albeit influencing every aspect of modern history.<sup>21</sup> Fascism represented the fullest expression of modern masculinity, even if the new fascist or National Socialist man was not that new, since his most basic traits in fact emanated from normative masculinity with an aggressive twist.<sup>22</sup> Nazism went to great lengths to regulate the expression of masculine identity as well as to glorify representations of Aryan masculinity via its visual propaganda, while National Socialism's preoccupation, if not obsession, with manly beauty and with every detail of male appearance and comportment is well documented.<sup>23</sup>

The Metaxas regime deviated from the Nazi paradigm to a significant extent. Even if male dominance over women was taken for granted in the case of Greek fascism, women's roles, from physical appearance to character traits,

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18 J.W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', op. cit., p. 29.

19 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 21.

20 George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

21 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 5.

22 *Ibid.*, 180.

23 *Ibid.*, 168.

were deemed to be in much greater need of specific guidelines. In stark contrast to the detailed descriptions, prescriptions and representations of female role models, masculinity was only inferred via the regime's propaganda: men were not specifically described in the regime's publications nor addressed as a group by the dictator or the intellectuals supporting the regime. Boys were not attributed special pages on the regime's youth magazine *I Neolaia* [The Youth],<sup>24</sup> which systematically featured pages dedicated to women, 'The Girls' Pages'. The dominant visual representation of masculinity was of a young athlete, unsurprising as physical exercise has always been important in the construction of masculinity.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note though that this representation was not expressed via written speech, but via visual means, that is through the publication of photos in the press and via public demonstrations, such as parades or sports competitions, which were heavily publicised by the regime. Conversely, the physical characteristics and general appearance of women were described with great precision: the regime even suggested an ideal type of feminine beauty in harmony with the heroic era of Metaxas, that of the natural brunette.<sup>26</sup> This ideal look of Metaxist woman as further delineated by the stigmatisation of two counter-types of femininity: the so-called 'woman-doll', propagated by cinema and fashion, and the 'feminist' who possessed 'masculine manners and attire'.<sup>27</sup> Both the very feminine woman and the very masculine woman were equally rejected by the regime, so that women found themselves constantly in search of an idealised middle ground.

But this ideal Metaxist feminine profile also required 'behavioural training', as explained in one of the numerous articles dedicated to young women in *I Neolaia*, which praised 'a girl who does not provoke by her behaviour or her shameful clothing or by her extreme intelligence'.<sup>28</sup> Similar prescriptions were entirely absent when it came to masculinity. Again, certain character traits can be inferred by the historical personalities which were presented as inspirations figures in *I Neolaia* and in that sense they should be better viewed as 'reminders' of what masculinity was rather than as 'demands' of what femininity ought to either be or become. Stories which developed over several issues revolved around Byzantine Emperors. For instance, the life of Emperor Nikephoros Phokas ran throughout the years that *I Neolaia* circulated, while

24 *I Neolaia* [The Youth] was EON's weekly magazine which circulated from 15 October 1938 to 26 April 1941.

25 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 169.

26 'Το μασκάρωμα,' [The disguise] *I Neolaia*, no. 10 (9 December 1939).

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

Alexander the Great and life in ancient Sparta were both themes that appeared in 1940, just a few months ahead of Greece's involvement in the Second World War. Other stories told the tale of Leonidas in Thermopyles,<sup>29</sup> or narrated the glory of the heroes of the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829).<sup>30</sup> It was obvious by the choice of such figures that masculinity was imagined as being closely linked to warfare and, by extension, as a sacrifice for the nation, for *patria*. Higher causes had been inspiring ideas of 'true manliness' throughout modernity, yet, as Mosse, observes, 'at no time was it ever quite explicitly stated that a man's body belongs not to himself but to his people. The Nazis took a belief that had been operative in wartime—the necessity of sacrifice—and transformed it into an absolute principle'.<sup>31</sup> This was clearly the case for the Metaxas regime too, and as war was fast-approaching, such heroic references of sacrifice became more frequent. To be sure, as war was nigh, references to sacrifice and heroism became more frequent in the 'Girls' Pages' too, and here young women were often reminder of their duty to stand by the fighting soldiers, their husbands and sons, and the fighting nation.<sup>32</sup> The evocation of sacrifice generated both a cult and a culture of death that concerned both women and men, and played a fundamental role in the construction of their gendered identities. As if notions of life and death were not opposed to each other, the regime's ultra-nationalist discourse invited people to die in the name of an eternal life to come, the eternal life of the nation, where the mortal life of men and women ultimately had neither meaning nor place. Having said that, one should note that these traits of ideal masculinity predated Metaxist gender propaganda. As was the case with fascism elsewhere,<sup>33</sup> the renewal of the masculine ideal under nationalism in Greece resided exclusively in the intensive militarisation

