

Antonio or the Message: Bourgeois Conformism and the Dictatorship of the Colonels in Greece (1967-1974)

Philip Hager (Royal Holloway)

2007 marks the fortieth anniversary of the ‘Revolution of the 21st of April,’ the coup executed by a military troika, the junta that seized power for seven years (1967-1974). During this specific period theatre gradually became a medium through which the people of Greece participated in the public affairs. In a coercive society defined by a military State, political activity was reduced to the private sphere. Theatre publicised private opposition and created a condition of political complicity between stage and auditorium. Audiences were not sole observers of an action, but a living group of acting individuals that fulfilled their part as citizens. Theatre, as it is a place of illusion, offered the illusion of citizenship. Moreover, since it created the conditions for the forbidden to occur, theatre functioned as a place of resistance to the dictatorship of the colonels. It must be clear though, that resistance through theatre is only symbolic; that is, it can only *inspire* resistance in the social sphere.

The period of Greek history that began at the end of World War II in 1945 is defined by the civil war between nationalists and communists, and its consequent polarisation. The dictatorship of the colonels was the climax and the end of this situation of partial democracy; partial, because one part of the population experienced an ordinary bourgeois capitalist everyday life, while another part of the population (the communists) was violently repressed. The Greek civil war is seen by many historians as the Greek manifestation of the Cold War: Greece, as a dependent State participated in the global policies of polarisation.

Haralambis argues that the dictatorship was a result of contradictions within Greek social structures and observes that the army was ‘identified with the idea of the

nation [...as its] source, and guarantor; the precondition of the nation's existence' (Χαραλάμης 77).¹ National identity was defined by the repressive apparatuses as the opposition to the anti-Greek other, the communists, who were also referred to as Slavs, or reds. According to this logic, democracy could only be maintained when the traitors of the nation would be extinct. 'The revolution was not aiming at the death of democracy, but at democracy's salvage from death that would come with the red totalitarianism, as a result of actions carried out by the politicians of the time' (Μακαρέζος 14). A gradual democratisation of the State occurred during the 1960s when a party of the centre won the elections. However, this government was deposed by the palace. This led to a period of political abnormality and popular demonstrations, requesting a more democratic regime. It was a period in which political awareness was growing in parallel with the explosion of oppressed leftist activity.

Poulantzas, in *The Crisis of the Dictatorships* discusses the existence of the para-State in post-war Greece, and defines it as a network that 'functions behind the façade of the State Apparatuses, which carefully disguise it [...and] provides a permanent recourse for the bourgeoisie in their struggle to maintain and safeguard their power' (Poulantzas 100-101). Therefore, the para-State and its practices were illegitimate. When the colonels seized power in 1967, they claimed legitimacy on behalf of the para-State. The purposes of the dictatorship were the conservation of bourgeois State, the rescue of the national character, and the elimination of the communist danger.²

¹ All quotations from Greek sources are translated by me.

² Nikolaos Makarezos, of the leading troika of the 1967 coup, in his book *How We Were Driven to the 21st of April 1967*, claims that '[t]he need for an effective confrontation of the [political] dead end created by the pre-April national crisis, dictated the following double mission to the Military Revolution of the 21st of April:

I. **The prevention:**

The 'Revolution' came as a result of the destabilisation of the bourgeois order aiming at the reinforcement of law and order. For that they employed practices of 'brute violence' (Close 282). The coup was an act of autonomy of the para-State. It was an attempt to legalise unlawful aggression and violence. The bourgeoisie trapped in its (nationalist) contradictions remained indifferent to the new social condition, hence providing passive support to the colonels.

