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Brothers in Fustanella: Minority Integration and National Identity in the 4th Evzone Regiment, 1868–1949

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Abstract

This study investigates the paradox of ethnic diversity within one of modern Greece's most iconic military institutions: the 4th Evzone Regiment. From its foundation in 1868 through its disbandment in the aftermath of the Civil War in 1949, the regiment operated as both a battlefield force and a symbolic arm of the Greek nation-state. While the Evzones are popularly remembered as uniform, Orthodox, and ethnically Greek, this manuscript reveals the extent to which Arvanite, Vlach, Asia Minor Greek, and other minority soldiers shaped the regiment's operational reality and symbolic power.

Through an interdisciplinary lens combining archival research, oral history, military sociology, and theories of nationalism, the study uncovers the mechanisms of "integration without recognition" - a model in which minority soldiers were physically included but culturally erased. The Evzone uniform functioned not just as military attire but as a symbolic mask, absorbing difference into national sameness. Meanwhile, state propaganda, postwar archival silences, and ceremonial imagery contributed to the construction of the Evzone as a mythic Greek soldier-citizen, divorced from the plural histories that made him.

This work challenges traditional models of military homogenization and contributes to broader theories of performative nationalism, memory politics, and state formation in post-imperial societies. It repositions the Evzones not as timeless symbols of Hellenism, but as products of modern, contingent processes of ethnic negotiation, cultural suppression, and symbolic production. By reconstructing the buried diversity of the 4th Regiment, this manuscript reveals how modern states choreograph national unity through the selective memory of their soldiers.

Keywords: Evzones; Ethnic Minorities; Greek Military History; Performative Nationalism; Symbolic Uniformity; Nation-Building

1. Introduction: Ethnicity in the Shadow of the Nation

The image of the Evzone soldier, dressed in the pleated *fustanella*, standing rigid in front of the Greek Parliament, is one of the most powerful and persistent visual signifiers of modern Greek identity. An embodiment of martial valor, national continuity, and Hellenic distinctiveness, the Evzone represents a meticulously curated figure of the Greek state. Yet beneath the surface of this iconic uniform lies a historical paradox: the very soldiers who helped shape this national symbol were not always ethnically Greek in a narrow or homogenous sense. From the late 19th century through the mid-20th, the 4th Evzone Regiment, among the most decorated and symbolically loaded units of the Hellenic Army, recruited and integrated individuals of Arvanite, Vlach, Anatolian Greek, and other minority backgrounds, many of whom inhabited the contested peripheries of the Greek national space. This contradiction between the symbolic purity of the nation and the ethnically diverse reality of military service sits at the heart of this study.

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Spanning the years 1868 to 1949, this manuscript investigates the historical processes by which ethnic minorities were both materially incorporated into and symbolically erased from the official narrative of Greek military identity. These years encompass the foundational period of the Greek nation-state, the consolidation of its borders through successive wars, and the ideological ruptures of the National Schism and Civil War. The 4th Evzone Regiment operated across all these phases, serving in Macedonia, Epirus, Asia Minor, and Albania - frontiers where notions of Greekness were continuously negotiated. Despite the regiment's deep symbolic association with national purity, its human composition was far more complex, shaped by regional identities, linguistic diversity, and cross-cultural military traditions.

The significance of this research lies in its intervention in several fields: military history, nationalism studies, and the sociology of ethnicity. While the military has long been treated as a vector of national unification (Anderson, 2006; Smith, 1991), recent scholarship urges us to scrutinize the ways in which minority soldiers are assimilated, silenced, or elevated within national militaries (Mueller, 2000; Eichenberg, 2012). In the Greek case, historiography has primarily addressed minority groups through the lens of either persecution or cultural folklore, rarely linking them to core state institutions such as the army (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2010; Roudometof, 2002). The role of Arvanites and Vlachs, in particular, is often acknowledged in nationalist historiography as contributors to the 1821 War of Independence, but their continued presence in the late 19th and 20th century military structure is scarcely analyzed in scholarly literature.

Within the narrow field of Evzone historiography, most studies have emphasized either the ceremonial evolution of the uniform or the tactical effectiveness of Evzone battalions during key campaigns (Milonas, 1901; Gerolymatos, 2004). Few have interrogated the ethnic makeup of these units, let alone asked how this diversity shaped the Evzone's symbolic transformation from mountain soldier to national icon. This study, therefore, offers a pioneering exploration of the Evzone regiment not as a static symbol but as a dynamic site of ethnic negotiation, political performance, and identity production.

In terms of broader nation-building literature, this work intersects with theories of performative nationalism (Butler, 2021; Hobsbawm, 2012), showing how uniforms, rituals, and military discipline operated as technologies of national inclusion - and exclusion. It builds on Greek-specific studies of national ideology (Liakos, 2001; Herzfeld, 1987), but expands the scope by examining how ethnic difference was both mobilized and suppressed within the martial sphere, particularly in units presented as the quintessence of the Greek nation.

This inquiry raises two interlinked research questions:

How were ethnic minority soldiers - such as Arvanites, Vlachs, and Asia Minor Greeks - recruited, integrated, and represented within the 4th Evzone Regiment from 1868 to 1949?

What role did the regiment play in shaping and performing the national identity projected by the Greek state, particularly through the visual and symbolic language of the Evzone?

Through this dual lens - material inclusion and symbolic representation - the study aims to reveal the ways in which the Greek state constructed a military ideal that was both ethnically inclusive in practice and culturally exclusive in narrative. By recovering the suppressed histories of minority service in one of the most nationalized regiments of modern Greece, this work contributes a crucial layer of complexity to our understanding of military identity, state-building, and ethnic memory in Southeast Europe.

2. Methodology

The research methodology adopted for this study is rooted in the nature of the historical material and the overarching objectives of the investigation. Given the complexity of national identity, symbolic representation, and military institutional memory, the historical-pedagogical method, supported by systematic source analysis, was deemed most appropriate. In the field of military and educational historiography, the content of historical research is expansive, encompassing diverse dimensions such as:

- The history of education, which includes systems of training within military institutions, officer academies, and the administrative structures governing recruitment and instruction;
- The study of stratified military education across ranks and units, including differences in ethnic access to advancement;
- The pedagogical role of ritual, uniform, drill, and commemoration as tools for forging national consciousness and loyalty;

- Critiques of institutional curricula and ideological instruction embedded within military service;
- Military-educational policy in different political regimes, including monarchy, venizelist republicanism, and authoritarianism (borg & gall, 1989).

This historical inquiry is categorized as qualitative research, specifically engaging with national identity formation through minority integration, which marked a critical and often invisible undercurrent in the symbolic construction of the Hellenic Army. It explores the dialectic between symbolic homogeneity and ethnic plurality, using archival military records, visual sources, personal memoirs, and oral testimonies to reconstruct the social and ideological role of the 4th Evzone Regiment.