29 'Ο Λεωνίδας στις Θερμοπύλες,' [Leonidas in Thermopyles] *I Neolaia*, no. 18/69 (3 February 1940).

30 Special issue on the War of Independence, *I Neolaia*, no. 24 (25 March 1939); 'Ο ηρωικός θάνατος του Μάρκου Μπότσαρη,' [The heroic death of Markos Mpotsaris] *I Neolaia*, no. 44 (12 August 1939).

31 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 170.

32 Kar.(aiskaki), '[On Our Watch]'; 'Με το όπλο κατά του εχθρού: Ελληνίδες που πολέμησαν για την Ελλάδα,' [Taking the weapon against the enemy: Greek women who fought for Greece] *I Neolaia*, no. 10 (7 December 1940); 'Ξαναζούν οι Σπαρτιάτισσες,' [The Spartan women live again] *I Neolaia*, no. 14 /116 (4 January 1941); S. (itsa) Kar.(aiskaki), 'Καθήκον και δικαιώματα,' [Duties and Rights] *I Neolaia*, no. 22/124 (1 March 1941); S. (itsa) Kar. (aiskaki), 'Η Ελληνίδα γυναίκα στον πόλεμο,' [The Greek woman at war] *I Neolaia*, no. 24/127 (15 March 1941); S. (itsa) Kar.(aiskaki), 'Αρχαίες Σπαρτιάτισσες,' [Ancient Spartan Women] *I Neolaia*, no. 28/131 (12 April 1941); S. (itsa) Kar. (aiskaki), 'Πως πολεμούν οι θυγατέρες της ΕΟΝ,' [How the daughters of ΕΟΝ fight] *I Neolaia*, no. 30/133 (26 April 1941).

33 See Moss, *The Image of Man*, 155–180.

of an already military model, which romanticised the defence of the nation as the most supreme form of masculinity. In sum, Metaxist masculinity was not enriched with new elements. The transformation of masculinity under the Metaxas regime consisted of the intensification of pre-existing, traditional elements.

The construction of femininity followed a different process. Women were called upon to assume new roles and responsibilities, such as active participation in the administration of the imagined Metaxist community and in the military apparatus, while making sure that they also remain faithful to their traditional roles as mothers and child educators.<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, masculinity was a much more strict and certainly more limited compared to the malleable and multi-dimensional new perceptions of femininity. While femininity was riddled with tensions, such as narratives circulating at the time of Greece's involvement in the Second World War in October 1940 where women were called to overcome their alleged 'female nature' by participating in the war, Metaxist era masculinity emerged as one-dimensional and mono-semantic.

How could we interpret such discrepancy vis-à-vis the construction or the definition of these antithetical gender identities within the Metaxas regime? Why was masculinity taken for granted while femininity required such a level of precision and special attention? Recourse to the categories of 'tradition' and