In 1972, Théâtre Téchnis in Athens produced Lula Anagnostaki's play *Antonio or the Message*. Anagnostaki was a fairly young playwright and this production marked the initiation of the celebration for the 30 years of Théâtre Téchnis. The socio-cultural event itself (the celebration) added significance to this particular production. Carolos Coun (the artistic director and founder of Théâtre Téchnis) was one of the most acknowledged theatre directors in Greece, and Théâtre Téchnis was a highly legitimate institution in Greek avant-garde theatre. Most of the production's reviews start with a quick reference to the celebratory character of the occasion and Coun's overall contribution: 'Theatro Technis has reached thirty years of activity, constantly devoted on creative work of a higher artistic level' (Δόξας 2). 'One of Coun's finest traditions is that he gives the chance to young dramatists to break the *barrier of silence*. The ones, however, who manage to walk through the *Narrow Gate* are subjected to the danger of *crashing* against the wall of the *unacceptable*' (Καλκάνη 4). The latter quotation reveals the difficulty of *entering* the (re)strict(ed) world of Théâtre Téchnis and the conservatism of the bourgeois mainstream theatre audiences.

a) Of the pre-arranged outbreak of the fourth Communist Round and the consequent massacre.

b) Of the overturning of the bourgeois order and the establishment of a Stalinist Dictatorship.

c) Of the incorporation of Greece behind the [Iron] Curtain and its geographical mutilation.

II. **The safeguarding** of the preconditions for a normal functioning rhythm of the public life in the Country, and the return, as soon as possible, to parliamentarism on healthy ground. In other words, the settlement of the clearly political problem' (Μακαρέζος 13).

I will argue that this production was an act of resistance to the cultural and physical submission of the country to an illegitimate (and illiterate) military regime, as well as an attempt to raise political awareness among the bourgeoisie.

Antonio is set '[i]n a room without walls where people from various countries live together. The room has view over streets, squares, and gardens where soldiers and policemen meet in an attempt to impose a new order' (Μιχαηλίδης 35). This house is located, according to descriptions, somewhere in England: 'On Sundays, after the meal, we always have tea here. With lemon. I don't like tea. I warn you... You will have to get used to the habits' (Αναγνωστάκη 10-11). The house is shelter for refugees from places where the 'new order' has been imposed; it resembles a prison, or an asylum. The regime constitutes an invisible and ambiguous threat of violence that eventually becomes visible and physically affects everyone inside and outside the house.

Threat generates action, which comes in the form of words spoken by men and women that enter the house. The message of fear and violence is announced through their language in increasing waves, to conclude in a spectacle of brutal physical violence by the regime. Anagnostaki pointed out that in this play the characters are given freedom; they are fragmentary, and their actions are often incomplete or completed by another character. Moreover, events progress 'freely and are introduced by the characters; accordingly they lead everybody, finally shaping the play, with their own meaning and autonomy' (Αναγνωστάκη 15). Therefore, the characters are not complete individuals, but fragments of a collective unconscious, and it is up to the events to construct the plot. Anagnostaki created an abstract sign-system that is characterised by lack of logical consistency and psychological causality.

The residents of the house live in constant fear: they fear what is to come; a certain establishment, an order from which they hide. It is a totalitarian order that spreads like a plague; so does the fear. The terror of totalitarianism and violence (reality) generates fear, and creates tendencies of escape. The house offers an illusion of privacy, which means detachment from reality, and therefore safety. The shelter they seek is the very illusion of the house being a shelter: they escape reality in order to feel safe. Reality is fear. The illusion is severely damaged when it is clearly exposed: physical violence invades the house in parallel with a counter-message of reaction that has been spread by a group of young men and women, Antonio's trusted friends. Antonio is a double figure within the play: he is the adopted son of the owner of the house (Alikí), and a mythical revolutionary. The former is an oppressed boy in a man's body and physically present, while the latter is the representation of an ideal and physically absent. The former is matter, while the latter is spirit. Antonio's friends appear as friends of Alikí's son, but reveal themselves as followers of the ideal. They appear to play a game, and discuss the future of their resistance. They are interrupted by State agents who appear to confirm the threat and bring violence on stage.

