

Women, Gender, and Technosciences, 1900–2020

A Beard to Govern

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“One Woman Started It All”. Gendered Approaches to the Governance of Knowledge in Post-War Greece

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8 “One Woman Started It All”. Gendered Approaches to the Governance of Knowledge in Post-War Greece

Loukas Freris and Maria Rentetzi

September 1960. Leon Carnovsky, Professor of library science at the University of Chicago Graduate Library School, and his wife, Marian Satterthwaite-Carnovsky, travel on a ship that has set sail from Italy to Greece. Carnovsky, “a forceful and persuasive lecturer, helpful adviser, and consummate critic”, with unprecedented experience for his time of the structure and government of public libraries abroad, was often in demand by UNESCO to advise foreign governments on library programs and education. In 1955, he had counseled the Israeli government about the feasibility of opening a library school in Jerusalem, and pleased with the success of the Israeli experiment, UNESCO invited Carnovsky to undertake a similar mission to Greece five years later. At the Greek port of Piraeus, the Carnovskys were welcomed by Stella Peppa-Xeflounda, head of libraries of the Greek Ministry of Education.¹ That day Carnovsky “dutifully recorded that, for the first time in the peninsula’s history, guests were delivered by bookmobile to an Athens hostelry”. Indeed, Peppa-Xeflounda gave the couple a ride to Athens on a bookmobile, part of the country’s mobile library program (Haygood 1968).

Peppa-Xeflounda had first met Carnovsky in 1948, when, as a guest of the British Council, she took a course at University College London’s School of Librarianship (in a program now known as Library and Information Studies) and visited several specialized libraries in Britain, France, and Scandinavia (Collingham 1952: 13). Through the UNESCO scholarship she also participated in the first international summer school for librarians in Manchester and London, organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the International Federation of Library Associations and the government of the United Kingdom. One of the five instructors of the summer school was Carnovsky, while Peppa-Xeflounda was among the 50 librarians from 19 countries who took part in the meeting, which lasted four weeks.² These seminars helped her become the first person in Greece with a modern library education, and it seems that she played a prominent role at the time.

In a lengthy article published in 1952, the *UNESCO Courier* introduced Peppa-Xeflounda as the person largely responsible for the founding of the first modern public lending library in Greece in 1948. “Two years ago the Greek island of Aegina had no public library. Today it has. This is largely due to the

initiative of one woman” (Collingham 1952: 13). The year of Carnovsky’s visit to Athens, the *UNESCO Courier* celebrated Peppa-Xeflounda as the woman in charge of the UNESCO Mobile Library program in Greece: “The cultural warmth that radiates from the Mobile Library of Mrs. Peppa-Xephounda is a conquest over the arid intellectual soil of some of the country districts” (“Books on Wheels” 1960). Peppa-Xeflounda, then, was among those who implemented UNESCO’s plan in Greece and governed knowledge in a deep and significant way. Hired by the Ministry of Education, she dedicated her entire life to the creation and promotion of the institution of the public library in the country, accepting high levels of responsibility and shaping an entirely novel and successful educational program.

After World War II, UNESCO, presenting itself as a modern Prometheus of sorts, championed the idea of public libraries as a weapon that would liberate people from the bonds of their ignorance by teaching them their rights. Promoting a universal culture of reading, UNESCO offered technical aid to its member states through literacy programs and the development of public libraries. Public libraries could be perceived as regulatory places constitutive of concepts of globalization and standardization of knowledge. At the same time, however, the public library (mobile or not) was a vehicle through which governments created national identities. In other words, as André Maurois, the famous French author closely associated with UNESCO, argued, “a library is not only a valuable tool for the nation’s use – it helps shape the nation itself” (1961: 18).

While the Greek government supported Peppa-Xeflounda’s effort to establish public libraries throughout the country, and, with particular emphasis promoted the institution of mobile libraries, it did not show the same willingness when it came to educating the people who would staff these libraries. It is not by chance that reports from UNESCO envoys about the establishment of a library school in Greece were locked away in ministries’ desk drawers not long after they saw the light of day. Given that the vast majority of professional librarians were women, librarianship was considered to be a “soft” female occupation, probably temporary, involving bookkeeping, and not requiring an academic background.

Feminization was indeed a critical aspect of the public service sector in the country. Since their late massive entry into the Greek public sector in the 1930s, women occupied lower positions in the hierarchy, performed monotonous tasks, were given fewer opportunities than their male colleagues, and were paid much less (Avdela 1990). In this gendered context, the resulting gap in the education of librarians was again filled by women’s initiatives.

From 1961 to the late 1970s the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) of Athens provided vocational training in librarianship, helping young women to enter the job market. In these seminars, instructions were provided on a variety of key library topics, such as cataloging, classification, bibliography, and library management. From Peppa-Xeflounda and

the YWCA to the young women who staffed public libraries; in every way women held the institution of public libraries in their hands.

