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"Forging the Nation: Class, Region, and Identity in the Greek Army (1821–1949)"

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Abstract

This study examines the social composition of the Greek Army from the War of Independence (1821–1829) to the conclusion of the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), exploring how class, regionalism, and ethnic diversity shaped its structure and function. While the Greek Army played a pivotal role in nation-building, its internal dynamics have often been overshadowed by political and military narratives. By analyzing recruitment patterns, training practices, and the experiences of soldiers, this research uncovers the army's role as a microcosm of Greek society and a tool for social mobility.

The study pays particular attention to regional disparities in recruitment, the integration (or exclusion) of ethnic minorities, and the evolving relationship between the army and the state. Using military archives, personal memoirs, and census data, it also investigates how the army reflected—and occasionally exacerbated—divisions within Greek society, especially during the National Schism (1914–1922) and the Civil War.

By situating the Greek Army within broader European and Balkan military contexts, this research highlights its unique role in shaping Greek national identity. Ultimately, the study contributes to our understanding of how military institutions mediate social change and reinforces the importance of the common soldier in the making of modern Greece.

Keywords: Greek Army, Social Composition, Nation-Building, Class and Regionalism, Ethnic Minorities, Modern Greek History

1. INTRODUCTION

The Greek Army occupies a pivotal role in the modern history of Greece, serving as both a symbol and an instrument of the nation's tumultuous journey from fragmented Ottoman rule to a unified nation-state. Across the formative years of modern Greece (1821–1949), the military was central to a series of transformative events: the War of Independence (1821–1829), the consolidation of the monarchy, territorial expansion during the Balkan Wars, and Greece's participation in two World Wars. More than a purely martial force, the Greek Army became a crucible for social and political dynamics, reflecting and influencing the broader processes of state-building and national identity formation. However, while military historians have extensively examined Greece's major campaigns and strategic evolution, the social composition of the Greek Army remains a relatively underexplored facet of its history.

At its core, the Greek Army was not only an instrument of war but also a key institution through which disparate social classes, regional identities, and ethnic groups encountered one another, often for the first time. During the War of Independence, the army was primarily composed of irregular militias drawn from rural areas and led by regional warlords. By the late 19th century, the establishment of conscription and military academies began transforming the armed forces into a more standardized institution, albeit one that continued to mirror the profound social inequalities and regional divisions of the Greek state. In the early 20th century, the Greek Army emerged as a testing ground for notions of citizenship and belonging, grappling with questions of who could—and should—serve in the defense of the nation. Ethnic minorities, women, and marginalized social classes often found their participation circumscribed by cultural prejudices and political considerations. These dynamics reveal the army as both a microcosm of Greek society and a battleground for broader struggles over identity and inclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework. The Historical Context of the Greek Army

(1821–1949). Research Questions

The importance of the Greek Army in shaping modern Greece cannot be overstated. As a unifying force, it brought together individuals from diverse backgrounds and regions under a shared national banner, fostering the development of a common Greek identity. The Balkan Wars (1912–1913), for example, saw soldiers from newly annexed territories, such as Macedonia and Crete, integrated into the national military structure. These wars were not only a means of territorial expansion but also a powerful symbol of the army's capacity to forge a sense of collective purpose among a fragmented populace. At the same time, the army's role in exacerbating social divisions, particularly during moments of political crisis, underscores its dual function as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force in Greek society. The National Schism (1914–1922), during which the army itself split along royalist and republican lines, highlighted the deep political fissures within the institution and their repercussions for the nation as a whole.

Central to this study are three key questions. First, what were the class dynamics of the Greek Army? The officer corps was predominantly drawn from the educated urban middle and upper classes, often trained abroad and steeped in European military traditions, while the rank-and-file soldiers were largely composed of conscripts from rural, agrarian backgrounds. This disparity

raises important questions about the interactions between officers and enlisted men, as well as the extent to which the army provided avenues for upward mobility or reinforced existing class hierarchies.

Second, how did regional identities shape the composition and character of the Greek Army? From the pre-independence klephtic bands to the conscription systems of the 20th century, the army was deeply influenced by regional disparities in economic development, political allegiances, and cultural traditions. Certain regions, such as the Peloponnese and Crete, were historically overrepresented in the military, while others contributed disproportionately fewer soldiers. Understanding these patterns provides insight into how the army both reflected and reshaped regional dynamics within Greece.

Finally, what role did ethnic minorities play in the Greek Army? Despite Greece's self-image as a homogeneous nation-state, its population has always been marked by ethnic and linguistic diversity. The inclusion (or exclusion) of groups such as Jews, Arvanites, Vlachs, and Slavic-speaking populations raises critical questions about the relationship between military service, citizenship, and national identity. The experiences of minority soldiers in the Balkan Wars, World War II, and the Civil War illustrate the ways in which the Greek Army grappled with competing ideals of inclusion and exclusion.

This study argues that the Greek Army was a key institution for both reinforcing and challenging social hierarchies, contributing significantly to the formation of a modern Greek national identity. As an engine of modernization, the army facilitated the integration of diverse social groups into the fabric of the Greek state, creating opportunities for mobility and shared purpose. Yet it also mirrored and perpetuated the divisions of Greek society, often serving as a site where conflicts over class, region, and ethnicity played out. By examining the army's social composition across key historical periods, this research sheds new light on the ways in which military institutions mediate social change and illuminate the fault lines of a nation in transition.

In focusing on these underexplored dimensions, this study seeks to contribute to the broader historiography of modern Greece while also engaging with contemporary debates in military and social history. By situating the Greek Army within the wider context of state formation and nation-building, it highlights the profound connections between military service and the evolution of collective identity. This research underscores the importance of understanding the social underpinnings of military institutions to grasp the complex processes through which nations are made and remade.

