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Make Ellas Great Again (MEGA): How has the concept of palingenesis featured in the propaganda produced by Greek ultranationalist groups since 1936?

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Introduction

Roger Griffin introduced the concept of ‘palingenetic ultra-nationalism’ in *The Nature of Fascism* (1991).¹ This book has signified a ‘turning point in the historiography of fascism’, and it remains a point of reference for scholars engaging with the subject.² Palingenesis, derived from the Greek words *πάλι* (pali: again) and *γέννηση* (genisi: birth), is generally translated as ‘rebirth’, or sometimes ‘regeneration’. Ultra-nationalism encapsulates forms of nationalism that reject ‘anything combatable with liberal institutions’.³ Combining the two, palingenetic ultranationalism refers to the societal rebirth that ultranationalists call for in periods of crisis or decline, based on a mythicised narrative of the past, to ensure a prosperous, crisis-free future.⁴ History is presented as linear, culminating in a teleological ‘new order’ that promises health and ‘national greatness’ as a replacement for ‘weakness’.⁵ According to Griffin, palingenetic ultranationalism is a fundamental tenet of generic fascism.⁶

This desire to reconstruct a mythicised past is also at the core of Svetlana Boym’s theory of ‘restorative nostalgia’.⁷ She argued that right wing nationalists in particular view the past as a model that should be restored, recovering a utopian interpretation of their society’s mythicised origins.⁸ In this process, conspiracy theories are used to construct ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dynamics as a means of delineating and thus targeting the ‘mythicised enemies’ of the nation.⁹ Crucially, Boym noted that ‘the stronger the rhetoric of continuity’, the more selective its representation of the past becomes.¹⁰

In January 2025, Panagiotis Zestanakis published an article analysing the contemporary presence and political influence of nostalgia in Greek public discourse, in which he labelled Greece as a ‘nostalgic nation’.¹¹ Similarly, in December 2025, the Greek newspaper *To Vima* published a short article series titled ‘Greek Nostalgia’.¹² In his contribution to this series, author Yannis Antiochiou wrote that ‘in times of crisis or dissatisfaction [...] public discourse

¹ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter Publishers Limited, 1991).

² Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis, ‘Introduction: Fascism at 100 (and a Bit)’, in *Beyond the Fascist Century*, ed. by Constantin Iordachi and Aristotle Kallis (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1–22 (p.6).

³ *Ibid.*, p.37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.35,39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

⁷ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p.41.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.42.

¹¹ Panagiotis Zestanakis, ‘Nostalgic Nation: Simplicity, Togetherness, and the Senses in Contemporary Greece’, *National Identities*, 27.4 (2025), 413–35 (p.414).

[...] turns to the past', where 'nostalgia does not function as a memory, but as a model'.¹³ In short, '[Greeks] do not remember [the past]; [They] recreate it'.¹⁴ It is therefore unsurprising that Greece's far-right has so consistently fictionalised and distorted the past to propagate their extremist ideologies.

This process of '[recreating] the past' is at the core of Griffin's palingenetic ultranationalism and Boym's restorative nostalgia. This dissertation will synthesise these theories to analyse the ways in which ultranationalist groups in Greece have interpreted and used palingenesis since 1936, and to what effect. These ultranationalist groups are the Fourth of August regime, led by General Ioannis Metaxas between 1936 and 1940; the April 21st Revolution, led by a military junta between 1967 and 1974, with Colonel George Papadopoulos its primary leader until 1973; and Golden Dawn, the neo-Nazi group led by Nicholas Michaloliakos, which has been active since 1980. Using examples from different forms of their propaganda, I will argue that palingenesis is a fundamental element of Greek ultranationalist ideology, revealing the extent to which the distant past has been instrumentalised to legitimise authority, justify totalitarian politics and incite violence and oppression across the Greek far right. Each of my examples are from separate timeframes, yet all three display clear and at times interconnected features of palingenesis. George Mosse, whose theories contributed to Griffin's conception of 'palingenetic ultranationalism', continuously stressed the 'primacy of ideology'.¹⁵ Hence, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the ideological content of these ultranationalist movements.

The process of using the past to legitimise authority has been identified in a multitude of other far right, fascist and authoritarian examples.¹⁶ A significant and well-researched historical example of this rebirth rhetoric is found in Fascist Italy and specifically in *romanità*, the myth of the regeneration of the Roman Empire. Mussolini's framing of Italy's past as the foundation for its future has been deemed a fundamental reason for his regime's popularity and virility.¹⁷ Neo-fascist activities in Italy also adopt palingenetic rhetoric, particularly through

¹² Yannis Antiochiou and others, 'Ελληνική Νοσταλγία', *To Vima* (3 December 2025) <https://www.tovima.gr/print/nees-epoxes/elliniki-nostalgia/> [accessed 20 April 2026]

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ George Mosse, 'Introduction: The Genesis of Fascism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1.1 (1966), 14–26 (pp.19-20).

¹⁶ Jessica Kourniakti, *The Classical Asset: Receptions of Antiquity under the Dictatorship of 21 April in Greece (1967-73)* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2018), p.21.

¹⁷ See: Jan Nelis, 'Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of Romanità', *Classical World*, 100.4 (2007), 391-415.

commemorative rituals that honour fascist martyrs. For example, both Italian and Greek neo-fascists commemorate the death of Mikis Mantakas, a young Greek nationalist killed in 1975 during clashes between neo-fascists and left-wing groups in Rome, highlighting certain connections between the two movements.¹⁸ More broadly, Elgenius and Rydgren described the rhetoric of rebirth as deeply pertinent in modern political ideology, such as in Boris Johnson's 'Take Back Control' Brexit slogan, Putin's obsession with 'recreating the power of earlier Russian Empires' or Trump's 'Make America Great Again'.¹⁹ Palingenesis is a pertinent lens for understanding the ideology and popularity of nationalism and ultranationalism, both in historical examples and in matters of the present.

To begin answering this question in relation to Greece, some context is necessary. Greece's '*longue durée*' is objectively very long, technically spanning back to the Bronze Age. Richard Clogg wrote that 'the past weighs particularly heavily on Greece'.²⁰ He further suggested that Greece suffers from *progonoplexia*, or 'ancestoritis', an 'obsession with past glories' that is 'hardly surprising' given Greece's cultural circumstances.²¹ Following the watershed 1821 revolution that overthrew four centuries of Ottoman occupation, the last two centuries have been rife with coups, civil wars and parliamentary failures. These events caused the crises that Wodak and Angouri identified as the conditions under which far-right movements find their most receptive audiences.²² It is against the backdrop of these two centuries that Greek nationalist discourse has developed, raising questions of ethnic identity and national belonging.

These three case studies are notable chapters of recent Greek history, and there is no shortage of scholarship on a variety of relevant issues in each period. Historiography on Metaxas has been particularly focused on whether his regime could be classified as fascist, as scholars like Griffin and Aristotle Kallis placed it in the wider context of interwar authoritarianism.²³ On the questions of regeneration and nostalgia, Marina Petrakis' *The Myth of Metaxas* stands out the most.²⁴ She offered an in-depth analysis of Metaxas' propaganda

¹⁸ 'Νέες σφοδρές συμπλοκές αριστερών και δεξιών στους δρόμους της Ρώμης', *Macedonia* (2 March 1975); 'Μιχάλης Μάντακας (1952-1975) – Οι Ιδέες Δεν Πεθαίνουν!', *Golden Dawn* (28 February 2020) <https://xrisiavgi.com/2020/02/28/12/134344/> [accessed 23 April 2026].

¹⁹ Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren, 'Nationalism and the Politics of Nostalgia', *Sociological Forum*, 37.1 (2022), 1230-1243 (p.1236).

²⁰ Richard Clogg, *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.2; Kourniakti, pp.25, 197.

²² Jo Angouri and Ruth Wodak, 'The Greek Success Story and the Rise of the Far Right' *Discourse & Society*, 25.4 (2014), 540–565 (p.544)

²³ Griffin (1991); Aristotle Kallis, 'Neither fascist nor authoritarian: The 4th of August regime in Greece (1936-1941) and the dynamics of fascistisation in 1930s Europe', *East Central Europe*, 37.2 (2010), 303-330.

