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*Pages on the Crisis of Representation:  
Nostalgia for Being Otherwise*

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THE SOCIALIST ERA IN GREECE (1981–1989)  
OR THE IRRATIONAL IN POWER

1. PRELUDE

This essay in historical interpretation explores a moment in recent European history when the political and the social converged in an atmosphere of heightened expectations as to what a political party and its charismatic leader could achieve in the transformation of the societal structures of a nation-state. The case for study is Greece and the political change that occurred in 1981, when, for the first time since the establishment of the state (1829), a genuine transition in political government took place, which was to test the function of democratic institutions, demonstrate their resistance and prove their viability. The 1981 change of government in Greece presents a fine example of institutional resistance at a moment of historical crisis; simultaneously, it shows the role of leadership in the process of establishing democratic institutions within the power structure of a European society.

How institutions react to political interventions is one aspect of this study. The specific historical episode also shows that even in contemporary democracies the leadership principle can easily transform itself into a ritualistic centre of traditional authority, in direct contrast to its own self-articulation. We suggest studying this process, which reflects what might be called the ‘irrational in politics’, a process, in this specific case, through which institutional authority was replaced by personality appeal and political life was associated with individual idiosyncratic unpredictability. The transformation of its ‘charismatic’ leader from a ‘sophisticated rebel’ to a ‘dinosaur’, from a respected academic of the New Left in the United States to an autocrat of a Balkan province, is another interesting characteristic of the same process: the leader did not simply lose all control of his own government, but moreover adopted a populist rhetoric in order to neutralize all forms of criticism against his personality.

The ‘people’ (laos) became the ultimate source of power, consolidating the privileged position of the governing party against the rest of the political system.

The gradual transformation of an optimistic promise to a grand-scale social disillusion undermined the reliability of all political discourses in Greece and eroded the position of the political as social practice and moral valuation. The socialist decade in Greece led to the complete privatization of its citizens by establishing a traumatized and introspective de-politicization. The failure of democratic socialism to gain reliability also destroyed all political projects for reform in the civil life of the country. The end of the 80s showed a strong tendency towards the episodic and symptomatic gradually replacing the promise of the political with the efficacy of a functional administrative machine (mostly dedicated to propaganda and culture wars). In turn, this gave rise to an instrumentalisation of political discourse, which came to be replaced by a technocratic understanding of politics as secular rituals of nation building and social cohesion, in the post-modern era of devolution within the process of the ongoing European federalism. The paradoxical intricacies of this process, with Greek society on one hand trying to participate in the European unification process and the Greek government on the other struggling to keep the country in its peripheral presumed autonomy, express the cultural and political dilemmas of the country in regard to its future orientation.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL SETTING

In 1981, a major shift in Greek politics took place. For the first time after World War II and the restoration of the Republic in 1974, there was to be a smooth handover of power from a conservative political party to a socialist ‘movement’ with somewhat nebulous policies about the position of the country in the international arena and with an agenda of radical social reforms. The change itself was extremely important and a test case for the strength of the newly established republic. Since its formation the Greek state had suffered from permanent structural instability and frequent institutional implosion. Throughout the twentieth century a number of constitutional crises led to the imposition of colorful and ineffective dictatorships, regimes that led the country to major disasters (Cyprus 1974) and polarized society, legally instituting deep divisions along ideological lines. Furthermore, such institutional policies of exclusion and marginalization established a hagiological tradition of persecuted victimhood and oppression for the left-wing parties: the emotional appeal of this

tradition became the central discourse of political debate in the country for many decades and remains until today a powerful rhetoric for self-articulation and identity.

