

# Patterns of recollection and historical testimony in Thanasis Valtinos' *Orthokosta*\*

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## RÉSUMÉ

Le but de cet article est de présenter une nouvelle lecture du roman de Thanasis Valtinos *Orthokosta* utilisant des outils historiographiques et littéraires, principalement par l'étude des discours développés sur les membres des bataillons de sécurité tout au long de l'après-guerre en Grèce. De plus, une tentative est faite de placer les 47+2 récits de *Orthokosta* (47 chapitres numérotés, et deux fragments situés au début et à la fin du livre, respectivement) dans le contexte historique de leur création (1984). Enfin, une analyse de la structure et du contenu des récits des personnes concernées expose les modèles d'une superstructure en partie responsable de ce qu'elles se souviennent, racontent, et tentent éventuellement de prouver ou de cacher. À un deuxième niveau, le présent article s'efforce également d'examiner les 10 récits du livre non directement reliés à la guerre civile, en vue de produire une lecture de celui-ci de nature à les corréler et à les replacer dans le cadre plus large du travail de Valtinos.

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present a fresh reading of Thanasis Valtinos' *Orthokosta* using historiographical tools along with literary ones, primarily by studying the discourse regarding the Security Battalions members throughout Post-War Greece. Moreover, an attempt will be made to place the 47+2 narrations of *Orthokosta* (47 numbered chapters, and two fragments situated in the beginning and the end of the book respectively) in the proper historical context of their creation (1984). Finally, an analysis of the structure and the content of the narrations of the individuals involved will expose patterns of a superstructure that is partly responsible for what they recollect, what they narrate, and what they possibly attempt to prove or hide. On a second level, this paper will also try to examine the 10 narrations of the book that are not directly concerned with the Civil War, in order to produce a reading of the book that can be correlated with and placed within the wider framework of Valtinos' work.

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The publication of the first edition of *Orthokosta*<sup>1</sup> in 1994 was a milestone in terms of the perception of the Civil War in Greece.<sup>2</sup> No other novel has caused as much controversy, igniting a wide discussion in 1994 that is still very heated and affects both scholarly research and public discourse. Shortly after its publication, historians, book critics, writers, journalists, political scientists and intellectuals became embroiled in a public feud<sup>3</sup> concerning its historical accuracy and the new insights it brought to the understanding of the Occupation and the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> Since then, the novel has found itself repeatedly in the public spotlight because of the ongoing discussion concerning “revisionism” in modern Greek historiography—a discussion that began partly due to *Orthokosta* itself,<sup>5</sup> which explains why it is still of such great interest.

There are two main reasons why *Orthokosta* engendered such controversy following its publication: the portrayal of the Occupation from the point of view of former Security Battalion members<sup>6</sup>, and the extensive references to violence committed by ELAS. In a way, *Orthokosta* was a groundbreaking work, as it was the first novel by a writer of such importance and nationwide stature to include voices of members of the Security Battalions. As Maria Bontila notes, collaborators with the Germans were usually presented in fiction as silent, background figures, as there was a common consensus on this point.<sup>7</sup> This was not a phenomenon pertaining solely to literature; a similar viewpoint was evident in films about the Occupation. Collaborators were portrayed as cowards and money-grubbing characters with physical defects – a caricature that has survived to the present day in contemporary culture in the person of the actor who played most of these roles, Artemis Matsas.

The attempt by the public to forget “shameful” aspects of its recent past, such as the collaboration of a part of the population with the enemy, is of course predictable. A similar reaction can be seen in the case of France and its memory of Vichy.<sup>8</sup> But the Greek case is unique because of the Security Battalions’ meta-life in the collective memory. Despite being in the front lines of the winning coalition during the Civil War, the Security Battalions have remained a dark subject in Greece through the years. Although the members of the Security Battalions were not prosecuted for their actions, and although some were rehabilitated in the army and others even went on to become members of Parliament, there was no public reference to their past because the word “Tagmatasfalitis” (Security Battalion member) had a powerfully negative connotation for a large part of the population. As a result of the disapproving attitude toward the Security Battalions, even their compensation was indirectly

carried out by naming them participants in the national resistance against Germans along with E.D.E.S. and Battalion 5/42.<sup>9</sup>

When Thanasis Valtinos was asked if the individuals from his village who had participated in the Security Battalions and served as models for the characters in *Orthokosta* avoided talking about their actions during the Occupation, his answer was a clear “No”. Nor did they regret their past or consider themselves traitors or collaborators.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore valid to suggest that a different model of recollection of the 1940s existed or still exists in Kastri and, perhaps, other communities, according to which participation in the Security Battalions was not something to hide but was instead firmly entrenched in the memory of these communities. Factors that might have contributed to this disparity between micro-level and macro-level are the power and privileges the former members had earned from the post-war State and the elimination of opposing viewpoints, due either to the physical absence (as a result of war casualties, exile, or emigration) or the political absence (through discrimination by the post-war State) of their rivals.

