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“Associations for the mental health of children and adolescents in post-war Greece (1950-1980)”

My work within the research programme Thales centres on mental health associations for children and adolescents in post-war Greece. Then, my presentation will direct this panel to another direction, bringing out the mental health dimension of social protection and welfare, in relation, of course, to public sociality.

Welfare and mental health care in Greece

My research covers the period after the Second World War up to the late 1970s, when things in welfare and public health were starting to change in Greece. While in other countries of the Western world the part of the state in welfare was becoming stronger already in the interwar period and welfare states were established after the War, in Greece the welfare state developed later, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the field of mental health up to the 1970s private initiatives were equally or more significant than state initiatives, while the family and the Church complemented state and professional insufficiencies. Mental health care in general was rather underdeveloped, with few services and professionals, mainly gathered in Athens and Thessaloniki.

Things were even less developed in the field of child and adolescent mental health. This was in general a new field, established in countries such as the USA, Britain and France in the 1920s and 1930s. In Greece its organisation began in the 1950s and child psychiatry was recognised as a separate medical specialty in 1962. A number of private institutions were founded in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly medico-pedagogical centres, namely services were psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers diagnosed and treated children with intellectual disability and various personality and behaviour problems, and special schools for children with intellectual disability. These services responded to the inefficiencies of the public sector, as until the 1960s public services included only one public special school, which had been founded in 1937, a couple of

medico-pedagogical centres and two state psychiatric services: the children’s department in the public neurologic and psychiatric hospital of Athens, founded in 1949, and the first specialised neurological and psychiatric hospital for children, founded in 1958.

In addition to private services, private initiative was evident in the founding of voluntary associations for child and adolescent mental health. These were both professional and lay and aimed at the advancement and dissemination of knowledge, the training of professionals and the information of the public, and the mobilisation of the state, in order to provide support and more and better services. The first of these associations were the Greek Society of Mental Hygiene and Neuropsychiatry of the Child, which was founded in 1957 by professionals of child medicine, mental health, social work and special education, and the Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted Children, which was founded in 1960 by parents of mentally retarded children. Mental retardation was the main term used for intellectual disability during this period.

In this presentation I will focus on the Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted Children *as a case study of public sociality in post-war Greece*. I will examine the cultural notions on which affinity was based in the Union, placing it within the international context of the movements of parents of mentally retarded children in Europe and North America, as well as within the national context of post-war political, social and cultural circumstances and professional discourses in Greece.

Parents’ associations in Europe and North America and the Greek Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted Children

The few existing studies on associations of parents of mentally retarded children show that active movements of parents developed in Europe and North America in the post-war years. Certainly parents had for centuries a central, if not the principal responsibility for caring for mentally disturbed and disabled children – and adults, we should add. However, it was mainly after 1945 that this role was recognised and discussed and parents became outspoken activists, forming local and national organisations.¹

¹ James Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States*, Berkeley 1994); Chloe Silverman, *Understanding Autism: Parents, Doctors, and the History of a Disorder*, Princeton 2013; Veronica Strong-Boag, “‘Forgotten People of All the Forgotten’: Children with Disabilities in English Canada from the Nineteenth Century to the New Millennium,” in Mona Gleason, Tamara Myers and Leslie Paris (eds), *Lost Kids: Vulnerable Children and Youth in Twentieth-Century Canada and the*



In most countries, mental retardation was one of the first problems that served as the basis for the collective organisation of parents. This was because it was among the problems most commonly spotted in childhood and, until the 1950s, it could include problems that are considered today as distinct entities, like autism. By forming voluntary associations parents did not just aim at compensating the lack of public services for their children; they also overcame their isolation by meeting each other, discussing, receiving and offering guidance, developing a collective identity. Whilst achieving contact and solidarity with each other, parents were also speaking out, making their experiences and demands heard beyond their communities, in order to achieve public and state support. Gaining wide membership in the 1960s, associations of parents of mentally retarded children in Europe and North America managed to exercise influence on mental health policies and professional projects.