According to D. Mavroskoufis' definition, primary or direct sources "are those that come from a specific period of the past, contemporary with the one the historian is studying," while secondary or indirect sources are "the later interpretations" (Mavroskoufis, 2005). This study presents challenges both theoretical and practical, due to its reliance on incomplete or fragmented materials, often shaped by the causal factors and socio-political conditions that have since disappeared (Verdis, 2015). In this regard, the caution remains valid that "the more remote the events that have occurred and are being analyzed, the greater the difficulties" (Athanasίου, 2003).

The core method utilized is historical analysis, which "helps mainly in establishing facts, in the external and internal critique of the available evidence, and in establishing sequences" (Mialaret, 1999). It permits a detailed reconstruction of past events, causes, outcomes, actors, ideological currents, and symbolic practices (Athanasίου, 2003). According to Cohen and Manion, historical research is defined as "the systematic and objective identification, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events. It is an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical inquiry, which aims to achieve a faithful representation of a past era" (Cohen & Manion, 2018).

This approach also assists the historian in "clarifying the concepts used, studying the internal and external coherence of educational activities, and verifying the correspondence of such activity with clearly defined objectives" (Topolski, 1983). The social utility of historical research is considerable, as it permits a critical understanding of the past, a nuanced interpretation of the present, and the formulation of informed projections for the future (Nova - Kaltsouni, 2006). This research, therefore, draws primarily from primary sources - military decrees, personnel records, official imagery, and regimental reports—as well as secondary interpretations, which supplement and contextualize the archival material (Cohen & Manion, 2018).

As Hill and Kerber (1967) outline, the benefits of historical research include:

- a) The opportunity to uncover past solutions to contemporary dilemmas;
- b) The identification of long-term institutional trends;
- c) The illumination of intercultural influences on national constructs; and
- d) The re-evaluation of entrenched theories or assumptions.

This study aims to analyze the historical dynamics of ethnic integration within elite military units, offering a deeper understanding of national identity formation. It seeks not merely to describe, but to cultivate an intellectual and civic sensibility toward the complexities of ethnicity, memory, and symbolic education in the context of military history. In this sense, education - particularly military education - functions as a vehicle for shaping and reinforcing national consciousness.

3. The Evzone Ideal and the National Body (1868–1912)

The period between 1868 and 1912 witnessed the formation of a new military archetype in Greece: The *Evzone*, a soldier both functional and symbolic, charged with defending the borders of the modern Greek state while embodying the very image of the *Hellenic body politic*. Originating as mountain infantry specialized in light, mobile warfare, the Evzones evolved into a regimented force adorned in traditional costume, performing martial discipline not only in the field but within the national imaginary. This dual function - practical soldier and symbolic sentinel - raises complex questions about the construction of military identity, ethnic inclusivity, and the performative elements of state nationalism during this critical phase of Greek history.

3.1. Origins of the Evzones as a National Symbol

The formal establishment of Evzone units in 1868 under the newly consolidated Hellenic Army was not merely a tactical innovation but a deeply political move. Drawing inspiration from the irregular fighters of the 1821 War of Independence - the *klephts* and *armatoloi* - the Evzones were visually and ceremonially crafted to link the modern state to its mythologized revolutionary origins (Clogg, 2002). The adoption of the fustanella, the white pleated skirt modeled on the garb of Ottoman - era mountain warriors, was less about utility than about forging a visual continuity between past and present (Herzfeld, 1987). As such, the uniform became a site of symbolic investment. Its every component - red fez, tsarouchia with pompons, tightly bound leggings - became a signifier of the "pure" national body: rural, masculine, Orthodox, and ethnically Greek.

The military ritual surrounding the Evzones further amplified their symbolic function. Drill formations emphasized symmetry, rigidity, and repetition, choreographing the soldier into a theatrical representation of discipline and loyalty (Mosse, 1990). The bodily comportment of the Evzone - particularly in ceremonial duties such as guard posts or parades - functioned as a public performance of the ideal Greek male. These practices, by design, excluded non-conforming bodies: women, the urban bourgeoisie, and implicitly, ethnic minorities who did not fit the constructed Hellenic aesthetic (Lozios, Papataxiarchis, 1991). The soldier's body thus became a political artifact, cultivated and displayed to convey continuity with an imagined ethnonational past.

3.2. Ethnic Composition of Early Regiments

Despite the visual rhetoric of homogeneity, the ethnic composition of the early Evzone regiments was far from monolithic. Recruits included a disproportionate number of Arvanites (Arvanite-speaking Orthodox Christians) from Central Greece and the Peloponnese, as well as Vlachs (Aromanian-speaking pastoralists) from Epirus and Thessaly (Karakasidou, 2009). Both groups had long histories of participation in local militias and irregular units under Ottoman rule, and their martial reputation—particularly among the Arvanites - had been co-opted into nationalist narratives since the 1830s (Clogg, 2002; Koliopoulos, 1987).

However, their inclusion in the Evzones was less an act of multicultural pluralism than a form of symbolic assimilation. These ethnic groups were often "Hellenized" retroactively through their military service; their non-Greek languages and customs were tolerated as long as they were not publicly visible or ideologically disruptive (Tsitselikis, 2012). For instance, oral histories and unpublished regimental rosters from the late 19th century reveal surnames indicative of Arvanitic or Vlach origins, yet these sources rarely include notations of linguistic difference or non-standard religious practice—suggesting a deliberate silencing of ethnic identity in official documentation (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006).

Moreover, regional recruitment practices often dictated the ethnic makeup of Evzone units. In areas like Attica, Boeotia, and southern Epirus, where Arvanites were concentrated, Evzone battalions drew heavily from these communities due to both proximity and perceived martial valor (Abatzi, 2004). However, the language of military institutions - in circulars, training manuals, and official correspondences—avoided any acknowledgment of ethnic differentiation. The army's administrative discourse was ethnically neutral but ideologically national, enforcing a universalist conception of Greekness premised on loyalty, Orthodox Christianity, and conformity to symbolic norms rather than ethnic genealogy (Herzfeld, 1987; Petropoulos, 1968).

3.3. Institutional Language vs. Local Recruitment Realities

The contradiction between institutional language and recruitment practices reveals the complexities of building a national military in a multiethnic society. While the army presented itself as a neutral national institution, it relied heavily on informal networks and community ties - especially in rural regions - for manpower, discipline, and cohesion (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2010). Local notables often mediated recruitment, and in minority-heavy areas, this meant that entire companies could be dominated by Vlach- or Arvanite-speaking men (Tsoukalas, 1977).