The collapse of the Junta in 1974 radically changed the social and political framework within which the Occupation was researched and remembered. Historical conferences began to be held, first abroad (London 1978, Washington 1978, Copenhagen 1984 and 1987) and later in Greece (National Institute for Research, 1984).<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Fillipos Iliou published KKE’s archive from 1945 to 1949, thus establishing to a great extent a new disciplinary paradigm of the Civil War.<sup>12</sup> According to this new paradigm, scholars of history presented the ELAS army as liberators whose primary goal was the establishment of a democratic, parliamentary regime. The battle of Athens in December 1944 was caused by Great Britain’s desire to control Greece without taking into account the transformations undergone by Greek society as a result of the resistance movement. After the Varkiza Treaty and the disarmament of ELAS, there followed a period known as the “White Terror,” during which para-military bands in coalition with groups that had collaborated with the Germans terrorized those who had participated in or were sympathetic to ELAS. Due to this “campaign of terror,” which was carried out with the consent of the State, those likely to be prosecuted fled to the mountains, forming the first small groups in order to survive. These conditions made it clear to the Greek Communist Party (KKE) that it would be impossible for it to participate in Greek politics under equal terms, leading it to boycott the 1946 elections and to move its operations to the mountains, and finally to create a structure to organize the fugitive groups that would evolve into the Republican Army.<sup>13</sup>

This interpretation was passed on to the public partly through the extensive publishing of memoirs by eye witnesses, the majority of whom belonged to the left.<sup>14</sup> They clung to an idealized version of the past, focusing on the hardships they had been through and overlooking possibly dark details concerning ELAS or the Republican Army, creating in this way an image of the left as the moral victor of the Civil War through its very defeat.<sup>15</sup> The change of era was marked on a constitutional level by the recognition of ELAS as part of the national resistance with an act of law by the newly elected PASOK government in 1982.

Thanasis Valtinos claims he had finished writing *Orthokosta* by the mid-1980s, setting the above as the historical context for its creation. The writing of the *Descent of the Nine* in the late 1950s was inspired by the sociopolitical circumstances Valtinos saw in Greece. Less than a decade earlier the country had been rocked by civil war, yet a mere ten years later all of this past drama was deliberately forgotten.<sup>16</sup> In this context, *Descent of the Nine* was a call for remembrance. One could see *Orthokosta* as a similar undertaking, but with exactly the opposite goal: to sound the alarm concerning elements that were being left out in an attempt to glorify the Greek resistance. There is another reason why the historical context is important in the reading of *Orthokosta*: it is the context in which the action of the book is set, the historical space in which the narrators return to their past and reconstruct it through their testimonies.

Since the late 1970s Valtinos had in fact been collecting testimonies from Kastri to use as models for verbal expression in his attempt to capture instances of oral speech with which to enrich *Orthokosta*. Nevertheless, those testimonies were never used as such in the actual body of his text. On the other hand, in *Partida*, a book he wrote about *Orthokosta*, Kostas Voulgaris suggests that some of the chapters of *Orthokosta* contain directly transcribed portions of such testimonies, concluding that the book is nothing more than an attempt to present the Security Battalions' side of the story in the guise of a novel.

In his interviews, Valtinos is always direct about the relationship of *Orthokosta* to the historic past: he describes events as he remembers them, as they were passed on to him by witnesses and recollected in the village, trying not to change anything, and asking those witnesses still alive for clarification concerning things of which he is unsure of. While some critics see loyalty to the past as a defect, it can bring a new dimension to the reading of *Orthokosta* if it is seen under the genre of a “non-fiction novel.”<sup>17</sup> In this light, *Orthokosta* serves as a portrayal of the way individuals from the village of Kastri might talk about their past in the first years of “Metapolitefsi” (this term refers to the restoration of democratic political processes in Greece following 1974).

