

University Seminar #703: Modern Greek Studies  
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Speaker: Ipek Celik  
Topic: Papadiamantis and Dimitriou: Imagining Greece from Below

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#### Summary of Presentation:

Celik's paper brought together the works of Alexandros Papadiamantis and Sotiris Dimitriou to explore the ways in which these two authors deal with the commodification of bodies—and particularly, in Papadiamantis, of female bodies. Celik opened with a discussion of Papadiamantis's novel *The Murderess*, in which the main character kills five infant girls, including her own granddaughter. In Celik's view, Papadiamantis was aware of the objectification of women taking place in the larger Greek cultural sphere at the time—both in terms of dowry and marriage practices, and in terms of the nationalist co-opting of the “cult of motherhood... as a means to preserve and transmit the ethnic identity within and beyond Greece”—and, while not overturning or even overtly criticizing these trends, did in his novel reflect “how increasing commodification of marriage and reproduction obscure, augment and alter constructions of personhood and the social worth of female bodies.” Celik explored other critics' treatment of Papadiamantis's novel and argued that many of these interpretations fail to place the actions of the main character within the context of the changing economic realities of the Greece of the time, which was deeply affected by the introduction of capitalist elements into traditional institutions such as marriage. Hadoula's murders, Celik argued, “are an attempt to break with the commercial relations of reproduction by eliminating the dowry problem for the poor and also cutting of her own reproductive vein by killing of her granddaughter.” These interrelationships between money, family, production, consumption and violence are also themes that Celik located in earlier short stories by Papadiamantis, such as “Fortune from America” and “The Gleaner.” Celik showed how this happens in specific passages of *The Murderess*, through the dissolution, fragmentation, and objectification of the body, particularly the female body.

Celik then explored the ways in which Sotiris Dimitriou, nearly a century later, “portrays the post-Cold War neo-liberal Greece not as promise of democracy and prosperity for migrants but as a land of many objectified bodies in the borders of sanity, ethnicity, and sexuality,” in stories whose cast of characters include prostitutes, pimps, mad men and women, and incestuous family members. Her argument here is that Dimitriou, like Papadiamantis, depicts the commodification of bodies—and in a way that is particular to his own historical moment. Dimitriou, born and raised in Epiros, near the border with Albania, worked as a superintendent in the Athens City Council's Department of Refuse Collection, and has seen firsthand the way that globalization has effected the mapping of geographical mobility onto human bodies. Celik looked specifically at Dimitriou's 1993 novel *May Your Name Be Blessed*, which “traces the displacements between Greece and Albania from Second

World War through the collapse of Communism, seen through the eyes of two generations, three narrators, and three routes of migration: from rural Greece to urban Albania and back, forced migration of Greek minorities from southern to northern rural Albania, and migration from rural Albania to Athens.” The novel is, Celik argues, “a book about labor regimes, migration and various ways bodies are commodified and dehumanized.”

Part of Celik’s talk also tried to place these novels in the context both of realism and of naturalism—which, as Rachel Bowlby suggests, stands at the crossroads of commerce and culture. Celik concluded her talk with the suggestion that both Papadiamantis and Dimitriou inquire into “the destructive crossroads of culture and commerce,” a century apart, and in different social and historical conditions.

Summary of Discussion:

Q: I want to take you right to the end, where you talked about the category of the naturalist novel, you referred to the novels you’re working on as “naturalist machines.” I was wondering if you could articulate for us how you’re trying to work through the issue of naturalism with regard to these works.

A: Bringing emphasis on the economic interpretation of the novel is in a way a naturalist reading, and I haven’t seen “The Murderess” approached in that way before. I spend more time on the Papadiamantis text because Dimitriou has already been described as a naturalist writer, though not in the sense of Zola’s work, looking at these economic aspects of texts. So my intervention is basically looking at these writings from the perspective of economy and money, and showing how you can find that aspect in these two naturalist texts.

Q: But Dimitriou is contemporary, while Papadiamantis is of a different era. So are you arguing that they’re formally the same, the work of these two writers? Are you drawing a formal analogy between the two? I don’t have access to the Greek, and haven’t read these writers, so it would be good to hear a bit about how they write, the formal aspect.

