The Greek political publishing field during the long 1960s, exemplified by the case of Istorikes Ekdoseis, 1963-1981
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The Greek political publishing field flourished during the long 1960s. Varieties of subfields were created by the dozens—if not hundreds—of mainly small and short-lived publishing projects that sprung out of nowhere only to vanish into thin air soon after. If it had not been for second-hand bookstores and a handful of collectors and timeworn left-wingers who held on to their old books, their existence would have been long forgotten.

The Greek political publishing field was the fruit of an encounter between the youth radicalisation of the time and the communist tradition of the 1940s. The idealism and anti-establishment character of the field’s agents resulted in limitations as far as some of the available resources are concerned. The initial lack of economic capital and the low hierarchisation are of great significance. Cheap pamphlets—both in terms of the material quality and the price—poor design and aesthetics, in general, were in large part a result of the lack of economic capital. The field’s readers being young students and toilers—thus, with little spare cash for books—functioned also to restrict the field. Publishing projects were therefore forced to publish cheap pamphlets to keep costs and prices down and were thus always barely breaking even.

The standout characteristic of the field is the centrality of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital is what provides each individual publishing project—and the field as a whole—with radiance within the field and a specific position in the publishing sphere. The ideological and political aura of the global long sixties brought politics and thus the political publishing field to
the attention of the youth—primarily, but not only. The field thus attracted the most vivid (i.e., young, energetic and politically active) social group as readers. This gave a great boost since the youth was better educated and travelled than prior generations. Part of the readership thus became agents of the field—working as translators or reviewers of titles they read abroad. These networks were crucial for a publishing field that was characterised by a dearth of economic capital, boosting the centrality of symbolic capital since translated titles that conveyed political and ideological authority dominated it.

Symbolic and economic capital—as perceived by the agents of the field—was reflected in the materialisation of publishing production. The aesthetics of the field were heavily influenced by the significance of the former and the dearth of the latter. On the one hand, exact copies of the foreign editions to be translated were produced in an attempt to extract the symbolic capital of the original. On the other hand, the lack of economic capital led to a devaluation of aesthetics when symbolic capital was not interconnected to the work, i.e., the work of a significant publisher and author. In the case of Istorikes Ekdoseis, that would be a work from the Chinese Foreign Languages Press during Mao Zedong’s era.

The lack of economic capital but predominantly the fact the political publishing was in the epicentre of the political activity of the long sixties—being the only means of propaganda these minuscule groups had—led to the domination of amateurs as publishing field agents, except for printers. The majority of those involved in the field during the time had no prior engagement and none afterwards. Their publishing and political activity intertwined, and when the latter ceased, so did the former.

The field is constituted by various subfields that held partial autonomy, meaning that they could differentiate from the general characteristics of the field but not to the extent they could be considered autonomous publishing fields. For alternative and countercultural publishing, aesthetics was far more important, since it was considered to be a political statement.

The political publishing field peaked at the same time as social and national liberation movements worldwide. The political and ideological magnitude and *aura* of movements and revolutionary leaders globally—and
their publishing activity—were transformed into symbolic capital for the Greek publishing projects that were translating and publishing their works. By the end of the 1970s, revolution was no longer in the air. It is no coincidence that by this time the British punk-rock band *The Stranglers* would sing “No more heroes”, wondering what had happened to Leon Trotsky and “dear old Lenin”.656 Through this song, it is as if *The Stranglers* are paying tribute to the heroes of their youth, mourning their parting.

This end of an era, with the fading out of legendary revolutionary figures and movements, shook the political publishing field. A readjustment of publishing plans was attempted to salvage symbolic capital—and in so doing—the field as a whole. Issues such as gender, culture—as well as some original assessments based on the Greek reality—were attempted. But it was too late; the band had—to coin a phrase—moved on. The 1960s youngsters were now family men and women, and their commitment to the movement and to the various publishing projects without adequate financial compensation could not continue. Until then, they had been compensated by the feeling that they were contributing to a revolutionary cause that would soon be victorious. Not anymore. Political groups’ headquarters, publishing houses and bookstores were shuttered, their archives and stocks scattered. Due to this shortage of written resources, I had to revisit orality, through oral history, to be able to reconstruct what had been in practice an almost exclusively print culture. The rise of digital communication and publishing—from blogging to social media proved—a saviour here since it multiplied my sources in a dual way. So, too, has digitisation. On the one hand, many field agents of the time shared their stories in the online space or engaged in discussions about the period. On the other hand, it became much easier to trace and contact potential interviewees.

This publishing field—both as a historical narrative and a material culture—was long gone when I set about researching it. But the peculiarities of this field made it so intriguing—both from the perspective of social and cultural history and also of publishing studies—that I felt compelled to investigate. And—as best I could—to write it all down.

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