²⁴ Marina Petrakis, *The Metaxas Myth* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006).

methods, but discussed Metaxan ‘regeneration’, as opposed to Griffin’s palingenetic rebirth. One of the biggest historiographical focuses on the junta is the never-ending debate of whether the regime was backed by the United States. This debate reflects a fascinating tendency of Greek politicians and scholars to frame Greece as a perpetual victim at the hands of foreign interventions, a trope that dates back to the Ottoman occupation. There is limited scholarship linking the junta to Metaxas, despite their temporal proximity. Othon Anastasakis offered one such study in his comparison of propaganda in the two regimes’ education systems.²⁵ The works of Emmanuela Mikedakis and Jessica Kourniakti are unique contributions in their focus on the use of antiquity in the junta’s propaganda.²⁶ Scholarship on Golden Dawn offers the most sustained examinations of the movement’s archaic symbolism and rituals, perhaps partly as Griffin’s interventions in the study of fascism corresponded temporally to Golden Dawn’s gradual rise in popularity. For example, Eleftheria Ioannidou and Halikopoulou and Vasilopoulou authored two relevant and focused studies of palingenesis in Golden Dawn’s ideology.²⁷ It is worth noting that English language studies are far more accessible than its equivalent Greek studies, both in person and online.

This dissertation aims to fill two main gaps in existing historiography of memory and the far-right in Greece. Firstly, there is a lack of sustained comparative analysis of these three significant examples of ultranationalism, let alone any comparative analysis through the lens of palingenesis. Anna Karakatsouli’s article on varied uses of the distant past in authoritarian Greece is the only study I found that does this to an extent, although she focused primarily on the 1821 revolution, with limited references to Golden Dawn or palingenetic ideology.²⁸ Secondly, by combining Griffin and Boym’s theories, this dissertation is placed at the intersection of far right and memory studies. David Barnes’ examination of nationalist nostalgia around Brexit is one of the few examples I found where Griffin and Boym’s theories are synthesised in the same manner as this dissertation.²⁹ While scholars of Greek history are active in both of these fields, there is yet to be much sustained focus on their many intersections.

²⁵ Othon Anastasakis, *Ideology and Education under the dictatorships of 1936 and 1967* (London: LSE, 2014).

²⁶ Emmanuela Mikedakis, *Renouncing the recent past, ‘revolutionising’ the present and ‘resurrecting’ the distant past: lexical and figurative representations in the political speeches of Georgios Papadopoulos* (Sydney: UNSW, 2007); Kourniakti (2018).

²⁷ Eleftheria Ioannidou, ‘Mythologies of Genesis and Neo-Nazi Palingenesis: Commemorating the Battle of Thermopylae in the Political Rites of the Golden Dawn’, *Humanities*, 11.88 (2022) <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11040088> [accessed 2 December 2025]; Daphne Halikiopoulou and Sofia Vasilopoulou, *The Golden Dawn’s ‘Nationalist Solution’* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

²⁸ Anna Karakatsouli, ‘Conflicting Claims over the Legacy of 1821: The Case of the Far Right in Greece’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 39.1 (2021), 71-91.

²⁹ David Barnes, ‘Going Back Somewhere: Nostalgia and the Radical Right’, *OpenDemocracy* (6 August 2019) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/going-back-somewhere-nostalgia-and-radical-right/> [accessed 23 February 2026].

A qualitative methodological approach shaped by Teun van Dijk's framework of critical discourse analysis will be used, which holds that political texts are never neutral.³⁰ Instead, they construct historical narratives that serve specific ideological interests, such as legitimising social hierarchies.³¹ This framework allows for speeches, periodicals, websites and visual sources to be understood, not merely as records of ultra-nationalist claims, but as active instruments for the construction and dissemination of palingenetic narratives. I am primarily concerned with the ideological intentions embedded in each propaganda example, following Griffin's own methodological focus on the discursive and symbolic content of ultra-nationalist output.³² I will therefore evaluate how each movement understood its relationship to the distant past, independently of how positively that understanding was widely received. A limitation of this study is the vast chronology of the historical periods examined, which constricts the depth of treatment each study receives. However, detailed contextual analysis is a necessary trade-off in favour of tracing palingenesis across Greece's ultranationalist history, and each movement is used as an analytical case study of this broad historical model.

The source base across the three case studies is varied, reflecting the different political and temporal contexts in which each movement operated. My primary sources for Metaxas are drawn from the anthology *Speeches and Thoughts* and from his propaganda ministry's visual material.³³ Amongst other significant Metaxas scholars, Petrakis used both of these sources to a great degree. The equivalent anthology of Papadopoulos' speeches, titled *Our Creed*, is my main rhetorical evidence for the junta, supplemented by photographic evidence of the regime's public spectacles.³⁴ These sources form the basis of Mikedakis and Kourniakti's analyses of junta's use of the distant past. For Golden Dawn, the party's magazine and website constitute my principal sources, alongside video recordings of one of its commemorative rituals.³⁵ These sources have also been used in the pivotal works of Ioannidou, Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou. Notably, *Speeches and Thoughts* was published during the junta. This is a methodologically significant attestation to the ways each successive ultra-nationalist movement curated and inherited the ideological legacies of its predecessors, a process of

³⁰ Teun van Dijk, 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', *Discourse and Society*, 4.2 (1993), 249–283.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Griffin, p.44.

³³ Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγοι και Σκέψεις 1936-41*, 2 Vols. (Athens: Govostis, 1970),

³⁴ George Papadopoulos, *Το Πιστεύω Μας*, 2 Vols. (Athens: 1968, Genikis Dieuthinseos Tipou kai Pliroforion)

³⁵ Golden Dawn, *Χρυσή Αυγή* <https://xrisiavgi.com> [accessed 20 November 2025]; *Golden Dawn*, 13 (1984); 'Speech of Michaloliakos at Thermopylae', *I Kathimerini* (10 December 2012) <https://youtu.be/H9bR2eW1WQU?si=nSCBqhEvHxO-yyP3> [Accessed 31 March 2026].

ideological transmission that justifies the selection of my three examples and is consistently commented on throughout this dissertation.

This dissertation is structured around my chosen case studies, each examining an iteration of Greek ultra-nationalism. Chapter 1 examines the Fourth of August regime (1936-41) of Ioannis Metaxas, analysing features of palingenesis in his rhetorical and cultural propaganda. I draw on speeches and visual propaganda to argue that Metaxas framed classical antiquity as a living inheritance to be spiritually embodied by Greeks, an inheritance shaped by a selective and teleological understanding that the Third Hellenic Civilisation was the culmination of Greece's previous historical civilisations. Chapter 2 turns to the April 21st military junta (1967-74) to show how the Colonels instrumentalised palingenetic rhetoric to legitimise their authoritarian regime. Through an analysis of Papadopoulos' speeches, as well as of the regime's emblem and public spectacles, I argue that the junta presented itself as a corrective intervention in Greece's otherwise unbroken civilisational trajectory. Chapter 3 examines Golden Dawn (1980-present), analysing how the movement adopted palingenetic logic outside of executive power through its emblem, magazine and website articles, and through its annual commemorations at the ancient site of Thermopylae. I argue that classical antiquity was used to broaden the movement's appeal and draw strict racialised boundaries that subsequently justified political violence. My conclusion synthesises these case studies as I reflect on the main contrasts and continuities in their features of palingenesis, as I emphasise the enduring weaponisation of the distant past to legitimise extremist views in Greece today.

Chapter 1

*‘I appeal to all Greeks, from the first to the last, from the rich to the poor, from the nobleman to the labourer. And I call upon all of you to work with all your might for the great task of our national rebirth.’*³⁶

The Fourth of August regime was established during a period of significant ‘political and social disturbance’, namely due to social conflicts that arose from the Great Depression and the instability of the Greek parliament that culminated in its total collapse in 1935.³⁷ By the time Metaxas had established his regime on August 4, 1935, Greece had experienced three failed coup attempts in ten years (1926, 1933, 1935).³⁸ This partly explains why the establishment of his regime was met with very little opposition.³⁹ The dictator stayed in power until his death in January 1941, dying a national hero after rejecting Mussolini’s demands in October 1940 for Italy to peacefully occupy Greece during World War Two.⁴⁰

From the outset of his dictatorship, as he addressed the nation in a radio broadcast on August 10, 1936, Ioannis Metaxas made it clear that his fundamental aim was to bring about a national rebirth in Greece.⁴¹ He framed his regime as the beginning of the ‘Third Hellenic Civilisation’, a civilisation that would embody ideals of ‘Helleno-Orthodoxy’, revering the ‘deep religious beliefs’ of Byzantine Orthodoxy and the cultural and spiritual ideals that ‘Hellenism’ attributes to Ancient Greece.⁴² He sought to establish both ‘cultural continuity’ through the classical and medieval periods until the present, and ‘cultural specificity’ in setting Greece apart from the contemporary ultra-nationalist regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.⁴³ Essentially, Metaxas envisioned his Third Hellenic Civilisation as the inevitable culmination of Greek cultural and civilisational greatness.

