

University Seminar 703: Modern Greek

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Kostis Karpozilos

Communists Carrying the American Flag: Americanism, Anti-Americanism and the Greek Left (1944-1949)

Despina Lalaki

American Espionage and Philanthropy: Perspectives from the Greek Left

Presiding Chair: Vangelis Calotychos, Columbia University

Rapporteur: Alexis Radisoglou, Columbia University

Attendees: Charlotte Camillos, Senam Asamoah (Columbia), Marios Efthymiopoulos (Columbia), Aristotle Tziampiris (NYU), Elsa Stamatopoulou (Columbia), Bruce Robbins (Columbia), Chloe Haralambous (Columbia), Tracy Essoglou (New School), Nikki Leger (Bryn Mawr), Lygia Georgiou, Karen Van Dyck (Columbia), Peter Bratsis (CUNY), Eleni Natsiopoulou (CUNY), Rosario Forlenza (NYU), Angela Camillos, Erato Basea (Columbia), Zoi Karoulia (Mount Sinai School of Medicine), Poulikos Poulidakos (Mount Sinai School of Medicine), Eleni Kyramargiou (University of Aegean), Neni Panourgia (Columbia), Dimitris Kousouris (Konstanz University), Stathis Gourgouris (Columbia), Eric Poulos, Kostis Kornetis (NYU)

Paper Abstracts:

Despina Lalaki

Two years before the CIA-instigated Junta in Greece fell, artists and intellectuals such as Pantelis Voulgaris, Karolos Koun, Miltos Sachtouris, Odysseas Elytis and Theodoros Angelopoulos – the forefront of the Greek avant-garde, grantees of the Ford Foundation and often critics of American imperialism – became embroiled in a public debate about the relationship of the Greek Left with the American centers of power due to revelations in the media about the Foundation's work in Greece. Without a doubt this was not the first time that the Greek Left faced such a predicament. The close collaboration, for instance, between the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) the predecessor of the CIA and the National Liberation Front (EAM) during the war developed against a background of cautious optimism, calculated trust and high aspirations. Capitalizing on these two cases, and while taking into consideration the historical particularities in place, I employ a micro-sociological approach to examine individuals' motivations and actions and to the complex networks and associations set in motion by the OSS and the Ford Foundation. I argue that such an approach may reveal additional aspects in a story that hitherto has been largely framed by discussions on Leftist anti-Americanism.

Kostis Karpozilos

Traditional readings of Greek anti-Americanism understand its growth in connection with the policies of the Greek Left in a linear narrative that connects the Greek Civil War (1944-1949) to the anti-imperialist manifestations of the post-dictatorship years (1974-1989). This paper challenges this picture by focusing on the transformations of Americanism and anti-Americanism during the 1940s, the period regarded as the founding moment of Greek anti-Americanism. More particularly, it demonstrates the appeal of United States foreign policy and the New Deal policies among the Greek Left and the aspirations for a United States intervention in favor of the National Liberation Front (EAM). These aspirations were demonstrated in the December 1944 events and reflect the parallels between the reformative New Deal policies and the modernizing agenda of the Greek National Liberation Front (EAM). Therefore, the impetus of anti-Americanism among the Greek Left after 1946 cannot be disassociated from the simultaneous transformations of Americanism in the United States that led to the Truman Doctrine and the postwar reevaluation of the New Deal era. Moreover, the ties between the Greek Communists, the Greek-American Left and American liberalism -as in the cases of Connie Poulos, Kostas Karayiorgis, Basil Vlavianos and Panos Harissiadis- indicate that ideological parallels had an organizational dimension as well. In this context, this paper proposes a comparative, transnational study of the multiple relations between Americanism and anti-Americanism that move beyond preconceived certainties on the relation of the Left to the image of America.

Summary of Discussion:

Q.

Just three very quick points. One is anecdotal. The father of a very good friend was arrested after the December events. He was a prominent bourgeois in Athens – like many of them, he was arrested – but he was also an American citizen. The communists were informed that this was an American citizen. He was released. There's a public memoir I'd be happy to share with both of you.

One question is, when you compare this with high politics: What is the impact of these very interesting individuals? Can you argue that they had a decisive impact or is it really a fascinating sideshow?