Based on Peppa-Xeflouda's achievements in implementing the mobile library in Greece, one of the most ambitious UNESCO educational programs, this chapter explores the gendered governance of knowledge after World War II through institutional archives. We argue that international organizations such as UNESCO played an important role by creating opportunities not only for women's education but also for promoting women to leadership positions in their country of origin. By doing so they at least attempted to alter the gendered governance of knowledge in fields that were already considered as female disciplines. In Greece, the government promoted the establishment of public libraries because it considered them an ideal space in which the "enlightenment" of the people could be achieved; a space that would prove that Greekness was (both historically and culturally) directly linked to the pro-American policy of Greek post-war governments. Mobile libraries and libraries in general were seen as sites of Cold War propaganda.

The Dissemination of Knowledge in Female Hands

Stella Peppa's first post-secondary studies were a two-year seminar in library science at the National Library of Greece from 1930 to 1932. These studies likely contributed to her appointment as head of the Department of Libraries and Archives at the Ministry of Education in 1933. As William Carter, head of UNESCO's Bureau for the Exchange of Persons, described her role in the late 1940s, Peppa-Xeflouda became from early on a *fonctionnaire*, a civil servant of higher status, which later raised some eyebrows in UNESCO when her case was discussed.³ In 1933, she was also appointed secretary of the General Council of Libraries of Greece, an institution founded in 1931 with the aim of "organizing, specializing and arranging libraries in Greece in a spirit of harmony in accordance with the modern principles of librarianship".⁴ In addition, in 1937, she enrolled in the Panteios School of Political Science, from where she received her Bachelor's degree in 1940.

Peppa-Xeflouda's first important contact with new approaches to librarianship was through attending UNESCO's first international seminar for librarians. The seminar was held at the Manchester Public Library and headed by Arne Kildal of Norway in 1948. It brought together participants from some 20 countries and included lectures from the staff, university professors, and guest speakers; providing discussions and demonstrations of public library services. As Everett N. Petersen, UNESCO's first Head of Public Library Development, reported, the seminar was "an eye-opener for librarians from countries where public library services are little developed" (Petersen 1953:533). Subjects discussed, included: "the philosophy of public librarianship... the organization and administration of public libraries, technical processes, personnel, and finance" (Ibid.). Immediately after the completion of these summer courses, Peppa-Xeflouda was awarded a UNESCO

reconstruction fellowship. That brand-new program was established by UNESCO to “assist and stimulate educational, scientific and cultural reconstruction” (Drzewieski 1948: 5) especially in war-devastated countries planning to rebuild their facilities. The fellowship supported Peppaxeflounda’s tour in various European countries from October 1948 to March 1949. She had the opportunity to “visit a large number of institutions: public libraries as well as National – General and Special Libraries and to study librarianship” in “Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Belgium and France”.⁵

On her return to Greece, Peppaxeflounda immediately began to promote and transmit the knowledge she acquired. In 1949, she wrote an article in the magazine *O Bibliofilos* in which she suggested the urgent need to establish a school for librarians in Greece:

The education of library staff requires special training and presupposes the existence of Library Schools... if one examines the programs of the library schools in America and in European countries, one will see that they pay the most attention to the practical part of the librarians’ education. Because they all agree that while the librarian is of course a scientist, he is also a technician and an expert (Vakalopoulou 1994: 1).⁶

At the same time, Peppaxeflounda organized Greece’s first public lending library in Aegina, her home town. The fact that this library was installed in Aegina was symbolic in several ways. In 1829, Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias founded the first National Library of the newly formed Greek state also in Aegina.⁷ Thus intended or not, Peppaxeflounda’s action demonstrated the country’s strong library tradition. Previously, in Ottoman Greece, there had been libraries in Greek schools, established under the names *scholio*, *gymnasion*, or *academia* and usually operated by an Orthodox monastery. Many of these libraries were maintained after the establishment of the new Greek state in 1832, while new libraries, such as the National Library and the Library of the University of Athens, were added (Tsirimokos 1934). However, these libraries were aimed at a specialized and educated audience as they were used mainly by academics, researchers, or students. In contrast, the public library that Peppaxeflounda organized was—by definition—aimed at a larger population; a group also targeted by state propaganda.

Thus, Aegina, a small island in the Aegean Sea just South of Athens, became a point of transition from a classic library to the first public lending library in Greece. “And the emphasis is on the words modern and lending”, noted the *UNESCO Courier* when it welcomed the establishment of the library. Although public libraries already existed in Greece, they were “only public in the sense that they are property of the municipality... Readers may not borrow, nor are they free to browse amongst the shelves” (Collingham 1952:13). The lending system and the principle of free access to shelves were some of the innovative features of this library which would later be adopted by older

state libraries (Peppa-Xeflounda 1958). In addition, since its establishment, it housed a collection for children, making it the first and only library in Greece to provide such services for many years (Thanopoulou 1995).

Although the Aegina library started informally and on a voluntary basis, its establishment, along with Peppa-Xeflounda's influence at the Ministry of Education, was instrumental for the 1949 legislation that concerned the nation's library system. The governance of knowledge through the new public system for the distribution of books, and the establishment of library studies in the country were both strongly shaped by Peppa-Xeflounda and women's organizations. Yet, the politics of knowledge remained in the hands of the government.

The Politics of UNESCO's Technical Assistance Programs

In 1949, Konstantinos Tsatsos, the Minister of Education, noted that

The Greek state has so far witnessed a long delay in the establishment and organization of libraries in the capital and in the provinces. However, any further delay in this matter, which makes us lag behind other Balkan countries, many of which have maintained a well-organized library for many years, we do not think has a valid justification (Tsouderou-Papadatou 1962a).

