

## **University Seminar #703: The Modern Greek Seminar**

December 4, 2013

Speaker: Kostis Kornetis, Assistant Professor at the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies at New York University.

Topic: "Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics, and the 'Long 1960s' in Greece"

Presiding Chair: Vangelis Calotychos, Columbia University

Rapporteur: Justin McNamee, Columbia Law School

Attendees: - Fotios Kaliampanos; Peter Bratsis; Erato Basea; Stefanie Leontiadis; Marie Elene Cavellezo; Katerina Stefatos; Karen Van Dyck;

Chloe Haralambous Howe; Kostis Karpozilos; Daniel da Silva; Alberto Medina; George Fragopoulos; Despina Lalaki; Yannis Hamilakis; Nikoleta Alexopoulou; Mark Mazower; Scott Cairns; Eric Poulos

### **ABSTRACT:**

Putting Greece back on the cultural and political map of the 'long 1960s,' this book traces the dissent and activism of anti-regime students during the dictatorship of the Colonels (1967-1974). It explores the cultural as well as ideological protest of Greek student activists, illustrating how these 'children of the dictatorship' managed to re-appropriate indigenous folk tradition for their 'progressive' purposes and how their transnational exchange molded a particular local protest culture. It examines how the students' social and political practices became a major source of pressure on the Colonels' regime, finding its apogee in the three-day Polytechnic uprising of November 1973, which laid the foundations for a total reshaping of Greek political culture in the following decades.

### **BIO:**

Kostis Kornetis is Assistant Professor at the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies at New York University. He received his PhD in History and Civilization from the European University Institute, Florence. From 2007 to 2012 he taught in the History Department at Brown University. His research focuses on the history and memory of the 1960s, the methodology of oral history, and the use of film as a source for social and cultural history.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Vangelis Calotychos welcomes everyone to seminar, the last seminar of this semester. Many of you know our speaker very well. Prior to his current role he was at Brown. Pleased to be hosting his first formal presentation of his new book tonight. The book, an exhaustive study of the period in Greece, would have been a lot longer had he included the comparison to Spain.

SPEAKER:

Kostis: A great moment to be presenting this work finally: it took many years for this book to be published. I think several elements of the part that was dropped were incorporated in some form in this book.

Culmination in November 1973 – student uprising against junta, the only form of social upheaval that took place during the 7 years of colonels' dictatorship

- Students demanded radical changes and ultimately created new meaning
- I have tried to demonstrate how new collective identities are developed, how individuals look back at those years and their past militancy

Slide showing national *lieu de memoire* is shown

- First post-Junta elections were scheduled on the specific date of the uprising, a year later, became a national symbol
- Revisionist version of event suggesting polytechnic was staged, or other
  - o Acquired new momentum recently, extreme right propaganda – challenging death of a specific person and saying photograph was taken from advertisement, story resurfaced after 40 years

Every movement since then, up to 2008, riots has evoked Polytechnic as a model

- Remains imprinted in Greek memory that it was the students of the Polytechnic that broke down the junta

Polytechnic generation has currently come under attack for being accountable for vast economic/political crises after 2009

- Original verification by central left
- Blanket rejection of entire post-1974 political legacy

Permanent, constant criticism of that generation was a trigger for the current book, trying to demystify that generation's history

- One of the main tools I used was oral history, since Greek students were representative of a social movement following 1968 subjectivity; thought it was useful to investigate the role of individuals of the period
- But a great semantic distance separated past and present by the time I began, this altered the way former activists think of themselves – they'd undergone various transitions, fragmented identities

Oral testimonies: powerful tools to highlight collection between culture and politics, public and private, past and present – I wanted to explore psychological and deeper elements

- Set of basic questions: what was it like to be a young man/woman then? What was the “structure of feeling”
- Primary importance – why participate when cost of participation could be so high? What were the motivations that preceded the key events?