Classifying *Orthokosta* as a “non-fiction” novel provides us with a formula to approach this work by bringing together both the author’s intervention in the formation of the novel and the fundamental question of the immediate connection between this novel and reality, without falling into the trap of discussing the relationship between art and reality, which has so often been to the detriment of *Orthokosta*.<sup>18</sup>

The novel consists of 47 numbered chapters preceded and followed by two book excerpts, which raises the total number of chapters to 49. The inclusion of the prologue and the epilogue as organic rather than secondary parts of the novel is in accordance with Valtinos’ creative universe, in which every element of the printed text is an equal part of the fictionalization process of the book.<sup>19</sup> In *Orthokosta*, these two excerpts create the framework for the rest of the book, enclosing the other chapters between them. They are, furthermore, the only pieces of text that deviate from the linguistic environment of the rest of the book.

The prologue is an excerpt from *Depiction of the Land of Prasion and Thireatidos (Gis prasion kai thireatidos katalogi)*, a fictional book by Isaakios, Bishop of Reontos and Prastos.<sup>20</sup> This brief, two-page text describes the history of the monastery Orthokosta, destroyed by pirates in 1724 and rebuilt by a monk, Varnavas Kausoksiliotis (Varnavas Fire-wood). The text also includes a lyrical description of the area surrounding the monastery: wooded hillsides, deposits of silver, and a beautiful river crossing the land.

The epilogue, on the other hand, follows the clinical style of an entry in a modern-day encyclopedia. The subject is again the monastery of Orthokosta, but this time it is described through cold, hard facts: geographical coordinates and administrative classifications are used to define the place. The history of the monastery is researched through the etymology of its name, and no personal impressions are injected in the text. Following this, the “entry” refers to Isaakios’ book of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, calling him a “fabricator” (“psevdīs Isaakios”) and rejecting all the descriptions in his testimony, attributing them to “poetic escapism from a life of duress” (341). From the “entry” we learn that Isaakios spent the last twelve years of his life in the monastery, under confinement for heresy and simony.

Each text claims itself to be the true description of the monastery. Both are based on an authority, the first on that of an eye witness, the second on that of modern-day facts, leaving no room for doubt. Their nature extends the irony. The older account provides the only true description we have from that time; one can easily imagine it being used as an unquestionable source by

scholars, even by contributors to encyclopedias. An encyclopedia entry, on the other hand, is, by nature, the bearer of undisputed truth. Through the invalidation of the one text by the other, each of them suggesting that it alone holds the truth, we find a critical viewpoint about what constitutes truth—a view that permeates *Orthokosta*.

The 47 numbered chapters that form the main corpus of the book do not depart significantly from the issues broached in the two non-integral excerpts that frame them, and as such can be viewed in their turn as testimonies of events in the same region. The chapters have the form of oral interviews of individuals from Kastri transcribed on paper by an invisible hand and presented to the reader unedited.<sup>21</sup> In some chapters, a man in his fifties, well acquainted with the interviewees, clearly a fictional portrayal of Valtinos, interrupts the narration with questions, comments, and corrections to the narrators. Dimitris Raftopoulos notes that “the narrations are rarely complete; their beginning is frequently absent, while the episodes end or are altered when repeated by a different person. Most of the time, one can assume, an initial question has preceded and the text begins from some point in the response.”<sup>22</sup> There appears to be no specific, predetermined subject that the narrators must talk about. The majority of the stories revolve around events during the Occupation and its aftermath, but there are other chapters about incidents far more recent or far older. Life in times of peace is not beautified in these recollections; quarrels, poverty, and violence are everywhere in them. The same harsh realism is used to describe their lives but they seem to have nothing in common with the “blood-thirsty animals” they would become during the war.<sup>23</sup>

The main theme of the book, however, is the Occupation and the Civil War as they unfold in the stories of the 38 remaining chapters. Local history looms large in these chapters, starting from the creation of the regional branch of ELAS in 1943. According to the testimonies, locals welcomed the resistance group and enlisted in the organization. Disputes occurred only when ELAS made clear its desire to take power in Greece after the Occupation, and persecuted those opposed to its plans. In February, 1944 ELAS created camps in isolated monasteries (Orthokosta, Loukou, Elonas) to detain its rivals; some of the narrators of the novel were held in captivity in these camps. The camps were dissolved in March, 1944 after German troops began operations in the region, and the prisoners fled to Tripoli to protect themselves. On March 31 the Security Battalions were formed in Tripoli by people being pursued by ELAS in an attempt to protect themselves. Three arson attacks were carried out in the village. In the first one, in May of that year, ELAS set selected houses of Security

Battalion members on fire. As a response, the Security Battalions, along with the Germans, routed the village, arresting those who were under suspicion for associating with ELAS and forcing the neutrals to move to Tripoli. ELAS burnt down the houses of the people who had fled to Tripoli a few days later, after accusing them of collaborating with the Germans. When the Germans left Greece, ELAS besieged the Security Battalions in the cities, leading to massacres in some cases (Meligalas) and surrender in others (Tripoli). The loss of ELAS' power after its disarmament in February, 1945, offered an opportunity for revenge to its victims. ELAS leaders were often lynched by mobs in retaliation. The Civil War is rarely mentioned in the testimonies; it did not affect community life in the way the conflicts of the Occupation did.