The new political party that was to take over government had been established only six years earlier in 1974 and professed to be the inheritor of all liberal traditions of the centre-left political ideology. It had indeed functioned as the platform for the co-existence of various political figures and ideological tendencies, spanning from conservative centrist policies to extreme revolutionary ideas. The Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) presented itself indeed not as a party but as a *social movement* which appealed to the vote of the excluded, the dis-privileged and the persecuted. The right-wing party of New Democracy, established by Constantine Karamanlis (1907–1998), also in 1974, proved itself totally insufficient in dealing with the looming social crisis and, most importantly, with the problems arising when a political system, based on oppression and persecution, removed from above its authoritarian policies. After so many decades of institutionalized persecution of political difference, the structure of the state apparatuses and the mentality of public servants, army officers and professional politicians needed a deeper change than parliamentary decrees. The resistance of old established interests was also considerable: between 1974 and 1981, the conservative party of New Democracy fell victim to the conscious attempt of its leader to bring together all right-wing elements from diverse previous generations. Consequently, instead of a radical break with extreme right-wing elements, Karamanlis effectively sheltered them and made them immune to prosecution, creating thus an atmosphere of discontent even among his own liberal centre-right supporters.

Karamanlis and his party aspired to becoming a liberal party in the tradition of General De Gaulle in France; indeed Karamanlis presented himself as a stern, apophthegmatic statesman detached from everyday politics and as the prudent leader whose mind was dedicated to re-inventing the position of Greece within the context of the ongoing European unification. His famous slogan was ‘Greece belongs to the West’, by which he meant that Greek society had to transform itself from a Balkan, post-Ottoman, social formation into a contemporary state based on law, order and meritocracy, on the models of western European liberal democracies and more specifically on the French political system.

However, the compromises he had to make with the old political establishment were rather serious and in effect undermined the modernizing project itself. Without himself realizing it, Karamanlis organized his party on the dichotomy of *us* versus

*them*, in a rather naive attempt to assimilate and, as he expected, neutralize extremist right-wing elements that remained active within the state apparatuses and more specifically the army. Yet, his overall program was seriously undermined by his inability to effectively abolish endemic problems of the Greek state, namely political clientelism, suspicion between citizen and state, public corruption, or indeed to solve deep structural problems of society such as the separation of church and state. On the economic side, the party failed to establish an open market economy regulated and supervised by the state without relying on it as the primary investor; the state retained its privileged position through heavy subsidizing programs funded through high taxation, especially on the lower classes.

In hindsight, 1974 and the restoration of the Republic could have been another critical moment in Greek history in which changes could have been made without major social problems. The atmosphere of hope was so contagious that any change introduced by the government would have been considered as necessary and inevitable by all social forces. The legalization of the Communist Party contributed to the elevated status of Karamanlis as a statesman and opened political processes to a considerable percentage of the population, excluded until then from mainstream political life. For several years it seemed that the new political establishment had gained the trust of a substantial majority and had created a consensual democracy never before experienced in the political life of the country.

Yet Karamanlis' reluctant modernization was hampered by his promotion of economic statism, through the taking over of the most important banks and profitable businesses in what was called 'socialization'. Intense socialization led to what was later euphemistically called 'social-mania' and put a sluggish state bureaucracy in charge of the most profitable sectors of the economy. Despite the high growth rate and the intense social mobility of the years between 1975 and 1981, the political and social atmosphere remained static because of the government's inability to convince the majority of citizens that modernization required changing the mentality of the state bureaucracy, the police and the army. The social presence of such apparatuses was rather heavy and clouded everyday life in a way which on many occasions created generalized anxiety and social panic about a possible return to oppressive regimes. The ongoing problems with Turkey in Cyprus and the Aegean sea exacerbated the sense of weakness and national anemia felt by the general public. Even the important event of joining the European Economic Union (1980), after Karamanlis' personal persistence and lobbying in all European capitals, was insufficient to change the

feeling that the conservative government was not doing enough to move the country forward, strengthen society and empower citizens. Indeed citizens felt defenseless before state bureaucracy, which acted through opaque connections and served interest groups associated with the ruling party. Despite the continuous attempts by the government to control corruption, it seemed that such state of affairs was rather endemic in the Greek public sector and indeed it was a natural part of the actual political process itself.