One of the most substantial source bases for examining the ways palingenesis features in Metaxas’ propaganda is the anthology *Logoi Kai Skepseis (Speeches and Thoughts)* published in 1968 across two volumes, containing transcripts of hundreds of his speeches between 1936 and 1941. The table of contents for the two volumes lists the dates, locations and

³⁶ Metaxas, Vol. 1, p. 16; All translations from the original Greek are the author’s own.

³⁷ Vassilios A. Bogiatzis, ‘From the ‘Nobleman’s Sword’ to the ‘Flag of the Fascist Ideals’’, *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 11 (2022), 315-337 (p.319).

³⁸ Clogg, pp.109-111.

³⁹ Ibid., p.109.

⁴⁰ Petrakis, p.194.

⁴¹ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.16.

⁴² Bogiatzis, p.327; Kallis (2010), p.315.

⁴³ Kallis (2010), p.314.

main talking points of each speech, facilitating the identification of thematically relevant sources. The volumes were published during the junta, one of the many indicators that the Colonel's regime revered Metaxas and his ideology. This detail makes one speculate the extent to which the junta preserved speeches that were especially aligned with the 1967 regime.

Metaxas' speeches reveal his understanding of the role of Greece's youth in inheriting the Third Hellenic Civilisation and advancing its cultural and spiritual aims. A good example of this feature is his speech to the *Ethniki Organosi Neolaias* (EON) (National Youth Organisation) in Ioannina on June 13, 1937. In this speech, Metaxas first explained the shortcomings of the first two Hellenic Civilisations. Classical Greece lacked religious beliefs, and the Byzantine Empire offered limited intellectual developments.⁴⁴ Then, addressing his audience, he stated that 'you have come to renew both civilisations' and 'will fix your gazes on the works of your great ancestors'.⁴⁵ He then stressed the importance of their racial and religious identities, stating that their 'Greek bodies' and Christian values were vital as they carried out their ordained duties to renew Greece.⁴⁶ This speech framed the EON not just as a youth organisation, but as a vehicle for Metaxas' vision for national palingenesis. He saw the youth as adequately equipped, both biologically and spiritually, to learn from and surpass the achievements of classical and Byzantine Greece.

Palingenetic symbolism also featured in the EON's flag, which depicted a double-sided Minoan Axe (see Fig. 1) that is reminiscent of (and possibly the inspiration for) the symbol of the National Fascist Party, the *fascis*. The Minoan Civilisation is thought to be the first civilisation of Europe, located on the modern-day Greek island of Crete. Vasileios Papadakis, a diplomat in the 1940s and avid supporter of Metaxas and his palingenetic vision, wrote that the Minoan Axe was the 'oldest' and most 'magnificent' symbol in Greece's history, therefore the most appropriate image to symbolise the future of the Third Hellenic Civilisation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.197.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.198.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Vasileios Papadakis, *Η Χθεςινή και η Αιωνιανή Ελλάς* (Cairo, 1945), p.51

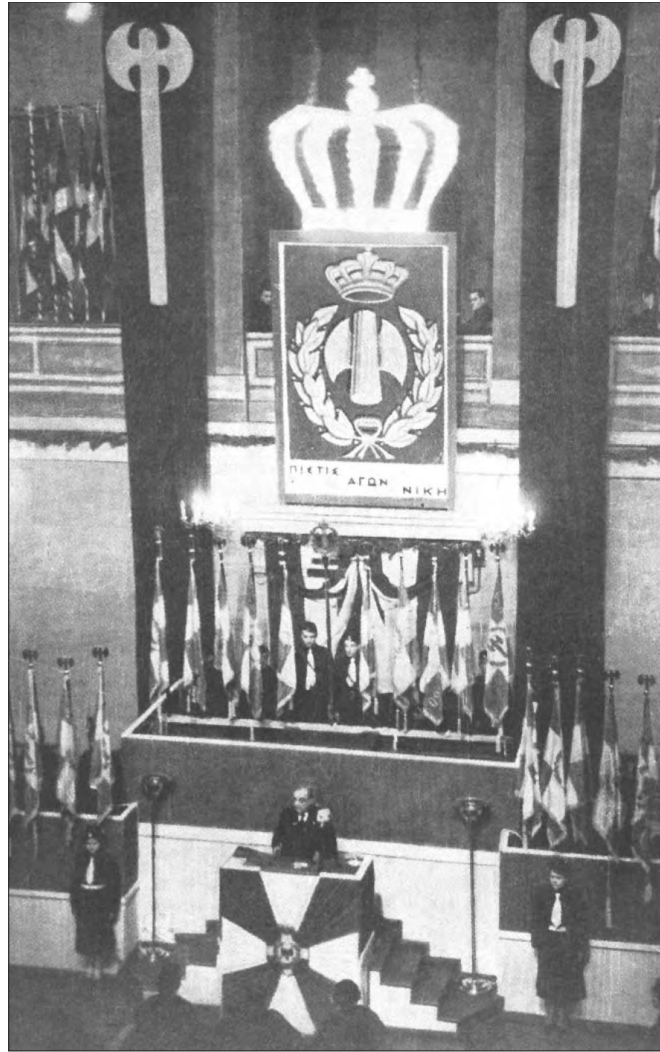


Figure 1: Metaxas speaking at the EON conference, January 1939⁴⁸

The EON was established in November 1936 for nine- to 25-year-olds, and by 1940 had reached a peak of 1.2 million members.⁴⁹ According to Marina Petrakis, the EON was created for the ‘quick and thorough propagation [...] of the ideas linked with the regeneration of Greece’.⁵⁰ The speech in June 1937 and the symbolism on the EON’s flag are just two examples of the way the regeneration of Greece was central to Metaxas’ youth indoctrination.⁵¹ Furthermore, Spyridon Ploumidis stated that the EON was ‘Spartan’ in its organisation and that its members appeared as ‘spoiled children of the dictator’.⁵² Furthermore, in her assessment of the use of antiquity under the junta in 1967, Jessica Kourniakti noted that the ‘impressionable

⁴⁸ Petrakis, p.23.

⁴⁹ Spiridon Ploumidis, ‘Το καθεστώς Μεταξά (1936-40)’, *University of Athens* <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/ARCH252/Metaxas.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2026], p.11.

⁵⁰ Petrakis, p.140.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ploumidis, pp.9, 11.

and formative' years of the Colonels took place during the Fourth of August regime.⁵³ It is challenging to trace their exact participation in EON activities, but many of the colonels were trained at military academies run by Metaxas' regime and were undoubtedly inspired by Metaxas' ideology.⁵⁴ Overall, Petrakis concluded that the EON became Metaxas' main popular base, as well as the most successful vehicle for the propagation of the regime's ideology.⁵⁵

The concept of palingenesis also featured in Metaxas' interpretations of Ancient Spartan virtues. In a speech titled 'Address to the People of Sparta' (20 May 1938) Metaxas summarised the road to political and economic decline that Greece 'suffered at the hands of liberal parliamentarianism', and the threats communism posed to its already 'ill' state.⁵⁶ Greece was in a genuine state of democratic crisis when Metaxas took power, which partly legitimised the casting of liberal parliamentarianism as Greece's main enemy and as the force that would pave the way for communism, leading to the deterioration of Greek will, moral values and unity.⁵⁷ He then stated that the 'ancient paradigms' of the Greek 'race' were what motivated his every action, particularly the Ancient Spartan practices of self-sacrifice for the state.⁵⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed in his speech to the aptly named Organisation of National Rebirth on November 14, 1936. Here, he suggested that Ancient Sparta exemplified political unity and military organisation which constituted the 'pure Greek ideals' that allowed Greece to prosper for 'thousands of years'.⁵⁹

For Metaxas, antiquity served as the main source of inspiration for the youth and therefore the future of Greece. However, the full scope of this ancient heritage was not incorporated. Crucially, Metaxas' regime avoided and at times suppressed any mention of ancient Athenian democracy.⁶⁰ For example, in his speech in Sparta, ancient Athens is referenced purely for its artistic and cultural contributions, and the d-word is avoided completely.⁶¹ Here we can turn to both Griffin and Boym. Griffin wrote of the palingenetic tendencies for 'irrational' and 'mythic' interpretations of the past, and Boym suggested that the most selective presentations of the past are found in regimes that focus the most on supposed

⁵³ Kourniakti, p.14.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Petrakis, p.4.

⁵⁶ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.381.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.17; Bogiatzis, p.323.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.382.

⁵⁹ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.126.

⁶⁰ Alexis Fidetzis, *Εμφυλές ταυτότητες στο αισθητικό λεξιλόγιο της «4ης Αυγούστου»* (Athens: NKUA, 2007), p.58.