In Greece the first organisation of parents of children with mental disabilities was founded in 1960. This also centred on mental retardation, aiming at the prevention, treatment, education, professional training, social adjustment and care of retarded children. Although not as influential as its counterparts in the USA, Britain and France, it had contact with them, was familiar with their work and had many common features with them: it aimed at enlightening and mobilising parents, while informing the public and the state and demanding public services and social protection measures. The Union organised public events, which apart from their fundraising character provided an opportunity for the Union to make its agenda known, by inviting government officials and journalists. Although it did not manage to found annexes throughout Greece, as it aspired, it had its aims and activities reported in newspaper articles and radio and television interviews, while it also published its own magazine between 1968-1973, as well as a few books.

Finding common ground: perceptions of childhood, parenthood and the family

The key notion in the Union's identity and the cultural ground on which affinity was built was childhood. During its early years the Union concentrated on minors, children and adolescents, all of who were designated as 'children.' This orientation to childhood is

United States, Vancouver 2010, 33-50; Claire Sewell, "The Emergence of the Carer: Mental Health Care in England and Wales, c. 1946-1999," PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2015; and Claire Sewell, "'If One Member of the Family Is Disabled the Family As a Whole Is Disabled': Thalidomide Children and the Emergence of the Family Carer in Britain, c. 1957-1978," *Family & Community History* 18 (2015): 37-52.



noticeable not only in the Union’s name and first statute, but also in the first service it established, a special school for individuals aged six to 18.

However, in less than ten years, as the children of the first members had grown, the Union expanded its scope to adults with mental retardation, like the parents’ associations in other countries had already done. The Union was pointing out that the mentally retarded grew up and that those who graduated from special schools had to be offered different assistance and services. For this reason, the Union organised in 1969 a protected workshop for the graduates of the special school. In 1979 the Union changed its name to PanHellenic Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted *Persons and Children* and included in its aims ‘care for life.’²

Still, it continued to describe mentally retarded adolescents and adults as ‘children’ and its members were in favour of keeping their adult offspring at home and managing his/her affairs for life. This came in contrast to the concept of mental retardation as lack of adjustment, a concept that the Union adopted from mental health sciences of this period. According to this concept, the mentally retarded had limited abilities but could attain a *degree* of socialisation, independence and usefulness to their self, the family and society, provided they received proper social, psychological and educational handling. Despite this view, the Union saw the mentally retarded as eternal children, permanently dependent on their parents. Even today parent advocates in Greece argue that in other, ‘advanced’ countries, adults with mental retardation are more independent, for example they move out of their parents’ house or get married; on the contrary, in Greece, they say, this is impossible because of the different nature of the family in this country: parents are in general more protective and the ties between family members are closer.³ Within this context parents are considered as carers and legitimate representatives of their offspring *for life*.

Therefore, the Union was primarily an association of parents, whose identity was based on the perceived parental duty to support and represent their offspring irrespectively

² “Statute of the PanHellenic Union of Parents of Unadjusted Children,” 1979, Archive of the Court of First Instance, Athens, 3700/13-8-73, in Greek.

³ Interview of Konstantinos Georgopoulos, 14/6/2014, 00.54-00.56, 1.28-1.29; and interview of Panayotis Noutsos and Persefoni Mantzila, 18/6/2014, 00.28, 02.11-02.14. Georgopoulos became a member of the Union in 1981, but his son had been in Stoupathio in the late 1960s-early 1970s. Noutsos and Mantzila are married and were members of another parents’ association, founded in 1974. Noutsos was also involved the PanHellenic Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted Children.



of their age, on the premise of mental retardation being a form of perpetual childhood. Thus the collective identity and links of affinity within the Union were grounded on cultural concepts of parenthood and childhood that originated from broader traditional cultural understandings of the family and the roles of parents and children in Greece: namely the perception of the family as a closely tight unit, with a strong sense of solidarity between members and with minimal margins for individuality and independence, especially for younger and female members. Even if the family was going through important changes in the 1960s and 1970s, with the emergence of new family models and new individualist concepts of the self, as a result of modernisation and urbanisation, traditional values that bonded individual identity to the family were not eliminated.⁴ Such values fed into the concepts of childhood and parenthood that were used by the Union to understand and deal with mental retardation.