Meaning within the play is produced by its irrationality and its resistance to traditional structures of realist drama. The characters are stripped off their individuality and act accordingly. In this chaotic universe only the structural variations of the theme of threat do not fall apart. The structure of the play derives from the notion of threat of violence. The rest of the structural elements (the dynamic relations between events and characters) are built upon this ground, following an internal causality of succession of events, and not a logical/psychological causality of behaviours.

Moreover, threat spreads and gradually dominates the space in the form of a disease surrounding the house.

The atmosphere of the play consists of a poetic darkness and constant menacing signs, creating a claustrophobic environment. The domestic space can be described as a closed circuit, from which there is no point of escape. The circle asserts a certain degree of continuity, in that it does not have a starting or an ending point. Threat enters the circle of the house from the periphery of a wider homocentric circle. It surrounds the space of the house, thus creating a circular notion of siege, that gradually closes down to the centre. The outer circle is defined as the State. It is a continuum of oppression and violence, which is represented by waves of threat that occupy the whole of the outer circle, and gradually invade the inner circle. The latter is the private space of the house: it is a smaller reproduction of the outer one. They share hierarchical structures and power organisation schemes, but reversed. The inner circle is the structural centre of the play; it is the exemplary case within a wider context. Fear/threat comes in an outside → inside scheme.

The two circles are presented as the Family and the State. However, the specific case of family is consisting of various elements, often with opposing needs and wills; they are strangers to each other. Thus, it is not a typical example of a bourgeois family. Fear (of the outside) gradually leads to conformism, as a medium of anonymity and safety, which again leads gradually to loss of identity, mass stereotypes, separation from the experience and the self, alienation. The slow but steady invasion of fear creates events within the microcosm of the house. The reactions to the outside are only passive; they follow the events without participating. It is only a matter of time for the menacing vibrations to invade the private in material form: physical violence.

The only active resistance to the threat comes from Antonio's friends. Their actions radicalise the inside/private by making it part of the outside/public struggles. They invade the inner circle before the agents of the State. They dissolve the private, in order to confront the terror of the public. The connection between the youth and the environment of the house is established by Eleni: she represents the house in the *game*.³ The inside space of private safety has been shrinking since she joined the strange family living in this house. The private space of the house is defined by conformism to the local habits, and the bourgeois ideology of passive observation of spectacular life. For its residents, the house is a place of anonymity, a safe place in which they can continue an unsuspected life. The safety of the private is the last thing dissolved by the State. The physical invasion of privacy by the public/State is the ultimate mechanism of suppression and oppression employed by the established order. Slater points out that, according to Marxist theory, 'private life appears free yet has in fact been colonized by public commercial and political institutions' (148). Therefore, the safety of the private appears as a vital myth/illusion of the bourgeoisie.

In the scene with Antonio's friends, a message of counter-action is delivered, reversing the dynamics of relations and events. The main struggle of the play is encapsulated here: the various power structures fall apart and their mythologies are disillusioned to reveal reality. Reality exposes the State Apparatus as a set of repressive and reproductive institutions. For the most part of the play the private is dominated by the public (on the symbolic/psychological level). At the end the private is physically eliminated: the lack of the illusion of safety, will remove individuals

³ It is a game of questions and answers: its logic is that each one answers to the previous question. Thus, truth reveals itself, but hidden under a seemingly illogical order. Eleni asks the questions and the youth answer. The universal character of the youth movement is revealed in some of the answers: 'Have you ever honoured your parents? Not me, my brother has. I was doing other stuff. Were you ever in Paris, in the spring? I can't remember any more. Were you ever a follower of fire? Whenever it was needed, yes' (Αναγνωστική 84).

from their alienated privacies, and turn them to active agents. This scene is at the centre of the circular structure of the play; it is its climax and counter action. It marks the explosion of the private, and its consequent public struggles.