Despite the overall optimism of the period, among the general population the feeling of lost security was rather deep. After the fall of the dictatorship Greek society opened to mass tourism, a movement further instigated by tales of heroism during the anti-dictatorship campaign throughout the world. The arrival of tourists led to uneasy comparisons for the locals and confirmed the idea lurking in Greek society about the cultural physiognomy of Greece. The historical isolation from the rest of Europe and the sense of having been left out of major events that changed the world became acute and rather traumatic. Free movement to western European countries made the comparison more distressing, showing Greece lagging behind other European countries in all but agricultural products. The promised industrialization was slowing down due to interventionist policies of state bureaucracy and the rising influence of the left-wing workers' unions, which were demanding modern security regulations and appropriate salaries without consolidating appropriate infrastructural changes. The conservative government's gradual failure to make the state efficient and establish a strong economy created the certainty among people that they were not doing enough to modernize society.

Such certainty had an immense psychological impact on the social polity of the country. The conservative party of New Democracy was in its core membership the inheritor of old right-wing ideologies about the privileged position of Greece as the birth-place of Western civilization. This ideological construct of Germanic and English origins, propagated by educational apparatuses and imposed as a self-evident truth, was of immense psychological investment for the Greek population, who felt that at least because of their ancestry they were indeed 'European'. Any questioning of the 'European' nature of the Greek people was immediately considered anti-Greek and against the nation. The idea even took racial expression as a claim of direct kinship by blood between modern and ancient Greeks, with the implicit nineteenth century belief that blood lines have remained 'pure' and unchanged throughout history. Yet the geographical position and the historical development of the country

were indicating both a marginal and a non-European social conditioning. The Ottoman conquest had isolated the centres of Greek culture from the intense political debates and secularization processes that created modern European states.

As a country Greece was a product of modern European nationalism, yet without having confronted the problems associated with modernity or broken away from traditional elites of power and authority. Despite the institutional modernization, through a constitution based on civil identity, as understood in its inception in 1843, social reality remained ecclesiocentric and followed religious practices which entailed a strong anti-modernist agenda. The strange ideological amalgam of classical libertarian Athenian democracy and oppressive Byzantine theocracy never emerged as a paradox in the mind of state ideologues planning education curricula or politicians making statements about history. Indeed this contradictory and self-cancelling ideology lies at the heart of the Greek political life and to this day produces comic and bizarre reactions and essentially neutralizes contemporary revisions of identity and self-articulation.

The Greek government started to promote an ideological position which was to become the main form of constructing statements of self-definition in Greek politics. The paradox of marginality was translated into terms of 'privileged autonomy', as an indication of political and cultural independence from the political centers of Europe and, politically, from the United States. The marginal position in Europe became somehow an 'exceptional position', so that Greece had to be recognized by other Europeans as a special case, within the political processes of the advancing European unification, in which the country aspired to participate. Indeed the idea of a 'special case' became the main argument for joining the European Economic Union during the prolonged negotiations. Furthermore, the position of the 'special case' was used in order to make Greece acceptable to the Europeans not on the basis of the economic strength of their society but as the main external influence for strengthening democracy.

Essentially such an ideological argument indicated the failure of the government to establish a modern discourse for the self-articulation of cultural production in the country, and in political terms consolidated the double language of belonging and not-belonging to Europe. In even more dangerous territory, Greece wanted fervently to participate in institutions and decision-making processes but felt that it was not bound to implement any of their decisions. The rhetoric of 'special case' dominated not simply the way that the Greek government dealt with the European Economic

Union but most importantly the way that it presented the political position of the state to its citizens. The perception that Greece was to be accepted into the Union not for the merits of its actual achievements but as some kind of concession to disprivileged late-comers caused a palpable shattering of public confidence and established counter discourses of self-representation. The feeling of being treated as inferior led to compensation mechanisms of religious traditionalism: before and after 1981, a marked revivalist movement for the renewal of the Greek Orthodox Church represented the position of the country in opposition to the whole of the West, on the basis of theological differences. Ordinary citizens felt that what was not given to them by their political leadership could easily and without any uncomfortable questions be lavishly bestowed upon them by the traditional source of authority and status in the country, the Church. In many occasions the Orthodox tradition was transformed into the political discourse of an *Orthodoxist* ideology constructing an emotionally powerful image of deep and unbridgeable differences with the rest of Europe.