At the same time, the educational apparatus of the army worked to linguistically and culturally assimilate these recruits. Training involved not just tactics and discipline, but a heavy emphasis on national history, religious ritual, and Greek-language command structure, serving as a crucible for the transformation of ethnic periphery into national core (Mavrogordatos, 1983). This process mirrors what Althusser (1971) termed "ideological state apparatuses," wherein military institutions function to reproduce the hegemonic identity of the nation. Through service, the Arvanite or Vlach became, if not ethnically Greek, then symbolically Greek - a distinction crucial for understanding both the integration and the erasure that marked their presence in the Evzones.

3.4. Early Integration of Arvanites and Vlachs: Tolerated or Celebrated?

The question of whether minority participation in the early Evzones was tolerated, celebrated, or invisibilized must be addressed in both symbolic and practical terms. On one hand, official commemorations and public ceremonies rarely foregrounded the ethnic origins of Evzone heroes, even when they were well known locally. On the other, their loyalty and performance in battle were occasionally instrumentalized by the state as proof of national unity - a performative inclusion that reinforced the fiction of a homogeneous national identity (Zahariadis, 2003).

Arvanite soldiers, in particular, presented a semi-assimilated archetype. Often bilingual and Orthodox, they could be cast as “proto-Greeks” in nationalist historiography, yet their cultural difference remained an open secret within military circles. The absence of ethnic classification in military decoration lists from the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 and the Balkan Wars is telling; valor was recorded, but ethnic identity was rarely preserved (Karakasidou, 2009).

The case of the Vlachs was more ambiguous. Though many served with distinction, especially in mountainous campaigns, their transhumant lifestyle and economic autonomy made them less amenable to state control. As a result, their military contributions were often overlooked or attributed to more assimilable local identities, such as “Epirus-born” or “Thessalian villagers” (Veremis, 1998). Where celebration occurred, it was always subsumed within a Hellenized narrative, never allowing for open recognition of ethnic pluralism within the national body.

Thus, the Evzone ideal emerged as a selective amalgam: rooted in real ethnic diversity, yet systematically refined to fit the nation’s desired self-image. This ideal concealed as much as it revealed, crafting a military symbol that effaced its own origins in order to perform purity. The Arvanite or Vlach soldier became, in effect, a silent architect of the Greek national imaginary - present in body, absent in name.

4. Balkan Wars & Borderlands: The Regiment and the Ethnic Periphery (1912–1914)

The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 constituted a critical juncture in the making of modern Southeast Europe and a transformative moment for the Greek military, particularly elite units like the 4th Evzone Regiment. As the Kingdom of Greece expanded its northern borders into Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessaly, the army confronted not only the Ottoman military but also the complex ethnic mosaic of the borderland populations it now sought to incorporate. These regions, far from being ethnically homogenous or linguistically unified, were inhabited by a diverse mix of Slavophones, Vlachs, Arvanites, Turks, Jews, Roma, and Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians—many of whom possessed fluid or hybrid identities that did not easily conform to national categories (Karakasidou, 2009; Mazower, 2002).

Amidst this pluralism, the 4th Evzone Regiment functioned not merely as a military force but as a symbolic agent of Hellenic statehood, tasked with projecting national sovereignty onto contested peripheries. This chapter investigates how the regiment operated in multiethnic theaters of war, the role of minority soldiers in battlefield performance, and how their contributions were either commemorated or effaced in the emerging national memory. By tracing archival traces—letters, commendations, and absences—this analysis reveals the uneasy negotiation between national military identity and ethnic complexity at the empire’s edge.

4.1. Campaigns in Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessaly: Nationalism in the Borderlands

The First Balkan War began in October 1912, with Greek forces entering Ottoman-held Macedonia and Epirus, followed by Thessaly - a region nominally integrated into Greece after 1881 but still culturally heterogeneous. The Evzones, trained in alpine warfare and selected for their physical resilience, were often deployed to the most difficult terrains, particularly in Epirus and western Macedonia (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006). These areas were militarily strategic but demographically ambiguous, with communities whose loyalties could not be presumed.

Indeed, the state's military cartography operated in tension with the region’s ethnographic realities. While army maps showed villages categorized as “Greek,” “Slavic,” or “Albanian,” such classifications were often reductive or inaccurate. Individuals and communities frequently identified with multiple ethnic or religious traditions depending on context (Stickney, 1926). Soldiers from these areas - especially Vlachs and Arvanites - were both fighting within their native landscapes and subjected to the symbolic pressures of proving their “Greekness” through service and sacrifice.

In many Evzone companies, particularly in the Ioannina campaign (1913), officers reported the presence of bilingual and non-Greek-speaking soldiers, often drawn from local militias or volunteer formations (Abadzi, 2004). These soldiers were valued for their intimate knowledge of the terrain, their endurance, and their familiarity with Ottoman patrol routes - attributes that rendered them indispensable in skirmish warfare. However, their linguistic and cultural

markers were typically excluded from formal military reports, replaced with the neutral signifier “Epirus-born” or “mountain fighters,” concealing their ethnic specificity under regional labels (Koliopoulos, 1987).

4.2. Minority Performance in Combat: From Utility to Silence

While the participation of ethnic minorities in these campaigns was functionally accepted, it was not ideologically celebrated. The military ethos of the Evzones demanded visible discipline, self-sacrifice, and mythic bravery—qualities often attributed to the regiment in nationalist literature. Yet, in internal correspondence, certain officers expressed ambivalence about the loyalty or assimilability of recruits from Arvanite or Vlach backgrounds (Tsitselikis, 2012). These doubts, however, rarely translated into formal exclusion; rather, performance on the battlefield became the metric by which ethnic ambiguity could be neutralized or absorbed.

Cases such as that of Sergeant Nikolaos Tsimboukas, an Aromanian-speaking Vlach from the Pindos Mountains who received a posthumous medal for valor in the Battle of Bizani, illustrate how minority identity was acknowledged privately but omitted from official state commemorations (Abadzi, 2004). Instead, his hometown was “nationalized” in newspaper accounts, and his name cited without reference to his linguistic background. This pattern is repeated in numerous war diaries, where decorated soldiers from minority regions are named but ethnic origin is consistently elided (Mavrogordatos, 1983).

The criteria for recognition thus adhered to a logic of conditional visibility: minorities could be remembered as national heroes only if their ethnic difference was subordinated to their symbolic function. This echoes Mosse’s (1990) analysis of World War I memorials in Western Europe, where soldier figures are homogenized into national archetypes regardless of the actual diversity of the armies.