2.2. Research studies on the period under investigation (1821–1949)

Historians have examined various dimensions of the Greek Army's history, particularly its role in military conflicts and state-building efforts, yet significant gaps remain in understanding its social composition and broader societal implications. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on the strategic and operational aspects of the Greek Army, often overlooking the interplay between military service and the socio-cultural fabric of modern Greece. For instance, Dakin's seminal work (*Dakin, 1973*) explores the military campaigns of the War of Independence, emphasizing strategic maneuvers and alliances but pays little attention to the

diverse backgrounds of the fighters and their impact on the emerging national identity.

Similarly, in another study (Dakin, 1972) examines territorial expansion and diplomatic efforts during the Balkan Wars and the Asia Minor Campaign but treats the army as a monolithic institution, with minimal analysis of its internal social dynamics. Richard Clogg (Clogg, 1979) briefly acknowledges the political role of the military in the National Schism but does not delve into how class, regional, and ethnic identities influenced military cohesion and morale.

More recently, Mark Mazower (Mazower, 2001) has shed light on the resistance movements and collaboration within occupied Greece during World War II, highlighting the interactions between the Greek military, the population, and occupying forces. However, his focus remains on broader resistance efforts rather than the composition of the regular Greek Army and its implications for social hierarchies during and after the conflict. Likewise, John S. Koliopoulos (*Koliopoulos*, 1999) provides a microhistorical account of divisions during the Civil War but primarily examines local allegiances rather than the social stratification within the Greek military itself.

While these studies offer invaluable insights into the military, political, and strategic dimensions of Greek history, they leave unaddressed several critical questions that this manuscript seeks to answer. Specifically, they do not explore how class dynamics influenced the relationships between officers and enlisted men or how service in the army provided—or failed to provide—pathways for social mobility. Furthermore, the roles of regional identities and ethnic minorities remain largely overlooked. While some historians have touched on minority populations in Greek history, few have examined their participation in the armed forces and how this shaped or challenged ideas of national belonging.

This manuscript seeks to fill these gaps by examining the Greek Army as a site where social, regional, and ethnic divisions were negotiated, contested, and redefined. By focusing on the experiences of rank-and-file soldiers, minority groups, and regional disparities, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the army's role in the broader processes of nation-building and social transformation in modern Greece.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research methodology

The research methodology is designed to align with the study's objectives, combining an interdisciplinary framework with rigorous historical analysis. This approach integrates social history, military studies, and political sociology to explore the Greek Army's social composition and its role in shaping modern Greece from 1821 to 1949.

The study employs a multi-pronged methodology focused on key areas of investigation, including the class, regional, and ethnic dynamics within the Greek Army, and how these factors influenced national identity formation. A historical investigation is central to this approach, emphasizing the long-term impacts of military service on social mobility, cohesion, and exclusion (Borg & Gall, 1989). This qualitative methodology highlights the significance of reconstructing historical narratives while addressing gaps in prior scholarship.

Primary sources are a cornerstone of this research, with archival records serving as critical evidence. These include military service

rosters, conscription records, training manuals, and correspondence housed in Greek and international archives. Oral histories from veterans and their descendants provide unique insights into lived experiences, while military documents offer perspectives on institutional policies and strategies. Secondary literature, including academic studies and historical analyses, contextualizes these findings within broader historiographical debates (Mavroskoufis, 2005).

Periods of uncertainty, particularly during events like the National Schism (Kyriakidis, 2023), and Civil War, are examined through a lens that balances fragmented archival evidence with oral testimonies. This methodological challenge reflects the inherent difficulty of reconstructing events from incomplete historical records, as noted by Verdi Ath. (Verdi, 2015) and Athanasiou Leonidas (Athanasiou, 2003). These challenges are addressed by adopting Jaspers' philosophy that modern science represents an ongoing pursuit of understanding (Jaspers, 1950).

Historical analysis is the primary method employed, emphasizing the systematic and objective identification, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence. This approach uncovers facts, evaluates their significance, and situates them within chronological narratives (Cohen & Manion, 1977). This approach functions as a means to comprehend the past, interpret current realities, and anticipate future developments (Nova-Kaltsouni, 2006). Historical analysis, as the principal method, uncovers factual evidence, critically evaluates its validity, and constructs coherent chronological narratives (Mialaret, 1999). The method is critical in investigating the interplay between class, region, and ethnicity across key historical periods. By combining primary archival data with interpretive insights from secondary sources, this approach provides a multi-dimensional understanding of the Greek Army's evolution and societal impact.

Hill J. E. and Kerber A. (Hill, Kerber, 1967), highlight the benefits of historical research, including its capacity to resolve contemporary issues by drawing on past insights, identify long-term trends, and refine established theories. By analyzing Greece's geopolitical and sociopolitical transformations through the prism of military history, this study reveals the dynamics of nation-building and military professionalism, offering valuable lessons for contemporary debates on military and social integration.

This research transcends the documentation of historical events by addressing critical themes such as social stratification, national identity, and institutional modernization. By synthesizing archival evidence, oral histories, and secondary analyses, it contributes to a nuanced understanding of the Greek Army's role in shaping modern Greece.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historical Context and the Role of the Greek Army (1821–1949)

The Greek Army played a pivotal role in shaping modern Greece, evolving from irregular bands during the War of Independence into a structured, professional institution by the mid-20th century. Its history reflects broader social, political, and cultural transformations, as it became both a microcosm of Greek society and an agent of change. This analysis examines key periods in the development of the Greek Army, highlighting its shifting social composition, institutional evolution, and its impact on nation-building efforts.

4.1. The Greek War of Independence (1821–1829)

The origins of the Greek Army lie in the irregular militias that emerged during the War of Independence. These groups, composed largely of rural peasants, *klephts /armatoloi* (bandits turned freedom fighters), and merchant-class leaders, were the primary force behind the struggle against Ottoman rule. Unlike traditional European armies, these bands lacked centralized organization, relying instead on local leadership and guerrilla tactics (Dakin, 1973).

The social composition of these forces reflected the fragmented nature of Greek society under Ottoman rule. Rural communities provided the bulk of the manpower, motivated by promises of land and freedom. Merchant leaders, who financed the rebellion, often assumed command positions, blending their economic resources with political aspirations (Clogg, 1979). Foreign philhellenes, inspired by Romantic ideals, also played a significant role, introducing European military practices and serving as a bridge between Greece and Western powers. However, the lack of unity among these diverse groups often led to internal rivalries, undermining efforts to establish a cohesive military structure.