Yet in other ways the Union was moving away from traditional cultural notions of the family and parenthood, and promoted new ones. This was evident in the argument that parents could and should be alert and active agents of their children's mental health and social adjustment. This model of parenthood was inspired by the example of foreign parents' associations, but it also responded to indigenous cultural understandings of parenthood and childhood in the post-war years. In this troubled time of modernisation and political conflict, the family was perceived as going through a crisis. Concerns over the protection and moulding of childhood heightened, as parents' fitness to raise their children to respond to the new challenges of modern life was questioned. Amid such concerns a variety of interventions targeted the family and childhood. These included

⁴ For an illustration of the perceived duties of parents towards their children see Efi Avdela's research on juvenile delinquency in post-war Greece, which vividly illustrates how parenthood was invested with the obligation to guide, supervise and discipline children. The same historian, in her analysis of honour, has highlighted the strong sense of family honour during the same period, which meant that parents could perceive their honour in relation to the honour of their adult offspring. Although the character of the family was changing in the 1960s and honour was obtaining a more individual character, gender and ages hierarchies were maintained, and honour still had strong family references. Efi Avdela, *For Reasons of Honour. Violence, Emotions and Values in Post-War Greece*, Athens 2002, in Greek, 53, 127-129, 176, 216-217, 232-3, and Efi Avdela, *Youths in Danger. Supervision, Reformation and Justice for Minors after the War*, Athens 2013, in Greek, 380-383, 473, 480-83. The preservation of a collective/familial perception of the self even in the cities was highlighted by social scientists and mental health professionals, who were studying the social changes in Greece in the 1960s. Adamantia Pollis, "Political Implications of the Modern Greek Concept of Self," *The British Journal of Sociology* 16 (1965): 29-47 and Georgios Vasiliou & Vaso Vasiliou, "The Social Values as Psychodynamic Variables. Preliminary Exploration of the Meaning of 'Philotimo'," *Neuropsychiatric Chronicles* 5 (1966): 121-135, in Greek.

mental health and special education initiatives, which stressed that modern families needed the help of professionals to deal with the post-war realities of life, and criticised parents for not detecting and confronting their children’s adjustment problems quickly enough.

Therefore, the model of active parenthood proposed by the Union responded to broader social and professional challenges to parenthood in post-war Greece. Especially discourses of mental health and special education played a significant role in shaping the Union’s idea that parents were key actors in the issue of mental retardation. We should note here that the Union was founded within the context of a mental health service, the Centre for Mental Health and Research, and continued to collaborate with professionals throughout the period under consideration, despite the occasional tensions emerging between professionals and parents.

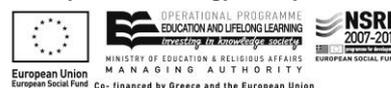
The family in the public sphere

An important aspect of the ideal of active parenthood was that parents had to exit the private realm of their home and join a parents’ association. This was viewed as an obligation of parenthood, a source of comfort and support for parents, and, most importantly, a more effective way of dealing with mental retardation. The collectively organised parents were depicted by the Union as enlightened and active, freed from prejudice, guilt and shame, more positive and helpful towards their children and more able to gain support from the state.

The Union and the State

Indeed the Union turned repeatedly to the government, claiming that responsibility for the education and protection of the mentally retarded had to shift from the private sector to the state. Some of these demands were becoming heard by the military dictatorship (1967-1974). The Colonel’s regime, in its attempt to acquire legitimacy, attempted to re-organise the social security system. Although these attempts were largely unsuccessful,⁵ during this period the Union benefited from government funding and from the establishment of the Department of Special Education in the Ministry of Education in 1969, which organised the first seminar for the training of teachers in special education in

⁵ Dimitris Sotiropoulos, “‘The Communist who Sets Fire and the Pauper and Starving Laborer’: The Social Policy of the Dictatorship,” in Gianna Athanasatou, Alkis Rigos and Serafim Seferiadis (eds), *The Dictatorship, 1967-1974: Political Practices – Ideological Discourse – Resistance*, Athens 1999, 115-131, in Greek.