But research also focused on other things, not just oral testimonies – tried to trace specific dynamics at work in early 70s

1967-74: military interventions, rise of counterculture, time of colonel's regime discussed

- Third wave of democratization
- Seems totally out of place to suggest US influence

Marwick: best way to look at the 60s is as an extended chronological period, the long 60s – 1958/9 until 1973/4

- This kind of chronology also makes sense for Greece
- Greek 60s elsewhere presented as a short decade

My view: pre-junta period inextricably linked to actual dictatorship years

- Rather than fostering total segregation, I believe junta unwittingly provided the complex and intricate terrain for unfolding of the Greek long 60s

Interview with Dionysis Savvopoulos – the foremost *poète-chansonnier* of this time reflects on Greece: “I haven't been to Salonica for seven years. . . . Last time I went I was impressed by the change. Many things that were not accessible to the lower classes now are everywhere to be found. You see them being sold in every corner: refrigerators, televisions, kitchens. Let alone the building blocks.”

- Television: standard accessory for half of Greek households by mid-70s, was luxury in mid-60s

Country also becoming a tourist destination from early 60s

- Years of dictatorship are when tourism really took off
- Slogan: Greece is a place of “peace and quiet”
- 394,000 in 1960 → 2.5 million in 1975
  - o Development of commercial air travel, etc. coincided

Apart from high-class tourism, interesting that several Greek islands became hippy headquarters – liberal habits openly pursued

- This upset both the regime's moral standards but also traditional local communities of the time
- Contact zones between Greek youth and international folks
  - o In other words – and this is a major point of the book concerning the contact zones between the Greek youth and the international intellectual currents – the authoritarian regime was much less impenetrable than we tend to believe.

Generation – entailing a “common location in historical time and space which creates a predisposition towards a particular mode of thinking, acting and experiencing”

- Two cohorts: not normative periods, but subjectively defined cohorts because these two groups share a historical experience creating a community of perceptions

- Gen. Z force of change in pre-1967 years

*Lambrakides Movement:*

- Did not manage to maintain structure of protest following coup
- Inefficient, lost a great part of rank and file
- Gen. Z opted for underground networks, clandestine methods
  - o Thought this would eventually raise consciousness of public and cause massive reaction, which never materialized
- Impossibility of forming mass networks, need to make presence of resistance felt

In a way, Gen. Z symbolizes continuity of the past

Assassination of Lambrakis in 1963, junta, as linear continuation of civil war

- Typical representation: “I was born during the Civil war...”
- No interval for our generation – pattern in people’s life stories
- Resistance organizations that originated abroad often theorized violence to topple regimes

Book attempts to demonstrate aspirations and imaginary resources of students

- I should also mention my own difficulties in researching this
- Arrests in summer of 2002 of (alleged) members of 17<sup>th</sup> of November leftist organization gave rise to media-generated hysteria that stopped just short of demonizing the entire clandestine resistance against the colonels

Youths were not ideological, cultural, political clones of civil war periods; this partially explains why junta didn’t succeed in classifying them

- Conservative, sometimes military backgrounds
- These youngsters, beyond suspicion, got radicalized because of junta itself
- Vast number of students being radicalized that did not belong to the “dangerous citizens” category – the “usual suspects”
- Not a coincidence that many of ringleaders fostered their networks in prestigious, private high schools such as American School of Athens

Students confronted regime by using a legal platform – demanding free elections in university, starting from Law School

- Was unprecedented, but had counterpart in Spain where students managed to legally depose old union
- Following 1971, first massive initiatives of student body  
300 students, many got beat up, many got their heads shaved
- Exactly same thing happened later with *The Strawberry Statement*, a movie all about Columbia though it is not mentioned – students occupied large space and police storm building and beat them black and blue while they were singing – this is how the movie ends

Book traces the form of cultural welfare developed against student regime

- We have a real explosion of political text being published, about 150 new publishing houses were created between 1971 and 1973, emphasizing the political book
- Of 2000 new titles, many oriented to radical left politics, many authors published were unorthodox

New individual and collective behaviors influence course of events

- Gender dynamics also important here
- Presence of women at forefront of Law School movement is really striking
- Growing consciousness of parity, though I am not suggesting parity became a reality in these student circles, but I believe this is a really important moment almost without precedent

Development of student movement- book explores relationship between international and local dimensions

- Student mentality marked by domestic presence of abusive regime, and enhanced by comparison to other movements abroad
- Fundamental differences between Greeks and '68 elsewhere: in Greece, student movement came in on a way of cultural/political rebellion