As the war progressed, attempts were made to formalize the military. Ioannis Kapodistrias, the first governor of independent Greece, sought to establish a professional army by integrating irregular bands and introducing Western training methods. This period marked the nascent stages of the Greek Army's transformation from a patchwork of local militias into a unified national force.

4.2. The Modernization of the Army (1830s–1910)

Following independence, the Greek Army underwent significant modernization, beginning with the founding of the Evelpidon Military Academy in 1828. This institution aimed to train a new generation of officers who could lead a disciplined and professional force. The academy was heavily influenced by Bavarian and French military traditions, reflecting the influence of King Otto of Bavaria and subsequent European advisors (Woodhouse, *Modern Greece: A Short History*, 2002).

Despite these efforts, regional and social disparities persisted. Recruitment patterns revealed a stark divide between urban elites, who dominated the officer corps, and rural conscripts, who made up the rank-and-file. This divide often created tensions within the army, as officers brought European ideals of discipline and hierarchy, which clashed with the traditional values of peasant soldiers. Additionally, certain regions, such as the Peloponnese and Crete, were overrepresented in the military, while other areas lagged behind in providing recruits. These disparities reflected broader inequalities within Greek society and hindered the army's ability to act as a unifying institution (Mazower, 1991).

The modernization of the Greek Army during this period laid the groundwork for its role in the expansionist ambitions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By professionalizing its officer corps and adopting European military practices, the army became a symbol of the modern Greek state, even as it struggled to overcome internal divisions.

4.3. The Balkan Wars and World War I (1912–1918)

The Balkan Wars marked a turning point in the Greek Army's history, as it played a central role in Greece's territorial expansion and the integration of new populations. Soldiers from different regions fought side by side, fostering a sense of national consciousness and shared purpose. This period also saw the

incorporation of newly annexed territories, such as Macedonia and Epirus, into the national military structure, further diversifying the army's composition (Dakin, 1972).

However, the National Schism of 1914–1922 deeply impacted military cohesion. The political divide between royalists, who supported King Constantine, and Venizelists, who backed Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos, split the army into rival factions (Kyriakidis, 2023). This division undermined the army's effectiveness during World War I, as loyalties to political leaders often superseded national interests (Clogg, 2002). The schism highlighted the fragility of the army's role as a unifying force, exposing the extent to which political conflicts could infiltrate military institutions.

4.4. The Interwar Period and Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922)

During the interwar years, the Greek Army became a vehicle for rural-to-urban migration and social mobility. Military service offered rural conscripts opportunities to interact with urban life and gain access to education and professional training. For many, the army served as a gateway to economic advancement, bridging the gap between Greece's agrarian past and its modernizing ambitions (Mazower, 2001).

The Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), however, exposed the limits of the army's inclusivity (Army Headquarters, 1957). Ethnic minorities, particularly Muslims and Slavic-speaking populations, faced significant discrimination, both within the military and in broader society. The Asia Minor Campaign also revealed the deep societal rifts exacerbated by the war (Kyriakidis, 2021), as the catastrophic defeat and subsequent population exchanges reshaped the demographics of the Greek state (Koliopoulos, 1999).

4.5. World War II and the Civil War (1940–1949)

World War II was a defining moment for the Greek Army, as it resisted Axis forces during the Greco-Italian War and played a vital role in the broader Allied effort. Soldiers from across Greece united against a common enemy, temporarily setting aside regional and political differences. However, the occupation that followed fractured this unity, as resistance movements, such as the National Liberation Front (EAM), gained prominence. While the regular Greek Army collaborated with the British-backed government-in-exile, tensions between the army and guerrilla groups revealed the complex interplay of class, ideology, and loyalty (Mazower, 2001).

The Greek Civil War (1946–1949) marked the culmination of these divisions. The army, now aligned with the royalist government, became a battleground for ideological conflict between communists and anti-communists (Army Headquarters, 1971). Class dynamics played a significant role, as rural conscripts often sympathized with the communist cause, while the officer corps remained staunchly conservative. The civil war underscored the extent to which the Greek Army reflected the broader social and political fault lines of the nation, complicating its role as a unifying institution (Koliopoulos, 1999).

According to the above data, from its origins as irregular bands during the War of Independence to its role in the ideological struggles of the Civil War, the Greek Army underwent profound transformations between 1821 and 1949 (Baerentzen, Iatrides, et. al., 2000). While it served as a symbol of national unity, its internal dynamics often mirrored the deep social, regional, and political divisions within Greek society. The dual role of the Greek army as

a unifying and fragmenting force sheds light on its central position in the creation of modern Greece.

5. Class Dynamics in the Greek Army

The Greek Army's class dynamics played a crucial role in shaping its structure, function, and societal impact from the 19th century to the mid-20th century. The interplay between the aristocracy, middle-class elites, and predominantly rural rank-and-file soldiers not only influenced the army's internal hierarchies but also reflected broader class relations in Greek society. These dynamics were particularly pronounced during periods of political upheaval and social transformation, where the military acted as both a stabilizing institution and a site of tension between different social groups.

5.1. Officers and Elites

The officer corps of the Greek Army was historically dominated by the aristocracy, middle-class professionals, and members of established military dynasties. In the early years following independence, many officers hailed from prominent families with connections to the monarchy or the political elite. These officers often leveraged their social and political influence to secure commissions, which were seen as prestigious positions that conferred authority and respectability (Woodhouse, 1998).

The establishment of the Evelpidon Military Academy in 1828 played a key role in shaping the officer corps by introducing formalized training and creating a professional military elite (Kyriakidis, 2016). The academy's curriculum, influenced heavily by Bavarian and later French military traditions, reflected the aspirations of the Greek state to modernize its military along European lines (Clogg, 2002). However, the academy primarily admitted candidates from wealthy or politically connected families, perpetuating the dominance of the aristocracy and the emerging urban middle class in the officer ranks (Kyriakidis, 2016).