1971. The Union's special school became one of the training centres for this seminar, and employed two of the first seminar graduates. The Union presented these developments as signs of progress and indications of its success: it had managed to be respected and make the problem known and embraced by the government. Although it seems that the Union was exaggerating the extent of state intervention and probably its own part in provoking it, its relationships to the state highlight a common feature of voluntary associations: while they are often considered autonomous from the state, they commonly cooperated with and depended on it in order to pursue their goals.⁶

Shifting boundaries between the public and the private

The Union's efforts to achieve state support and to re-shape the family as an open and publically active entity were part of a larger political agenda to move mental retardation from the private sphere of the family to the public sphere of open discourse and political decisions. Even though the Union saw mental retardation as a principally family concern, it believed that it was not just a private matter, but a social issue, a problem that affected thousands of families and deprived society and the national economy from potentially productive units. With such social and economic overtones, mental retardation was a national problem that had to be publically known and confronted. The Union stressed that it was not handling a private case, but was working for the whole of society.

In this way, parents entered the public sphere and negotiated a shift in the boundaries between the public and the private. These boundaries, as different strands of historiography have shown, are historically and culturally constructed and changing.⁷ In the second part of the twentieth century in particular, social movements, like the feminist,

⁶ Alan Kidd, "Civil Society or the State?: Recent Approaches to the History of Voluntary Welfare," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 15 (2002): 328-342; and Peter Dobkin Hall, "A Historical Overview of Philanthropy, Voluntary Associations, and Nonprofit Organizations in the United States, 1600-2000," in Walter Powell and Richard Steinberg (eds), *The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook*, New Haven 2006, 32-65.

⁷ For example, Norbert Elias and Philippe Ariès analysed the historical process of the sharpening polarisation between an impersonal public realm and a private realm of intimacy and emotionality, while historians of gender have explored the cultural preconditions and the political consequences of the construction of the public and the private as 'separate spheres.' Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: A History of Manners*, Oxford 1978, first published in 1939; Philippe Ariès, "Introduction," in Roger Chartier (ed.) *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, Mass. 1989, first published in 1986, 1-11; and Leonore Davidoff, "Regarding Some 'Old Husbands' Tales': Public and Private in Feminist History," in hers *Worlds Between. Historical Perspectives on Gender & Class*, Cambridge 1995), 227-276.

disability and mental patients' movements, challenged long-established social relationships – between men and women, the sane and the insane, the able-bodied and the disabled – and defied the confinement of family relationships within the private sphere.⁸ The Union, as well as other parents' organisations outside Greece, attempted to transform mental retardation from a private, personal and domestic trouble to a public, social and political issue. Thus, these organisations can be seen under the light of the politicisation of the private, highlighting the bottom-up character that this process could take, when embodied by non-professional voluntary associations.

Conclusion

To conclude, the PanHellenic Union of Parents and Guardians of Unadjusted Children underlines a hitherto neglected feature of associations of parents of mentally retarded children in Europe and North America: their part in the politicisation of the personal and the domestic, which was under way in the second part of the twentieth century.

In addition, the Union provides an important insight into post-war public sociality in Greece, demonstrating that voluntary associations were built on the basis of extra-associational cultural notions. In the case of the Union, these were the family as a closely tied entity, childhood as dependence on parents, and parenthood as concern and responsibility for children. At the same time, voluntary associations could promote novel cultural concepts, which also corresponded to broader cultural and social trends. The Union drew on foreign parents' associations, on professional ideas of mental health and special education and on the post-war challenges posed to parenthood and the family, in order to construct the family as a node of a social network of parents' associations, and to envision parents as aware promoters of children's adjustment and as active advocates active outside the private sphere, who made the problem of mental retardation known and demanded and achieved help from the state.

Consequently, and finally, the Union offers a good example of bottom-up initiatives, usually overlooked by research in comparison to state policies, and underlines the

⁸ Most famously the second wave of the feminist movement, from the 1960s onwards, asserted that 'the personal is political.' For an analysis of the disability movement in the framework of late-twentieth century social movements, see Tom Shakespeare, "Disabled People's Self-Organisation: A New Social Movement?," *Disability & Society* 8 (1993): 249-264.



interplay and liquid boundaries between the state and the private sector. By establishing its own services, bringing mental retardation to the public sphere and gaining state support, the Union was playing a part in the organisation of welfare in Greece during the first post-war decades, a period of puny state welfare.