Final point: It's fascinating that before the Cold War really started, the Greek Left and the United States of America were not on unfriendly terms. I was just looking at some data about what is the state of the Greek people in Americanism and anti-Americanism today. And because I don't necessarily trust either polling firms or Greek newspapers I tried to independently confirm these results, and I did. If you look at what they are saying, the number of Greek people who want to have a confrontational relationship with the US today is 0.8%. In the question, What is your view of the following countries in 2005, 27% said they had a positive view of the US. Today it's almost 60%. And so on and so forth. I think there is a changing happening right now, and I was wondering if this could be

reinforced or even inspired or explained by what you're doing. And final point, to Despina Lalaki: That would be, if we wanted to fast-forward to today, a lot of evidence in support of your thesis about historical contingencies and cultural factors. If we're seeing a real change of anti-Americanism today, they way to explain it could be historical contingency. It's the crisis, it's Merkel, it's not the US or Obama.

Q.

There is a line that becomes thin between what is going on inside and outside these countries like Greece and Belgium that are not yet in the Cold War division. I would like a comment from both of you on this changing and moving line when the Cold War is not yet a reality.

Q.

I have a question for Despina: As I was hearing you talk about the Ford Foundation, I was also thinking about the Rockefeller Foundation, which also had an immense presence in Greece. They've also had a tremendous role in what we've come to think of as the American Empire. I was just wondering if you could contextualize a little bit the Ford Foundation presence in Greece.

A (*Lalaki*).

I'll start with the last question. There is an interesting transference of knowledge, experience and individuals between all those foundations. It's interesting that you mention the Rockefeller Foundation, because it had been in Greece way before the Ford Foundation. They were responsible for many projects that had to do directly with culture, like the excavation of the Athenian agora and the reconstruction of the Attalos Stoa. There is a certain know-how and prestige there, which the Ford Foundation completely lacks in the beginning in the 1950s. What it doesn't lack is resources, a certain exuberance at the time. You could not apply for a small project: it had to be a big project, a large idea. And then if we come down to the individuals themselves who through long association with the Rockefeller family imagine themselves as direct successors largely trying to emulate the Rockefellers's work and compete for prestige and recognition. [*tape inaudible*]. Of course what is very particular about the Ford Foundation is it's much more direct – all those rumors about connections with the CIA were not just rumors – connections with the government. They are not formal but very casual connections with those individuals who travelled down to Washington D.C. and asked around, What is it you're interested in? These are the kinds of relationships one can follow in the archives of the Ford Foundation. And of course, I agree that American philanthropy is a big chapter in the history of American Empire making great inroads – in education, medicine, the arts and so forth – in parts of the world in times that the American governments have developed only scant policies or have no involvement whatsoever.

A (*Karpozilos*).

As for the issue of decisive impact: We're used to think of think of this only in relation when it confirms the dominant scenario. And then we say that all other probabilities were based on misconceptions or on wishful thinking. Up to a certain point this story of defeat can be seen as one of minimum impact. On the other hand, I think that even though these

marginal stories do not appear in the official diplomatic exchanges they illustrate social and intellectual traditions that at that point were not marginal. The idea of a global alliance, convergence, between the United States and the Soviet Union was not a marginal scenario in 1944. It was seen as a probability. This explains, I think, why there is resentment against the British Empire, especially in Europe, whereas American Imperialism – this word that became so common in the language of the Greek Left after 1947 – was not there. The intervention of the United States was either minimal or benevolent, in terms of the support for the Greek population in the 1940s, or was instrumental in the relief work of the 1920s and 1930s, for instance for the Asia Minor refugees in Greece. So I think we should revert the question: how did people imagine the future in 1944? Then we can discuss which ideas and scenarios had a decisive impact.

A (*Lalaki*).

I think it would also be helpful to differentiate between what we could call latent anti-Americanism and active anti-Americanism. That's why it is important to pay attention to historical circumstances. Today we may argue that anti-Americanism is not be active in terms of current events or it might not be helpful in our efforts to understand and analyse social problems, but it's not something we should ignore, saying it's obsolete or politically irrelevant.

Q.