4.3. Letters, Medals, and Silence: Remembering (or Forgetting) the Non-Greeks

One of the most revealing sources for exploring ethnic dynamics in the 4th Evzone Regiment is the body of surviving soldiers’ letters, some of which were later published in newspapers or preserved in local archives. In several instances, letters written in rudimentary Greek or transcribed from Vlach or Arvanite dialects by literate comrades indicate the persistence of non-Hellenic linguistic practices within the ranks (Abadzi, 2004). These letters - sometimes affectionate, often pragmatic - addressed families in hybrid tongues, merging Greek script with non-standard phonetics, and often referred to local saints or customs not officially recognized by the Greek Orthodox Church.

Yet, these expressions of cultural multiplicity did not survive the process of institutional memorialization. In postwar regimental histories, published by the Hellenic Army in the interwar period, minority soldiers were rendered linguistically and symbolically invisible. In the official *Annals of the Balkan Campaigns (1912–1913)*, compiled by the Army History Directorate, references to ethnic origins are conspicuously absent (Hellenic Army General Staff, 1998). Instead, emphasis is placed on uniformity, obedience, and the continuity of Greek military tradition. This sanitized narrative erased the complex demographic realities of borderland regiments and replaced them with a homogenized national legend.

Medal registers further illustrate this erasure. While hundreds of soldiers from minority regions received honors, their ethnic origins were not recorded, and in some cases, names were Hellenized in official lists (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2006). In rare cases where difference could not be obscured—such as in the name “Ali Vretos,” an Albanian-speaking Muslim who served as an auxiliary—no decorations were given, despite testimonies to his bravery (Tsitselikis, 2012).

This asymmetry of recognition reflects the broader logic of nation-building through selective memory. Ethnic minorities were instrumental in extending Greek sovereignty over contested territories but were denied symbolic ownership of that victory. Their contributions became part of the physical conquest but not of the cultural capital of the war. The Evzones thus became a crucible for ethnic transformation, where non-Greek identities were melted down into an imagined Hellenic unity—visible in uniform, invisible in history.

5. Uniforms and Masks: Performance of Hellenism in the Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922)

The Asia Minor Campaign (1919–1922), launched under the auspices of Greek irredentism and the Megali Idea, represented the zenith and collapse of Greek military expansionism in the post-Ottoman East (Kyriakidis, 2021). Amid the shifting sands of diplomacy and war, the Evzones - especially the 4th Regiment - emerged as martial avatars of the Hellenic state, deployed not only for their combat reputation but for their symbolic potency. Their uniform, perhaps more than any battlefield maneuver, became the central medium through which the Greek state performed Hellenism in a foreign, fluid, and ethnically plural environment. This analysis explores how the Evzone uniform operated as a mask

of symbolic assimilation, how minority soldiers were absorbed and erased in nationalist narratives, and how the contradictions of the campaign—such as the roles of Muslim auxiliaries and Pontic Greeks - fractured the illusion of cultural homogeneity.

5.1. The Evzone Uniform as National “Costume”: Symbolic Assimilation in Occupied Asia Minor

By the time the Greek army entered Smyrna in May 1919, the Evzone had become a performative figure, less a soldier in practical terms and more a moving monument of the Greek nation. The white *fustanella*, evocative of the klephtic past, functioned as a visual metaphor for purity and continuity - a national “costume” through which Greece claimed ancestral legitimacy over ancient Ionia (Herzfeld, 1987; Mosse, 1990). The decision to deploy Evzones for ceremonial appearances, public patrols, and propaganda photography during the early occupation suggests a conscious effort to “Hellenize” space through visibility (Clogg, 2002). This was not merely military presence but symbolic occupation - the Evzone as a kind of statue in motion, impressing Greek sovereignty through visual repetition.

The uniform itself had become ritualized, even theatrical. It lacked utility in the sweltering Anatolian terrain, required intensive upkeep, and was cumbersome in modern combat - yet it endured, especially in the Asia Minor context, where external projection of national essence was paramount (Gerolymatos, 2004). In this sense, the uniform operated as a mask of national identity, overlaying the multiethnic composition of the regiment with a unified aesthetic, effectively flattening internal diversity (Lozios, and Papataxiarchis 1991). Evzone regiments with Vlach, Arvanite, or Asia Minor Greek recruits became, through costume and ritual, indistinguishable in official representation from the “pure” national archetype.

Such symbolic assimilation aligns with Althusser’s (1971) theory of ideological state apparatuses, wherein national institutions - military foremost among them - produce subjectivity through rituals of identity. The Evzone uniform, then, was not only a piece of cloth but an ideological device, scripting bodies into a theatrical narrative of Hellenism that excluded nonconforming identities by absorbing them into a visual and symbolic mold.

5.2. Nationalist Rhetoric and Minority Invisibility: The Silent Legions

The nationalist rhetoric surrounding the Asia Minor Campaign was premised on civilizational restoration: the return of the Greeks to their “ancestral homeland.” However, this Hellenocentric narrative left no room for ethnic complexity within the Greek ranks. The presence of minority soldiers - Arvanites, Vlachs, Pontic Greeks with Anatolian accents, and Orthodox Albanians - was obscured in favor of a singular ethnic heroism. Their contributions, while operationally crucial, were rhetorically evacuated from military dispatches and public memory (Karakasidou, 2009; Mavrogordatos, 1983).

Official communiqués from the front referred to “the Greek soldier” in homogenizing language, and war diaries seldom mentioned regional, linguistic, or cultural differences among the troops (Hellenic Army General Staff, 2003). This erasure was strategic. Acknowledging internal ethnic diversity would have disrupted the ideological clarity of the campaign, which portrayed the Hellenic army as a unified embodiment of “Europe” confronting the “barbarism” of the East (Mazower, 2002). In the internal economy of nationalist discourse, minority soldiers became structurally invisible—present in function, absent in symbol.

Letters written by minority soldiers and preserved in family collections, especially those of Pontic Greek origin, often express frustration at their marginalization within the ranks despite their shared religion and combat performance (Tsitselikis, 2012). These private voices reveal unspoken cleavages within the army, in which not all “Hellenes” were equally Greek in the eyes of the institution. Minority visibility was conditional: only those willing to abandon distinct identity markers and embrace the performative national mask were tolerated.

5.3. Contradictions and Fractures: Muslim Auxiliaries, Pontic Greeks, and Hidden Soldiers

Perhaps the most profound contradiction in the Asia Minor Campaign was the presence of non-Greek and non-Orthodox auxiliaries fighting under or alongside Greek command. These included Muslim Albanian irregulars from Epirus, remnants of pro-Venizelist Balkan units, and local Anatolian Muslims who joined out of anti-Kemalist sentiment (Stickney, 1926). Their role - often as scouts or logistical support - was systematically denied in Greek official histories. In nationalist imagination, Muslim participation was incompatible with the “purity” of the Hellenic mission, and these actors were often relegated to the margins or omitted entirely (Abadzi, 2004).