Interesting to use Lenin and coca-cola type image about how far someone could go in terms of challenging censorship – American flag on toilet seat

Polytechnic generation was not as subversive as counterparts in other countries

- Romanticized communist past
- “Glocal” thinking – thinking globally but acting locally
- Picture of cover of book 16<sup>th</sup> of November, 1973

Major source of pressure on colonel’s regime

- I argued student movement was a powerful vehicle of modernization for time that came right after the junta
- It was the student movement which discredited the attempt of the regime to liberalize from within
- Perhaps if occupation hadn’t happened, things would have developed in very different way in Greek society

Polytechnic presents itself as signaling a total rupture with the past

- Rivalry between different components of the movement
- In reality, differences reached apogee in three days of polytechnic uprising

Juxtaposing memories and experiences of students, and comparing to international environment

Finally, book offers archaeology of origins regarding international influences on Greek youth that can be useful to understand more contemporary events taking place in youth culture in Greece and beyond

## Q&A SESSION

Vangelis: Certainly Kornetis's book has a complex methodology, which Kostis did a very good job delineating in a short period of time.

Q: I'm interested because you talk about the international context, referring to France, wondering whether anything in other direction – Greek impact on some part of the Balkans?

A: There is not much that I encountered regarding the Balkans to be honest, I believe somehow there are the boundaries were more delineated. Recent flow of information from Greece towards Western Europe, Greece becomes paradigmatic case of authoritarian regime taking place in 60s – others are authoritarian dinosaurs. There are some people who have become emblematic figures. I am arguing that there is a flow of information the other direction, I would like to challenge the idea of the center/receiver country, whatever western countries send all the information and Greece just receives, this challenge is a material part of the long 60s in general.

Q: I know there was interaction between Italy and Yugoslavia among leftists and women, wondering whether anything similar here.

A: I haven't encountered anything regarding this, but it's an interesting question.

Q: When you spoke about folklore and how in one performance students were enraged, can you explain or just talk a bit more about how were they using folklore?

A: Enraged students, the person who talks about them makes direct reference to May '68. Discussion of most emblematic figure. Regional societies – people coming from provinces could find peers who had come from same geographical region. Completely inactive and really discovered by students at the time in order to act as mobilizing structures or occupation points. In those regional societies, people would do traditional dances, another part of the strategy, same with the attire. What you saw Lennon wearing is pretty typical of the time.

Q: You said this generation affected others, is it a rupture of conception of national narrative?

A: I don't think it is. If we talk about polytechnics, we should also talk about different strategies of different groupings, trying to find a common platform, but you don't have a radical manifesto that goes against this national narrative. The interesting thing about the polytechnic is that you have the Greek flag; many testimonies of those involved talking about importance of flag. Recites national anthem, revolutionary song, and very specific connotations. Polytechnic very careful about what comes out on radio station doesn't come as a surprise that few anarchists who were inside polytechnic were marginalized.

Q: In a sense we are seeing continuities, within national framework

A: If you look at it, this idea of a national liberation which is very much in vogue at the time, connects with 3<sup>rd</sup>-worldism, pretty much the same everywhere. Powerful references

to Greek revolutionary tradition as well. Somehow the problem here, of course it's a national symbol but of course revolutionary.

Q: I'm really interested in this way you are painting the picture of the methodology – oral histories etc.; talking about this cultural middle ground – seems like you are making a parallel between methodology and what you can say about this period – thick description that doesn't go into exceptionalism, something about this could be very helpful to what is going on right now – when you look at the forms of mimicry, that particular form or of using of dances – what is different about those kinds of forms of mimicry and taking on western ideas and what was happening in other countries in terms of working with America? What are the fine differences of this thick description?

A: it's not all the same, I think this is why the re-appropriational tradition, we see this happening basically in places with authoritarian context and where the boundaries of censorship are played with, you don't have exactly the same hide and seek with censorship in other contexts. You have it in Spain.

Q: I know I feel it, especially in the Catalan situation.