Foreign training and political connections further entrenched the elite status of officers. Many high-ranking officers studied in military institutions abroad, particularly in France and Germany, where they were exposed to European doctrines of discipline, organization, and leadership. These foreign-trained officers often returned with a sense of superiority over their locally trained counterparts, reinforcing class distinctions within the military (Mazower, 2001). Additionally, the close ties between the officer corps and the monarchy ensured that political loyalty often trumped merit in promotions, further alienating officers from the enlisted men they commanded.

5.2. Rank-and-File Soldiers

In stark contrast to the officer corps, the rank-and-file soldiers of the Greek Army were predominantly drawn from rural, agrarian backgrounds. Conscription, introduced in the mid-19th century, became a defining feature of military service, ensuring that the bulk of the army comprised peasants and laborers with limited formal education or economic resources (Koliopoulos, 1999). For many rural conscripts, military service represented their first exposure to life outside their villages, offering both challenges and opportunities for personal growth.

Despite the hardships associated with conscription, military service provided some avenues for upward mobility. Soldiers who demonstrated exceptional skill or loyalty could rise through the ranks, though such opportunities were relatively rare and often limited to non-commissioned officer positions. For a select few,

military service became a pathway to social advancement, enabling them to gain skills, experience, and connections that could improve their prospects in civilian life (Dakin, 1972).

However, the benefits of military service were unevenly distributed, reflecting broader social inequalities. Rural conscripts often faced harsh living conditions, limited access to resources, and discrimination from urban-based officers. These disparities underscored the hierarchical nature of the Greek Army, where rank and class intersected to shape the experiences of soldiers.

5.3. Impact of Class on Military Hierarchies and Relations

The class divide between officers and enlisted men had a profound impact on the Greek Army's internal hierarchies and relations. While the officer corps projected an image of discipline and professionalism, their often-condescending attitudes toward rank-and-file soldiers bred resentment and tension. These tensions were exacerbated by the stark contrast in lifestyles and privileges between the two groups, with officers enjoying better living conditions, higher pay, and greater social status (Mazower, 1991).

During times of political upheaval, these class-based tensions often came to the forefront. For example, during the National Schism (1914–1922), loyalties within the army were split along both political and class lines (Kyriakidis, 2023). Officers, who were generally aligned with the monarchy and the conservative establishment, found themselves at odds with conscripts, many of whom sympathized with the republican ideals espoused by Venizelos. This division undermined the cohesion of the army, contributing to its struggles in maintaining discipline and effectiveness during World War I (Clogg, 1979).

The Greek Civil War (1946–1949) further highlighted the role of class in shaping military hierarchies and relations. The conflict, which pitted communist insurgents against the government forces, revealed the deep ideological and class divides within Greek society and the army itself. Many rural conscripts, disillusioned by the economic hardships and inequities they faced, sympathized with the communist cause, while the officer corps largely remained aligned with the conservative government. These divisions often manifested in desertions, insubordination, and strained relationships between officers and enlisted men (Koliopoulos, 1999).

In addition to internal tensions, class dynamics influenced the army's ability to act as a cohesive national institution. The privileged backgrounds of many officers often led to a disconnect between the leadership and the rank and file, limiting the effectiveness of communication and the soldiers' trust in their superiors. This disconnect was particularly evident during the Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922), where the disparity between the aspirations of the officers and the experiences of the soldiers contributed to the army's eventual defeat (Mazower, 2001).

It must be made clear that class dynamics were a defining feature of the Greek Army, shaping its structure, internal relationships, and societal impact. The dominance of aristocratic and middle-class elites in the officer corps, juxtaposed with the rural and agrarian backgrounds of the rank-and-file soldiers, created a hierarchical system that mirrored the broader inequalities of Greek society. While military service offered some opportunities for upward mobility, these were often limited and did little to bridge the divide between officers and enlisted men.

Periods of political upheaval and war further amplified these tensions, exposing the fragility of the army's cohesion and its vulnerability to external ideological and social pressures. The examination of the class dynamics of the Greek army reveals the dual role of the institution as a stabilizing force and as a site of division in Greek society, highlighting its central position in the historical course of the nation.

6. Regionalism and Recruitment Patterns

The Greek Army's recruitment patterns and regional composition reflect the deep-rooted regional disparities within Greek society. From its inception during the War of Independence to its critical role in the 20th century, the Greek Army mirrored the uneven distribution of economic development, political influence, and cultural traditions across the country's diverse regions. While the army served as a unifying force at certain historical junctures, it also exacerbated regional tensions, especially during times of political and social upheaval. This analysis explores the dual role of regionalism in shaping recruitment patterns and its broader impact on national unity.

6.1. Regional Disparities

The early years of the Greek Army were marked by a pronounced overrepresentation of certain regions, particularly the Peloponnese and Crete. During the War of Independence (1821–1829), these regions emerged as the strongholds of the revolutionary movement. The Peloponnese, with its long history of klephtic resistance against Ottoman rule, provided a substantial number of fighters, while Crete's strategic location and fiercely independent population made it a vital contributor to the revolutionary cause (Dakin, 1973). This pattern of regional overrepresentation persisted into the early years of the modern Greek state, as the nascent army drew heavily on these areas for manpower.

Overrepresentation of the Peloponnese and Crete was not solely a result of their military traditions but also their political influence within the early Greek state. Leaders from these regions dominated the political landscape, ensuring that their constituencies played a central role in shaping the army. However, this disproportionate reliance on specific regions often marginalized other parts of Greece, such as Epirus and Thessaly, which were either under Ottoman control or less politically integrated into the new state.

By the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), recruitment patterns began to shift, reflecting Greece's territorial expansion and the integration of new regions, including Macedonia, Epirus, and the Aegean islands (Kyriakidis, 2021). These newly annexed areas became important sources of conscripts, diversifying the army's composition. Soldiers from these regions, many of whom were recent additions to the Greek state, played a critical role in defending and consolidating Greece's territorial gains. This shift in recruitment patterns marked a significant step toward creating a more inclusive national army, though regional disparities remained (Clogg, 2002).