Even though there are many different narrators, there are few variations in the recollection of the past. The events are listed in a linear fashion, seldom using flashbacks, in a style that resembles Valtinos' early novellas *Descent of the Nine* and *The Life and Times of Andreas Kordopatis* (*Synaksari Andrea Kordopati*). But the scenes appear to be cut off from the historical context in which they occur, deprived of interpretations and of connection to anything beyond local experience. Exceptions to this are the chapters narrated by the brothers Kostas and Giannis Dranias. Through them, a global view of events surfaces in the novel, an approach to Greek history that shifts away from the micro level and includes in its interpretation actions from the national and international political arena.

The disagreement of the testimonies in the book with scholarly history makes them look like products of a counter-memory<sup>24</sup> still in existence among the local population. A different perception of past events is at work within the community and is reproduced through micro-networks in the village. These recollections do not maintain a defensive stance toward the dominant historiography; on the contrary, they aggressively attempt to establish their own version of the past as the only acceptable interpretation of it. The conflict over memory is not without a reason. As Tzvetan Todorov argues, the act of remembering is not “a task of recovering memory [...] but rather the defense of a particular selection among these facts, one that assures its protagonists of maintaining the roles of hero or victim when faced with any other selection that might assign them less glorious roles.”<sup>25</sup> In *Orthokosta*, the act of remembering is the act of redefining the sides of good and evil in the 1940s, defending under current circumstances the decisions the narrators made back then. The testimonies might be addressed to a person with whom they are well acquainted with, but in fact they are answers to the accusations of treachery

and collaboration.<sup>26</sup> A number of recurring patterns in their speech assists them in this attempt.

The routine violence repeatedly depicted in daily life describes a world where every decision is de-ideologized under the weight of survival. Moral values and ideas become a luxury in a time when one has to hide under a murdered woman's skirt and pretend to be dead to avoid execution; A man is killed because of a tune he played on his clarinet, and a father is forced to participate in a festive party with the murderers of his son on the same night as the killing. The atmosphere of terror and violence is well-suited to the organization of the narratives through the action-reaction pattern. The decisions that a given character makes are a response to an earlier action by ELAS—in most cases a necessary response in order to survive. This way of presenting the past frees the subjects from responsibility for their actions, casting them as mere reactions to ELAS' earlier wrongdoing, whether their actions are enlisting in the Security Battalions in 1944 or torturing to death an old captain of ELAS in 1946. This line of narration is used even when the story does not support it. In any case, the latter event is presented first and the narrators' earlier decision is reported in the story as its result. In other cases, certain events are falsely chronologized to reinforce the desired scenario. In addition to the above, there is the use of the massacre of Meligalas, the battle of Athens in December 1944, and the Civil War to confirm ELAS' evil ambitions and its decision to execute anyone who might stand in its way. By presenting the local resistance groups of 1943 in the light of the actions of ELAS in the fall of 1944 and of the Republican Army between 1946-1949, the narrators give the impression of a unified KKE, unchanged over time, in complete control over the structure of its organizations, thus providing a justification for the decision of the narrators to take up arms against it right from the start.

Of particular interest in the organization of the testimonies is the different ways in which the story of the final days of Markos Ioannitzis is presented by different persons in the novel.<sup>27</sup> Markos Ioannitzis was a liberal lawyer and ex-officer of the Greek army who came from one of the small villages on the outskirts of Kastri called Karatoula (the same village in Kastri where Valtinos was raised). Ioannitzis was killed by ELAS in the fall of 1943, and his death is often cited as the reason the interviewees opposed ELAS and enlisted in the Security Battalions. But while ELAS' cruelty and the unrightful assassination of the most respected young man of the village is their purported justification, in one testimony we read that Karatoula was one of the only two villages in the area without an EAM organization. The village was known for its support



of the King, so naturally it was against an army having social reconstruction and parliamentary democracy as its goal. This dimension in their relationship with ELAS never appears. On the contrary, they speak of the good will they showed toward the resistance up until Ioannitzi's murder.