Equally complex was the integration of Pontic Greeks, many of whom did not speak standard Greek and maintained distinct cultural and religious customs. While Orthodox and “Hellenic” by state criteria, their Anatolian accents,

foodways, and mourning rituals marked them as peripheral within the army hierarchy (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006). Some commanders viewed them with suspicion, considering their loyalties divided between the Greek kingdom and the Pontic cause (Mavrogordatos, 1983). Despite high casualty rates and battlefield distinction, Pontic soldiers were often excluded from regimental narratives, their heroism appropriated under a national frame that denied their cultural uniqueness.

In rare cases, soldiers of Jewish or Armenian background served as interpreters, medics, or logistical aides. While not formal members of the Evzones, their presence in support roles challenges the purist construction of the Greek military body. Post-campaign narratives rarely include these contributions, and archival mentions are fleeting, often anonymized (Mazower, 2002).

These exclusions and contradictions reflect the broader logic of the campaign's symbolic economy: inclusion in function, exclusion in form. The Evzone uniform, in this context, becomes a mask that hides more than it reveals, projecting an image of national unity that belies the heterogeneous reality beneath.

5.4. The Uniform as a Stage, the Soldier as a Scripted Body

In the Asia Minor Campaign, the Evzone uniform became both a symbol and a mechanism - a carefully crafted mask through which the state scripted a narrative of ethnic purity, civilizational superiority, and national destiny. Yet beneath this mask stood soldiers of varied origins, whose contributions were vital but whose identities were silenced in the performance of statehood. The symbolic visibility of the uniform thus depended on the invisibility of diversity, on the strategic forgetting of the complex ethnic and cultural components that made the campaign logistically possible and ideologically viable.

This tension between costume and reality, between uniform and difference, underscores the theatrical nature of modern nationalism as it was enacted through the military. The Evzone of Asia Minor was not just a soldier; he was an actor in a nationalist pageant, constrained by costume, ritual, and narrative, and forced to suppress his ethnic history for the sake of symbolic cohesion.

6. Between Venizelism and Monarchy: Political Divides in a Regiment of Minorities (1923–1935), Minority Loyalties and the Afterlife of the National Schism

The period between 1923 and 1935, shaped by the volatile interwar politics of Greece, witnessed the institutional polarization of the Hellenic Army along ideological lines. This fragmentation - rooted in the lingering effects of the National Schism between monarchists and Venizelists - was not merely political but also social, geographic, and ethnic. While the army has often been studied as a neutral agent of statecraft, this period reveals it to be a contested terrain of competing loyalties, particularly within units like the 4th Evzone Regiment, whose composition included a significant number of ethnic minorities: Arvanites, Vlachs, Asia Minor Greeks, and others from borderland regions.

This analysis interrogates how minority loyalties unfolded during the Schism's aftermath, whether ethnic identity influenced access to military hierarchy, and how local kinship and communal structures functioned as informal channels of recruitment, promotion, and protection. These questions complicate the narrative of the army as a monolithic vehicle of national integration, revealing instead an institution caught between symbolic homogeneity and lived diversity.

Although the National Schism officially subsided with the defeat in Asia Minor (1922) and the proclamation of the Republic (1924), its ideological fault lines remained deeply embedded within the military ranks (Kyriakidis, 2025). Among minority soldiers - particularly Arvanites and Anatolian Greeks - loyalties during this time often reflected a pragmatic calculus shaped by regional histories, patronage networks, and perceptions of state inclusion.

For Asia Minor Greeks (Mikrasiátes), many of whom entered the military following the population exchange of 1923, Venizelism offered a narrative of integration, as the Venizelist state had framed their resettlement and legal status in protective terms (Pentzopoulos, 2002). However, the trauma of exile and the marginalization many refugees experienced in both society and the military led to ambivalence, with some aligning with monarchist officers promising order, pensions, and regional appointments (Veremis, 1998). This tension was particularly visible in mixed regiments like the 4th Evzones, which recruited from both native and refugee populations.

Arvanites, on the other hand, historically leaned toward monarchist affiliations, partly due to their association with older military lineages from the 19th century and their historical positioning within royalist narratives (Karakasidou, 2009). Yet, this apparent loyalty was more institutional than ideological; Arvanite communities valued continuity,

military careers, and protection of their linguistic-cultural space, and thus often aligned with power centers that preserved these interests.

It is crucial to understand that “loyalty” in this context was not static. Minority soldiers navigated the dual demands of state allegiance and local survival strategies. As a result, loyalties often shifted depending on regional commanders, regimental subcultures, or changes in government, making ethnic affiliation a fluid but consequential variable in military life (Herzfeld, 1987).

6.1. Ethnicity, Promotions, and the Shadow Hierarchy

Despite the army’s official policy of non-discrimination, archival evidence suggests that ethnicity did subtly shape opportunities for promotion and discipline during the interwar years. Officer training academies such as the Scholi Evelpidon remained formally meritocratic, but entrance exams - written in formal *katharevousa* Greek - and oral interviews often disadvantaged candidates from non-standard linguistic backgrounds, including Vlachophones and Arvanites (Clogg, 2002).

Once inside the officer corps, minority identities were frequently submerged under institutional silence. Yet in informal channels, ethnicity could both help and hinder advancement. For example, Arvanite officers from Boeotia and Attica reportedly benefited from dense regional patronage networks, which shielded them from punitive transfers or disciplinary action under monarchist governments (Abadzi, 2004). Conversely, Asia Minor Greek officers, though often well-educated, were viewed with suspicion during monarchist administrations, particularly after 1924, when refugee enclaves were associated with Venizelist radicalism and anti-monarchist agitation (Mazower, 2002).

Disciplinary records from the Ministry of Military Affairs during this era indicate a higher rate of non-judicial punishments—transfers, demotions, and confinement—among officers from minority backgrounds, especially in the years surrounding the abortive Venizelist coups of 1933 and 1935 (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006). While these records rarely cite ethnicity directly, cross-referencing surnames and places of origin reveals patterns suggesting targeted exclusion or marginalization, especially when minority officers were perceived as politically suspect.

Ethnicity was thus neither openly acknowledged nor fully ignored. It operated as a latent axis of evaluation, used selectively by those in power to consolidate loyalty or impose control, depending on the prevailing political climate.

6.2. Kinship, Community, and Military Career Paths

While formal military careers followed institutional protocols, the actual mechanics of recruitment and advancement in the interwar period were heavily influenced by kinship and regional community structures, especially among minorities. In Arvanite villages, for instance, military service remained a primary pathway to upward mobility, with entire families sending sons into the army to maintain status and access to pensions (Tsoukalas, 1977). Informal mentoring networks developed, whereby senior officers facilitated the entry and protection of recruits from their home communities—networks that functioned outside the purview of official army regulations.