The structure of the play creates a spatial binary, from which various signifiers arise. The *message* of the title is to be found in the succession of binaries; it is a reaction to these binaries, or even reaction to the notion of binary and polarisation, which was integral part of the collective consciousness and a determining factor in the historical developments in post-war Greece.

The spatial binary (inside – outside) implies the binary safety – danger. It is, moreover, the distinction between two phases of reality: the familiar and the unknown. The inside forms the private space, while the outside is that of the public. Bourdieu argues that ‘[o]ne might add to this theme of privacy [...] that of the residence, the house as a stable, enduring locus and the household as a permanent unit, durably associated with a house that is endlessly transmissible’ (65). In the sphere of the private/household we find the notion of the family: ‘[...] when we think of privacy as the domestic, intimate and familial world, we associate it with (for example) emotion rather than reason [...] personal rather than monetary or material bonds’ (Slater 144).

The people in Alikí’s house share a bond of fear; they stay together in order to survive. They form a stereotypical family, in order to escape participation in the violence of the public. Bourdieu again suggests that according to ‘[t]he dominant, legitimate definition [...] the normal family [...] is a set of related individuals link either by alliance (marriage), or filiation, or, less commonly, by adoption (legal relationship), and living under the same roof (cohabitation)’ (64). The individuals that form the household in *Antonio* are not related by blood, and are not married; this

household consists of strangers. However, the core of the family is Alikí and her adopted son, and they all share a bond that consists of trust and immaterial motives.

Anagnostaki presented on stage the nucleus social unit, the oppressed and oppressive bourgeois family. The State is the absent power structure that appears only at the end, forceful, invasive, and oppressive. Anagnostaki underlined the domestic oppression and violence, which is succeeded by the State violence. The former is mostly psychological, whereas the latter is physical.

For the characters of the play the private space provides the illusion of safety. 'The bourgeois idealization of the private was bound up with the idea of home as *haven* from the public world' (Slater 146). Family, based on regularities and stereotypes provides this illusion of safety, while at the same time 'it is the main subject of reproduction strategies' (Bourdieu 69). It is, according to Bourdieu, the locus of both biological and social reproduction. Respectively, the State aims at forming a corpus of regulations that will promote a specific type of family, thus encouraging 'logical conformism and moral conformism' (Bourdieu 71). The individuals that live in the house, under Alikí's rule, conform to the local logical and moral stereotypes to be accepted by the local (bourgeois) community, and eliminate any suspicion of irregularity.

Bourdieu concludes that 'family is indeed a fiction, a social artefact, an illusion [...], but a "well-founded one," being produced and reproduced with the guarantee of the State, it receives from the State at every moment the means to exist and persist' (72). In *Antonio's* case the illusion is demystified due to the violence of the State and its physical presence within the private space of the family. When the State physically crosses the line that separates the public from the private, it suspends the distinction between the two levels of social activity/reality; it *breaks the rules* that

itself has established. The characters of the play fear this *unlawful* deed, and they find shelter in escaping reality: Aliko insists on the continuation of the conformed life she leads, although the menacing waves bring the message of violence closer. It is the bourgeois myth of safety within the private world of the household. The *unlawful order* imposed by the State, illustrates an oppressive totalitarian bourgeois State, and implies the regime of the colonels: it was a case of illegitimate para-State agents claiming legitimacy. Aliko's reaction to it reflects the reaction of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the colonels in Greece: there was, until then, no public reaction to the regime. Inaction means, in this sense, support to the established order.

The domination of the private by the public is already revealed from the very beginning of the play (or even before that); the difference at the end is that the domination has become material, physical, violent.

Whereas family life, leisure and consumption have been presented as sacred and as autonomous spheres of freedom, they have in fact become the objects (and vehicles) of modern forms of social control such as advertising and marketing, State policy, bureaucratic rationality. (Slater 148)

Aspects of totalitarianism, such as oppression, and violence, complete an idea of Anagnostaki's indirect point of reference: the State of Greece in 1972.