As Alfred Reisch (2013) has argued with respect to the activities of the U.S. Information Service (USIS), the distribution of books to key individuals, libraries, and research institutions during the Cold War could be considered a type of political warfare against the Soviet bloc. John Matthews (2003) has described this program as the "secret Marshal Plan for the mind". On a smaller scale, the establishment of libraries and the distribution of books through mobile units in Greece served a similar aim: to affect the political behavior of the public and reduce the power of the country's Communist Party.

In Greece, the end of World War II coincided with the beginning of the Greek Civil War between the right-wing Greek government army (backed by the United Kingdom and the United States) and the left-wing Democratic Army of Greece (discreetly backed by the Soviets). The involvement of the great powers in this civil conflict has led many historians to consider the Greek Civil War as one of the first "hot" moments of the Cold War. As the historian André Gerolymatos put it, the Greek Civil War was "an international civil war, at least by proxy" (2016: xiii). The conflict ended in 1949 with the victory of the Greek government and its Western allies. Although at the time, Greece's political system was a "royal parliamentary democracy" power was essentially in the hands of non-parliamentary powers stronger than the official government: The king and his entourage, the intelligence services directly controlled by the CIA, and the military directly dependent on NATO and the

United States were the key players during this period (Mazower 2000; Liakos 2019). According to Peter Grose, biographer of Allen Dulles, the first civilian director of the CIA, “the most important center of power in Athens was the German-born Queen Frederika, manipulative queen mother of the future King Constantine” (1994: 450). But the defeat of the left in no way signaled the elimination of leftist views from the whole of Greek society. Just before the start of the Civil War, in the elections held on 31 March 1946, the power of the left had been measured by its absence. The decision of the leadership of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) to abstain from the elections resulted in a general electoral abstention estimated at 20–25% of the electorate—a dynamic that did not disappear during the Civil War (Mazower 2000: 7; Klapsis 2011).

In this context, the government’s support for libraries served not just the reorganization of the nation; it entailed an attempt to reproduce the official discourse of the state. Enacted in November, Emergency Law 1362 of 1949 proposed the establishment (and reconstruction) of state libraries across the country, so as to create (or restore) and to uniformly organize publicly supported libraries.⁸ The idea was to establish a standardized national library system, and the law described in detail the management, operation, and supervision of local libraries. A major concern was the recruitment of educated librarians who could classify and register new books, offer borrowing services, and preserve the new, precious holdings. Thus, one of the provisions referred to the “special training of executives for the acquisition of a specialized staff of librarians and classifiers”.⁹ According to the law, the training courses had to be conducted by the National Library, the country’s major library, founded in 1829, after Greece’s War of Independence.

Despite the legal provisions for the standardized management of libraries, the training of librarians had not yet become a national task. Instead, in the early 1950s, the USIS established four libraries in the country, in cities where the KKE was strong: Athens, Patras, Salonica, and Kavala. The “American Libraries” in Greece function as information nodes in an extended transnational network of libraries across the globe. By the end of the 1950s, USIS had established 161 libraries in 65 countries (Bournazos 2019: 283). Besides books, these libraries offered a window into American culture, music, and civilization. As Wilson P. Dizard—who served in the U.S. State Department and USIS at the time—put it, “Our worldwide system of libraries and cultural centers presents more than an image; they communicate directly and personally by mind and heart” (Dizard 1961: 191).

In collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Education, USIS soon offered training workshops for young librarians throughout the country: a two-day seminar in Athens in 1955, followed by five more seminars in other Greek cities in 1956, and finally, in 1957, a two-week training course at Athens College, a prestigious private school co-established by the Greek merchant Emmanouil Benakis, and American philhellenes in 1925. USIS’s activities were running in parallel with UNESCO’s initiatives in Greece, which had

offered the first international training opportunity to Peppaxefluda in 1948 and which donated the first mobile library unit to the country in 1957. In the early 1960s, UNESCO sent two internationally renowned librarian educators to Greece to assist in assessing the country's library system as part of its technical assistance program (Krikelas 1982).

In the first post-war decades, providing technical assistance to developing countries by sending experts from United Nations family organizations was common. Technical assistance was crucial in the co-construction of the late-developing State. According to David Webster, "Technical assistance as a new form of diplomacy was just as much about spreading ideas of modernity from North to South as it was about delivering economic development" (2011: 250). As Webster further notes, "in selling expertise, technical assistance advisors were also selling a specific model of development to receptive, like-minded elites in developing countries" (2011: 271). In the context of the development and modernization policies advocated by the then-Prime Minister of Greece, Konstantinos Karamanlis, the Greek government considered UNESCO's consulting as another bridge between Greece and the West.

The first UNESCO expert to arrive in Greece was Leon Carnovsky, Professor at the University of Chicago's Graduate Library School. Almost immediately after receiving Carnovsky's report, the Greek Ministry of Education asked UNESCO for another expert to reassess the situation. The second study was conducted shortly afterwards, in 1962, by Preben Kirkegaard, Director of the Royal Danish Library School in Copenhagen (Krikelas 1982). Although both experts were sent by UNESCO, their approaches differed significantly, and each came to their own conclusions about where to establish the new library school in Greece and whether it should be autonomous or part of a renowned institution.