World War II further reshaped recruitment patterns, as the demands of total war required a broader mobilization of manpower. Regions that had historically been underrepresented in the army, such as Northern Greece, became more integrated into the national military structure. However, the process was not without challenges, as economic disparities and cultural differences continued to influence the experiences of conscripts from different regions (Mazower, 2001).

6.2. Impact on National Unity

The Greek Army played a dual role in relation to national unity. On one hand, it acted as a unifying institution by bringing together individuals from diverse regions under a common banner. Through conscription, the army exposed recruits to a shared national identity, fostering a sense of collective purpose. Military training, ceremonies, and symbols reinforced this identity, emphasizing loyalty to the nation over regional affiliations. This was particularly evident during the Balkan Wars, when soldiers from newly annexed territories fought alongside those from older regions, forging bonds that transcended local loyalties (Dakin, 1972).

On the other hand, the persistence of regionalism within the army often undermined its unifying potential. Regional loyalties and rivalries, deeply embedded in Greek society, frequently resurfaced within the military. These tensions were especially pronounced during moments of political crisis. For example, during the National Schism (1914–1922), soldiers and officers often aligned themselves with opposing political factions based on regional affiliations. The schism, which pitted royalists against Venizelists, not only divided the country but also fractured the army, with units from different regions supporting rival leaders (Kyriakidis, 2023). This division severely undermined the army's cohesion and effectiveness, contributing to military setbacks during World War I (Clogg, 1979).

The Greek Civil War (1946–1949) further exposed the impact of regionalism on national unity. The conflict, which saw communist insurgents battling government forces, was deeply influenced by regional dynamics. Northern Greece, particularly the mountainous areas, became a stronghold for communist guerilla fighters, while the government drew support from urban centers and more politically conservative regions. These regional divisions were mirrored within the army, where loyalties were often split along local lines. Mutinies and desertions, particularly among conscripts from areas sympathetic to the communist cause, highlighted the enduring power of regional identities in shaping soldiers' allegiances (Koliopoulos, 1999).

Even beyond the battlefield, regionalism influenced the army's internal dynamics. Recruitment practices often favored certain regions, creating disparities in representation and reinforcing perceptions of favoritism. This was particularly evident in the officer corps, which remained dominated by individuals from politically influential regions like Athens and the Peloponnese. Such imbalances not only undermined the army's claim to represent the nation as a whole but also fueled resentment among underrepresented areas (Mazower, 1991).

Consequently, it turns out that regionalism was a defining feature of the Greek Army, shaping its recruitment patterns and influencing its role in national unity. While the army succeeded in bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds, its persistent regional disparities often reflected and reinforced broader social and political divisions within Greece. From the overrepresentation of the Peloponnese and Crete in the early army to the shifting patterns of recruitment during the Balkan Wars and World War II, the army's composition evolved alongside the nation's territorial and political transformations.

However, the impact of regionalism on national unity remained ambivalent. While the army provided a platform for fostering a shared national identity, it also served as a battleground for

regional rivalries, particularly during times of political crisis. The National Schism and the Civil War underscored the extent to which regional loyalties could undermine the army's cohesion and its ability to act as a unifying institution.

Examining the interaction between localism and recruitment patterns reveals the complex relationship between the Greek army and the nation it sought to serve. The army's history reflects the broader challenges of forging a unified national identity in a society marked by deep regional divisions.

7. Ethnic Minorities in the Greek Army

The Greek Army's relationship with ethnic minorities, including Arvanites, Vlachs, Slavic-speaking populations, and Jews, sheds light on the complexities of nation-building in Greece. While the army served as a platform for national unification, it also imposed policies of assimilation that often marginalized minority identities. These groups contributed significantly to Greece's military efforts, yet their experiences reveal a dual reality of inclusion and exclusion, shaped by state policies and societal attitudes.

7.1. Inclusion and Exclusion

The Arvanites, Vlachs, Slavic-speakers, and Jews experienced varied degrees of inclusion within the Greek Army. Their participation was frequently contingent on assimilationist policies that sought to align their identities with the state's nationalist vision. The **Arvanites**, an Arvanian-speaking group with roots in southern Greece, were instrumental in the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829). Unlike the modern Albanian population, the Arvanites identified strongly as Greeks and adhered to Orthodox Christianity, which was a key marker of national belonging in 19th-century Greece. Celebrated figures such as Markos Botsaris and Andreas Miaoulis exemplify their critical role in the struggle for independence. The Arvanites were widely integrated into the Greek Army and seen as loyal contributors to the nation, but their linguistic and cultural heritage was often downplayed in favor of a homogenized Greek identity (Clogg, 2002). State policies promoted the use of Greek in public and military life, framing Arvanian as a dialect rather than a distinct language, to reinforce national unity (Woodhouse, 1998).

The **Vlachs**, a Latin-speaking Greek population historically associated with transhumant pastoralism, shared a similar experience. Vlachs played significant roles in the Greek Army during the Balkan Wars and other conflicts, often serving in units drawn from Epirus and Thessaly. While their military contributions were recognized, their linguistic heritage was subject to assimilationist pressures, as the state sought to solidify their identification with Hellenism. Vlach recruits underwent Greek-language training and were encouraged to view their cultural distinctiveness as a secondary aspect of their identity (Mazower-a, 2002).

The **Slavic-speaking populations** in Macedonia and Northern Greece faced more significant challenges (Collective, 2023). Viewed as potentially aligned with Bulgaria or Serbia, particularly during the Macedonian Struggle and the Balkan Wars, these communities were often regarded with suspicion by the state. In southern Greece, the first settlement of Slavs in the Peloponnese took place around the middle of the eighth century, by King Copronymos (Paparrigopoulos, 1843). Military service became a tool for assimilation, with Slavic-speaking soldiers subjected to linguistic and cultural re-education. These measures, while aiming to integrate Slavic-speakers into the Greek nation, frequently

alienated them, creating tensions that persisted into the 20th century (Karakasidou, 1997).