When the private sphere is discredited, the only resistance to the State is the group of Antonio's friends. Michailides argues that in *Antonio* the youth undertake the difficult role of raising collective awareness: 'What happened between *The Gathering* [Anagnostaki's first play] and *Antonio* were the events of May 68 in Paris. The youth have taken on their part, found their character' (Μιχαηλίδης 39). Antonio's friends reflect the generation of the 1960s; they echo the collective consciousness of a generation that negates the bourgeois logic. The private sphere exits from the domestic space, it becomes public: 'the personal is political' (Slater 149). The

dissolution of the private points at the every day acts of resistance: revolutions in every day life.

Plant points out that ‘daily acts of disruption and resistance to work, authority and consumption showed that the spectacle was being contested’ (32). And this is exactly the kind of action the young revolutionaries want to undertake:

YOUNG MAN B: It will be a bizarre invasion. We will all wear the same clothes, nothing special or fancy; for example a blue shirt and a pair of tweed trousers. We will be silent. [...] From now on they will constantly find us in front of them, because we will never leave any more. (Αναγνωστάκη 81-82)

The ‘they’ of the above is the bourgeoisie; the people that ‘suspect nothing’ (Αναγνωστάκη 79). The youth must go and ‘talk to them about enemies they can’t see anywhere’ (Αναγνωστάκη 79).

Kristeva argues that ‘liberation of social behaviour was experienced as a revolt against bourgeois morality and family values’ (18). And this is what Antonio’s friends are determined to do; scare them with unconventional behaviours, so that the bourgeoisie will be able to recognise their entrapment within the bourgeois contradictions. The youth reverse the structural scheme (inside → outside), thus signifying that private must become public in order to resist the new totalitarian order. The reaction starts from the private sphere, in the everyday lives of the oppressed: the intimate, non-material relations of the private sphere should expand to the public and construct a new society free from the bourgeois stereotypes.

The reception of Anagnostaki’s play by the critics was positive, but with question marks. A part of the establishment was supportive even though they had spotted problems in the play. The critical response to *Antonio* reflected the expectations of the theatre establishment in regard to an emerging playwright, as well as their scepticism towards Modern Greek playwrights; the discourse was focused on the originality and

especially the binary content – form. A clear message was expected due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural context; a message against the regime, which the opposing feeling would grasp. Anagnostaki herself announced a message in the title of the play, but then created a complex universe that was not easily deciphered.

Antonio was mainly criticised for its lack of causality, the absence of fully drawn characters, and the lack of action; all the above add up to the absence of a clear message: ‘no one can really see the message of the play’ (Δόξας 2). Kritikos, delivering the most intimidating critique of the play argues that ‘[*Antonio*] includes nothing truthful and significant under its *serious* skin. [...] Violence and oppression are to Ms Anagnostaki just words, and not real life experiences’ (Κριτικός 4). Margaritis, in his own account of the play and the performance, disagreed with Kritikos suggesting that ‘whatever may seem like a deficiency in the eyes of the uninformed spectator [...] is in fact intended’ (Μαργαρίτης 2). Furthermore, Kalkani argued that ‘[...] my logical and poor frame of analysis is betraying *Antonio*; that is, its musicality, the surreal narrative of the play, the very deeply drawn and fascinating small scenes in which humans reveal themselves’ (Καλκάνη 4). She implied that the depth of the play is far beyond reason and merely a matter of sensitivity, which cannot be analysed in a review.

Kalkani grasped and clearly reflected what Anagnostaki tried to expose, a plague created by humanity. Abuse of power, oppression, violence are the main themes of the play; ‘all the characters are fugitives in indoor spaces that are not asylums, because fear has dominated them, and because the epidemic spreads closer each time, more monstrous, present, constant; there is no safety anywhere’ (Καλκάνη 4). Here she points out the imprisonment of the individuals within their own space; they are fugitives, their asylum/prison is the house, their illusory space of safety.