Carnovsky experienced difficulties in identifying the right location for the school of librarianship. However, as he noted, "if the perfect site were demanded before establishing a library school, no school would be established at all" (1961: 12). In the end, he proposed a location contrary to the centralization tendencies of the time, which favored the capital, Athens. Carnovsky considered that the University of Salonica in Northern Greece was the best choice for the new library school since this institution was "young and adventurous in spirit" (12). He believed that the University's "large and well-organized library"—together with Salonica's Municipal Library, which he also praised—would provide the necessary background for enhancing the teaching of library courses (12).

Carnovsky suggested that the new school "be incorporated with the School of Philosophy" at the University of Salonica (24). According to the UNESCO expert's recommendations, prospective students planning to enroll in the library school would first have to attend the courses of the School of Philosophy for two years, while the actual training in library science would take place in the third and fourth year (14–15). He also stressed the need to organize seminars for the training of employees already working in

libraries(20). The main reason Carnovsky suggested that the library school be part of an existing school was his conviction that a new endeavor like this should be sponsored by a prestigious educational institution (Gerolimos 2011). On leaving Greece, Carnovsky submitted his report to the Ministry of Education in the hope that this would form the backbone of the new school. However, the Greek government did not find his proposal satisfactory.

Two years later another representative of UNESCO, Preben Kirkegaard, came to Greece with the same purpose: to study the conditions in the lending library system in Greece, and to submit his ideas for the establishment of a formal program of librarian education. In his report, Kirkegaard proposed, unlike Carnovsky, the creation of an independent school in Athens, a solution he arrived at after consulting with the Ministry of Education as well as some librarians. In the Ministry, he “found very little support for the plan of affiliating the library school with the University of Salonica” (Kirkegaard 1964: 4). Taking into account this reluctance concerning a library school in Northern Greece, and seeing that it would be rather difficult to find enough professional librarians in Salonica to support the school’s curriculum, Kirkegaard came up with the Athens solution. Athens was home to a significant percentage of the Greek population and also had more libraries, both functioned as additional reinforcements (Gerolimos 2011).

Finally, one of the most compelling points of the Kirkegaard report was that UNESCO would provide technical assistance to help organize the new school of librarianship.¹⁰ Starting in the academic year 1963–1964 and for the next three years, UNESCO would allocate an annual fund for sending experts to Greece, providing fellowships for the training of young Greek librarians abroad, and for the provision of equipment. The total cost in Kirkegaard’s plan amounted to \$44,500 (Kirkegaard 1964: 10). However, despite any hopes that might have been fueled by these reports, neither proposal was implemented by the Greek Ministry of Education. It would take many more years before the country’s first Department of Library Science was established in 1977 (Krikelas 1982).

The vacuum created by the state’s failure to establish a library school was filled partly by the newly founded Library School of the YWCA in Athens. YWCA Athens had started operating in the early 1920s and acquired a high-rise building in the city center in the 1950s, which enabled them to better organize programs aimed at the development and support of women. Under Chairperson Athena Tsouderou-Athanassiou, daughter of a former Greek Prime Minister, Emmanouil Tsouderos, the YWCA Athens housed social services, a boarding school for female students, a hostel for women travelers, a restaurant, and a lending library. One of the most important aspects of the YWCA’s work consisted in providing educational and training programs that aimed to educate young Greek women and thus enable them to “practice some ‘female’ job”. Thus, foreign language courses were taught within the YWCA, and a school for secretaries as well as the library school were established.¹¹

From September 1961 until 1977, when the Library Science Department at the Technological Educational Institute of Athens was established, the YWCA was the only way to be trained in librarianship. Their annual study program was the first professionally organized training in the field of libraries in Greece. In its first year of operation, 12 people took part in the courses at the YWCA—the same number of Greek graduate students who had studied librarianship abroad that year. The following year the interest increased with student numbers doubling (Tsouderou-Papadatou 1962b). In total, 288 people graduated from the school from 1961 to 1977 (Gerolimos 2011).

Because the YWCA school was the only provider of librarian education in Greece, the Greek government was forced to officially recognize it. The school received state certification in 1964.¹² While granting permission to operate, the government did not mention the graduates' professional rights. Since the school was not an institution of higher education; the government considered it to be a vocational high school for young women who had a basic education and worked (or wanted to work) in libraries. Even after attending this school, young librarian graduates were considered unskilled by the Greek State. Prerequisites for admission were a high school diploma, an interview, an entrance essay, and working knowledge of English. Courses were taught by local librarians and lasted three hours per day. Attendance costs 250 drachmas per month (Tsouderou-Papadatou 1962b). At the time, the minimum monthly wage for 18-year-old female office workers was set at 1.250 drachmas, as reported in the centrist newspaper *Eleftheria* (1961).