A: Formally, no, they’re not at all the same, but I’m suggesting there is a link between them, in the way they look at the objectification and commercialization of bodies in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The specifics of the ways they look are different, the approach of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is completely different from that of the 20<sup>th</sup>, because the ways bodies are commodified are completely different. But that’s what makes this an approach that treats these texts as naturalist texts—though I haven’t quite decided whether I should call them realist or naturalist texts, so that is definitely a missing part of the paper here, and you’re right to point it out.

Q: Again, since I haven’t read either writer, it’s a bit hard for me, and there’s also a huge gap of time between the two, more or less a century. I’d be curious to hear from others who have read these writers, whether they’re formally very similar.

Q: I’m intrigued by the question, because I’ve been working a lot on immigration in literature, which is certainly a huge issue in Papadiamantis—so often in his stories he really feels the exodus out of Greece. You’re very right to bring up the issue of the economy, in terms of what’s happening to bodies, the movement of bodies, which is what the entire country is feeling then. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we have a very diff kind of movement,

and the shock is always how a country that experienced the first kind of movement, an outward movement, can be so un-understanding when they're on the receiving side of this kind of immigration. I'm interested in the way you're bringing up the parallel structure of how money is working in these texts, but I think it might be good to see how different they are, too. With Papadiamantis's understanding of how exchange works, there's something so much more shocking, or perhaps shocked, from his perspective, about how commodification is working, than we see with Dimitriou, where this has become sort of run of the mill. I think you brought us to the point where we saw an interesting similarity, but you might want to bring in the differences, too.

Q: Just to rephrase my question again, I was essentially asking whether you might be pushing naturalism to avoid being a Marxist. But you're also thinking about the temporality of the market, the historical temporalities are different with regard to these two writers.

Q: If we compare Zola with Papadiamantis, Zola provides the entire social fabric and puts the characters within it, but Papadiamantis doesn't do that, the social aspect is missing. For instance, in most of the Athenian stories he wrote, he tells us the character is going from one site to the other, but doesn't follow him as he travels, whereas Zola would have every step in there.

Q: At one point you brought up the story "Fortune from America," which would bear out everything you've been saying about these other two works: the migrant who goes abroad and doesn't return until we see him come back to Greece as a consumptive body. In America he works in a silver mine, and the story is very much about competing economies. So in some ways these two stories feed into one another, because the exchange occurs when he returns, and the money gained from a foreign capitalist system is brought home to save a dowry system that's petering out. But the story also analyzes the values that get deranged in the process. It might even work better for some of your points. Characteristically in Papadiamantis and other works from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you have this folkloric model where the person who leaves is described in terms of the dead. This is true of Vizyenos, too, the story of the tailor who returns from Constantinople, and is already dead.

Q: Which also ties into the folk song tradition, if you go away you're dead, even if it's just to the next village over.

A: That's a very valid question, I should put more emphasis on what the difference is between these two approaches, and work on that comparison further, what the difference would be from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because they're writing in very different ways, and the descriptions are very different. As for the comparison of Papadiamantis and Zola, there's also the fact that Papadiamantis is for the most part writing about Skiathos from Athens, not observing in the very direct way that Zola did.

Q: How does Dimitriou deal with the concept of language? When Papadiamantis was writing, the language question was a big problem, so can you tell us how Dimitriou is dealing with it, or whether he is, in terms of this kind of naturalism?

A: Dimitriou's writing is extremely difficult to read, he's using all these dialects, Epirot dialects, words from the region, and also inserting some Albanian and Vlach, so there's a

similar usage of a multiplicity of languages, as there is in Papadiamantis with *katharevousa* and *demotiki*. We could say that Dimitriou does combine the languages of the region in a similar way, confusing the notion of a pure Greek.

Q: But Papadiamantis took a language that was flat on its back and gave it life. It's coming alive. He took the *katharevousa* and breathed life into it. In a way that makes him a realist, because he dealt with a problem the Greeks were dealing with at the time. But Dimitriou doesn't seem to be doing that.

A: A lot of people comment on Papadiamantis's use of language, they say there's a continuity from the past to the present in his use of language. He's certainly using ancient as well as Byzantine Greek, but maybe he's also referring to a fracture in the society at the time, referring to all of these debates. Because essentially there are two ways of interpreting that "multilingual" aspect of his work: as continuity or as fracture.