The story of Ioannitzi's death is a recurring topic in many chapters, each exploring a different rumor concerning the exact circumstances of his murder; all of these recurring narratives, however, depict cruelty and disregard for human life by ELAS. The last dinner he had with his friends the night before his death—a biblical allusion to the Last Supper, at the end of which one of those attending the banquet will betray him—often comes up: a peaceful gathering of friends creates a stark contrast with the harshness of the times and the murder of Ioannitzi that follows. What remains veiled in all but one case is the content of Ioannitzi's conversation that night, announcing the beginning of a revolt against ELAS through the formation of a new military group in the mountains with the support of British liaisons. This information would transform Ioannitzi from an unsuspecting victim of ELAS to an opponent operating in the mountains with a motive and who, at that time, with so many incidents and conflicts occurring, was for ELAS a thorn in its side.

This kind of self-incrimination is further in evidence through the use of other methods. In his first testimony, in the fourth chapter of the book, Kostas Dranias talks about his service in Trikala in the summer of 1945, depicting an almost medieval scene, with fires burning all around the village at night for protection and the army locked inside the camps after sunset, terrorized by roaming squadrons of former ELAS members.<sup>28</sup> Members of the army still appear to be powerless, in contrast with the communists, who have the ability to achieve what they want: Dranias's battalion is transferred from its camp because of an article in the KKE newspaper, *Rizospastis*, mentioning the connections between the army and the para-military Sourlas group.

The testimonies of Kostas (chapters 4, 29, 33) and Giannis (chapters 9, 19) Dranias belong to a different category of recollection of the events. Kostas Dranias was the subcommander in the Tripoli battalion and served as an interrogator of civilians. German troops saluted Giannis Dranias on the street and he knew the pass codes in order to be able to circulate after curfew to visit his mistress. These testimonies are less in keeping with the one-dimensional action-reaction pattern of other testimonies intended to justify the narrators' actions, and instead subsume their actions under a strategy with nationalistic concerns. They construct a greater interpretive context for their actions, creating a bipolar system, with ELAS on one side and the powers trying to

protect democracy on the other. The two men do not restrict their testimonies to justifying all their actions as a response to ELAS violence, but instead give higher ideological dimensions to their decisions. Violence in these testimonies is condemned, even the violence of their inferiors. Kostas Dranias says in chapter 33: “The hordes from the Battalions grabbed whatever they could find. Kastri was burned down, of course. We went to Agios Petros, same thing there. Then down to Aigiannis, from there to Mesogeio Astros. And all of them barging into houses, plundering. As if they were in a foreign land. In a foreign country. A country I could never imagine”(234). Denouncing the violence and the atrocities, Dranias accepts the facts, which he knows he can't deny, but simultaneously discharges himself from the responsibility of these actions, attributing them to reasons unrelated to him. He condemns the extreme violence, referring to the reports he wrote exposing the problems to his superiors. His denouncement is accompanied by citing the lack of authority he had to stop the atrocities along with his ignorance of what was happening, and also his attempt to change things by forwarding an official report of what he had seen to his superiors. In two separate places he mentions that he left his office in Tripoli just once, and only to collect an ELAS captain who had decided to collaborate with them—all this to stress how little responsibility he had over what was happening away from Tripoli.

These social frames of memory appear throughout the book, not only in the stories by former Security Battalion members and their relatives but by those who had suffered at the hand of the Security Battalions as well. An explanation for this paradox might be that this narrational strategy is the only one they can use in recollecting their past. Two incidental references, however, on pages 114 and 248 respectively, open up a different possibility for understanding all the testimonies in the book.

The first one, the testimony of a man named Loukas, is about a night in 1946 when a group of fifteen para-military troopers came to Karatoula to capture Panagiotis Veremis, a former high-level cadre of EAM. According to Loukas, the men in charge of the group were not from the village; they were simply stationed there, but he doesn't know by whom. This detail changes the interpretative structure of the “White Terror” as an act of revenge, and instead suggests a vertical organization of the “campaign” with leaders of the groups being imposed from above in the hierarchy. Instantly, his wife interrupts him and asks him to stop talking (114). When he responds that what he is saying is true and should be mentioned by someone, his wife finally agrees, but says that he shouldn't be the one to jeopardize himself through such a testimony.

There is here, breaking through the lines of the text, a silencing of any events that are at odds with the common recollection of the past.