I want to challenge you both a bit. Question number one is: How do you define intelligence? There is a big difference between an agent and an informant. Number two: There is no friendly Empire, there are just decision being made in 1944, and by 1945 there is obviously suspicion between the Soviet Union and the United States. Obviously, there couldn't be an alliance, and the structure of alliance all across the world was also [*tape inaudible*]. The reason I am saying this is because the United States in the 1950s created a policy for the next 150 years, which means that in essence it's all about marketing policy. You know better than me as historians that any empire always has its friends, but always has its counterparts coming in and challenging them and learning from them. So those that came were trying to figure out what would be the next step into the development of that region.

Another thing: Greece was divided fifty-fifty between the West and the East. I understand why one would say that the Americans would support the leftist cause for a short period of time, but I cannot explain how and why the left today causes all this trouble by saying everything has to do with intelligence – everything that happens happens because of the CIA, capitalist ideology and so forth. That does not have an historical background. I'm wondering where this does come from?

Q.

I'm interested in the way Despina talks about this cultural support. And Kostis, you were more talking about this individualist approach. Both of you were saying this is not traditional history or sociology, and I heard this refrain going through the papers of – on your side, Despina – arts, literary figures. And certainly Kostis has a wonderful pile of names of artists and writers. I guess it's kind of a discipline question: What are each of you drawing on in order to speak differently?

A (*Lalaki*).

I draw from that interdisciplinarity you just described I am really interested in historical particularities and in reconstructing the historical moment, to the extent that is possible, while paying particular attention to what we call agency. At the same time, I am interested in structures and process for which historians usually do not account or using sociological tools to open up fields such as that of archaeology to different kinds of scrutiny and analysis.

The question whether there is a friendly Empire or not: I think what I tried to show is that precisely these binary oppositions are not always helpful, if we mean to understand history.

A (*Karpozilos*).

As to the first points about agents and informants: Yes, I'm not the most informed on intelligence and I will look back at this. I'll try to combine these two comments because I think that they represent two different perceptions on history and society as well. Your position – and I was taking notes – that there was “always” fifty-fifty and an “inevitable” course of history, requires a certain understanding of historical development. I come from a different standpoint and I think that history does not operate in a predefined pattern. This is why I was trying to emphasize the contingencies of the transition between 1944 and 1948. Our biological, intellectual, social formation is based on the idea of a linear transition from the Second World War to the Cold War, and then a continuum from 1948 to 1989. I recognize the foundations of this idea of historical development. I have to admit I'm not fond of this: I'm trying to emphasize the probabilities and contingencies between 1944 and 1946/1947/1948. Periods of transition underline these probabilities. Writers, artists, and all people with contradictions, underline the difficulty of understanding history in a linear progress.

Q.

I have two questions for Kostis first. One is to what extent these figures were representative of a wider tendency and to what extent were they quixotic figures who, as you were saying, believed in this kind of harmonious coexistence but were overtaken by developments. The other one is: Your story ends in 1947. How would you place Polk in this?

And I have a question for Despina as well. How do you account for the fact that Ford was privileging left-wing artists, either as recipients, like Anagnostakis, or trustees, as Angelopoulos. I'm wondering to what extent things in the end were not as black-and-white, maybe as Poulantzas implies, whether things were much more fluid. And if there was an ulterior motive of the Ford Foundation privileging left-wing artists – were they trying to co-opt them? What were they trying to achieve?

Q.

Can I just jump on that and say that whenever I hear about the Ford Foundation, what always comes to mind is there being in the forefront of assisting and also co-opting minorities in this country. I had a close friend who would always tell me to think of them very much like Lyndon Johnson. I'm interested whether the Foundation's activities on

the ground in Greece and the modes of cooptation etc. are influenced by activities in the US or the other way round.

Q.

My conclusion is that romantic idealists always lose.

Q.

I think the serious question we should ask Kostis is the one he provoked himself at the beginning by saying, I'm trying something out on them that I usually do in social history by looking at individual lives to try and understand large movements. I think in retrospect the failure is registered. In the time of examination there is nothing idealist about what people are doing, they are actually realists. The amazing thing is that people think that realists know and succeed, and this shows that even the most extraordinary calculating mind is not a machine that can actually manipulate history. So the really serious point that I am still not sure how to really account for is the challenge you set yourself at the beginning: Is this a way to ultimately account for social history?

Q.

A quick point on the Ford Foundation, which has always been attacked by the right wing in the United States. It has always funded the Civil Rights Movement, and in New York City in 1968 there was a huge fight between the black community about control of the schools, and the Teachers' Union, and a lot of the liberal establishment was very much against that, and black parents were funded by the Ford Foundation. And so it has almost become a shibboleth of the right wing to always attack the Ford Foundation. So the fact that it was in 1945 in Greece playing a similar role.