Within the social context of the performance, the only logic according to which she could approach Anagnostaki's dramatic world was that of everyday life under colonels: oppression, threat, and fear were the disease that was spreading among the Greeks.

Georgousopoulos argued that '*Antonio or the Message* is without a doubt Anagnostaki's best product. [...] She always gave the impression of a sensitive and cultivated receiver of the zeitgeist of our times' (Γεωργουσόπουλος 41-42). Her message was delivered in an unconventional manner; the irrationality of the play not only proposed a new contemporary form, but also created meaning in itself. In other words, the logic of the form corresponded to the logic of the play in terms of content

In *Antonio*, Anagnostaki negated the constitution and division of society that intimidates the weak. Anagnostaki's point of reference was the bourgeois society, and more specifically the Greek bourgeois society, in which fear was the main component in the post-war years. The youth do not belong within this logic, therefore signifying a radically different vision. Anagnostaki, part of the young generation, participated in the youth movement. The production of *Antonio* was a celebration for the thirty years of Théâtre Technis, and at the same time the celebration of a growing movement. The students were carrying out a noisy protest, which was limited in range, but constant and spontaneous. This movement gradually grew stronger and reached its climax in November 1973, when it managed to incorporate the (bourgeois) public of Athens. Anagnostaki understood her position within time (history) and space (Greece); her play was inspired by and inspired the flowing ideas of her time. Anagnostaki criticised the bourgeoisie, which was sinking in fears and traumas of its past.

References

- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge: Polity, 1994.
- Close, David, ed. *The Greek Civil war, 1943-1950*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Revolt, she said*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2002.
- Plant, Sadie. *The most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in the postmodern age*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Poulantzas, Nicos. *The Crisis of the Dictatorships: Portugal, Greece, Spain*. London: NLB, 1976.
- Slater, Don. 'Public/Private.' *Core Sociological Dichotomies*. Ed. Chris Jenks. London: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Αναγνωστάκη, Λούλα. *Αντόνιο ή το Μήνυμα*. Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1972.
- Γεωργουσόπουλος, Κώστας. *Κλειδιά και Κώδικες Θεάτρου: II. Ελληνικό Θέατρο*. (1984). Αθήνα: Εστία, 2000.
- Δόξας, Άγγελος. 'Στο Θέατρο Τέχνης Αντόνιο.' *Ελεύθερος Κόσμος* 18 Φεβ.1972: 2.
- Καλκάνη, Ειρήνη. 'Αντόνιο της Λούλας Αναγνωστάκη.' *Απογευματινή* 10 Μαρ 1972: 4.
- Κριτικός, Θεόδωρος. 'Αντόνιο ή το Μήνυμα της Λούλας Αναγνωστάκη.' *Ακρόπολις* 17 Φεβ.1972: 4.
- Μακαρέζος, Νικόλαος. *Πώς Οδηγηθήκαμε στην 21^η Απριλίου*. Αθήνα: Πελασγός, 2005.
- Μαργαρίτης, Αλκιβιάδης. 'Αντόνιο ή το Μήνυμα στο Θέατρο Τέχνης.' *Τα Νέα* 26 Φεβ. 1972: 2.
- Μιχαηλίδης, Γιώργος. *Νέοι Έλληνες Θεατρικοί Συγγραφείς*. Αθήνα: Κέδρος, 1975.

Χαραλάμπης, Δημήτρης. 'Η Δικτατορία ως Αποτέλεσμα των Αντιφάσεων της Μετεμφυλιακής Δομής του Πολιτικού Συστήματος και οι Αρνητικές της Επιπτώσεις.' *Η Δικτατορία 1967-1974: Πολιτικές Πρακτικές-Ιδεολογικός Λόγος-Αντίσταση*. Επ. έκδ. Γιάννα Αθανασάτου, Άλκης Ρήγος και Σεραφείμ Σεφεριάδης Αθήνα: Καστανιώτης, 1999. 75-91.