The second instance is in chapter 35, when a narrator starts talking about the circumstances under which the villagers of Karatoula enlisted in the Security Battalions, but he is interrupted by someone present at the discussion and is warned “not to say things he shouldn’t” (248). This proves that there are things that should be said and others of which no one must speak. Since this important facet of the testimonies is passed from the tape recorder onto paper and then to us, the readers, informing us of the conditions under which memory is recollected, we can assume that the same conditions have affected the recollections we read elsewhere as well.

Let us examine the above in the light of the three “labels” used, often unfairly, to characterize *Orthokosta* since its publication: first, that it is a “left-wing novel”; second, the “Security Battalion’s Holy Bible” and third, a “great historical novel”. Starting from the latter, regarding the characterization of “historical novel” that has been attributed to Fillipos Iliou,<sup>29</sup> we can see that *Orthokosta* closely follows history not in its actual reporting of the events in the region during the Occupation, which are presented in a biased fashion throughout the book, but in the area of the representation of the actual speech of the former members of the Security Battalions. We may not learn what happened in Kastri by reading *Orthokosta* but we can learn how, and under what circumstances, the protagonists recollect it. Calling *Orthokosta* the “Holy Bible” of the Security Battalions reveals more about it than what first comes to mind. While the initial use of this label was meant to comment on the intentions behind its writing, if we leave Valtinos’ intentions aside, since we can never actually know them but only make assumptions, we see that this second label describes the content of the book well. *Orthokosta* is indeed a kind of “Holy Bible” of the Security Battalions, in so much as it contains their truth, or their side of the story, the past they recollect (or reconstruct) in order to protect their past. But being their “Holy Bible” does not exclude *Orthokosta* from being a “left-wing novel” as well. “Left-wing,” not necessarily in the interpretation Valtinos and Dimitris Raftopoulos give—that is, in so much as it is a different evaluation of ELAS and, in this way, allows the Left to come to terms with its own mistakes—but “left-wing” in the narrower sense that it reveals the patterns through which ELAS’ rivals have built their own version of the events, presenting a “wall of voices,” all leading to the condemnation of ELAS, but with enough flaws in this wall to enable the reader to see that this “truth” is constructed in many different ways.

Memory constitutes the basic element of unity in a community. A common memory of a common past is the first thing that is created in every community in order to establish bonds that will keep it together, regardless of whether the community is as big as a nation or as small as a village. For this reason, it is essential for all of its members to agree on a common way of recollecting the past, by choosing to make similar omissions in their testimonies, by using the same techniques and by naming (or categorizing) things in the same manner.<sup>30</sup> In this way, the testimonies in *Orthokosta* that refer to the Occupation and the Civil War construct not only a common way for villagers from the region to remember civil war, but also their validating system and their values.

If we take the 38 chapters that talk about the Occupation and the Civil War as a representation of local memory of that era, this leaves the remaining 9 chapters of the book as a depiction of the way they recollect other eras, both before and after the decade of the 1940s. In the book's 47 chapters, the decade of the 1940s is given the great majority of space, and this is an important factor in formulating the entire local memory. While all the other testimonies are fragments, without connection to one another and without connection to current events, the Civil War is still vivid, alive, an open wound that still shapes identities and standards of conformity. The memory of the '40s is too much for them to handle or include in the same system with all the other events. What happens in *Orthokosta* is that all the other memories not relating to the Occupation have no room to express themselves, as the Occupation was something so important that nothing else can be recollected. It is often argued in Greece that the Civil War<sup>31</sup> has been by far the most formative event of contemporary Greek history. Valtinos shares this opinion. If we reread this book and look at those chapters that do not focus on the Civil War, what we have is a book about local memory in a certain region, how it is formed, and what kind of structure it has. We are talking here about memory that is expressed out in the open, because what is hidden underground remains a mystery. In this respect, we can see common ground with two other well-known works by Valtinos, the novellas *Deep Blue Almost Black* (*Ble Vathy Shedon Mavro*) and *Woodcock Feathers* (*Ftera Bekatsas*). *Orthokosta* refers for the most part to memory that is spoken, to the forces that shape it, and to the channels that transform it and cause people to recollect things other than what they actually witnessed at the time. *Deep Blue Almost Black* is generally considered to be a book about memory and how it torments people, memory that cannot be expressed, but keeps growing while remaining locked inside a person like a cancer, in the end becoming the

person itself. The female narrator who talks into the tape recorder is simply trying, through words, to express and thereby escape from her memories, and concludes her monologue with the well-known lines: “Memory can’t be put aside, memory just is...” In a similar vein, the novella *Woodcock Feathers* is about a quarrel between a married couple in which the husband’s voice and his arguments are constantly drowning out those of his wife. Whatever she says, the dominant male voice has an answer, leaving her without an argument to prove her point. She tries to support herself in non-verbal ways, by hitting her husband or breaking the jewelry he bought her. She insists she has reason to feel the way she does, whether it is due to loneliness of the spirit or loneliness of the flesh. Whichever of the two it might be, there is something inside her that motivates her to persist in destroying her marriage, something she cannot express through words because she is not capable of arguing with her husband, or simply because words are inadequate to convey the import of her feelings.<sup>32</sup>