The follow-up on Constantin Poulos is that he got a contract from a very established publishing house to write a book about Greece, about what happened to him, about Greece even prior to World War II and during the occupation, and the State Department actively lobbied the publisher not to publish it. The publisher was very independent and said, Send me one single sheet of paper that shows me he is a communist. Now around that time there was the Polk Commission: Constantin Poulos was the only dissenter, he was the only one who said the KKE was not behind Polk's assassination. So the book never got published, so it's an interesting symmetry with Karageorgis in Bucharest and his comrades wanting to kill him, and Poulos, a firm believer in the American dream and American liberal democracy, not being published in the United States.

Q.

I think the common element in the over-generalizing dramatically is a tendency to kill the messenger. So the so-called failure of the idealists is not new and specific to this story. It's that when you have witnesses to a marginal story, there is always invariably a cleanup after the case where those witnesses and messengers are systematically eliminated, whether it's during the story itself or historically being written out of the story. It would be fascinating, I think, to look at contemporary standpoint theory and intersectionality, and the language and dynamics that are being created around intersectionality with respect of understanding people whose personal existence is in fact a matrix of categories, and using that intersectionality in a way to re-historicize the

characters that each of you have chosen to identify, whether institutional characters like the Ford Foundation or individuals themselves.

A (*Lalaki*).

I find this story with the Ford Foundation fascinating precisely because it works on so many different levels. There is an interesting oral historical project by the Ford Foundation that interviewed at the time some of the most prominent trustees. So you get to see exactly how these projects are taken up, on what grounds, if there is a grand plan. When it comes to Europe and the arts, there was an overarching plan for Europe that was in place already since the 60s but did not at the time really concern Greece. So this particular project, this very specific interest in Greece takes place during the junta because all those scholars and artists – many of them find themselves in exile, others in prison, lose their jobs, are denied the opportunity to publish or to do their work. It is definitely targeted to that group of people. There was an interesting comment in that oral history archive I mentioned before about what the other trustees, the rest of the board, thought about specific little projects. These were considered kind of pet projects different trustees would bring in the foundation, depending very much on personal interests, in addition to having all these connections often to the government, to which the rest of the board would merely consent. Another question to add is what the junta thinks about all this at the time. How come it allows this very very public discussion taking place for about three years, if not more. And it seems that on that level as well, it serves the junta very well, because first of all it undermines the leftism of the Ford Foundation grantees. On the other side it also legitimizes its project of controlled liberalization after being so strongly criticized by Europe.

A (*Karpozilos*).

I guess the Polk question was answered by the expert. It seems that this conflict between American correspondents in Greece and American policy experts persisted in 1946 and 1947. There is a continuous effort by the American government after 1946/1947 to control who is coming to Greece representing American news agencies, to control information in a similar way the British did in 1944.

The broader ideological tendencies, I think, were representative of an epoch, of an era that was formulated after the 1929 Great Depression. This was this social and political coalition that, I think, defined the development of the United States and was open to ideas of state intervention, central planning and the acceptance of the Left as a legitimate part in the New Deal. In the case of Greek Americans, this coalition of liberals and leftists is reported by the OSS as being the most dynamic force within the communities. This is expressed in the fact that ethnic Americans vote for Roosevelt in 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944, having him as the prototype, the person who saves them. Remember Roth's account, the debate between the father and the son in 1948 whether to vote for Wallace or Truman. And then if one compares the FBI documents and the interrogations of Karageorgis, one can see similar patterns of what is important in persons' lives and how this defines the aftermath.

The main question, though, remains whether we should be optimistic about the future or pessimistic. The 19th century and 20th century for revolutionaries and radicals – who thought of themselves as realists and not idealists – is a story of continuous failure, and

1989 is the year that epitomizes this historical failure of a century of political and social radicalism. So in a way I do understand what Poulikos is saying about the contradiction, people trying to escape from what Marx would define as the iron laws of history. But at the same time I think we should emancipate our thought from this idea of success and failure. What do we define as failure in 1948 – how can we judge the repercussions of this political tradition, for instance, in Greece? Was it a failure? Yes, it was a failure in the sense that Greece was not transformed into a socialist country. On the other hand, the persistence of a tradition of the Left in Greece can be regarded as a success. So in a way we have to relativize these terms, and I think after a point history does not operate like a dance in a dancehall where you have predefined steps, or if that happens, there are more steps- that is what we have to discover.