⁶¹ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.381.

historical continuity.⁶² This fragmentary and entirely subjective interpretation of historical facts is a continuous thread in the ideology of the Metaxas' regime, the junta and Golden Dawn.⁶³ Indeed, Metaxas' appeals to a nostalgic and mythic interpretation of Greece's history were fundamentally rooted in a selectively teleological narrative of Greece's distant past, creating the paradigm that future ultranationalist groups would adopt.

Furthermore, this speech in Sparta shows how Metaxas' interpretations of the past were championed as examples that could 'placed in [Greek people's] souls' and 'guide [their] actions'.⁶⁴ Themes such as the 'spirit' of Greece or the notion of a 'Greek' or 'national' soul are central not only to Metaxas' ideology, but also to the ideologies of the junta and of Golden Dawn. George Mosse highlighted the importance of the 'revolution of the spirit' and unity brought by a 'common soul' in fascist ideology.⁶⁵ He stressed the role of this unity in the construction of 'common myth', an idea that served as a basis for Griffin's development of palingenetic ultranationalism.⁶⁶ Using Mosse's theory, it can be further argued that Metaxas' focus on spirits and souls was used to justify the authoritarian structure of his regime. If indeed all members of a nation have a 'common soul' with their leader, then that leader embodies the nation's needs and nature, thus offering government participation for every 'soul' through that sole leader's actions.⁶⁷ Palingenesis therefore featured heavily in Metaxas' ideology as he presented himself as a spiritual leader seeking the unity of the 'Greek soul'.

Beyond his rhetorical propaganda, Metaxas' focus on the Greek spirit was particularly notable in cultural and intellectual propaganda. Bogiatzis described Metaxas' desire to 'bring about national regeneration' as shaped by a 'national soul' that inspires 'national art'.⁶⁸ For instance, in a speech in May 1940, Metaxas called on Greek artists to take inspiration from the 'unending source' of the Greek 'national soul' to create 'authentic Greek' art.⁶⁹ The paradigm for such 'authentic' art was spearheaded by Metaxas' *Yfipourgeion Typou kai Tourismou* (YTT) (Sub-Ministry of the Press and Tourism), or as Marina Petrakis described it, the 'Ministry of Propaganda and Indoctrination'.⁷⁰ Through the YTT, the Metaxas regime was 'ideologically supported' by a number of artists and intellectuals that helped generate various

⁶² Griffin, pp.27, 35, 37; Boym, p.42.

⁶³ Karakatsouli, pp.75, 77.

⁶⁴ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.382.

⁶⁵ Mosse, pp.19-20.

⁶⁶ Griffin (1991), p. x.

⁶⁷ Mosse, p.20.

⁶⁸ Bogiatzis, p. 330; Ioannis Metaxas, *Το προσωπικό του ημερολόγιο (1933-41)* (Athens: Icarus, 1960), pp.841-842.

⁶⁹ Metaxas, Vol. 2 (p.304).

⁷⁰ Petrakis, p.4.

forms of propaganda, such as theatrical performances, propaganda posters and public spectacles.⁷¹ Petrakis argued that in '[disseminating] the themes epitomised by the regime', the YTT directly 'strengthened Metaxas' position'.⁷²

The YTT also published political periodicals, tourist periodicals and brochures that featured printed photographs on virtually every page.⁷³ At this point in time, the press was a significant vehicle used in Greek politics to promote ideology, and over 100 periodicals were being published on a weekly basis, 41 of which were strictly classed as 'political'.⁷⁴ The YTT took a large number of legal measures to ensure 'complete control and manipulation of public opinion' through the press, revealing its significance as a disseminator of the regime's ideology.⁷⁵ Nathalie Soursos highlighted the value of photographs included in these periodicals as a source for understanding the 'motives and aesthetics' of the Metaxas regime.⁷⁶ One of the best examples of Metaxas' palingenetic vision being realised through 'national art' was the work of Greek photographer Nelly's, who worked for the YTT between 1936 and 1939.⁷⁷ According to Soursos, Nelly's gave 'visual form' to Metaxas' ideas of 'racial and cultural continuity' throughout his three Hellenic Civilisations.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Anastasakis, p.123.

⁷² Petrakis, p.4.

⁷³ Nathalie Soursos, 'The Dictator's Photo Albums: Photography under the Metaxas Dictatorship', *Journal of Modern European History*, 16.4 (2018), 509–25 (p.513).

⁷⁴ Petrakis, p.8.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.10.

⁷⁶ Soursos, p.511.

⁷⁷ Maro Vasiliadou, *Nelly's: Setting the Image of Greece in the Mind of the World* (7 July 2023) <https://www.greece-is.com/nellys-setting-the-image-of-greece-in-the-mind-of-the-world/> [accessed 23 March 2026]. (The artist's name was always stylised as 'Nelly's').

⁷⁸ Soursos, p.516.



Figure 2: Nelly's, 'Parallelisms', New York World's Fair 1939⁷⁹

The collage in Fig. 2 was part of 'Parallelisms', a series of photographs and collages that depicted Greek men and women in traditional and modern dress, next to or overlaid on statues and ancient Greek friezes. The primary function of this technique was to highlight Metaxas' notion of direct racial continuity across Greece's history.⁸⁰ Fig. 2 creates an idealised representation of Greece's classical heritage and of Greek traditional values, with a particular agricultural focus. The synthesis of the collage collapses the temporal distance between modern and ancient Greeks, asserting that, as the title 'Parallelisms' suggests, these idealised images of Greek antiquity and modernity occur in a continuous and corresponding manner.

The 'relatively gigantic' collage was used in Greece's stall at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, an exhibition showcasing cultures from around the world.⁸¹ The fair's theme was 'the world of tomorrow' and its slogan was 'Dawn of a New Day', an apt summary of Metaxas' understanding of 'palingenetic rebirth' under his regime.⁸² Nonetheless, Metaxas' vision of this

⁷⁹ Atechno, Nelly's (11 January 2023) <https://atexnos.com/nellys-η-φωτογράφος-της-κινητικότητας-νέλλυ/> [accessed 15 February 2026]

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² 'World's Fair Theme To Be The World of Tomorrow', *New York Herald Tribune* (October 9, 1936), p.1.

new day was inextricable from a return to an idealised Hellenic past. Consequently, it was in equal measure the dawn of an old day.

Beyond perpetuating the distant past's palingenetic continuity, Nelly's photography of the male body, as is also present in Fig. 2, contributed to an idealised model of masculinity present in Metaxan, Nazi and Fascist ideology.⁸³ George Mosse, amongst others, argued the importance of the 'new man' archetype as the embodiment of palingenetic ideology, the ideal individual that shapes the national community and its 'eternal' values.⁸⁴ Indeed, Bogiatzis asserted that the aim of state run organisations like the YTT or the EON was to produce this model of the 'new Greek man'.⁸⁵ Metaxas aspired for men to embrace the Spartan military ideals of protection and sacrifice for one's community, while expecting women to 'assume the supportive role of the figure who bids farewell to the warrior'.⁸⁶ Fidetzis argued that by making the human body a factor in Greece's national continuity, the adoption of this masculine archetype became a factor for its national cohesion.⁸⁷ That is to say, for example, the expectations of this aesthetic contributed to the 'Spartan' organisation of the EON for Greece's male youth.⁸⁸ It would not be implausible to speculate that this expectation directly impacted the ideology development of the future April 21st junta leaders. Overall, the insight into Nelly's photography style that Fig. 2 constitutes an example of how propaganda aesthetics under the Fourth of August regime propagated key palingenetic themes of racial and cultural continuity across Greece's long history. To use Boym's language, Nelly's represents Metaxas' aspirations to restore a mythicised model of Greece's national origins.⁸⁹

I have argued that the Metaxas regime featured the concept of palingenesis in its propaganda as Metaxas disseminated a vision in which the distant past was not a historical period to be studied, but a living inheritance to be embodied through spiritual unity, an ideologically indoctrinated youth and inspiring cultural propaganda.

⁸³ Fidetzis, pp.66-67; Griffin, p.74.

⁸⁴ Mosse, p. 21; Griffin, p.35.

⁸⁵ Bogiatzis, p.336.

⁸⁶ Fidetzis, p.60.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.67.

⁸⁸ Ploumidis, p.11.

⁸⁹ Boym, pp.43, 49.