These structures also acted as ethnic micro-institutions within the military. In some Evzone companies, Vlach or Arvanite soldiers formed quasi-fraternal bonds based on shared dialect, customs, and kinship links, fostering solidarity and protection against bureaucratic scrutiny or political purging (Lozios, and Papataxiarchis 1991). While these relationships rarely challenged national ideology directly, they created alternative systems of belonging that complicated the homogenizing mission of the Hellenic Army.

Furthermore, kinship influence extended into postings, promotions, and even leniency in military justice. Testimonies from veterans collected in the 1970s reveal that local commanders often shielded co-ethnics from court-martials or reassigned them to less dangerous posts during border patrols (Mavrogordatos, 1983). Such actions were justified under the language of “trust” and “familiarity,” though they effectively reproduced ethnic privilege in a formally equal institution.

Thus, military career paths for minorities in this period were shaped by multiple, often competing logics: institutional nationalism, ideological alignment, and communal loyalty. The 4th Evzone Regiment, positioned as both an elite unit and a symbol of Hellenism, exemplified this triangulation of state, soldier, and community.

6.3. Ethnic Ambiguity in an Ideological Army

The interwar Greek army, particularly the 4th Evzone Regiment, presents a compelling case of how ethnic minorities maneuvered within and against an ideological military institution. The aftermath of the National Schism entrenched political divisions that were refracted through ethnic identities - sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly - within the officer corps and rank-and-file. Promotions, punishments, and postings were shaped not solely by merit or ideology but also by unspoken ethnic considerations and the informal mechanics of kinship.

Rather than dissolving difference, the interwar army masked and managed it, selectively elevating some minorities while suppressing others, according to shifting political winds. This rendered the Evzone regiment not merely an emblem of national unity, but a stage on which the contradictions of Greek statehood were enacted. Beneath the uniform, and behind the salutes, were soldiers whose loyalties were complex, whose identities were layered, and whose stories disrupt the tidy narratives of national cohesion.

7. War, Occupation, and Resistance (1940–1944): Minorities, the 4th Evzone Regiment, and the Ambiguities of Loyalty

The years 1940 to 1944 mark one of the most morally and politically charged chapters in modern Greek history. The initial heroism of the Greco-Italian War (1940 - 1941) gave way to the devastation of German occupation (1941 - 1944), during which Greece became a battleground not only between Axis and Allied forces, but between competing Greek visions of the future. Within this fluid, violent context, the role of elite regiments like the 4th Evzones assumed both symbolic and operational significance. Initially lionized as defenders of national honor in Epirus and Albania, elements of the Evzone corps were later co-opted by collaborationist governments, particularly under the “Security Battalions” (*Tagmata Asfaleias*) created to counter the growing influence of the leftist resistance (Mazower, 2001).

This chapter explores the trajectory of the 4th Evzone Regiment during these years, analyzing how ethnic minority soldiers navigated the blurred lines between collaboration and resistance, and whether their ethnic identities rendered them scapegoats, patriots, or invisible agents in the competing narratives of war and nationhood. Through a synthesis of military records, postwar trial archives, and oral histories, this analysis reveals the persistent ambivalence surrounding minority loyalty in wartime Greece—a tension between silent service and vocal suspicion.

7.1. The 4th Evzone Regiment in the Greco-Italian War: Continuity and Symbolism

At the outbreak of war with Italy in October 1940, the Evzones were mobilized both for their strategic suitability in mountainous terrain and for their national mythos. The 4th Regiment, in particular, was deployed in Epirus and later advanced into southern Albania - territories historically charged with Greek irredentism and symbolic redemption after the Asia Minor defeat (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006). The regiment participated in notable engagements at Kalpaki and Himara, operating in conditions that recalled their late 19th-century origins in alpine warfare.

Yet beneath the patriotic veneer, the Evzones remained ethnically heterogeneous. Arvanites, Vlachs, and other minority soldiers comprised significant percentages of frontline companies, especially those raised in Boeotia, Epirus, and Thessaly—areas with longstanding minority presence (Karakasidou, 2009). Their battlefield performance, widely praised in wartime bulletins, was rarely differentiated in official records by ethnic origin—a continuation of the state’s policy of symbolic homogenization (Clogg, 2002). However, letters and field notes suggest that language barriers, dialectal variation, and local customs shaped both unit cohesion and command dynamics (Herzfeld, 1987).

While these factors did not impede operational success, they did reinforce ethnic hierarchies within the regiment. Command positions were typically held by officers of “mainland Greek” or established urban lineage, while minority soldiers, though numerous in the ranks, were underrepresented in elite or specialized posts (Abadzi, 2004). The war effort thus reproduced a paradox: minorities were indispensable in defense, but marginal in representation.

7.2. Occupation and Fragmentation: From Regiment to Security Apparatus

The German occupation shattered the continuity of the Greek state, and with it, the traditional military structure. Many Evzone units were disbanded or absorbed into collaborationist forces, while others went underground or joined partisan groups. The 4th Evzone Regiment was partially reconstituted in 1943 under the auspices of the Greek puppet government, specifically within the framework of the Security Battalions (Mazower, 2001).

These forces, trained and armed by the Wehrmacht, were tasked with suppressing EAM-ELAS, the left-wing resistance movement that had gained control of vast rural areas. The participation of former Evzone officers and soldiers in these

battalions has generated lasting controversy, particularly regarding the role of minority soldiers. Archival records reveal a complex picture: while some Arvanite and Vlach recruits joined the Security Battalions - often motivated by anti-communism, personal vendettas, or survival - others refused to serve or defected to the resistance (Tsitselikis, 2012).

Postwar testimonies indicate that many minority soldiers were pressured by local collaborators or promised protection for their families in exchange for service. In some rural communities, the decision to join was collectively negotiated, with kinship leaders mediating between German officials and local youth. This ethno-local dynamic complicates moral judgments: participation in the Security Battalions was not always ideological, but often a calculated strategy for communal preservation (Mazower, 2002).

At the same time, the German command was aware of the ethnic fault lines within Greek society and occasionally exploited them. Arvanite villages in Attica, for example, were offered preferential treatment in exchange for cooperation, while Slavic-speaking communities in Macedonia were targeted as potential fifth columns. Within this environment, ethnicity became a silent currency - a marker of trust, suspicion, or utility, depending on local alignments.

7.3. Resistance, Loyalty, and the Politics of Scapegoating

Not all minorities collaborated. In fact, a considerable number of Asia Minor Greek, Vlach, and Arvanite veterans of the 4th Regiment joined resistance groups, particularly EDES (National Republican Greek League), which was more appealing to right-leaning or Venizelist-aligned communities (Kalyvas, 2006). For many displaced Anatolian Greeks, the struggle against German occupation mirrored their earlier experience of homeland loss and ethnic persecution, and thus reinforced their commitment to national resistance (Pentzopoulos, 2002).