So during the period between 1974 and 1981 the confrontation of Greek society with modernity took an unpredicted turn towards the gradual investment of the secular with religious aura and authority, leaving thus incomplete the process of establishing secular structures of civic responsibility and political discourse. In 1981 the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement won the elections with a stunning majority, due to the general dissatisfaction of voters with the inability of the conservative government to fulfill promises and deliver long term societal projects. The new party promised not simply to end an era but to inaugurate a new period in Greek history in which Greek citizens would be masters of their own fate: 'Greece belongs to the Greeks' as opposed to the conservative slogan 'Greece belongs to the West'. The profound identity crisis indicated by these two slogans created an intellectual, political and somehow existential vacuum in the country, since the concept of 'belonging' indicated also the need to belong, a psychical need which, in the case of Greece, was frustrated by its historical separation from the rest of Europe and by its political history of weak and ineffectual governments. The Socialist Party declared that such frustration was over since now it could lead the social body in forms of self-recognition and self-articulation which would transform itself into a 'modern, progressive, free' society based on the principles of socialism.

The leader of the movement, Andreas G. Papandreou, was already a famous economist who in his book *Paternalistic Capitalism* (1972) had made a strong case

for a 'new political economy' which would differentiate itself from the traditional market economy. In this book Papandreou argued that resources are allocated '*through* the market but not *by* the market' (Papandreou, 1972: 6); so private corporate managers (Galbraith's 'technocratic elite') use the market for their own benefit. For Papandreou this kind of market planning is termed 'paternalistic capitalism', a term indicating 'the autocratic, big brotherish aspect of the process' which transforms the state into 'a cog in the process of private planning by the corporate establishment' (Papandreou, 1972: 91). The book is an attack on the American establishment from the point of view of the New Left critics of society. Despite his polemic, Papandreou stopped short of giving a viable financial planning which would redefine the relations between economy and the state. Probably because of his ideological origins, the belated purpose of his economic manifesto was to criticize American imperialism in a way that had already become common after the war in the *Monthly Review* generation and in the work of Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy. As in the whole American new left generation, an immense frustration dominated political criticism after the War, when the alliance between the military-industrial complex and the American government grew stronger. As David Renton remarked, the *Monthly Review* generation '...despised the aggressive, colonial mindset of America's leaders, and looked to America's enemies for hope' (Renton: 2004: 122). Papandreou's economic model was fully expressed in Baran and Sweezy's *Monopoly Capitalism*, where the close connection between the state and monopoly capital was analyzed in Marxian terms. In their books the writers argued that the revolutionary initiative against capitalism had 'passed into the hands of the impoverished masses in the underdeveloped countries' (Baran & Sweezy, 1966: 9). In a later book, Baran suggested that 'the establishment of a socialist planned economy is an essential, indeed indispensable condition for the attainment of economic and social progress in underdeveloped countries' (Baran, 1973: 241).

Papandreou's economic model was based on similar ideas about the underdeveloped countries, and was to be tested in deed after he took office. Another document to briefly look at is Papandreou's 1969 Benjamin F. Fairless Memorial Lectures, published under the title *Man's Freedom* (1970). In these interesting lectures, after criticizing both American neo-imperialism and bureaucratic socialism, he stated that: "The "isms" are dead. Neither capitalism nor socialism, as we have experienced them, constitute adequate visions for the new generation. We have witnessed, the last few decades, the death of the great ideologies that dominated man's imagination and

action only a while ago.' (Papandreou, 1970: 64). He proposed a new scheme of political action based on 'Social Planning as a path to freedom', and on 'Decentralized, democratic social planning' which would distinguish between 'political authority and the planning bureau'. He concluded: 'Man's freedom requires us to overcome the irrational interplay of social forces, to subject them to our conscious control. Thus, it requires social rather than private planning. But if this planning is to serve the interests, the values of the people at large, rather than those of a self-appointed elite, it must be democratic and decentralized' (Papandreou, 1970: 71).