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34 It is important to note at this point the absence of concrete female role-models emanating from the religious-Christian Orthodox tradition, an element that differentiates the Greek regime from its contemporaries in Spain and Portugal, where the patterns of monasticism and purity claimed a dominant role in shaping the female role-models. The Christian Orthodox dogma as well as the Byzantine Empire as the institutional embodiment of a specifically Greek form of Christianity were recurrent themes in Metaxist propaganda, yet, figures from the ecclesiastical tradition were absent as inspiring role-models of femininity. For the perceptions of femininity in Spain under Franco and in Portugal under Salazar, see Marie-Aline Barrachina, 'La "femme nouvelle" de la propagande phalangiste,' *Clio*, no. 5 (1997): 139–146, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cli0.413>; Marie-Aline Barrachina, 'La réécriture de l'histoire: Le mythe des grandes figures de Castille 1938–1945,' *Entre émigration et nationalisme: La presse féminine d'Europe 1914–1945*, ed. Rita Thalmann (Paris: Deux Temps Tierce, 1990), 183–203; Marie-Aline Barrachina, 'La section féminine de la Phalange espagnole: L'exclusion du politique comme aboutissement d'un discours survalorisant,' in *Femmes et fascismes*, ed. Rita Thalmann (Paris: Tierce, 1986), 119–131; Daniele Bussy-Genevois, 'Femmes d'Espagne: De la République au franquisme,' in *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, volume 5: Le xx<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Françoise Thébaud (Paris: Plon, 1992), 169–183; Daniele Bussy-Genevois, 'Les visages de l'Espagne ou la représentation introuvable,' *Femmes, Nations, Europe*, ed. M.C. Hook-Demarle (Paris: Publications de l'Université Paris, 1997), 25–36. A. Cova and A. Costa-Pinto, 'Le salazarisme,' in *Encyclopédie Historique et Politique des Femmes*, ed. C. Faure (Paris: PUF, 1997), 685–699; T. Gallengo Mendez, *Mujer, falange y franquismo* (Madrid: Taurus, 1983).

'modernity' can shed light to such questions. From this perspective, while men seemed to be tasked with the preservation of norms and tradition, women represent both norms and the exception, both tradition and the break with it. Obviously, these categories were not meant as absolute or monolithic blocks and the analogy was not as simple as identifying masculinity with tradition and women with modernisation, since women had to both affirm and transcend their traditional roles. Femininity had to remain faithful to pre-existing roles and their traditional content: mother, housewife, educator; at the same time the regime also sought to bring to life the woman-soldier, the woman-citizen, a woman who defied tradition via her active presence in the public sphere. Viewed this way, men were anchored in and limited by tradition, whereas women constantly oscillated between tradition and modernity, and had to navigate through the tensions generated. If we follow Connell, this was to be expected since 'a gender order where men dominate women cannot avoid constituting men as an interest group concerned with defence and women as an interest group concerned with change'.<sup>35</sup> Yet such discrepancies can also be explained by their different roles within the Metaxist symbolic system. Men had an operational function inside the Metaxist structure. They were the instruments of power. They were the means to realise the doctrine. They represented the desired order of things, yet they were powerless vessels through which power was exercised. Women's role meanwhile was a political and ideological issue. The fluctuation of expectations towards women between contradictory demands reflected the regime's attempt to combine tradition and modernity in the process of forming its own ideological and political identity. The regime's ideology regarding women's role was a reflection of its quest for identity, and of its own contradictions. These eventually, and certainly unintentionally, gave women the opportunity to negotiate the barriers of Metaxist femininity and the possibility to explore various roles and experiences within the Metaxist system.

### **Feminist Intellectuals: A Precursor to Metaxist Ideology on Women?**

To better make sense of this contradiction between tradition and modernity with regards to women's role, and the ideological construction of femininity propagated by the Metaxas regime, it is important to consider the intellectual

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35 Connell, *Masculinities*, 82.

context within which they were articulated. The endorsement of certain feminist positions vis-à-vis the salaried work of women by the Metaxas regime, mentioned above, raises the question of potential, unintended yet existing, affinities between interwar feminism in Greece and the regime's ideology on the role of women. The contradiction, or antinomy, of women's role and the multi-dimensionality of femininity established by the previous sections of this article was not only a characteristic of Metaxist ideology, but was also an element in the ideological constructions of femininity propagated by coterminous interwar authoritarian regimes.<sup>36</sup> However, what is equally interesting is that this oscillation, the tension between 'conservative' and 'progressive' or 'traditional' and 'modern' perceptions of femininity, was already present in the Greek feminist movement of the interwar period. It is important to note that it is certainly not the intention of this article to collapse or neglect the essential differences between specific strands of the interwar feminist movement, nor to focus extensively on interwar feminism, which is why it is necessary to have recourse to general categories. There is no intention to hint at any underground or intentional 'synergy' between Greek feminism and Metaxist ideology, or between European feminist movements and fascist ideologies of the interwar period. However, if we consider feminism as a construction with a given and one-dimensional 'progressive' profile, it becomes hard to understand the nature, the diversity and the evolution of the movement and its ideological positions. On the contrary, the integration of individual ideological products in their historical environment allows for re-examination of categories whose meaning tends to be thought of as being given and homogeneous over time, such as those of 'conservatism' and 'progressivism', bringing to light aspects that absolute classifications necessarily neglect. Is feminism a 'conservative' ideology or is Metaxism a 'progressive' one? Since these specific ideologies are derivatives of the same society, they are bound to 'converse' to a certain extent.<sup>37</sup> The superi-

36 See note 3, and in particular Rita Thalmann, ed., *Entre émancipation et nationalisme: La presse féminine d'Europe 1914-1945* (Paris: Deuxtemps Tierce, 1990).