Chapter 2

‘If the ship reaches the port and we follow the path we have charted, then Greece will continue on the path of progress and development, grounded in Hellenic-Christian ideals, continuing the tradition of passing the baton from our generation to those to come, a baton which has deep roots in the past, and time will serve as evidence of our three-thousand-year history.’⁹⁰

On April 21, 1967, a military junta staged a successful coup, led by officers George Papandreou, Stylianos Pattakos and Nikolaos Makarezos. These leaders are most frequently referred to as ‘the Colonels’.⁹¹ There was virtually no resistance to the coup, though there was a widespread refusal to cooperate with the new regime across the wider government.⁹² The junta was in power from 1967 until 1974, when it was toppled by a series of blunders and protests that began in 1973.⁹³

Classifying the junta has been contested in historiographical discussions. Clogg defined it as a ‘pseudo-fascist paternalist dictatorship’, Griffin labelled it as a ‘reactionary military regime’ reminiscent of ‘pre-war forms of authoritarianism’, and Nicos Poulantzas settled on ‘military dictatorship’ defined by an ‘ultra-reactionary form of nationalism’.⁹⁴ Most importantly, however, Papadopoulos’ regime fits Griffin’s definition of ‘ultranationalist’, as its anti-democratic authoritarian nature is entirely incompatible with ‘liberal institutions’.⁹⁵

While Metaxas was most focused on presenting the Third Hellenic Civilisation as the cultural culmination of thousands of years of Greek history, the military junta framed itself more as a corrective force that would set Greece back on the ‘path of progress and development’ that it had strayed off in recent years.⁹⁶ According to Kourniakti and Karakastouli respectively, the junta saw Greece’s history as a narrative of ‘perpetual Hellenic military and

⁹⁰ Papadopoulos, Vol. 1, p.17.

⁹¹ Constantine Danopoulos, ‘Military Professionalism and Regime Legitimacy in Greece, 1967–1974’, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 13.2 (1985), 485-506 (p.485)

⁹² Richard Clogg, ‘The Ideology of the “Revolution of 21 April”’ in *Greece Under Military Rule*, ed. by Richard Clogg and George Yannopoulos (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), p.159.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Clogg (2021), p.53; Griffin, p.161; Nicos Poulantzas, *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Greece, Spain* (London: Verso, 1976), pp.115.

⁹⁵ Griffin, p.37.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

cultural indestructability’ and ‘a long succession of valiant instances that led up to and included April 21’.⁹⁷ The junta however was a ‘necessary intervention’ in this long history as Greece had ‘lost [its] way’, and, according to Colonel Pattakos, ‘the stables’ were filled with ‘the excrements’ of ‘Communism, fascism, Nazism, obsequiousness and all natures of indignity’.⁹⁸ Indeed, as Richard Clogg argues, the Colonels’ coup was initially justified as a necessary measure to ‘forestall an imminent communist seizure of power’, in exactly the same manner as Metaxas in 1936.⁹⁹ So, from the outset it is clear that the junta publicly justified its establishment through a mythicised interpretation of Greece’s past to combat its present-day crisis of modernity.

A key source for this chapter is the compilation of Papadopoulos’ speeches titled *To Pistevo Mas* (Our Creed). These volumes were printed and distributed widely from 1968, particularly to teachers as mandatory teaching material.¹⁰⁰ The process of identifying speeches that reference Greece’s distant past and notions of rebirth was straightforward, as Papadopoulos spoke of these topics extremely frequently, and each volume contains an index where words like ‘αναγέννηση’ (rebirth) and ‘ιστορία’ (history) contain plenty of references. A CIA report created a month after the April 21st coup stated that none of the Colonels showed a particular ‘inclination toward speechmaking or public harangues’.¹⁰¹ In reality, every attempt was made to produce a continuous output of speeches, as well as other propaganda forms to popularise the junta’s leader and ideology.¹⁰²

One feature of palingenesis in the junta’s propaganda reveals the importance of Greek youth in their vision of societal rebirth. For example, on March 29, 1968, Papadopoulos gave a speech to university students in Thessaloniki, in which he articulated his understanding of the exceptional ‘time-tested’ Greek principles and the next generation’s obligation to uphold them.¹⁰³ He identified the ‘error’ of Greek society and the need to ‘correct [it] as soon as possible’ so that ‘ideal Greek citizens’ could be suitably guided by their ‘heritage’, ‘history’ and ‘tradition’.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he made repeated claims of Greek superiority, asking rhetorical questions like ‘what other people have a greater history’ or ‘more time-tested personal ideals’

⁹⁷ Kourniakti, p.16; Karakatsouli, p.77.

⁹⁸ George Papadopoulos, *To Πιστεύω Μας*, Vol. 2 (Athens: 1968, Genikis Dieuthinseos Tipou kai Pliroforion), p.83; Vasilis Vasilikos, *Ypothikes Papadopoulou Pattakou* (Athens: PLEIAS, 1968), p.107.

⁹⁹ Clogg, p.160.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Central Intelligence Agency, *The Greek Junta* (24 May 1967) <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79T00826A002000010036-4.pdf> [accessed 9 December 2025], p.4.

¹⁰² Mikedakis, p.84.

¹⁰³ Papadopoulos (Vol. 2), p.83.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

than ‘the Greek people?’.¹⁰⁵ He then echoed Metaxas’ preoccupation with the rebirth of the Greek spirit and the Greek soul, referring to Greece as the ‘source of the immortal spirit’.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, he sought to inspire national pride, Greek exceptionalism and love for the ‘fatherland’ in his majority student audience, a section of the population to which the junta’s nationalist discourse was communicated in a ‘more menacing way’.¹⁰⁷ To an extent, this focus on young people was an attempt to deter the ‘subversive ideals that were rapidly gaining ground’ throughout the 1960s, which saw large waves of global protests particularly amongst young people.¹⁰⁸ It also reflects the fundamental focus and virility of youth as the bringers of change, the individuals to which Papadopoulos’ ‘baton’ was being passed.¹⁰⁹ He concluded this by arguing that the regime’s slogan ‘Greece of the Greek Christians’ perfectly summarised and embodied the depth and breadth of Greece’s glorious distant past, making it the ‘guiding principle for the Greek people’.¹¹⁰ This slogan stands as a perfect example of how the Colonels tried to legitimise their authority by linking their regime to ‘ancient Hellenic Christian values and practices’.¹¹¹ It was therefore up to the next generations to fulfil their moral obligations and continue the constant and indestructible standard set by the ‘Helleno-Christian’ values that the junta tried so hard to endorse.¹¹²

Papadopoulos’ speeches also reveal the trope of interpreting the supposed crisis of modernity as a contamination of Greece’s otherwise healthy and robust historical past. In a press conference on March 15, 1968, Papadopoulos compared the junta’s role to ‘carrying out [an] operation, just as a surgeon does on the operating table’ to preserve ‘the life of Greece’.¹¹³ Medical metaphors were extremely common under the junta, a technique that represented Greece’s recent past as a bacterium or a cancer that was holding the nation back from the ‘heights of glory’ it could reach.¹¹⁴ Griffin suggested that palingenetic ultranationalist ideology tends to use history to outline a ‘natural order of things’ that have been ‘contaminated’ by crises of modernity, such as ‘decays in moral values’ or ‘internationalist socialism’.¹¹⁵ It can thus be

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Metaxas (Vol. 1), p.18.

¹⁰⁷ Kourniakti, p.37.

¹⁰⁸ Karakatsouli, p.80.

¹⁰⁹ Mosse, p.18; Papadopoulos (Vol. 1), p.17.

¹¹⁰ Papadopoulos (Vol. 2), p.85.

¹¹¹ Danopoulos, p.490.

¹¹² Ibid., p.16; Kourniakti, p.71.

¹¹³ Papadopoulos (Volume 2), p.31.

¹¹⁴ Mikedakis, p.279.

¹¹⁵ Griffin, p.37.

concluded that the junta believed that the ‘healthiest’ state Greece could be in was one founded upon palingenetic ‘Helleno-Christian’ ideals of the distant past.¹¹⁶

The use of the palingenetic phoenix in the regime’s propaganda is an example of how crucial the junta’s rhetoric of rebirth was to their ultranationalist ideology. During a different speech at a university in Thessaloniki (5 January 1968), Papadopoulos stated that ‘the rebirth of the spirit of Hellenism’ would be the foundation upon which ‘every further effort’ in Greece’s future would be based.¹¹⁷ Mikedakis argues that this notion of rebirth was integral to the Colonels’ regime, as is corroborated by their adoption of the phoenix as their official emblem (Fig. 3).¹¹⁸ According to Griffin, the phoenix is one of the most ‘universal and multivalent symbols of palingenesis’, used to refer to a period of decay ‘burgeoning’ into one of renewal and regeneration.¹¹⁹ The junta were doing just that, criticising the aforementioned contamination and decay of the recent past, and reiterating their self-proclaimed role of correcting the historical trajectory for which Greece was destined. Phoenixes were also used to symbolise rebirth or palingenesis in early Christian traditions, as well as in classical literature, such as the works of Herodotus or Tacitus in the fifth century BCE and the first century CE respectively.¹²⁰ Therefore, the phoenix also references the ‘Helleno-Christian’ ideals of Greek antiquity and Orthodoxy.¹²¹ Both because of what the phoenix itself represents, and because its use inherently references moments from Greece’s past that were already central to the junta’s vision, it can be concluded that this symbol encapsulated the essence of the junta’s use of palingenetic symbolism in their propaganda. It points both to the purpose of the April 21st Revolution, a revolutionary intervention to restore Greece’s path for its prosperous future, and to its cultural and spiritual foundations in Greece’s distant past.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.; Anastasakis, p.185.