Papandreou's plan for the reconstruction of the economy through social control seemed very promising and extremely appealing. In the same lectures Papandreou stressed the peculiar position of Greece: 'For Greece, a country that is European while partaking of the characteristics of the Third World, is a new type of experiment in intervention. For in the case of Greece, methods have been employed which are truly novel for the European continent. Greece has become the first Banana Republic on the European Continent' (Papandreou, 1970: 56). Following Papandreou's suggestion, the country could be the best experimental field for democratic decentralization and self-government that would place economic planning under social control and free the 'people' from capitalist exploitation.

When Papandreou in 1981 was elected a domestic reform program called '*Contract with the People*' was initiated. Socialization programs were introduced and certain decentralization policies transferred power to municipalities. The Greek Government Program as presented by Papandreou himself envisaged redistribution of wealth, social security for every citizen, educational reforms and tax relief for farmers. The Keynesian policy of raising salaries with the intention of mobilizing market economy was also introduced. By 1985, however, the annual inflation rate had again risen to 25%, which led to the constant devaluation of the currency and the immense growth of the deficit, to 10% of gross national product by 1986 and to 20% by the end of 1989.

Despite the major re-distribution of income, based mainly on re-directing funds, the investment rate decreased dramatically, while gradually a deep distrust towards Papandreou's personal style of government became dominant. Furthermore, against his anti-American rhetoric, ties with US, even under the hostile presidency of Ronald Reagan, were strengthened and the American military presence in Greece was increased. Papandreou's other external enemy, Turkey, was used to fan nationalist feelings of immense general appeal, despite the meager or rather negative outcomes

of his policies. In 1988, after a crisis in the Aegean and a badly prepared meeting with the Prime Minister of Turkey Turgut Ozal, Papandreou made the famous statement at the Parliament, which he had visited only twice since 1984: '*Mea Culpa*,' admitting to his own errors. Yet the policy of a rhetorically belligerent confrontation with Turkey continued till the end of the regime without any real changes in the actual bilateral relations.

However, beyond all these policies, which can be attributed to circumstantial and symptomatic factors of international politics, the greatest disappointment was on the domestic front. The charismatic leader who promised decentralization, self-government and open democracy soon transformed himself into a semi-mystical source of authority and power, above all criticism, changing ministers and cabinets for strategic reasons before major crises or policy announcements. Kostas Mardas' personal account from within the socialist party reads like a fascinating novel (Mardas, 1995), depicting the transformation of a democratic leader into a power-obsessed head of a ruling party who consciously made his own personality the central institution of Greek civic culture. Indeed the 'transposition' of his personality to the level of the ultimate institutional authority within his party, as happened with Nasser in Egypt, had a wide range of consequences for the political behavior of the citizens and the decision-making process of the administration.

The gradual disappearance of the citizen as an active political subject in the country became the dominant characteristic of Greek political life especially after 1985. Papandreou's 'incredible capacity to claim one thing while doing another' (Spourdalakis, 1988:258) created an immense deficit in the perception of the political in Greece; unable to change the state into a one-party system, he created a feeling of *loss* within the political system, which squandered all structural achievements after 1975. Francis Fukuyama stated that the fall of the dictatorships in 'Greece, Spain and Portugal' meant the beginning of the end for totalitarian states in Europe (Fukuyama, 2004:5). After the initial joy of 1981, the Socialist Party and its leader transformed themselves into an extremely traditional political formation with its authority based on clientelism and populism, annulling thus the 'new humanism' or the 'new political economy' that Papandreou had advocated in his writings before coming to power.

In one of his most notorious statements, which has become a political proverb in the vocabulary of the country, Papandreou declared that he had the right to negate himself; the fact of the matter is that he was doing it so fast at the end that there was nothing at all to be negated. PASOK rule ended in the immense existential void

that made all political projects irrelevant, and for better or worse made society autonomous from the political processes reflecting its structures. The outcome of eight years in government by the socialist part was the construction of the *dissociated citizen*, destroying thus the organic structure of the movement for political democracy and liberation that had guided left wing political parties after the Greek Civil War.