Q: Continuity and rupture – the quest nationally and socially to be separate – progressive national tradition whereas the junta in a continuum of 1940s were collaboration with Germans, etc. Another contest of who is the real Greek in a way, it seems nationalistic but this was the overtone of temporary struggles elsewhere. That's one issue. The second is the question of the political avant gardes. Construction of new left, derives and seeks interest from old left. Not a real rupture there. “Revolutionary communist party” example. We discussed the Italian resistance in the 40s, positioned as choices – how one chooses to participate, what is their motive? I'm not sure if the book emphasizes the motivations fully. A comment on the issue of choice.

A: I am trying to tackle this issue, it's a very difficult issue to try and historicize, because it was a very subjective thing, very difficult to generalize why this organization and not another, let alone the important choice of entering into this or not. Regarding first two connected points, I absolutely agree – there is a weird contest for authenticity – it's all about this, both for Greeks, leftists, resistance, etc.

Q: I would agree authentication is central to recuperation, taking back tradition from oppressive/dominant monopolization of it, but I think its transgressive power, while it lies within realm of utopianism, promises something yet to come.

Q: I'd like to ask about the afterlife, it seems like a lot of the current issues in Greece revolve around legacies or perceptions of either Greek being prone to political upheavals, from interviews how is the afterlife being transformed?

A: Most important thing concerning this, I think afterlives are so interesting, it could be its own book. Polytechnic had been institutionalized early on, what I really believe, despite the fact that this was a polarized society, the polytechnic, despite these fragmentations and who is bearer of true meaning and who is not, I don't think it was a divisive memory – it didn't divide people, I believe we are entering the realm of the memory of the Polytechnic becoming a divisive force now, this is a very recent phenomenon. Very powerful potential of creating two competing memories, I don't think

we had that before, even center right was part of the narrative. Identifying polytechnic as matrix.

Q: I'm looking at the picture and message brings to mind a tornado, strong anti-Americanism embedded in polytechnic, Greek politics, presented as revolt, I think you complicate enough that relationship with US on one side, I was wondering how in your research you came across situations where that relationship to the US was not so clear cut – thinking about 72-74, foundation funding of individuals, very public discussion taking place as to what position of the left should be these kinds of acts that are not explicitly imperialistic, no explicit agenda.

A: Intensity in which they talk about this now really depends on choices they made sometimes, but many faced this kind of dilemma. I remember one specifically has written a lot about this, feels very strongly about it. Really made another think a lot, in the beginning they were close to accepting it, but then they realized they couldn't, he kind of renders this, not 100% black and white thing. In general, this poses a very interesting question regarding cultural institutions in general, but seems to me to be an internal discussion for a while before it reached public. Interesting to contrast with other cultural foundations. Condoning events that were critical of the regime. IN general, what cultural foundations did is a very interesting question, but I admit I haven't done a ton on it.

Q: Before you talked about some of the questions about semantics, my point is more architectural, in the beginning of your presentation you talked about importance of memory, psychology of people in these moments – discusses a Faces of Time conference – reflecting back on cultural roots taking place in 20<sup>th</sup> century, lot of controversy why we were doing this, raising awareness about cultural roots, our intention was to have people realize rational architects that came to Greece during this period. I see a contrast between bringing in international points and promoting nationalism. My final question is if your book speaks about contemporary memory of this period and how the placement of architectures can affect the behavior of people?

A: I'm not an expert in architecture, but I don't believe there was a coherent architectural plan put forward, all I was saying before is we had the continuation of trends that had already started, I cannot think of architectural buildings encompassing the fascist ideals in Greece as we did elsewhere. I don't think aesthetically this really departed from what happened before, if you want to see aesthetics of regime, have to look at more than its symbol, look at its celebrations – the feasts of military virtue, things like this, I don't believe that we have clear cut residues of a coherent architectural plan.

Q: Professor at University of Athens was talking about internal spaces of University and this kind of concept, but I don't know.

A: probably have to be critical of modernism in general. As for the eclectic part, authoritarian regimes can be extremely eclectic in terms of their influences. We can talk about fascism in architecture. There is a lot of this. If residues of this kind should be eliminated or not, I'm not sure. I think Spain is a very interesting case, Italy as well.

Q: Albania is where fascist movement was taken by communists after.