Since the YWCA School of Librarianship did not provide participants with a state-recognized certificate, this was both a serious handicap for the YWCA in securing funding and also for bestowing upon librarians a recognized professional status in the eyes of academics and the government (Krikelas 1982). The journalist Virginia Tsouderou-Papadatou, sister of the then president of the YWCA, commented strongly on this problem at the time. In an article (1962b) in *Eleftheria*, she accused that the project of establishing a state-supervised library school was still stagnant despite the government having passed the relevant law in 1949. However, the downplaying of the “female profession” of librarianship was not just a Greek phenomenon (Brand 1983). In 1972, Dee Garrison argued that the feminization of public librarians in the United States, which had begun in the mid-nineteenth century, resulted in a lower professional status than it might have had if left in the hands of men (1972). Thus, librarianship was perceived as feminine, reproductive work, in contrast to the productive work of research and book writing done by men (Mars 2018; Higgins 2017; Simon 1994). Barbara Brand also reminded us in 1983 that women had played an important role as institution builders, and she drew attention to their networking efforts providing mutual support and advancement (Brand 1983). In twentieth-century terms, governing knowledge included not only institution building but also gender strategies for social advancement and recognition.

This state of affairs concerned all the young women who staffed the public libraries of the country. An exception to this rule was the staff of the library of the Greek Atomic Energy Commission (GAEC), which had been established at about the same time. The foundations of the Commission were laid down slowly in the early 1950s when the Greek government aimed at the country's participation in the creation of CERN, the European nuclear research center in Switzerland. At the same time, the influence of American foreign policy as expressed by the "Atoms for Peace" program gave a great impetus to the Greek Atomic Energy Commission (Rentetzi 2009, 2010). One of the first recruitments made by GAEC was Noria Christoforidou, hired in March 1959—"Employee number 36!", she recalled humorously—as a self-taught librarian "with foreign language qualifications".¹³ The Greek AEC took care of her education by sending Christoforidou to CERN; in 1960, her training lasting one and a half years, and in 1963, for another year "to widen her experience of library and documentation services" (see Figure 8.1).¹⁴ The recognition of the importance of a systematic and scientific education



Figure 8.1 Noria Christoforidou provides information to Kurt Gottfried, a visiting scientist from Harvard, CERN 1963 (Courtesy of CERN, <https://cdsweb.cern.ch/record/40366>).

for the librarian made it plain that other librarians' lack of state-organized education was not a matter of ignorance, but a clear political choice that implicated the Greek Crown and government, as well as US interests (Rentetzi 2009).

Thus, during the first decades after World War II, the Greek state did not treat librarians as a profession that employed scientific methods and, therefore, was in need of systematic education. Librarianship was considered an easy and unskilled job which consisted merely in acting as a caretaker or guardian of a book collection. Accordingly, public libraries were not considered institutions capable of educating people. The Greek state saw libraries instead as a means of anti-communist propaganda, "penetrating and influencing the rural population" (Lialiouti 2019: 180). This political importance of libraries became even more evident in the case of mobile libraries.

Mobile Libraries and Cold War Propaganda

In late 1957, UNESCO, in collaboration with the Greek Ministry of Education, launched a program to expand the free library service throughout the country and invited Stella Peppa-Xeflounda to govern its implementation. Having obtained the only Fulbright Scholarship intended for Greek specialists and youth leaders, she spent 1955 at the prestigious library school of Simmons College in Boston—acquiring the appropriate qualifications to lead a lending library program.¹⁵

As part of the new program, UNESCO donated a four-ton mobile library (or "bookmobile") to Greece in 1957 which was also equipped with a projector and screen to show films. With some 15,000 books at her disposal, Peppa-Xeflounda undertook the establishment of book collections in towns and villages around the country, starting from the extended area of Athens and gradually moving to other inland cities and islands. In each town that the mobile library visited for the first time, the librarians left a collection of 50 to 150 volumes, "usually in the office of the town clerk", which were exchanged for other books on later visits. The bookmobile visited the suburbs around Athens monthly, and more distant parts of the country once every two or three months (Carnovsky 1961: 6–7) (see Figure 8.2).

The Greek press warmly welcomed the initiative. Ioannis M. Panagiotopoulos, one of the most famous writers and educators of the time, wrote a laudatory article about mobile libraries. "An enlightened lady, Stella Peppa-Xeflounda", he related, "has devoted valuable forces and knowledge to the organization and promotion of these mobile libraries in the farthest corners of the country". He further noted:

Mobile libraries lend books, pass them on, return the borrowed ones, share others, pass them again, collect what they have scattered, scatter new ones. The villages welcome them at first with curiosity and cautiously, then they look forward to it. Mobile libraries are a cultural project the importance of which we may not have yet realized.