¹¹⁷ Papadopoulos (Vol. 1), p.110.

¹¹⁸ Mikedakis, p.314.

¹¹⁹ Griffin, p.34.

¹²⁰ Haricleia Gioka, ‘Contribution to the history of the phoenix symbol’, *Institutional Repository of Scientific Publications* (2023) <https://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/352335/files/?ln=el> [accessed 9 December 2025].

¹²¹ Mikedakis, p.204.



Figure 3: The symbol of the Colonel's regime¹²²

Palingenesis also featured in grand public spectacles during which the junta adopted recognisable classical symbols to popularise their ideology, a method that Chapter 3 will also explore as Golden Dawn also sought to popularise its ideology by using well-known Greek heroes and myths. Through these spectacles, the junta's aim was to rally support and disseminate their ideology in a memorable and popular manner. The audiences at such events were consistently in the tens of thousands, and attendance was mandatory, especially for students.¹²³ Figures are taken from two anniversary celebrations of the April 21st Revolution, depicting floats full of symbolism that reflected the unity of Greece, its military, and its history.¹²⁴ These spectacles were rife with palingenetic 'kitsch', understood by Natalia Skradol to be inauthentic art lacking in 'spiritual substance' and by Logothetis and others as 'cultural production based on the worthless imitation of art'.¹²⁵ For example, Fig. 4 depicts a particularly garish float, with a woman dressed as a statue of the ancient Greek goddess Athena, and four men on horseback dressed as ancient Greek soldiers. As will be discussed later, Golden Dawn

¹²² 'Οι πρωταγωνιστές της χούντας', *Digital Zoot* (n.d.) <https://digitalzoot.weebly.com/muiotakapparho972-epsiloniotakappaomicronnuomicrongammarhoalphaphietamu941nuomicron-chirhoomicronnuiotakappa972.html> [accessed 25 November 2025].

¹²³ Kourniakti, pp.117, 129, 162; Christos Drogaris, 'Καλλιμάγαρο Παναθηναϊκό Στάδιο: Τα Μυστικά Μιας Διαδρομής 2.353 Χρόνων', *Protothema* (12 October 2024) <https://www.protothema.gr/stories/article/1548590/ta-mustika-mias-diadromis-2353-hronon/> [accessed 4 April 2026].

¹²⁴ Kourniakti, p.182.

¹²⁵ Natalia Skradol, 'Fascism and Kitsch: The Nazi Campaign against Kitsch', *German Studies Review*, 34.3 (2011), 595–612 (p.597); Georgios Logothetis and others, 'The panem et circenses policy of the Regime of the Colonels in Greek sport, 1967-1974', *Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism*, 19.4 (2012), 174-78 (p.174).

capitalised on specific stories and symbols where a clear narrative could be applied to the present day. Fig. 4 displays quite the opposite, an example of the junta's consistent vague and exclusively aesthetic references the distant past that rarely offered any ideological substance.¹²⁶ This shows just how applicable Skradol and Logothetis' definitions of kitsch are to this strand of April 21st propaganda. Furthermore, Fig. 5's float features the regime's phoenix emblem as the backdrop to a range of soldiers, including four *evzones* (Presidential Guards), whose traditional uniform is based on clothing worn by the Greek resistance to Ottoman occupation in the nineteenth century. The use of different uniforms on the float gave Greece's modern military the same symbolic value as the traditionally dressed *evzones* that referenced Greece's revolutionary struggles. Framing the military in such a grand light reiterates Danopoulos' assertion that the junta used myths of the distant past to justify a more permanent military role in the nation's political affairs.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the symbol on the tabs between each *evzone* is the ancient Greek 'meander', which symbolises 'unity' and 'infinity' and is used as Golden Dawn's official emblem.¹²⁸ An aim of these spectacles was therefore to unite different aspects of Greek culture and society with aesthetics and examples from the distant past, with a particular focus on venerating the military. Overall, Karakatsouli suggests that though the effects of these 'pompous performances' were dubious, the general appeal of kitsch was used to promote the regime's ideology.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Karakatsouli, p.77.

¹²⁷ Danopoulos, p.505.

¹²⁸ Nichos Isychos, 'Mapping the Greek Far Right One Year After Golden Dawn's Conviction', *Illiberalism* (1 February 2022) <https://www.illiberalism.org/mapping-the-greek-far-right-one-year-after-golden-dawns-conviction/> [accessed 1 April 2026].

¹²⁹ Karakatsouli, p.78.



Figure 4: Float at an anniversary spectacle, between 1968 and 1970.¹³⁰



Figure 5: Float at the First Anniversary Spectacle, 21 April 1968.¹³¹

It has been argued that the concept of palingenesis was heavily featured in the junta's propaganda, as the regime presented itself as a corrective force in an ideologically degenerate society. The junta sought to instil their palingenetic ideology in the next generations, distinguishing it as a fusion of Christian and classical ideals that were communicated via rhetorical and visual symbolism and spectacles.

¹³⁰ Zoe Nichola, *Χούντα: Κι Αν Είναι Κιτς, Να Το Φοβάστε!* (21 April 2017) <https://www.tanea.gr/2017/04/21/lifearts/xoynta-ki-an-einai-kits-na-to-fobaste/> [Accessed 25 November 2025].

¹³¹ Digital Zoot.

Chapter 3

‘We as the Golden Dawn have a duty. [...] A duty to organise [our] nation, to colonise it ideologically, to put it in its place, [...] to make Greece Greek Again.’¹³²

Golden Dawn began in the form of a magazine in 1980, becoming a formal political party in 1983 and participating in its first elections in 1994.¹³³ Neo-Nazi Nikolaos Michaloliakos founded Golden Dawn and has led it ever since. Michaloliakos began his political activities in 1973 when he joined the nationalist, Metaxas-inspired ‘Fourth of August’ party.¹³⁴ Further showing how influential each ultranationalist movement was to the next, Michaloliakos met George Papadopoulos while in prison for his involvement in anti-communist violence in 1977. Upon the former dictator’s request, he became the leader of Papadopoulos’ far-right party in 1984, which he shortly left to focus on Golden Dawn in 1985.¹³⁵ Golden Dawn reached the height of its parliamentary success in the 2015 elections, when it received 400,000 votes and became the third biggest party.¹³⁶ In 2013, following the murder of anti-fascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas by Golden Dawn members, the party was put on trial and eventually declared a criminal organisation.¹³⁷

Overall, while there is room for debate concerning the classification of the Fourth of August and April 21st regimes, there is no doubt that Golden Dawn is a neo-Nazi group. Eleftheria Ioannidou classed them as an extreme form of a neo-Nazi party, and Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera distinguished the party as ‘particularly violent’ within the wider context of far-right groups in Europe.¹³⁸ Of my three examples of ultranationalism, Golden Dawn draws the ‘[strictest] boundary between [the Greek] ethnic community’ and others, and presents a

¹³² *I Kathimerini* (10 December 2012).

¹³³ Vasilis Nedos, ‘Το κλούβιο «αβγό του φιδιού»’, *To Vima* (11 November 2008); Antonis Ellinas, *Organizing Against Democracy: The Local Organizational Development of Far Right Parties in Greece and Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p.63.

¹³⁴ Ioannidou, p.4.

¹³⁵ Nedos.

¹³⁶ ‘Election Results’, Hellenic Parliament, <https://www.hellenicparliament.gr/en/vouli-ton-ellinon/to-politevma/ekloges/eklogika-apotelesmata-new/> [accessed 29 March 2026].

¹³⁷ Helena Smith, ‘Golden Dawn Guilty Verdicts Celebrated across Greece’, *The Guardian* (7 October 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/07/golden-dawn-leader-and-ex-mps-found-guilty-in-landmark-trial> [accessed 14 April 2026].