### 3. SOCIAL PSYCHODYNAMICS BETWEEN THE LEADER AND THE MOVEMENT

Unfortunately we do not have a substantial body of studies on the actual socio-political changes that took place in Greece under the Socialist Party; but it must be admitted that it was one of most fertile periods for collective fantasies, imaginary constructions and personal illusions. Indeed Papandreou's virile appeal generated collective fantasies and almost paranoid delusions of omnipotence, in contrast to the reality of economic collapse, social disunity and military weakness. The more impotent the government was to solve problems, all the more strongly the fantasy of Greece as an '*intellectual superpower*' was gaining currency among the population. The leader himself became the 'attributional interface' linking political symbols as public rituals with private symbolic significations. Participation in mass rallies and in political demonstrations became an event of self-definition and empowerment, while for the younger generation, who had just been given the right to vote at eighteen, mass pre-election rallies became rites of passage into adulthood and maturity.

The charismatic leader with his powerful rhetoric 'glued' the chaotic reality together, making his own personality an autonomous psychical symbol of intersection between the private and the public, the imaginary and the real, the symbolic and the personal. The leader was one of the few politicians known by their first name ('Andreas's Greece') as opposed to the 'Generation Mitterrand' in France or 'Reagan's America' in the US. The personalization of the political realm and its symbols became so powerful psychologically that 'Andreas' became synonymous with the party and the socialist tradition. The name of the leader became a 'thick synecdoche' of positive transference and thus of political heteronomy. The contradiction between the slogan of political autonomy and the practice of civic heteronomy never became an issue for party ideologues like Costas Laliotis, or even for Papandreou

himself. However, the contradiction became more visible as Papandreou's personality started exhibiting symptoms of self-aggrandizement and narcissistic immunity, signs of troubled childhood under narcissistic parents and indications of the absence of strong attachments during his formative years. (His semi-autobiographical work *Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front* [Penguin Books 1973] provides abundant material for a solid assessment of his personality.) But these symptoms became political events after a series of changes took place in the country and took on their collective significance.

Beyond any doubt things changed in the country, and life, or the felt culture in the country, took a different turn. First, by 1989 there was a deep demographic change due to the repatriation of political refugees from Eastern European countries. The change gave a distinct 'oriental' character to forms of social expression (music, popular culture, cinema, etc). The migrants from Eastern Europe created a structural problem of social adjustment which the government tackled efficiently and with considerable sensitivity. However, the trauma of displacement found its expression in the rise of introspective cinema, eminently in Theo Angelopoulos' *Voyage to Cythera* (1984), which set the tone for a generalized melancholia, culminating at the end of the decade with Angelopoulos' *Landscape in the Mist* (1988), in which the image of an absent, lost and silent 'father' embodies the lack of meaning and the death of all codes of signification.

Whereas socialism had promised an era of social optimism and cultural emancipation from intellectual and political inferiority, the reality was less than liberating: it brought to the fore social phobias and latent existential ambiguities that neutralized the creative imaginary in the country. Cultural reflection reverted to the cult of traditionalist 'Greekness' as articulated by the conservative thinkers of the 30s, while at the same time it promoted a religious revivalism that undermined the secular orientation of the previous government. In the period after 1985, despite the heavy funding of culture by the arts minister Melina Mercouri, no works of enduring quality were produced. On the contrary, popular culture based on banal or even vulgar social types (Harpoon 'Kamaki') dominated cinematic production, which after the introduction of video restricted itself to low budget movies depicting social caricatures or to the production of cheap porn movies for north European markets.

Despite its implicit endorsement of 'high culture' the socialist decade was marked by the rise of populist, commercial and derivative cultural representations. Furthermore, despite the early attempts to produce TV serials of high standards,