37 For a history of the feminist movement in Greece, see E. Avdela and A. Psarra, *Ο φεμινισμός στην Ελλάδα του μεσοπολέμου: Μια ανθολογία* [Feminism in interwar Greece: An anthology] (Athens: Gnosi, 1985), mainly the introduction, 13-97. See also E. Varika, *Η εξέγερση των κυριών: Η γένεση μιας φεμινιστικής συνείδησης στην Ελλάδα* [The revolt of the ladies: The Genesis of a feminist consciousness in Greece] (Athens: Emporiki Bank Research and Education Foundation, 1987); A. Psarra, 'Φεμινίστριες, σοσιαλίστριες, κομμουνίστριες: Γυναίκες και πολιτική στον μεσοπόλεμο,' [Feminists, socialists, communists: Women and politics in the interwar period] in *Βενιζελισμός και αστικός εκσυγχρονισμός* [Venizelism and bourgeois modernisation], eds. G. Mavrogorgatos and Ch. Hatziosif (Heraklion: University of Crete Publications, 1988), 67-82.

ority of motherhood, to which all currents of the feminist movement converge, leads to the inability to radically question the ideology of female particularity and ultimately jeopardises any emancipatory potential and any attempt of radical renegotiation of women's traditional role. The impossibility of articulating a consistent proposition, and the contradictions into which interwar feminists necessarily fell in their attempt to compromise between traditional and modern womanhood, were bequeathed to the Metaxist ideology on women.

Interwar Greek feminists, including those who continued to operate under the Metaxist regime, that is, their conservative wing, mainly coagulated around the Λύκειο Ελληνίδων [Lyceum Club of Greek Women] and their journal *Hellenis*, failed to challenge the limits imposed by so-called 'female nature'. This was a notion that necessarily undermined any attempt to appropriate the public space. The quest for a 'positive' identity ultimately led to a reversal of dominant 'masculine' values and the subsequent articulation of the doctrine of 'feminisation' of politics in which motherhood maintained a central role. Such a stance was shared by all trends of the interwar feminist movements in Greece with little variation. Failing to substantially question the values and symbols of the so-called 'feminine particularity', interwar feminists were persistently articulated their defence, thus introducing a new moral hierarchy, where the 'male' value system became the source of social dysfunction and injustice. In this way, they invented a historical, humanitarian, pacifist mission on behalf of women, which could only be achieved through the innate and exclusively feminine qualities of love, justice and respect for human life. From this perspective, a new conception of politics was born, based on the heart and emotions, a 'truly feminine' politics, which was essentially an affirmation of an ideology that saw women as beings lacking the ability to rationalise.<sup>38</sup> In their effort to challenge the monopoly of motherhood, interwar feminists introduced a multidimensional conception of female identity. However, not all these dimensions, the woman-mother, the woman-professional, the woman-citizen, had the same value. Motherhood reigned supreme, and its superiority was non-negotiable. Yet the oscillation and constant negotiation between two conflicting views of female existence, that of traditional non-negotiable motherhood and that of modern, active social participation, was present equally in Metaxist gender ideology and in wider interwar feminist discourse.

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38 On the affinities between Metaxism on the Greek feminism of the interwar years, see Rosa Vasilaki, 'Entre tradition et modernité: Idéologie, femmes, féminité sous le régime de Métaaxas (Grèce 1936–1941)' (PhD diss., Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2003).