¹³⁸ Ioannidou, p.3; Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera, *The Rise of The Far Right in Europe* (2014) <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-rise-of-the-far-right-in-europe/> [accessed 1 April 2026].

eugenic narrative of racially and morally superior Greeks.¹³⁹ And, unlike the previous two examples, Golden Dawn has never held executive power or had the opportunity to establish an authoritarian regime. However, despite existing on the fringes of Greek politics until 2012, and being under consistent legal pressure since 2013, Golden Dawn has acquired a sustained and organic cult following for which there was no equivalent in Metaxas and Papadopoulos' regime, despite their varied political organisations.¹⁴⁰ The party has an innately populist character, which has partly been attributed to the way it has rationalised and legitimised its beliefs through selective myths of Greek history.¹⁴¹ For instance, Ioannidou argued that Golden Dawn's parliamentary success in 2012 was directly linked to them presenting themselves as the bearers of the palingenetic rebirth that Greece needed in that period of economic crisis.¹⁴²



Figure 6: Golden Dawn's party symbol¹⁴³

As with Metaxas' Minoan Axe and the junta's phoenix, Golden Dawn's official emblem (Fig.1) is a good example of how the party features the concept of palingenesis, which Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou highlighted as a 'key underpinning of the rhetoric of Golden Dawn'.¹⁴⁴ Ioannidou has voiced a similar opinion when noting their adoption of Ancient Greek symbols, such as the use of the meander, as seen previously in Fig.5.¹⁴⁵ She argued that Golden Dawn has used this symbol to appeal to a wider populus, capitalising on the '[idealised] views of antiquity' that are 'embedded in Western culture' and are therefore not always flagged as overtly Nazi in style, despite its visual similarities to the swastika.¹⁴⁶ According to Antonis Ellinas, Golden Dawn sought to mask its National Socialist beliefs and establish itself as a more 'palatable' third way party, one offering a 'radical alternative' to existing political binaries.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, p.71.

¹⁴⁰ Helena Smith, *The Guardian* (7 October 2020); Ioannidou,

¹⁴¹ Joanna Kakissis, 'Why the Rise of Greece's Golden Dawn Party Is Bad for Europe', *TIME* (5 November 2012) <https://time.com/archive/6642741/why-the-rise-of-greeces-golden-dawn-party-is-bad-for-europe/> [accessed 2 April 2026]

¹⁴² Ioannidou, p.4.

¹⁴³ Golden Dawn, *Χρυσή Αυγή* <https://xrisiavggi.com> [accessed 20 November 2025]. The text reads: 'Golden Dawn (Nation – Faith – Freedom)'.

¹⁴⁴ Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou, p.65.

¹⁴⁵ Ioannidou, p.4.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁴⁷ Ellinas, p.67; Aristotle Kallis, 'International Fascism and the Allure of the 'Third Way' in Interwar Greece', *Fascism*, 11 (2022), 187-210 (p.189).

Its leaders believed that using this ancient Greek symbol could make the party appear traditional or even trustworthy. However, the meander also acts as a dog-whistle to neo-Nazis, referencing the recent history of National Socialism on top of Greece's 'glorified distant past'.¹⁴⁸ Overall, Golden Dawn instrumentalised ancient symbolism and the promise of national rebirth to broaden its appeal beyond those who would have explicitly identified as neo-Nazis, thus expanding the party's reach.

The 'Golden Dawn' magazine is another useful source for tracing the use of palingenesis in the party's propaganda. Golden Dawn claimed to have published over 400 political analysis articles by 1988 and, according to Ellinas, the magazine acted as their 'ideological mouthpiece'.¹⁴⁹ Issue thirteen (1984) contained an article written by Athanasios Konstas titled 'For a New Civilisation', which provides a significant amount of insight into the party's core revolutionary and palingenetic vision.¹⁵⁰ In this article, Konstas made lengthy references to the 'worldview' of 'hellenic harmony' and the need to '[restore Greece's] original integrity' as he criticised present-day democratic systems and 'internationalism'.¹⁵¹ His thesis was that Golden Dawn was 'fighting' for a 'new, vigorous, greater and purer civilisation', which would be established through the 'revolution of the soul and body' and through war, 'the cause of all progress'.¹⁵² As with Metaxas and the junta, the 'common soul' is a focal point of Golden Dawn's ultranationalist vision, helping to establish a sense of unity and belonging for its members.¹⁵³ Furthermore, this article shows the significance of violence as a means of practicing this vision. Konstas described war as the 'highest form of life, and the cause of all progress', an example of the militant aggression that is characteristic of palingenetic (and fascist) worldviews. For example, in Mussolini's 'Doctrine of Fascism' he declared that 'all doctrines which postulate peace at all costs are incompatible with Fascism'.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, Golden Dawn placed and continues to place conflict at the forefront of its ideology and practices.

The content of this article encourages and legitimises the violence committed by Golden Dawn's regimented paramilitary wing, which was described by a member as a 'fully

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ellinas, p.64.

¹⁵⁰ Athanasios Konstas, 'Για ένα Νέο Πολιτισμό', *Golden Dawn*, 13 (1984), 3-6.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁵² Ibid., pp.5-6.

¹⁵³ Mosse, pp.19-20.

¹⁵⁴ 'Mussolini - THE DOCTRINE OF FASCISM', [n.d.], *WORLD FUTURE FUND*
<https://worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/reading/germany/mussolini.htm> [accessed 17 April 2026]

operational military structure' that had 3000 troops 'ready for anything'.¹⁵⁵ These 'troops' have been at the centre of controversies over the decades, committing high profile murders and countless other acts of violence, including the aforementioned murder of Pavlos Fyssas and the murder of Pakistani retail worker Shahzad Luqman.¹⁵⁶ Their paramilitary wing is highly reminiscent of Mussolini's *squadristi* paramilitary groups that operated similarly to intimidate anti-Fascists. Golden Dawn has framed this violence as a continuation of Spartan *krypteia*, small terror units used by the state to eliminate opposition and prevent rebellions.¹⁵⁷ Ilias Kasidiaris, Golden Dawn MP, described these 'hit-squads' as 'the shield of Sparta that patiently guards the body of Greece'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, Golden Dawn has portrayed its 'mission' as one of perpetual conflict in the so-called 'defence' of Greece.¹⁵⁹ Though the party always had an anti-immigration stance, the 2008 crash and the influx of Syrian refugees in 2011 created the right amount of societal pressure for this rhetoric to gain support.¹⁶⁰ The long list of racist attacks that Golden Dawn members committed against refugees was a physical manifestation of the conflict and enmity that the party constructed ideologically.¹⁶¹ The violence itself, then, is not only justified by palingenetic ideology – it is precisely a rebirth of the political mechanisms from Greece's distant past.¹⁶²

A further form of Golden Dawn's propaganda is its website, which has functioned in a similar manner to the magazine since 2012. New articles under the categories of 'activities', 'ideology' and 'history/culture' are posted virtually every day, the content of which ranges from enraged online haranguing to (restoratively) nostalgic musings on Greece's past golden ages. The website is an accessible, rich and ever-growing source of the party's political opinions and interpretations of Greece's past. It is also helpful for tracking the group's activities, as commemorative rituals and rallies are constantly advertised.

¹⁵⁵ 'Το αίμα πνίγει τους νεοναζί', *To Vima*, 22 September 2013.

¹⁵⁶ 'Greece jails two 'Neo-Nazis' for killing Pakistani', *BBC News* (15 April 2014) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-27039350> [Accessed 1 April 2025].

¹⁵⁷ Kostis Papaioannou, *Τα «καθαρά χέρια» της Χρυσής Αυγής: Εφαρμογές ναζιστικής καθαρότητας* (Athens: Metaichmio, 2013), p.70.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Karakatsouli, p.82; Ioannidou, p.7.

¹⁶⁰ Ellinas, p.68.

¹⁶¹ 'Ψηλά τις Σημαίες, Συναγωνιστές! Δεν θα τους προσκυνήσουμε', Golden Dawn <https://xrisiavgi.com/2012/12/06/09/1110/> [accessed 20 November 2025]; Daniell Trilling, 'Why did Golden Dawn's neo-Nazi leaders get away with it for so long?', *The Guardian* (8 October 2020) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/08/golden-dawn-neo-nazi-violence-greece-political-class> [accessed 4 April 2026].

¹⁶² Ioannidou, p.7.