(Panagiotopoulos 1959: 1)

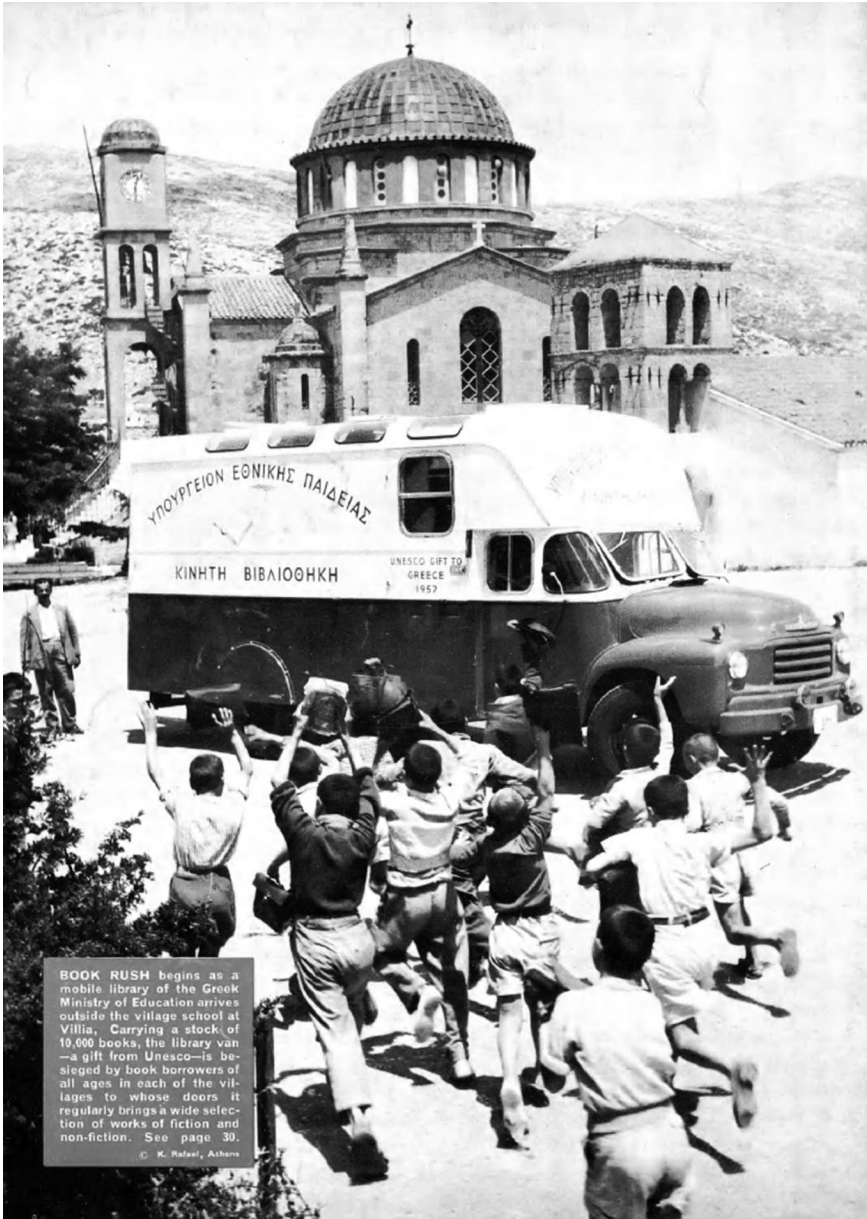


Figure 8.2 Arrival of the Greek bookmobile at the school of Villia, Greece, 1958 (Courtesy of UNESCO, *UNESCO Courier* 13(1), 1960 36).

While Panagiotopoulos's readers might not have realized the importance of mobile libraries, the Greek government understood how they served its own interests. While Greek authorities seemed reluctant to organize a state-supervised school of librarianship, the situation was completely different regarding the mobile libraries. Inspired by UNECSO's idea, the government organized four more vehicles that toured the country from September 1957 and throughout the next decade. And just like the original UNESCO bookmobile, these mobile libraries doubled as mobile cinemas, an institution with a long tradition in Greece.¹⁶ During the Marshall Plan, mobile units of the armed forces, properly equipped by the United States, toured the Greek countryside, showing propaganda films and videos of news and current affairs (Loukopoulou 2018)—“celluloid weapons”, as Thomas Doherty aptly described them, in the “Cold War struggle for hearts, minds and, perhaps most of all, stomachs” (2005: 151). Based on this tradition, Greek authorities perceived the new cine-library units as an opportunity for widely distributing government, and especially anti-Communist propaganda.

Despite the constant persecution of the Communists from the end of the Civil War onwards, in the late 1950s the Greek left was gaining momentum. In the elections of 1958, the Communist Party of Greece had been declared illegal, so the United Democratic Left (EDA) became the leading opposition party with 24.4% of the vote (Nikolakopoulos 2013). Despite the pro-American and anti-Communist orientation of post-war Greek governments, “the predictable political presence of the left and the repercussions of its ideology” posed a challenge to both the Greek government and their American allies (Lialiouti 2019: 40)—a challenge to which the establishment of public libraries could potentially be a powerful response.

The central figure in this strategy was Konstantinos Tsatsos, a former professor of law who would later serve as President of Greece from 1975 to 1980. In addition to being an experienced politician, Tsatsos was also one of the foremost Greek intellectuals. During the interwar and post-war periods, he had been instrumental in forming a discourse on Greekness which, according to the historian Antonis Liakos (2019: 379), combined Greek nationalism with an ideology of the free world.¹⁷ The common denominator was anti-Communism. According to Tsatsos and his allies, “Communism was not only a political but also a racial enemy” (Liakos 2019: 389; Papadimitriou 2006). Thus Communism was presented as an ideology that might suit the Slavs but certainly not the Greeks, seeing that all of Western culture had been built on Greek antiquity.