The affinities between feminism and Metaxism, in particular regarding the paradoxical position of simultaneous affirmation and contestation of traditional norms of femininity, were also manifest in positions and theories developed by female intellectuals who published under the blessings of the regime. The case of the intellectual Thaleia Rota is a characteristic example of such contradictions manifest within Metaxist ideology. In 1940, Rota published a treatise entitled 'Women as a Factor in the National Economy',<sup>39</sup> which addressed the issue of women's salaried work in the light of the issue of unemployment. Rota's treatise situated itself against feminism because 'instead of seeking the education of women and their perfection in the valuable work of the housewife, feminism sought political rights and economic independence for them, by [inciting them to] leave the house and look for paid work', and this 'shook the foundations of the family as an institution and the happiness that had developed in the family began to crumble'.<sup>40</sup> It also included a draft law on the organisation of women's work in Greece. Here, a totalitarian yet idiosyncratic conception of societal organisation emerged. On the one hand, it suggested women should be banned from all salaried work, that they should be entirely supported by the state in financial terms,<sup>41</sup> and that they should be educated in special female academies 'where there would be provided with the necessary knowledge to properly fulfil their natural and social destiny, as housewives and mothers'.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, and despite anti-feminist declarations, professional women, 'those who have embraced science motivated by true devotion to its objectives',<sup>43</sup> were granted a life of freedom such that every feminist would wish for herself. Professional women, 'who are like men in terms of character', were allowed 'to forget their personal happiness and put themselves in the service of science, for the sake of society as a whole',<sup>44</sup> and special provisions were put in place for them. As articles 12 to 14 of Rota's draft law explained, these women would be given the choice of having 'natural children' outside wedlock, they would be recognised by the state as 'genuine children from a legal marriage', and finally they would be generously financially supported by the state 'as civil servants' in order to raise such children.<sup>45</sup> In the report that followed

39 Thaleia Rota, *Η γυνή ως παράγων εθνικής οικονομίας* [Women as a factor in the national economy] (Athens: Dimitriou Dimitrakou, 1940).

40 Rota, [Women as a factor], 95.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid, 139–140.

43 Ibid., 99.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 141.

the draft law, Rota explained that this would allow women to avoid the cohabitation of men and women 'since this kills love' and 'offers nothing useful to the children being born'.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, a 'mother of superior intellect', Rota claimed, 'should be granted the freedom to have children since she can be trusted that these will become happy in life and capable of guiding others'.<sup>47</sup> Despite her stated opposition to 'matriarchy and matriarchal rights' as being 'incompatible to human nature as such',<sup>48</sup> Rota saw her draft constitution as the 'beginning of a future society, in which the family will consist of the mother and the children'.<sup>49</sup>

Thaleia Rota thus became the representative of a specific feminism articulated around a totalitarian and elitist conception of society. Her proposal attempted to combine a vision of femininity, perceived as 'natural', that both condemned women to an exclusive motherhood and aimed to preserve their limited social status and asserted elements of radical feminism which demanded freedom and a recognition of female existence in all spheres of life. The originality of Rota's conception in terms of social organisation did not lie in the traditional division of tasks and functions based on gender, which by recognising, rewarding, even glorifying motherhood, ended-up imprisoning women within the confines of the household. Rota's proposal was innovative and deeply disturbing because this was not deemed the fate for all women. Divided between inferior and superior, banal and extraordinary, gifted for motherhood and gifted for social life, women found themselves representatives of the split identity of the writer herself, and for that matter, of the split identity of the regime. It is interesting to note that the status of professional women was granted to those who had graduated from the Law School, like Rota herself, and those who were graduates of Theology.<sup>50</sup> For ordinary women, compulsory maternity, for extraordinary women unconditional freedom to choose the field and level of their studies, to choose their profession and exercise it for pleasure and not simply because of economic necessity, and to choose to give birth to children if one wished to do so without the obligation of marriage. Rota went from one extreme to the other, from absolute social exclusion for the undeserved yet glorified mothers, to total freedom of choice for deserving, exceptional women.

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 6.

49 Ibid., 149.

50 Ibid., 141.

The dichotomy of the female world proposed by Rota's project was the best reflection of Metaxist ideology. In order to respond to requirements and objectives as incompatible as the revival of tradition, in which the exclusion of women from the public space was a key element, and the quest for modernity, which required the subversion of these roles, the Metaxist imagined community that was projected into the future could only be based on an extreme segregation between 'exceptional' and 'ordinary' women. The division between exceptional women and ordinary women was not only a reflection of the elitist convictions of the writer. This division was ultimately the only solution for such an antinomic conception of femininity: the hierarchy between sexes was replaced by a hierarchy between women.