Keeping this in mind, if we look again at the prologue and the epilogue of the book, they give new meaning to their presence and to the 47 chapters that are interposed between them. Testimonies, recollections, memorials both written and spoken, all of these can convey only a small part of what a person has to say, as they are intermediated through so many filters –personal, political, idiosyncratic, or other– that in the end nothing of what we read, learn, or believe can be considered true, not even if we ourselves were eye witnesses, because we ourselves can also become inadvertent deceivers who will falsify what we know. Valtinos himself is subject to the same problem, and rejects the status of an objective compiler and editor of this book. Isaakios falsified his “description” because of his life of duress, which drove him to try to escape reality through lyricism. On many occasions Valtinos has described the life of a writer as the life of a monk, living in solitude, lacking worldly comforts, devoted solely to literature.

*Orthokosta* is an attack on the prevalent scholarly historiography of the Civil War through a number of witnesses’ testimonies that refute it. It is also an attack on the validity of historic knowledge through its criticism of the veracity of the resources that scientific research uses. Whether they are testimonies or archives or even cold, hard facts, they are formulated through one’s personal subjectivity, one’s own viewpoints, fears and wishes, and are thus transformed. In this way, *Orthokosta* refutes its own claim as a vehicle of the truth, since it too is just a series of testimonies; in any event, people’s experience cannot be conveyed in this manner, since it can never fit into words.

## NOTES

1. All citations in this article refer to the last edition of the book in 2007 by Vivliopoleion tis Estias.
2. Contemporary periodization of the civil war sets its beginning in 1946 and its end in 1949. Most events around which the majority of the testimonies in *Orthokosta* revolve (arrests and confinement in the monastery, the creation of Security Battalions, the migration of the population from Kastri to Tripoli and Athens, the three arson attacks on the village) take place in late 1943 and 1944. However, the way events are presented, they conform to the theory of the post-war State of the “three phases” of the civil war (1943-1944, December 1944, 1946-1949). In the last decade, there has arisen a new group of researchers, originating from many fields outside traditional historical disciplines, who support a “reperiodization” from 1943-1949 (Kalyvas-Marantzidis 2004). *Orthokosta* is often used as a resource in their publications. For this and similar reasons, *Orthokosta* is a crucial book as far as a literary approach to the complexity of the civil war goes.
3. The collective volume *Gia ton Valtino*, which was edited by Theodosios Pylarinos, includes some of the most important texts concerning *Orthokosta* (223-303). In Vangelis Calotychos’ “Writing Wrongs, (Re)righting History?: *Orthotita* and *Orthographia* in Valtinos’s *Orthokosta*”, Thanasis Skoupras’ “H Orthokosta tou Thanasi Valtinou kai i kritiki” and Dimitris Paivanas’ “The prose of Thanassis Valtinos. Postmodernism and the historiographical issue” there is a further analysis of the dispute. The latter work in particular attempts to draw a connection between the negative criticism about *Orthokosta* and the positive criticism about *Descent of the Nine* in the left wing press, to find out if either work was misinterpreted.
4. The Occupation and the Civil War are events that, in general, are hard to explore separately. In particular, studying the memory of the Civil War and the Occupation separately is impossible since the Civil War has been the filter through which the Occupation is approached by successive generations (Voglis 2008: 63).
5. Stathis Kalyvas cites *Orthokosta* as one of the reasons that helped shift his own focus to the mass-level (Kalivas, 2009).
6. According to Penelope Papailias, *Orthokosta’s* readers were annoyed because they were asked to “familiarize with a point of view different than the one of the disappointed communist: that of the hurt “enemy” (2007: 174). Similar is the approach by Fillipos Iliou who attributed the negative reception that *Orthokosta* had from left-wing intellectuals to their opinion that the ELAS violence should be interpreted through a left point-of-view (2003).
7. Bontila, 2006 pages 249-267.