The **Jewish population** in Greece, concentrated in Thessaloniki, experienced a unique set of dynamics. While some Jewish individuals served in the army during the Balkan Wars and World War I, their inclusion was limited by pervasive societal prejudice and anti-Semitic policies. Despite their loyalty and contributions, Jewish soldiers often encountered discrimination within the military, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward the Jewish community (Fleming, 2010).

7.2. Minority Experiences in Key Conflicts

Ethnic minorities were active participants in Greece's key military conflicts, but their experiences highlight the intersection of loyalty, assimilation, and discrimination within the army.

During the **Balkan Wars (1912–1913)**, minority groups such as the Vlachs and Arvanites were integral to Greece's military successes. Arvanite fighters, for example, were praised for their bravery in battles for Epirus and Macedonia. Their contributions were framed as emblematic of their loyalty to the Greek nation, though their Arvanian heritage was often minimized in official narratives (Dakin, 1972). Similarly, Vlach soldiers played key roles in the campaigns in northern Greece, their service seen as a testament to their integration into the Greek state.

Slavic-speaking soldiers, on the other hand, faced a more precarious position. During the Balkan Wars and World War II, many Slavic-speaking communities in northern Greece were viewed with suspicion due to their linguistic and cultural ties to neighboring Slavic nations. While some joined the Greek Army and fought valiantly, others aligned with guerrilla movements or maintained neutrality, fearing reprisal from Greek or enemy forces (Mazower, 2001).

The **Jewish population's contributions during World War II** are notable but often overlooked. Jewish soldiers fought in the early stages of the Greco-Italian War, demonstrating loyalty to the Greek state. However, the Axis occupation of Greece brought devastating consequences for the Jewish community. In Thessaloniki, thousands of Jews were deported to Nazi death camps, and the contributions of Jewish soldiers were largely erased from the post-war national narrative (Fleming, 2010).

The **Greek Civil War (1946–1949)** further highlighted the complexities of minority participation. Slavic-speaking communities, many of whom had faced exclusion and discrimination within the Greek Army, found a more welcoming platform within the communist Democratic Army of Greece (DSE). Promises of cultural autonomy and minority rights resonated with these populations, leading to significant participation in the communist forces. This, in turn, intensified the government's suspicion of minorities, with counterinsurgency operations often targeting Slavic-speaking villages and communities (Koliopoulos, 1999).

The experiences of ethnic minorities in the Greek Army illustrate the complexities of inclusion, exclusion, and assimilation within a nation-building institution. While Arvanites and Vlachs were celebrated for their contributions and largely integrated into the army, their distinct cultural identities were often overshadowed by the state's emphasis on homogenization. Slavic-speaking populations and Jews, on the other hand, faced greater challenges,

navigating suspicion and discrimination even as they demonstrated loyalty to the Greek state.

Through their participation in key conflicts, ethnic minorities contributed significantly to Greece's military history. However, their experiences also reveal the tensions inherent in balancing diversity with the nationalist aspirations of the modern Greek state.

8. The Army and National Identity Formation

The Greek Army played a central role in shaping national identity during the tumultuous process of modern Greek state-building. From its establishment following independence in 1830, the military became both a unifying institution and a reflection of Greece's political and social struggles. Through conscription, training, and propaganda, the army sought to forge a shared Greek identity across diverse populations. However, its involvement in political crises and internal divisions often complicated this role, highlighting the intersection between military service and national identity formation.

8.1. The Army as a Nation-Building Institution

The Greek Army emerged as a critical institution for nation-building, fostering a collective identity through compulsory military service and structured training. Conscription, introduced in the mid-19th century, played a transformative role in integrating disparate regions and social groups into a unified national framework. By requiring young men from various backgrounds—rural and urban, wealthy and poor—to serve together, the army became a melting pot for Greek society. This experience exposed recruits to a standardized set of cultural and linguistic norms, reinforcing the primacy of the Greek language and Orthodox Christian values as central to national identity (Mazower, 2000).

Military training served as more than preparation for warfare; it became a tool for social and cultural indoctrination. Recruits were immersed in a structured environment that emphasized discipline, loyalty, and obedience to the state. The army also provided education to conscripts from rural or underprivileged areas, addressing the widespread illiteracy that plagued Greece in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Kyriakidis, 2016). Through these measures, the army became a vehicle for transmitting state-approved narratives of Greek history and identity, fostering a sense of shared purpose among its members (Dakin, 1972).

The army was also a key instrument of propaganda during nation-building campaigns. In the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), for example, the military's successes were portrayed as heroic efforts to liberate historically Greek territories and populations. Posters, speeches, and ceremonies emphasized the army's role as the defender of Hellenism, reinforcing the notion that military service was both a patriotic duty and a defining characteristic of Greek citizenship (Clogg, 2002).

During World War II, the army's resistance to the Italian and German invasions became a rallying point for national pride (Kyriakidis, 2021). Stories of bravery and sacrifice on the Albanian front were widely disseminated, bolstering the idea that the Greek military was a symbol of national unity and resilience. However, the state's emphasis on a homogeneous identity often excluded minorities, such as Jews and Slavic-speaking populations, whose contributions to the military were either minimized or omitted from official narratives (Fleming, 2010).

8.2. The Army's Role in Political Crises

While the Greek Army served as a unifying institution in many respects, its involvement in political crises often undermined its ability to foster national cohesion. From its early days, the military was deeply entangled in the political struggles of the Greek state, reflecting and exacerbating divisions within society.

One of the most significant episodes of military involvement in political life was the **National Schism (1914–1922)**, which pitted royalists, loyal to King Constantine, against Venizelists, who supported Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos (Kyriakidis, 2023). This division permeated the army, splitting it into rival factions that undermined its effectiveness during World War I and the Asia Minor Campaign (Kyriakidis, 2021). Royalist and Venizelist officers often refused to cooperate, while conscripts from regions loyal to one faction or the other displayed varying levels of commitment. The National Schism revealed the extent to which political polarization could erode military cohesion, turning the army into a battleground for competing visions of Greek identity and governance (Clogg, 1979).