Thaleia Rota's case was not unique when it came to such a peculiar interpretation and endorsement of feminist theories. Elli Lambridi was another interesting example of an intellectual whose work suggested that the regime's ideology regarding women and femininity was not necessarily perceived as a regression in the status of women. Originating in the radical feminist milieu of the 1920s, Lambridi laid the foundations for a debate on the essence of the feminist movement. In her article published by the review *Anagennisi* [Renaissance]<sup>51</sup> on the occasion of the Tenth Conference of the International Alliance for the Women Suffrage and Equal Rights, Lambridi provided one of the most interesting and critical accounts on the so-called 'women's issue' and the future of feminism. Lambridi was quick to grasp that in her own times the impasse of a feminism derived from the 'liberal ideals of faith in suffrage, in individualism in the right to be elected, in private property and so on',<sup>52</sup> ideas which feminism was still upholding as absolute principles even though they were already declining.<sup>53</sup> Following this line of thought she described the formula of 'equal rights' as deprived of meaning, yet her critique did not originate in the typically fascist inimical stance to liberal rights, but in the Marxist critique of the bourgeois-liberal state. While agreeing that equality with men was always the principle on which feminism was articulated, equality did not make complete sense if it were not coupled with the idea of justice, since there can be such thing as 'unjust equality'.<sup>54</sup> She noticed that there were 'other oppositions more important than those revolving around gender for people in our days', and that the granting of rights in certain countries led to a decline 'in terms of protest

51 E. Lambridi, 'Κριτικές παρατηρήσεις στο σύγχρονο φεμινισμό,' [Critical considerations of contemporary feminism] *Anagennisi*, 5 January 1927, 278–284.

52 Lambridi, [Critical considerations], 280–281.

53 *Ibid.*, 279.

54 *Ibid.*, 280.

and combativeness'.<sup>55</sup> For this reason, she did not shy away from harsh criticism of feminists attending the conference for their conservatism, 'which has cut off official feminism from those political and social movements . . . that is the ones situated on the left, the social-democratic ones and the labour unions'.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, it is indeed surprising to find Lambridi a few years later as one the regular contributors in *Nea Politiki*, the Metaxas regime's most sophisticated journal where intellectual attempts at conceiving a cohesive Metaxist ideology were published. Lambridi was a constant presence between 1937 and 1939 where she contributed mostly with book reviews and translations and occasional short interventions. In one of these interventions, Lambridi emerged as a fervent supporter of EON and of the organisation's out-of-school time.<sup>57</sup> As she claimed 'the new pedagogical theories which have introduced into pedagogical practice the principles of free debate and the agency of the child, have left the new generation unfulfilled . . . This is due to a misunderstanding of the concept of freedom by democratic governance, in the same way that the concept of equality was also misunderstood'.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, 'this void can be filled by the youth organisation in totalitarian regimes'.<sup>59</sup> EON was praised for offering to children 'a sense of patriotism, national solidarity, labour, devotion to tradition',<sup>60</sup> and because 'children are not accountable to their teacher who does not know them in depth, nor to their exhausted father, who does not understand them, but directly to their leader'.<sup>61</sup> This was not the only article where Lambridi came out as a fervent supporter of the regime. Her interventions often referred to the 'greatness' or 'superiority' of Greek civilisation,<sup>62</sup> whereas in one of her book reviews she flirted with antisemitism when she asked 'how is it possible for a race [sic] who was successively hated by all peoples of the world, to not bear any responsibility for that?'<sup>63</sup>

55 Ibid., 284.

56 Ibid., 279.

57 E. Lambridi, 'Η εξωσχολική ζωή των νέων,' [The out-of-school life of the youth] *Nea Politiki*, no. 8 (August 1939): 981–988.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 985.

60 Ibid., 986.

61 Ibid.

62 E. Lambridi, 'Προς νέα ανθρωπιστικά ιδεώδη,' [Towards new humanistic ideals], *Nea Politiki*, no. 12 (December 1937): 1417–1432; E. Lambridi, 'Το Βαλκανικό Ινστιτούτο,' [The Balkan Institute] *Nea Politiki*, no. 9 (September 1938): 976.