8. Henry Rousso, p. 10.
9. Tasos Kostopoulos.
10. Personal interview with Thanasis Valtinos.
11. More on this subject can be found in ‘Mia diskoli tetraetia’ by Nikos Alivizatos (2008).
12. The first publication of the archives was in the pages of the left-wing newspaper Avgi in December, 1979 and January, 1980. This research was published in a book shortly after his death in 2004.
13. Two of the most important works according to this paradigm are *Istoria tou Ellinikou Emfiliou Polemou: 1946-1949* by Giorgos Margaritis and *Istoria tis Elladas ton 20o aiona, volumes C1 and C2* edited by Christos Chatziiosif and Prokopis Papastratis.
14. Giorgos Antoniou-Nikos Marantzidis, “The Greek Civil War Historiography, 1945-2001. Toward a new paradigm”.
15. Giorgos Mavrogordatos, 1999.
16. A critique of Greek Society forgetting its past can be found in the last chapter of *Tria Ellinika Monoprakta* (Michel Fais 1994) and in *Stoiheia gia tin dekaetia tou '60*.
17. Valtinos rejects the label “non-fiction novel” focusing on the creative interference a writer gives to any story through his personal style and craft making it impossible for any story to be left untouched by the writer’s fiction. He does repeat, however, on each occasion that in *Orthokosta* he remains loyal to the actual historical events as they took place in the area.
18. A great deal of the controversy around *Orthokosta* concerned the relationship a novel must have to reality and how much liberty the author can take when he sets his story in a universe of historical events. For further reading on this matter one can see Angelos Elefantis “Orthokosta tou Thanasi Valtinou”, Dimitris Raftopoulos “H Orthokosta den einai sapounopera” and Thanasis Valtinos’ interviews after the publication of the book in *Anti* and *Eleftherotypia* and the 2004 interview in *Ta Nea* “Sou skotonoun ti mana. Poia diakiveumata mou lete?”
19. An example of this technique in Valtinos’s writing is “Grammata stin Filaki” from *Tria Ellinika Monoprakta* (1979), in the introduction to which he says he found the letters thrown in the toilets of Kalamos Prison in Chania. Because it is text, the reader perceives this as the truth, while it is in fact a trick by the novelist to create an atmosphere of reality in the preface. Vangelis Calotychos goes so far as to include the cover and the epigraph of the book in his own interpretation of the book.

20. Vangelis Calotychos has done a thorough analysis of the meanings that the word “katalogi” could carry and what it would mean for the novel (2000).
21. Gina Politi has written an interesting article in which she focuses precisely on how *Orthokosta* upsets the established historical discourse, giving voice to the hitherto suppressed, “silent” subject of history (Politi 1994).
22. Dimitris Raftopoulos, “To mithistorima tekmirion kata Valtinou”.
23. Dimitris Raftopoulos, “Thanasis Valtinos: Orthokosta,”.
24. More about counter-memory in the society can be found in George Lipsitz’s *Time Passages: Collective Memory and the American Popular Culture*, pages 213-231.
25. Todorov, “The uses and abuses of memory,” page 21.
26. More on this can be found in Penelope Papailia’s article “Dinontas foni sti Dexia,” pages 184-185.
27. Ioannitzis is a name Valtinos uses for a real person who shared the same goals as his literary alter ego. The real name of this individual can be found in some of the reviews of *Orthokosta*. Since this is not an article about the local history of Kastri but rather an article about *Orthokosta* and the relationships within its literary universe, it is unnecessary to mention it here.
28. The worst acts of terror came from Aris Velouchiotis and his squadrons, who roamed the area while being hunted by military and militia groups.
29. Fillipos Iliou said this during a speech at the presentation of the book. No transcript of that speech has been saved. The content of his speech can be partly restored through the newspaper reportages of the following day: Xari Pontida “To Paraxeno onoma enos monastiriou” *Ta Nea*, May 18, 1994, “Valtinou gia Tagmatasfalites”, *Eleftherotypia*, May 18, 1994 , “Mnimi kai aisthisi tis Istorias”, *Kathimerini*, May 18, 1994.
30. An interesting analysis of this from a social psychologist’s point of view can be found in “Joint remembering: constructing an experience through conversational discourse” by D. Edwards and D. Middleton.
31. In the context of the book, the latter phase of the Occupation and the Civil War coincide with each other.
32. This is a common theme in Valtinos’ books. This article would run too long and stray too far from its subject if we were to search for similar passages in each of his books. A very vivid example of this, however, can be found in Valtinos’ interpretation of Dionisios Solomos’s *Flowers of the Abyss (Anthi tis Avyssou)*.



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