The army's role in political crises extended beyond the National Schism. Throughout the 20th century, it was a frequent participant in coups and revolts, often acting as both a catalyst and an enforcer of regime change. The 1909 Goudi coup, led by middle-ranking officers dissatisfied with the monarchy and the political elite, marked the beginning of the military's active involvement in shaping the political landscape (Kyriakidis, 2021). While the coup initially aimed to modernize the army and strengthen the state, it set a precedent for military intervention in politics (Mazower, 1991).

During the interwar period, the army was both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. On one hand, it played a crucial role in suppressing social unrest and defending the state against external threats. On the other hand, its internal divisions and political alignments contributed to a cycle of instability, as factions within the military often sided with rival political groups. This dynamic reached its apex during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), when the army's alignment with the royalist government against communist insurgents deepened existing societal rifts (Kyriakidis, 2021). The ideological divide between officers and rank-and-file soldiers, many of whom sympathized with the communist cause, further strained military cohesion and hindered its ability to function as a unifying institution (Koliopoulos, 1999).

The long-term effects of political polarization on the Greek Army were profound. Repeated involvement in political crises weakened its credibility as an impartial institution, while internal divisions often mirrored broader societal conflicts. The legacy of these divisions persisted into the post-war period, influencing the army's role during the military dictatorship of 1967–1974 and shaping public perceptions of its relationship with the state (Clogg, 2002).

It becomes obvious that the Greek Army played a dual role in the formation of national identity, acting as both a unifying institution and a site of division. Through conscription, training, and propaganda, it sought to instill a shared sense of Greek identity, emphasizing loyalty, discipline, and patriotism. However, its involvement in political crises, from the National Schism to the Civil War, revealed the limits of its unifying potential, as internal divisions often reflected the political and social fractures of Greek society.

By examining the army's role in nation-building and political crises, the complexity of military service as a tool for shaping national identity is highlighted. While the Greek Army succeeded in creating a framework for collective identity, its entanglement in political conflicts often undermined its efforts, leaving a legacy of both cohesion and division in the history of modern Greece.

9. Comparative and Transnational Perspectives

The history of the Greek Army cannot be fully understood in isolation, as it was shaped by both regional dynamics within the Balkans and the influence of foreign military powers. Examining the Greek Army through comparative and transnational perspectives highlights the shared challenges and unique developments that characterized military institutions in the region. The similarities and differences in class and ethnic dynamics between the Greek Army and other Balkan militaries provide valuable insights into the social fabric of the era. Simultaneously, the influence of foreign military models—particularly those of France, Germany, and Britain—on the Greek Army's structure and strategy underscores the interconnectedness of European military traditions (Kyriakidis, 2022). Greek soldiers abroad and diaspora financing further demonstrate the transnational dimensions of Greece's military evolution.

9.1. Comparisons with Other Balkan Armies

The Balkan states, emerging from Ottoman rule in the 19th and early 20th centuries, shared several commonalities in the development of their military institutions. Like Greece, countries such as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania sought to build modern national armies as part of their state-building projects. These armies were shaped by similar historical legacies, including the fragmentation of the Ottoman military system, rural-based conscription, and the challenges of integrating ethnic and regional diversity.

Class dynamics in the Greek Army were mirrored in other Balkan militaries. In Greece, the officer corps was dominated by middle- and upper-class elites, often trained in foreign academies, while the rank-and-file soldiers were predominantly drawn from rural, agrarian backgrounds (Mazower, 2002). Similarly, in Serbia and Bulgaria, the rural peasantry constituted the majority of conscripts, with officers typically drawn from wealthier and more politically connected families (Jelavich, 1983). These dynamics often led to tensions within the military, as the cultural and economic gap between officers and enlisted men created divisions that hindered cohesion.

Ethnic dynamics also played a critical role in the armies of the Balkans, though with notable differences. In Greece, minorities such as Arvanites, Vlachs, Slavic-speaking populations, and Jews experienced varying levels of inclusion and exclusion within the army, depending on their perceived loyalty and assimilation into the Greek national identity (Clogg, 2002). In contrast, Bulgaria's military efforts in the late 19th century often emphasized the integration of Slavic populations while marginalizing non-Slavic groups, such as Turks and Greeks, who were viewed as external or disloyal elements (Perry, 1988).

Romania's experience with ethnic minorities in its military provides another point of contrast. The Romanian Army, like Greece's, sought to assimilate Vlach-speaking and other minority populations into a broader national identity, but its multiethnic

composition, which included Hungarians, Germans, and Jews, posed unique challenges in maintaining unity (Hitchins, 1996). These comparative perspectives underscore the shared difficulties of nation-building in a region characterized by ethnic diversity and competing nationalisms.

9.2. Influence of Foreign Military Models

The influence of foreign military models on the Greek Army reflects the transnational nature of military modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries. Greece, like its Balkan neighbors, looked to European powers for guidance in building a professional and effective military. The adoption of French, German, and British military practices shaped not only the structure and strategy of the Greek Army but also its cultural and ideological orientation.

French Influence:

In the early years of the Greek state, French military doctrines played a significant role in shaping the training and organization of the army. The French emphasis on centralized command structures and the use of professional military academies resonated with Greek efforts to modernize its officer corps. The Evelpidon Military Academy, established in 1828, adopted French models of instruction (Kyriakidis, 2016) particularly in subjects such as engineering, artillery, and military science (Woodhouse, 1998). French influence also extended to Greece's participation in the Crimean War (1853–1856), where Greek officers observed and adapted French strategies in coalition warfare (Dakin, 1973).