63 E. Lambridi, 'Βιβλιοκρισία: R.N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, Το σύγχρονο μίσος κατά των Εβραίων,' [Book review: R.N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, Hatred against Jews in modern times] *Nea Politiki*, no. 9 (September 1937): 1145.

What caused Lambridi to collaborate with an authoritarian, fascist regime? Her 1925 article already expressed disappointment with liberalism and a scepticism towards liberal rights, such as equality between men and women, political rights such as suffrage and parliamentarism, and more general dissatisfaction with the humanistic principles on which interwar feminism was predicated. Was it possible for Lambridi, a sophisticated intellectual and radical feminist, to find 'new' meaning in politics in the Metaxist totalitarian fantasy? Was it possible that she interpreted Metaxist ideology regarding women as a more complex and multi-layered female existence, as the realisation of radical feminist demands for a more comprehensive participation in the political life of the nation, which went way beyond the mere demand for voting rights?

In any case, Greece under the Metaxas regime was not the only case where feminists were enchanted by the sirens of fascism. Julie Gottlieb traces three similar cases of ex-suffragettes in Britain who joined the ranks of the British Union of Fascists.<sup>64</sup> There is indeed a high probability that Lambridi 'regarded feminism and fascism as analogous political impulses, and saw in their conglomeration the potential for the resurrection of the spirit of . . . suffragette struggles'.<sup>65</sup> Like her British counterparts, her endorsement of fascism expressed 'the disillusionment and the disappointed hopes of politicised women'.<sup>66</sup> The two cases, that of Elli Lambridi, a former feminist who oscillated between Marxist and fascist ideas before finally sinking into an authoritarian universe, and that of Thaleia Rota, a young intellectual whose fluctuation between the glorification of motherhood and the desire for freedom and social participation led her to conceptualise a discriminatory feminism, are both revealing. They highlight affinities between feminism and Metaxist ideology regarding women's role and point to the appeal of the regime among some female intellectuals who discerned within the contradictions of Metaxist positions on women and femininity an opportunity to establish their presence in the public sphere.

### Conclusion

This article has attempted to examine the Metaxas regime using gender as a category of historical analysis. Focusing on the National Youth Organisation and the break it constituted for Greek society at the time, the article has allowed

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64 Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism*.

65 *Ibid.*, 165.

66 *Ibid.*, 156.

for a more nuanced account of the Metaxas fascist regime to emerge, revealing it as one riddled with tensions that were a product of modernity and the reconfiguration of gender relations that it entailed. In the light of the binary of 'tradition' versus 'modernity', it has shown the regime's perception of femininity and the role of women within the totalitarian type of society it envisioned were defined by elements that were, on the one hand, 'traditional' and 'conservative' because of their focus on motherhood and household care, and, on the other hand, were 'modern' and 'progressive' due to their focus on the public role of women as professionals; women were even seen as guardians of the nation as the Second World War became imminent. The juxtaposition of femininity and masculinity showed masculinity of this period in Greece was mostly fixed, rigid and determined by already existing elements which were radicalised by fascist militarist ideology. Yet femininity emerged as a battlefield between 'tradition' and 'modernity', between 'conservatism' and 'progressivism' and in that sense, the antinomic, contradictory dimensions of Metaxist perceptions of femininity reflected the regime's struggle for ideological definition. The formation of the 'new' type of woman could only be carried out within a very specific context that served specific goals, and this ultimately went beyond the capabilities of traditional practices. The creation of a special body, ΕΟΝ, which assumed the implementation of this project, i.e., the preservation of tradition, was self-defeating in that respect. The regime guaranteed the preservation of the traditional roles, 'mother', 'housewife', 'educator', through practices that ultimately challenged traditional interpretations of gender roles. Socialisation into gender roles no longer took place within the traditional context, where girls learn by imitating their mothers, but via an external body, ΕΟΝ, which appropriated and systematised this traditional knowledge and its associated values and undertook their preservation and implementation. Interpreting the regime through its oscillation vis-à-vis the role of women allows for an understanding of the Metaxas state, and possibly other coterminous regimes, not as 'traditional' or 'conservative' but rather as 'modern' or 'ultra-modern'. This was due to a determination to reproduce 'tradition' through recourse to modern techniques of discipline and subjectification, of the kind exemplified by ΕΟΝ and in particular its female division.