In the first government formed by Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis in 1955, Tsatsos took over the Ministry of the Presidency, a top ministry in post-war Greece, overseeing subordinate departments and acting as the Prime Minister's staff. The Greek elections of 1958 again brought victory

to the conservative faction. However, in the same elections, the left-wing EDA managed to considerably extend its share of the vote. The government's response was "to create invisible mechanisms for controlling political views that involved the Secret Services" (Liakos 2019: 389). Thus, the Ministry of the Presidency, under Tsatsos's leadership, drafted a proposal "for the organization of the Greek Enlightenment" which aimed, on the one hand, at "keeping the population in the national coalition" and, on the other hand, at "deploying a percentage of those affected by Communism and returning them to this faction". According to this proposal, one of the key tools for achieving these goals was mobile libraries, which were overseen by the Ministry of the Presidency and the Ministry of Education.¹⁸

Using vehicles and drivers from the Greek army and projection machines provided by the USIS, the government thus achieved an unprecedented diffusion of selected knowledge to the people in rural Greece. In this mountainous terrain, where many areas are geographically isolated, the contribution of the Greek army was decisive. Their military vehicles, built to withstand even the most difficult conditions, could reach the most inaccessible mountain villages. This capability was particularly important for the government propaganda apparatus if we consider that EDA had a strong performance both in urban centers and in the countryside (Rizas 2008). In the second half of 1957 alone, mobile cine-libraries visited a total of 264 villages. They lent about 10,000 books, donated another 7,500 books and magazines, and held 201 movie screenings. Much of the material distributed by these libraries was indeed propagandistic and anti-Soviet, as a look at the titles of some of the books makes clear: "Meet Communism", "Have at you Greece!", "Blame the Communist Party of Greece", "The Red Jackals", "Red Agents and Greek Workers", "In the Thieves of Siberia", etc.¹⁹

It would be naive to think that the Greek government based its propaganda machine entirely on some books and anti-Communist brochures, nor should we underestimate the impact of the mobile library program, and dismiss it as an expression of Cold War paranoia. These books were an important link in a chain. The goal of the Greek government was to dissuade those that "had been infected by Marxist materialism during the Occupation" (Liakos 2019: 380–381). For the sake of such political intervention, many institutions were used, first and foremost the schools, in which children are taught the values that the government chooses to transmit. As the then Minister of Education Konstantinos Tsatsos put it in 1949, "pedagogy" was nothing but "the continuation of the same war [that is, the civil war] in a new form" (Katsoudas 2018: 195). But state-sponsored nationalism was also expressed in churches, on the radio, in courtrooms, in national anniversary ceremonies, and wherever there was social life (Liakos 2019; Karakasidou 2000; Arkadas 2017). In this context, the books, magazines, and brochures that the Greek government distributed via the mobile libraries functioned as propaganda weapons.

Conclusion

On 3 January 2019, UNESCO tweeted about its recent video on the history of its educational programs and promised to take us on a visual journey around the world. In this 40-second-short clip, an image of a mobile library stands out. Taken in Colombia in 1955, the image features an “eager queue of girls” waiting to visit the UNESCO mobile library in Medellín.²⁰ This bus-like library attracted our attention. Our recent involvement with the history of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s mobile radioisotope laboratory made us want to learn more about this type of mobile unit (Rentetzi 2021). We soon discovered that such a mobile library had been donated by UNESCO to Greece in 1957 to bring books directly to people in areas where there were no local infrastructures. One of the photographs taken at that time shows a group of young children running happily toward the mobile library (see Figure 8.2). Our further involvement in the issue made us realize that this was not a simple photograph but a palimpsest with multiple historical and social layers.

At first glance at the photo, we can see the inscription on the door of the bookmobile: “UNESCO gift to Greece 1957”. Promoting a universal culture of reading and public libraries—and thus governing the dissemination of knowledge on a global level—UNESCO offered technical assistance to member states through literacy programs and the development of public libraries. Looking closer at the palimpsest, the figure of a woman appears, that of Stella Peppa-Xeflounda. This woman, a librarian at the Ministry of Education, was the driving force behind the development of public libraries in Greece. Taking advantage of the opportunities for studies abroad, i.e., through the provision of scholarships by UNESCO and other international actors, Peppa-Xeflounda developed leadership skills, and then she headed the mobile library program in Greece. Given the lack of archival sources, it has been impossible to access how many women (and men) were able to benefit from this program. What became obvious however, is that going deeper into the layers of the palimpsest, the figures of many more women are revealed; women who participated in the librarianship courses organized by the YWCA. The absence of any state concern about training librarians made the YWCA the sole choice of prospective librarians for over a decade. Thus, education in librarianship was left in the hands of Greek women.

Next, other figures emerge, such as Leon Carnovsky or Preben Kirkegaard, who visited Greece—separately—in the early 1960s to advise the government on setting up a library school. These experts reveal the role played by international organizations such as UNESCO after World War II. By sending experts to developing countries or by training young scientists through the institution of fellowships, international organizations tried to transfer a specific model of development to these countries. However, the indifference of the Greek government regarding the proposals of the UNESCO experts reveals that development is a deeply gendered issue.