German Influence:

During the reign of King Otto, the Greek Army experienced significant German influence, particularly from Bavaria, Otto's homeland. German advisors introduced Prussian military traditions, emphasizing discipline, hierarchical organization, and drill-based training. This influence persisted into the late 19th century, as Germany's military success in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) made it a model for military modernization across Europe (Bjornstad, 1916). German influence was evident in Greece's reliance on German-trained officers and the adoption of German-style uniforms and weapons during the Balkan Wars (Mazower, 2001).

British Influence:

British military influence became more prominent in the 20th century, particularly during World War I and World War II. The British provided significant logistical and strategic support to the Greek Army, aligning with Greece's role as an Allied power. British advisors played a crucial role in modernizing Greece's naval and air forces, while British military doctrine influenced counterinsurgency strategies during the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) (Clogg, 1979).

9.3. Greek Soldiers Abroad: Diaspora Financing and Recruitment

The role of the Greek diaspora in financing and supporting the army underscores the transnational dimensions of Greece's military history. Greek communities abroad, particularly in Egypt, the United States, and Western Europe, were instrumental in providing funds and resources for the army during critical periods, such as the War of Independence and the Balkan Wars. Wealthy diaspora philanthropists, such as Georgios Averoff, financed the construction of warships and military academies, strengthening the Greek Army's capabilities (Clogg, 2002).

Diaspora recruitment also played a key role in Greece's military efforts. During the War of Independence, Greek expatriates

returned from Europe and the Ottoman Empire to join the fight, bringing with them military training and ideological fervor inspired by the European Enlightenment (Dakin, 1973). In the 20th century, the Greek diaspora continued to contribute to the army, particularly through the formation of volunteer battalions during World War I and World War II. These transnational connections not only bolstered the army's strength but also reinforced the idea of Greece as a nation with a global reach and a shared cultural heritage.

It must be made clear that the Greek Army's evolution was profoundly influenced by its regional and international context. Comparisons with other Balkan militaries highlight both shared challenges—such as class and ethnic dynamics—and unique aspects of Greece's nation-building process. Meanwhile, the adoption of foreign military models underscores the transnational flow of ideas and practices that shaped the Greek Army's structure and strategy.

The role of the diaspora in financing and recruitment further illustrates the interconnectedness of Greece's military history with global networks of support and solidarity. Placing the Greek Army in broader comparative and transnational perspectives, reveals the complex interplay between local, regional, and international forces in shaping the military and national identity of modern Greece.

10. Conclusions

The history of the Greek Army from its inception to the mid-20th century is inseparable from the social, regional, and ethnic dynamics that shaped both its internal structure and its role in broader Greek society. Through an examination of class hierarchies, regional disparities, and the inclusion and exclusion of ethnic minorities, this study highlights how the army functioned as a microcosm of Greece's evolving national identity. At the same time, the military's entanglement with political crises and its adoption of foreign influences reveal the complexities of its role in the nation-building process.

The Greek Army was deeply shaped by **class dynamics**, with a clear division between the officer corps, dominated by middle- and upper-class elites, and the rank-and-file soldiers, predominantly drawn from rural and working-class backgrounds. While conscription offered limited pathways for social mobility, the class divide often undermined cohesion and perpetuated broader societal inequalities within the military. These tensions became especially pronounced during moments of political crisis, such as the National Schism and the Civil War, when class-based allegiances intersected with ideological and regional divides.

Regional disparities were another defining feature of the Greek Army. Certain regions, such as the Peloponnese and Crete, were historically overrepresented, reflecting their central role in the War of Independence and subsequent conflicts. However, the integration of newly annexed territories during the Balkan Wars and World War I diversified the army's composition, fostering a sense of national unity while also exposing the challenges of managing regional loyalties. During times of political instability, these regional dynamics often re-emerged, influencing the army's effectiveness and cohesion.

The **role of ethnic minorities** further complicates the narrative of the Greek Army as a unifying institution. While groups such as the Arvanites and Vlachs were largely assimilated and celebrated for their contributions, Slavic-speaking populations and Jews often faced discrimination and exclusion. These dynamics reveal the

army's dual role as both an integrative force and a tool for enforcing cultural homogeneity, reflecting broader societal struggles with diversity and national identity.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of **nation-building in Greece**, particularly the role of the military as a social and cultural institution. The Greek Army's efforts to instill a shared national identity through conscription, training, and propaganda highlight its significance as a vehicle for state-led integration. However, the persistence of class, regional, and ethnic divisions within the military also underscores the limitations of this project, offering valuable lessons for understanding the complexities of nation-building in ethnically and socially diverse societies.

The study also sheds light on the potential of military service as a pathway for **social mobility**. While the Greek Army provided opportunities for education and professional advancement, these benefits were unevenly distributed, often reinforcing existing hierarchies. By examining the intersections of class, region, and ethnicity within the military, this analysis contributes to broader debates on the relationship between military institutions and social change.

From a comparative perspective, the Greek Army's history offers insights into the shared challenges and unique trajectories of **military modernization in the Balkans and beyond**. The interplay of local traditions, regional dynamics, and foreign influences within the Greek Army reflects broader patterns observed in other Balkan militaries, while its specific experiences during conflicts such as the Balkan Wars, World War II, and the Civil War provide valuable case studies for understanding the role of the military in politically volatile contexts.

This study opens the door for further research into understudied aspects of the Greek Army's history. One promising avenue is the exploration of **oral histories**, particularly the personal experiences of rank-and-file soldiers, officers, and minority recruits. These narratives can provide invaluable insights into the lived realities of military service, shedding light on the interactions between soldiers of different backgrounds and the impact of military policies on individual lives.

Another important direction is the study of **women's roles in the Greek military**, particularly in auxiliary capacities during World War II and the Civil War. While women's contributions to resistance movements have been documented, their involvement in logistics, medical services, and other support roles within the regular army remains underexplored. Understanding these contributions can provide a more comprehensive view of the army's social composition and its relationship to broader societal changes.

Finally, comparative studies of the Greek Army's treatment of minorities with those of neighboring Balkan militaries could deepen our understanding of the interplay between ethnicity, military service, and nation-building. Such research could illuminate the shared challenges and distinct approaches of different states in managing diversity within their armed forces.

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