Features of palingenesis can be found in the ‘history/culture’ articles that defend and justify the actions of Metaxas and the junta. For example, in an article commemorating the establishment of the Fourth of August regime, the author heralded Metaxas’ leadership example as the method for fulfilling his ‘vision of nationalist revolutionary indoctrination’ and the ‘creation of a generation that will raise Hellenism to the position it deserves!’.¹⁶³ Similarly, an article on the junta wrote that:

‘more was accomplished in those seven years than in the entire period from Greece’s liberation until 1967 (excluding the four years following August 4!)’¹⁶⁴

Both passages reclaim past authoritarian episodes as necessary and productive moments in Greece’s ongoing regeneration progress, echoing Karakatsouli and Boym’s arguments on the selective presentation of history in the far right.¹⁶⁵ This is especially evident in the second quote, where the sole exception in two hundred years (Greece’s ‘liberation’ being the 1821 revolution) was Metaxas’ regime. Griffin argued that irrationality does not necessarily hinder palingenetic ideology, on account of its revolutionary and inspirational power.¹⁶⁶ The author proves Griffin’s point, as inspiring ultranationalist myths of ‘Hellenism’ and past revolutionary ultranationalist groups are the only necessary information for this sweeping timeline of Greece’s history.

Palingenesis also features heavily in Golden Dawn’s annual commemoration rituals at the site of Thermopylae, where a battle against Persian invaders took place in 480 BCE. Throughout Greece, the story is remembered as an example of Spartan bravery, increasing the affective popularity of its use. At Thermopylae, King Leonidas and his 300 Spartan soldiers led 1100 soldiers from other city states in fending off over twenty thousand Persian troops, until they were defeated due to a betrayal by a fellow Greek man. The battleground of Thermopylae was excavated by the Metaxas regime in the late 1930s, which benefitted the dictator’s public image greatly as he sought to connect the Third Hellenic Civilisation to the military glory of Ancient Sparta.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, before becoming a site of neo-Nazi commemoration, actual Nazis held their own re-enactment of the battle of Thermopylae during their occupation of Greece in 1941.¹⁶⁸ The ideological significance of this site for Golden Dawn therefore reveals

¹⁶³ ‘Η ταυτότητα του Ιωάννη Μεταξά’, *Golden Dawn* (4 August 2025) <https://xrisiavgi.com/2025/08/04/15/165124/> [Accessed 15 November 2025].

¹⁶⁴ ‘Για την 21^η Απριλίου’, *Golden Dawn* (22 April 2023) <https://xrisiavgi.com/2025/08/04/15/165124/> [Accessed 15 November 2025].

¹⁶⁵ Karakatsouli, p.77; Boym, p.42,

¹⁶⁶ Griffin (1991), p.28.

¹⁶⁷ Fidetzis, p.61.

¹⁶⁸ Ioannidou, p.2.

their inherent connection both to this distant myth of Spartan glory, but also to the Metaxan and the Nazi interpretations of that same myth.



Figure 7: Speech of Michaloliakos at Thermopylae (screenshot)¹⁶⁹

The earliest instance I could find of this ritual was from 2008, and it is unclear whether it occurred before then.¹⁷⁰ As seen in video recordings published on news websites and YouTube, the ritual primarily consists of hundreds of predominantly black-clad men congregating around a monument that depicts a frieze of Spartan soldiers and a statue of Leonidas, as seen in Figure.¹⁷¹ Some men stand on top of the memorial, a way of claiming ownership of the battle's history and presenting themselves as its moral and spiritual successors. Speeches are then given by a variety of party leaders, where palingenetic ideologues are particularly present.

For example, on August 26, 2012, Michaloliakos declared that Golden Dawn members were there to honour 'the Greeks who stopped the barbarians here', which is what his party 'will do too'.¹⁷² The story of Thermopylae provides two examples for the construction of Boym's 'mythical enemies': the foreign 'barbarian' Persians and the Greek betrayer.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ *I Kathimerini* (10 December 2012).

¹⁷⁰ Papaioannou, p.70.

¹⁷¹ *I Kathimerini* (10 December 2012).

¹⁷² 'Golden Dawn at the Thermopylae 26 August 2012', *Daily Motion* <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xt2ehk> [Accessed 31 March 2026]

¹⁷³ Boym, p.43; Ioannidou, p.10.

Michaloliakos directly applied these categories to the ‘anti-Greek’ immigrants and the ‘local traitors’ that threaten to ‘betray Greece once more’.¹⁷⁴ This ‘us and them’ narrative designates these imagined enemies as a cause of the crisis of modernity that Golden Dawn have set out to counteract.¹⁷⁵ The othering of these ‘enemies’ once again strengthens the kinship among Golden Dawn members as, according to another speech on December 10, 2021, they fulfil their ‘duty to colonise [their nation] ideologically’ and ‘make Greece Greek again’.¹⁷⁶

Palingenesis further features in the calling out of the names of recent ‘martyrs’ or of well known ‘heroes’ at the end of these commemorative rituals.¹⁷⁷ After each name is read out, participants shout ‘ΠΑΡΩΝ’ (present). The word ‘present’ collapses the elapsed time between the deaths of the ‘martyrs’ and the ritual’s performance, which turns grief for the dead into a conviction that reviving their memory can restore their participation in the ongoing conflict. Palingenetic rebirth therefore regenerates the individuals that embody the mythicised societies and virtues at the centre of Golden Dawn’s ideology. Furthermore, Ioannidou has suggested that the ritual is instrumental in mobilising individuals to seek the ‘immediate remedy’ to the ‘deep-seated crisis’ that these supposed martyrs have sacrificed themselves for, giving more purpose to their ‘common soul’.¹⁷⁸ In Lene Faust’s ethnographic observations of similar rituals performed by neo-fascists in Italy, with ‘*Presente!*’ being yelled instead of the Greek ‘*Paron!*’, she also noted how easy it was to exploit the emotions produced during these rituals for political purposes.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Griffin highlighted the ‘alchemical power’ of palingenetic rituals to turn ‘despair’ into ‘manic optimism’, grief into rebirth or even resurrection.¹⁸⁰ So, the palingenetic ‘*paron*’ ritual transforms grief into a sense of collective purpose, giving the dead a key role in the living movement’s mission for civilisational rebirth.

To summarise, Golden Dawn has used the concept of palingenesis in its propaganda to construct an exclusionary and racially charged conflict, invoking past iterations of ultranationalism, as well as its own myths of Greece’s distant violent past to create a united front for the party’s so-called revolution.

¹⁷⁴ *Daily Motion*.

¹⁷⁵ Angouri and Wodak, p.544.

¹⁷⁶ *I Kathimerini* (10 December 2012).

¹⁷⁷ Ioannidou, p.14.

¹⁷⁸ Ioannidou, p.7; Mosse, p.19.

¹⁷⁹ Lene Faust, ‘Moral Challenges in Anthropological Research among Italian Neo-Fascists: The Significance of the Body’, *Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, 146.1 (2021), 173–92 (pp.173, 183).

¹⁸⁰ Griffin, p.39.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how Greek ultranationalists have used the concept of palingenesis in the propaganda since 1936 to justify and popularise their ideologies. It has evaluated the political function of the distant past, revealing how a nation's history does not merely function as a backdrop to the present day, but as an active and malleable political resource. My study has applied Griffin's palingenetic ultra-nationalism and Boym's restorative nostalgia to show that Greece's history has been continuously exploited to legitimise authority, construct a national 'common soul' and frame political violence as a societal necessity. I have further shown how different features of palingenesis reflect the distinct political circumstances of each movement. Metaxas inherited a democracy in crisis, giving him the power to institutionalise palingenesis and present the Third Hellenic Civilisation as a stable reality, not an aspiration. In contrast, the junta lacked ideological cohesion or popular mandate, as shown in its reliance on performative and kitsch constructions of palingenesis. In contrast, Golden Dawn established an authentic populist support base and used rituals and violence to permanently position itself on the margins of Greece's political spheres. Nevertheless, the same fundamental logic runs across the Fourth of August, April 21st and Golden Dawn: modern Greece was and is the living heir of a mythicised ancient civilisation, whose legacy and inheritance is perpetually threatened by crises of modernity, concluding that each respective ultra-nationalist movement is the only force that can defend and restore the Greek nation.

Golden Dawn seems undeterred by its criminalisation, and other Greek far-right parties have gained further support and traction in recent years. In fact, Golden Dawn published an article three days before I wrote this conclusion, titled 'The Ethnic Continuity of Greeks'. In it the author described how modern Greeks are a continuation of the 'great people who created Ancient Greek Civilisation'.¹⁸¹ For us to understand this ever-present dangerous trajectory and debunk the myths that the far-right constructs, we must first understand, as I have shown, just how compelling the distant past is as a tool for the construction of ultranationalist ideology.

¹⁸¹ 'Η Φυλετική Συνέχεια των Ελλήνων', *Golden Dawn* (24 April 2026] <https://xrisiavgi.com/2026/04/24/08/169986/> [accessed 27 April 2026].

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