after 1985 the whole production line on state-controlled television stations was taken over by American serials, which set the pace for the productions of the next decade. The social types presented in these serials, based on American programs like *Dallas*, were depicting masculinity in crisis, or fatal women in search of meaningful life. The popular culture expressed more vividly the structural distrust of public personality, illustrating an amorphous introspective imagination in search of novel formal representations. The appearance of AIDS presented a new fear that further destabilized especially the machismo culture as represented by the strong virile and beyond-criticism leader. Around the end of the decade the charisma of the leader caused a crisis of masculine representation which led for the first time to the depiction of real homosexual characters. Indeed the crisis in masculine representations was so deep that the most masculine character in power seemed to be the famous actress Melina Mercouri, because of her un-political integrity. The other characters around Papandreou were reduced to weak and impotent individuals obedient to the demands of his higher authority and became symbols of servility. Cartoons of the period depict Papandreou as a Byzantine monarch surrounded by a prostrating court. In contrast, the cartoonist Giorgos Ioannou presented a series of social commentaries in cartoon under the title 'The Miracle'; Greek society was always on the verge of an imminent catastrophe but something always happened at the last minute and it was saved. The salvation didn't always take place; yet the atmosphere of an imminent end was palpable by 1988, when democratic processes were reduced to spectacles of self-promotion and to some degree of self-exposure.

When in 1989 PASOK lost power the end of an era of heightened expectations became a cynical reality. And when it returned to power in 1993 and 1996 it was obvious that even under Papandreou, Papandreou's legacy was silently pushed aside. When in 1996 Costas Simitis assumed power from the ailing and tragic figure of Papandreou, the party itself struggled to re-invent its character and more urgently to forget the Papandreou years, under the banner of 'modernization'. It was indeed an act of patricide which partially liberated the dynamic of the party and gave a new post-ideological and post-charismatic leadership orientation to the political debate. In the new reality Papandreou himself looked like a historical accident which could be remembered for both the surprise it caused and the loss it entailed.

#### 4. THE LEGACY OF SOCIALIST POPULISM

The Papandreou era undermined the validity of most existing political discourses in the country: it simply dismantled the vocabulary of politics and created a formulaic language of repetitive simplifications and platitudes. This was not because a left-wing party was unable to act responsibly from its new position of being in power and create a contemporary civil identity. The main problem with the Greek socialist party was that they felt as if they were still in opposition when they were in government. Although they were taking decisions on crucial issues, they always acted as a persecuted political fringe group. In reality, they themselves were persecuting their opponents through masterful media wars, especially while they had control of the mass media. After the control was lost and communication of ideas and public criticism became inevitable, the party collapsed and the leader lost his charismatic appeal.

After the ‘people’ were exposed to other sources of information, Papandreou’s simplistic populism lost its appeal and became unreliable and spurious, even for his own voters who started disbelieving and questioning the policies and the intentions of the government. After that point, his very presence created an immense gap in the political conscience of the country since his rhetoric neutralized the validity of political action. During his last term in office, Papandreou’s political discourse depoliticized all social projects and transformed them into a confusing and perplexing theory of ‘exceptional’ characteristics of impenetrable narcissism associated with his personality. He felt so empowered that during the campaign of 1989 without any hesitation he declared: ‘there are no institutions; the only existing institution is the people’ – a statement reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher’s notorious dictum: ‘there is no such thing as society’. The rhetoric of his last term in government destroyed all political forms of thinking and regressed the discourse of power to a pre-political mythologisation of the leader *cultus*. His very presence was living proof of the death of the political in Greece.

Indeed what was tried in Greece during the 80s was not simply a socialist experiment or a new form of administration – things that never took place anyway. The main principle that was tested was the leadership principle, the way that a charismatic figure could govern and give its specific orientation to social projects within the country. Furthermore how the leadership principle could easily degenerate into

an irrational use of power without thinking about its social and general consequences. The same was tested in 1910 in Greek history when the charismatic Prime Minister Eleutherios Venizelos (1864–1936) had the opportunity to radically change the constitution, introduce a functional parliamentary democracy and establish the state of the law in a political system tormented by corruption and disunity. But Venizelos opted for a compromise with monarchy and the old land aristocracy, creating thus a prolonged crisis of institutional authority. The crisis was expressed in the tragic conflict between the Parliament and the Crown which led to the Division of 1916–17 and finally to the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922.