The last layer of the palimpsest invites us to study the history of post-Civil War Greece through the operation of public libraries (mobile or not). The Greek government orchestrated an anti-Communist symphony around the libraries. The composer and conductor of this symphony was Konstantinos Tsatsos, one of the most important politicians and intellectuals of the time. Greece, indifferent to the education of the women who staffed its libraries, set up with great care a well-tuned mechanism for distributing thousands of propagandistic “hot books” (Reisch 2013) in every city and village in the country.

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Notes

- 1 Stella Peppa-Xeflounda, born Peppa in 1912, married Stelios Xefloundas (1901–1984), a Greek writer of the Generation of the Thirties.
- 2 The Work of the Libraries Division of UNESCO, 1948 Conference: UNESCO/IFLA International Summer School for Librarians, Manchester and London, LBA/CONF.2/6, UNESCO Digital Archives. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147429?_posInSet=8&queryId=5fa863b1-a66d-44a6-a9a8-a2964212fe16.
- 3 UNESCO Archives, Box Reg 331, 376 (495) “-56” Peppa.
- 4 F.E.K. (Government Gazette) [in Greek]. 210/1931 A, Regarding the establishment of the General Council of Libraries of Greece.
- 5 UNESCO Archives, Box Reg 331, 376 (495) “-57” Peppa.
- 6 All translations from the Greek are our own unless otherwise noted.
- 7 The official independence of Greece took place in 1832 when, with the Treaty of London, the country became a monarchy named the Kingdom of Greece. The Greek revolution had commenced in 1821, but until the arrival of Kapodistrias in 1828, the Hellenic Republic was not recognized as a state; it was called the “Provisional Administration of Greece” as long as it fought for independence from the Ottoman Empire. In 1826, Aegina was designated the provisional capital of the newly formed Greek state, a status it maintained until 1829, when the capital was moved to Nafplio. For an overview of the history of Modern Greece see Kolio-poulos and Veremis (2010).
- 8 Emergency Law 1362/1949. Retrieved from http://www.et.gr/idoscs-nph/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wH6SCddhZcqqXdtvSoClrL88bwy3eyVpoJ5MXD0LzQTLWPU9yLzB8V68knBzLCmTXKaO6fpVZ6Lx3UnKl-3nP8NxdnJ5r9cmWyJWelDvWS_18kAEhATUkJb0x1LIIdQ163nV9K--td6SIuUu1fBzJwL7HKBaEEb9xk3oSQy3OD0Y1jX0-GLI6LR8C.
- 9 Emergency Law 1362/1949. Retrieved from <http://www.et.gr/idoscs-nph/search/pdfViewerForm.html?args=5C7QrtC22wH6SCddhZcqqXdtvSoClrL88bwy3eyVpoJ5MXD0LzQTLWPU9yLzB8V68knBzLCmTXKaO6fpVZ6Lx3UnKl3nP8>

- NxdnJ5r9cmWyJWelDvWS_18kAEhATUkJb0x1LIIdQ163nV9K--td6SIuUu1fBzJwL7HKBaEEb9xk3oSQy3OD0Y1jX0-GLI6LR8C.
- 10 Through the early United Nations technical assistance program, UNESCO sought to lift developing states—like Greece—out of poverty and into Western-derived development trajectories (Webster 2011).
 - 11 “Athena Tsouderou-Athanassiou (1920–2008) President of YWCA Greece & President of the World YWCA”. Retrieved 10 November 2021 from <https://xen-athinon.gr/xen-athinon/athina-tsoyderoy-athanasioy-1920-2008-lt-br-gt-proedros-chen-ellados-amp-proedros-pagkosmias-chen/>; “YWCA Athens. History”. Retrieved 10 November 2021 from <https://xen-athinon.gr/history/>.
 - 12 F.E.K. 409/1964 B, Regarding the granting of a license for the establishment and operation of the vocational library school of the Christian Union of Young Women in Athens
 - 13 Noria Christoforidou, interview with Maria Rentetzi, Athens, Greece, 17 February 2005.
 - 14 <https://cdsweb.cern.ch/record/40366>.
 - 15 For a list of Greek Fulbright Scholarships 1954–1955, see http://www.fulbright.gr/images/alumni/pdf/GR_Grantees_1954-1955.pdf
 - 16 Gennadios Library, K. Tsatsos Archive, Subsection III, Folder 56, Subfolder 4, “Mobile Lending Libraries”, 1957. [in Greek].
 - 17 Other important figures of this intellectual elite were Ioannis Theodorakopoulos and Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, both collaborators and old acquaintances of Katsos from their days as students at the University of Heidelberg. For an analysis of “the correlation between [Greek] nationalism and Neo-Kantian philosophy of history in the interwar period” see Papari (2015).
 - 18 Gennadios Library, K. Tsatsos Archive, Subsection III, File 56, Sub-file 5, “Proposals for the organization of the National Enlightenment submitted to the Prime Minister”, 23/2/1959.
 - 19 Gennadios Library, K. Tsatsos Archive, Subsection III, File 56, Sub-file 5, “Proposals for the organization of the National Enlightenment”, 23/2/1959.
 - 20 “Gallery: Education transforms lives”. Retrieved 10 November 2021 from <https://en.unesco.org/galleries/education-transforms-lives>. For the full publication see Müller and Stanca-Mustea (2018).

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