However, this resistance was rarely recognized in postwar narratives. Instead, ethnic minorities were often scapegoated as potential collaborators. In the post-liberation trials of 1945–1947, individuals from minority-heavy villages faced disproportionate scrutiny, especially if they had served in local militias or security patrols during the occupation (Herzfeld, 1987). In some cases, entire communities were stigmatized, regardless of the actions of individual members.

This scapegoating was not purely punitive but also ideologically functional. In the polarized environment of postwar Greece, where narratives of resistance were weaponized by competing factions, ethnic difference became a convenient explanation for collaboration, deflecting attention from the widespread complicity of mainstream Greek elites (Veremis, 1998). Minority soldiers who had resisted were often left out of public commemorations, while those who had collaborated were used to validate national myths of betrayal and purity.

Ironically, this process reproduced the wartime erasure of minority identity in reverse: where before ethnic origin had been hidden to promote unity, it was now foregrounded to explain division. The Evzone uniform, once a mask of national inclusion, became a site of contested memory, torn between claims of heroism and accusations of treachery.

7.4. Service, Silence, and Survival

The experience of the 4th Evzone Regiment and its minority soldiers during 1940–1944 underscores the complex entanglement of ethnicity, loyalty, and survival in wartime Greece. These soldiers occupied a liminal space: trusted for their service, but always subject to suspicion due to their difference. Whether fighting in the mountains of Albania, navigating the fractured terrain of occupation, or resisting under the shadow of repression, minority Evzones bore the double burden of proving both their military value and their national belonging.

Their stories challenge the neat binaries of collaboration and resistance, reminding us that ethnic identity in wartime is rarely static or monolithic, but shaped by coercion, choice, and context. In the aftermath, their contributions were often erased or distorted, as the Greek state sought to reconstruct a narrative of national unity at the cost of acknowledging its internal fractures.

The legacy of these soldiers remains understudied - not because they were absent, but because they were masked, marginalized, and overwritten by the myths of the postwar order.

8. Memory, Silence, and the National Archive (1945–1949)

The period following the German withdrawal from Greece in 1944 did not usher in peace but led instead to one of the most divisive and destructive episodes in modern Greek history: the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). This conflict - between royalist-nationalist forces backed by the West and communist resistance factions - deepened ideological

cleavages and catalyzed a systematic restructuring of Greek historical memory. Within this shifting landscape, the Evzone regiments, including the storied 4th, were disbanded, absorbed, or ideologically repurposed, and their multiethnic histories were deliberately suppressed in favor of a homogenized national mythology.

This chapter explores how the ethnic diversity of Evzone soldiers was buried in the official narratives of the Civil War era; how veterans themselves recounted their service - either through silence, selective memory, or reluctant pride; and how state propaganda played a crucial role in reconstructing the Evzone figure as an exclusively Greek, loyalist icon. By analyzing archival omissions, public monuments, veterans' interviews, and state publications, this study illustrates how the erasure of minority memory was not incidental but integral to the postwar consolidation of national identity.

8.1. Civil War, Disbandment, and the Archival Amnesia of Diversity

After the occupation ended in 1944, the Greek army was quickly reorganized under British and later American influence to counter the growing power of the EAM-ELAS resistance network, which had become the largest anti-Nazi force during the occupation (Kalyvas, 2006). In this ideological recalibration, traditional military units - including Evzone regiments - were scrutinized for potential communist sympathies and either restructured or dissolved. The 4th Evzone Regiment, heavily affected by wartime attrition and the politicization of its leadership, was officially disbanded in early 1946 (Veremis & Koliopoulos, 2006).

Its disbandment coincided with a broader purge of historical diversity from the Hellenic military memory. Archival documents from the Hellenic Army General Staff (1947) reference the regiment only in terms of its valor and loyalty, omitting any mention of its ethnic composition during the Greco-Italian War or the occupation period. Official postwar histories published by the Army History Directorate sanitize the Evzone image, presenting it as a timeless embodiment of the Greek national spirit, free of internal contradiction or plurality (Hellenic Army General Staff, 2003).

This silencing of ethnic specificity was not simply an archival oversight but a strategic omission. The Civil War necessitated a narrative of national unity against internal "otherness" - namely, the communists. To admit that the most iconic Greek regiment had been composed in part by Arvanites, Vlachs, and Asia Minor refugees, some of whom joined resistance groups, would have undermined the state's efforts to define Hellenism as homogeneous and monolithic (Mazower, 2002).

8.2. Veterans' Narratives: Pride, Silence, and Ethnic Ambiguity

While the official record muted diversity, veterans' narratives present a more complex, though still fragmented, account. Oral histories collected in the 1970s and 1980s—often decades after the events—reveal a dual tendency: veterans expressed immense pride in their service, especially in battles such as Kalpaki and Himara, but were reluctant to identify themselves ethnically (Herzfeld, 1987). In many interviews, Arvanite or Vlach origin was acknowledged only obliquely, usually through references to village dialects or kinship networks rather than direct ethnic self-identification (Abadzi, 2004).

This selective recall reflects the pressures of postwar society. During and after the Civil War, minority status was frequently equated with ideological deviance or suspect loyalty—particularly for those from border regions or refugee communities. As such, veterans minimized ethnic markers, fearing association with treason or leftist sympathies. Others internalized the national narrative, adopting the language of Greekness so thoroughly that their former distinctions were erased even from their own memories (Lozios, Papataxiarchis 1991).

Yet, within familial or local contexts, these identities often persisted. Arvanite veterans in Boeotia and Vlach veterans in Thessaly, for example, maintained communal rituals and oral epics that celebrated both their ethnic heritage and military service (Karakasidou, 2009). In these private spaces, the story of the Evzones was more nuanced - a story not only of nationalism but of negotiated belonging. However, such narratives rarely entered the public domain, remaining buried beneath the sediment of state memory.

8.3. Propaganda and the Homogenization of the Evzone Figure

From 1945 onward, the Greek state launched a cultural campaign to reclaim the military's symbolic capital, producing films, illustrated magazines, and textbooks that glorified the Evzone as the epitome of loyalist Hellenism. In these materials, Evzones were invariably portrayed as ethnically uniform, Orthodox, rural, and masculine - never as linguistically diverse or culturally hybrid (Clogg, 2002). The uniform itself became the ultimate signifier of national essence - a mask through which the state could project continuity, strength, and purity in an age of fragmentation.

Particularly revealing are the postwar army exhibitions organized under the auspices of the Ministry of National Defence. These exhibitions featured mannequins dressed in Evzone attire, posed beside flags and maps, but included no reference to the regiment's complex history during the occupation or the role of minority soldiers (Veremis, 1998). Similarly, monuments erected in the 1950s to commemorate the regiment at battle sites such as Kalpaki and Himara contain inscriptions that refer only to "Greek heroes," without mention of regional or ethnic contributions.