Q.

I know very little about Greek history but I do have an interest in anti-communism. One thing that really struck me about both of your stories is the transnational connection. You both never used the term, but clearly both of your stories speak about this transatlantic connection between what's happening in the United States, what's happening in Greece, what's happening in Europe. And so one thing I was thinking about was, is there something really uniquely Greek about your stories, in particular with respect to anticommunism? The case, for example, of the Ford Foundation.

The other thing – which Kostis, you already addressed in your last comment – is what was the role of the Greek community in the United States. How did they shape those perceptions?

Q.

I would like to add to the discussion a comparative dimension. I like very much your insistence on contingencies, transitions, openness to the future and so on, and it seems to me that this was not only the case in Greece but also in Belgium and in Italy. Before the Cold War crystallized, as you put it elegantly before, there were one, ten, hundred, Cold Wars in many parts of Europe – an unstructured situation which we can maybe understand with the anthropological concept of liminality. A situation of uncertainty in which anything was possible, in which personal conviction and ideas were confused because people were in search of meaning. In 1944, Alcide de Gasperi, the Prime Minister of Italy, of the Christian Democracy, said, I see the Soviet Union overcoming the difference among people. This is a very Christian, Catholic indeed, etymological sense. If this contingency was everywhere in motion, is it possible to reconceptualize the Cold War not as an alignment to external ideological models but as a search for order, a search for meaning from an internal point of view.

A (*Lalaki*).

I think in many ways it was all about transnational connections and transference and comparisons. I think both were very comparative approaches really. Now whether there is anything unique here about Greece: my first tendency is to answer no, because similar policies and similar practices we can watch in the time all around Europe. On the other side, the one thing we can point out about Greece is that Greece has the dictatorship while in other cases the broadest policies are anticommunist. So I would trace a

difference there. And my interest today was also to go beyond precisely any categorical distinctions and absolutes and suggest that terms such as Americanism and anti-Americanism are not very helpful in order to really understand what happens on the ground.

A (*Karpozilos*).

It's true that there is a transnational aspect to this story, while there is also a transnational network of anticommunism, which is quite interesting in its own sense. But also, we should think how parallel developments in Europe and the States interrelate. The Italian-American case is indicative: Italian-American groups tried to influence voters in the 1948 Italian elections against the communist party. My understanding is that ethnic communities operated in a Cold War setting as dual ambassadors: they were ambassadors of European countries that were fighting communism in Europe, presenting themselves as representatives of these famine-stricken countries in Eastern Europe or Greece, and at the same time they operated as ambassadors of Americanism back in Europe. So when Italian-Americans created the Casa Roosevelt in Italy to educate labor they operate under a new dominant paradigm of what Americanism is. The most celebrated Greek case that epitomizes this interplay is the Macedonian Association, which is formed in the United States working against Slavs and communism, because American foreign policy interests and Greek national interests seem to go hand in hand against communism. This, up to a point, explains the transnational aspect and, I think, also defines the end of the tradition of ethnic radicalism in the United States. I'm quite skeptical about the idea that ethnic radicalism disappeared in the 50s because of McCarthyism. McCarthyism is just one part of the story. In the 50s there is a decisive defeat of ethnic radicalism, and this defeat, I think, has to do with the internationalization of the Cold War with the new social conditions in the United States, and the inability to support leftist causes in Europe or in Asia when the resistance movements seemed to be fighting against American policies. Can you be a Greek-American communist in 1948? This means that you are against the American government. You can be a Greek-American communist in 1942 and be in support of the State Department. This is the key-transformation from the World War to the Cold War. Greece is not exceptional. The only exceptional side of Greece – aside from the dictatorship later on – is the Civil War, the armed confrontation, which leads to the question of the “inevitable historical process”: Why didn't we have a civil war in Italy despite the existence of a strong communist party that carried arms and was ready to enter into battle? But I do agree with your point about a new meaning, and how the solidification of boundaries and the Cold War division created a new world order that substitutes the chaotic –and unpredictable– conditions of 1944, where people would travel all over the world.