The same failure was repeated on a minor scale by Papandreou's socialist experiment. The government had the golden opportunity to change the endemic culture of corruption, political clientelism and nepotism that was the hallmark of the previous right-wing parties. In 1982 and 1983, when major administrative reforms were attempted, all attempts to establish meritocracy were abandoned due to internal party pressures. All projects for social and economic reforms were gradually transformed into exercises on paper and the 'socialist' ideas of decentralization and self-government were transformed into a bureaucratic managerial style of operating, reflecting the extremely traditional, or even conservative, forces that had found refuge in the socialist party.

At the same time, Papandreou invested his power with a religious aura, avoiding public criticism, speechifying endlessly in a Castro-like style in front of his own people while reinforcing the most insidious values of patriarchal society and investing his authority with phallic power and sexual prowess. Yet while he was doing so, he was losing the moral legitimacy of socialism and the whole project of modernizing politics. The de-moralization of political life had nothing to do with the scandals of his personal life (extra-marital affairs etc). On the contrary such episodes humanized power, in a way similar to François Mitterrand in France or Olof Palme in Sweden, establishing a new relationship with a Greek people not overly obsessed by moral questions of guilt and retribution. Yet the whole issue of his personal life was presented especially by his media advisers in terms of Mediterranean machismo, stressing his manliness and his fecundity as a leader. Anthropologically, the fact that an ageing prime minister had a young mistress was extremely important for the symbolic fertility of the country. It expressed the libidinisation of the social sphere by sexualizing the political discourse and presenting a novel image of a leader who had regained his masculine qualities.

Robert D. Kaplan, an eye-witness to the gradual transformation of the PASOK government and Papandreou himself, observed that: 'Unlike the other foreign-educated intellectuals in PASOK, Papandreou was at home in their smoke-filled coffee houses and was devious to the core. Papandreou had a virile and demagogic speaking style, which the urban poor and the inhabitants of the Greek countryside responded to. His was a political style reminiscent of Argentina's Juan Peron, or Israel's Menachem Begin: another Western-educated, dynamic orator whose base of support was situated among the poorest and most Oriental part of the population, which he has prodded into ascendancy over the European half. Thus the Romios, not the Hellenes, surrounded Papandreou, formed its inner circle and ran PASOK for him' (Kaplan, 1993: 265-66).

Behind Kaplan's observation one can easily detect the problem of the confrontation with modernity in countries which didn't participate in the economic and social changes that shaped Western Europe. In its 'deep structure' Greek society remained a post-Ottoman formation, which articulated its political discourse in quasi-religious language, marked by the demoralizing inability of its leaders to establish a secular understanding of social practices, civil rituals and political values. Papandreou revived the Byzantine-Ottoman legacy of an authority that is worshipped and venerated but never criticized or questioned. Indeed, despite the fact that Papandreou introduced civil marriage, his wedding to his mistress took place in church; and when in 1989 an interim government was formed after an agreement between the Conservatives and the two main parties of the Left Papandreou described the collaboration as 'unholy and unprincipled' (Clive, 1990: 117).

His political idiom was more than populist: it was anti-secular and pseudo-religious, characterizing every criticism of his personality as something blasphemous and irreverent. Furthermore, a rhetorical study of his speeches during the election campaigns of 1981, 1985 and 1988/9 would indicate that the main tenor of his arguments was focused around the model of the black night of Right rule making people suffer on the way to the Calvary (Passion Week in the Orthodox ecclesiastical calendar) and the Resurrection (anastasis) of the people under the socialist government. The Manichean dualism of his political rhetoric encapsulated the vision of politics he and his party expressed: anti-modernist and anti-secular, based on irreconcilable polar opposites in a universe populated by demonic enemies and invisible conspiracies.

Within the institutional framework of modern democracy Papandreou made an impossible error of judgment: he identified his public office with himself. Indeed, in an inverted way he tried to introduce the presidential powers of the American political system for the prime minister's office, without instituting any of the sub-systems of checks and balances that gave the American presidency both personal character and collective endorsement. In the Constitutional Reform of 1986 the prime minister became the main source of power, divesting the presidency of all its powers and instituting partisan politics as the dominant form of political conduct in the country. From one point of view, this could be seen as the revenge of the much-despised American political system against its own renegade offspring.

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