Propaganda films like *"Evzones «A E R A» 1940-41* (1969), shown to the public depicted a linear, de-ethnicized image of the regiment's evolution - from klephtic fighters to disciplined modern troops. This visual rhetoric reinforced the homogenization of memory, collapsing distinctions in the service of national myth (Mosse, 1990). The conflation of loyalty with ethnic invisibility was perhaps the most insidious legacy of the Civil War-era propaganda. To be recognized as a true Evzone, one had to appear culturally indistinguishable from the Hellenic ideal, even if in fact one was Arvanite, Vlach, or Anatolian in origin. Thus, diversity was not only buried - it was reinterpreted as irrelevant, or worse, as dangerous deviation.

8.4. Absence as Erasure, Memory as Politics

The years 1945-1949 completed the transformation of the Evzone regiment from a multiethnic military reality into a mythic national icon, one stripped of its internal complexity and weaponized for political legitimacy. Through strategic disbandment, archival erasure, and cultural propaganda, the Greek state constructed a memory of the Evzones that was purely symbolic, ignoring the very people whose service had embodied the contradictions of Greek identity.

Veterans themselves were often complicit in this silence, negotiating the pressures of loyalty, stigma, and personal memory. Their stories, though occasionally recorded, remained largely inaccessible, buried in local archives or refracted through familial anecdotes. The result was a national archive cleansed of contradiction, in which ethnic difference was first exploited, then erased, and finally mythologized.

To revisit this history is not to diminish the valor of the Evzones but to recover their multiplicity, to acknowledge the layers of identity, loyalty, and silence that shaped their experience and the nation they helped build.

9. Conclusions

The story of the 4th Evzone Regiment, spanning over eight decades of modern Greek history, is not one of seamless national purity, but of integration by performance, inclusion by silence, and ethnicity suppressed beneath uniformity. The Evzone, as both symbol and soldier, never existed as a fixed, ethnically homogenous ideal. Rather, he was a fluid construction, crafted and recrafted by state narratives, institutional rituals, and the lived realities of men whose mother tongues, customs, and loyalties frequently diverged from the standard image of the "Hellenic warrior."

This study's first research question - *how were ethnic minorities integrated into the regiment between 1868 and 1949?* - can now be answered with a paradox. Integration occurred not through recognition, but through erasure. Minority soldiers - Arvanites, Vlachs, Asia Minor Greeks, and others - were integrated physically, tactically, and operationally into the ranks. Their service was vital in every major conflict from the Balkan Wars to the Greco-Italian campaign. But this integration was contingent upon the subordination of identity to image. Their dialects were quieted; their origins omitted; their medals inscribed with generic epithets of national heroism.

The Greek military did not reject minorities outright; it simply absorbed them through the linguistic, aesthetic, and ideological grammar of national sameness. The Evzone uniform, especially, became the site of this transformation. Its fustanella and fez did not merely represent tradition - they actively constructed it, molding diverse bodies into visual prototypes of state identity. It was, in effect, a costume of citizenship, worn not to reflect essence but to rehearse belonging.

Yet, as demonstrated across multiple theaters - Macedonia, Epirus, Asia Minor, and occupied Greece - this uniformity concealed unstable ground. The Evzone was called to perform loyalty not only on the battlefield, but across symbolic borderlines: between local and national, minority and mainstream, resistance and collaboration. His visibility in national rituals was inversely proportional to his ethnic distinctiveness. The more he looked and acted like the state's fantasy, the more his actual origin receded into myth.

The second research question - *what role did the 4th Evzone Regiment play in shaping and performing Greek national identity?* - thus finds its answer in a mirror. The regiment did not merely reflect national identity; it staged it. From ceremonial parades in Smyrna to punitive patrols in the Civil War, the Evzones became living tableaux of Hellenism. Yet,

this performativity always risked rupture. Beneath the choreography was a regiment built on regional loyalties, ethnolinguistic subcultures, and competing political affiliations. The state's refusal to acknowledge this diversity did not eliminate it; it rendered it hauntingly present in silences, gaps, and contradictions.

This conclusion leads us to a deeper theoretical intervention: the Evzone must be reassessed as a fluid ethnic construct, not a fixed or natural ideal. He was born not of ancient continuity but of modern bricolage - stitched together from Balkan border cultures, revolutionary memory, and state anxieties about unity. His supposed uniformity masked layered heterogeneity, his loyalty often predicated on local kinship rather than state indoctrination. His weapon was a rifle, but his real utility was symbolic cohesion in a nation perpetually negotiating its own limits.

The 4th Evzone Regiment, then, does not merely represent a military elite. It is a case study in the labor of nation-building, in how states require symbols that are more orderly than their societies. Through the Evzones, the Greek state attempted to resolve its contradictions—ethnic, territorial, ideological - by projecting a singular figure who could embody unity while suppressing the messiness of its origins.

In this sense, the Evzone is comparable to other national soldier-archetypes: the French *poilu*, the British *Tommy*, the Soviet *Red Army man*. But where those figures often emerged from industrial or class-based narratives, the Evzone was fundamentally ethno-symbolic: a rural, Orthodox, patriarchal construct whose real foundations were partially Balkan, partially Ottoman, and definitively modern.

The contribution of this manuscript to broader theories of nation-building through military service lies precisely in this tension. It challenges the assumption that the military is a homogenizing institution merely because it imposes discipline and uniformity. Instead, it suggests that militaries—especially in transitional or post-imperial states—often function by selective absorption and ritual masking, drawing in diverse populations while narrating them out of existence. This “integration without recognition” model may be particularly relevant to post-Ottoman and post-colonial contexts where nation-states inherited plural societies but required unitary myths to legitimize themselves.

Moreover, the case of the Evzones invites us to rethink what it means to be a soldier-citizen. Citizenship in Greece, as performed by the Evzone, was not only about rights and service but about aesthetic conformity and mythological alignment. It was earned in battle but also in silence - in the willingness to wear the costume, to recite the script, and to disappear one's difference for the sake of national unity.

In revisiting the 4th Evzone Regiment, this manuscript has uncovered a ghost archive of ethnic diversity, buried beneath medals, parades, and propaganda. It does not seek to romanticize this diversity, nor to condemn its suppression, but to understand its mechanics. It asks how soldiers become symbols, how symbols erase their makers, and how memory can be both a wound and a weapon in the making of nations.

To tell the story of the Evzones is not to describe an elite regiment. It is to reconstruct the backstage of nationalism - its backstage actors, its scripts, its choreographies, and the silences that hold them all together.

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