Q: Can I use an analogy from architecture here? There is the architect who wants to design buildings but doesn't want them to be used, whereas other architects actually want the designs to be used in space. I am convinced that Papadiamantis actually wanted to come up with a way of employing language in a way that could be used more broadly. There's also the question of upward mobility: *katharevousa* is a language created by the upper class, and poor people don't have access to it. In that sense Papadiamantis dealt with a problem that was existing, and he was indirectly concerned with the social problems. But then often he's accused of not dealing with the problems of his time.

A: Yes, that's what I'm saying, more or less. As for Dimitriou, I'm not suggesting that he's finding a solution, but he too is referring to some sort of a fracture, with the coming of immigrants, especially from the Balkans, and with this mingling of languages.

Q: I don't want to pull you too far away from what we're talking about, but I'm wondering if there might not be another subtext to your paper here that could be worth bringing to the surface. The immediate choice for the topic you're working with would have been Papadiamantis's short stories that are explicitly about immigration, whereas I see you making another move which I find very interesting, saying that we really have to think about in this story is reproduction and motherhood. You chose a story that wouldn't be the obvious one in terms of migrant subjectivity. And that makes me want to ask a question of Dimitriou: where is the feminine in his work? The question of how women are used is one that's so important to texts about migration, but when you pose Dimitriou's novel against the Papadiamantis, suddenly the whole feminine element seems extraordinarily lacking. Is this because you're following up on something that's come earlier in the dissertation? How do you treat this role of women and the discourse of reproduction and so on? That's how you started, at the beginning of the paper, but where are you going with this feminist question or intervention? Because it didn't come out with the Dimitriou.

A: I was mainly interested in the question or element of violence, the murder, the blood, it's the effect of the influence of objectification and commodification that leads to such a bloody ending, and that's the thing that interests me in Dimitriou, though not necessarily in that particularly story. I want to bring them together basically for the effect they have on the

reader, the element of violence, what happens to bodies, how they end up, how this dehumanization of the body turns into some kind of explosive moment.

Q: You're very concerned with the issue of the cancelled subject; these women are all dead bodies at home before they start. In a sense the main character in "The Murderess" is doing to the girls what the father could do by keeping them at home on the shelf—so she's disrupting that prerogative of the father. In terms of the national question, though, it seems like this author is seen as an interesting prefiguration of that which is represented in a more fragmented but perhaps more constrained way in Dimitriou.

A: I should also admit that earlier I was comparing this story with Dimitriou's short stories, all of which end with some kind of violence. The switch to the novel was something that happened later.

Q: I haven't heard about the twinning of the two authors since the early stages of the dissertation process, since the proposal, in which you began with the issue of language. You talked about how Papadiamantis deals with an artificial language, the purist language which is created to reflect the relationship of the classical to the modern language. He takes that purist language and stylizes it, draws it out with a number of registers, going back to classical, the Byzantine, using a softer form of purism, and sometimes writing with colloquialisms to the point where students can read his purism whereas they can't read others. But he's also using dialect, Skiathos dialect. At the level of language he's involved in a kind of migration from the regions which are being incorporated into Greece, and at the same time resisting the national narrative; he takes the language of the idealized compromise of the nation and in some way conveys these regions in a relationship in which they're both integrating and resisting that very integration. In the proposal I saw Ipek working with that in terms of Dimitriou's dialect. He's dealing with migration and the underbelly of Greek society, and showing the relationship between emigration and immigration; he shows returned emigrants behaving very badly to new immigrants. In that sense, he's doing economic work on the level of the language, as in *Tous ta leia o theos*, which is all about a Greek *gastarbeiter* who returns to his village and has people of all different idioms working on building his house. It's again like the dowry stories, a Greek who has gone abroad and is coming back, trying to enter into the economy, and there's a critique of the economy that's taking place. So there's a parallel in the way Dimitriou is talking about the resistance that's taking place in the language, again brought together with the integration into a new economy. It's my feeling that he does so in a much more unpredictable way than Papadiamantis did. Dimitriou is so much harder to pin down.

Q: But Papadiamantis is working from a different angle, he wanted to create a language for the people.

Q: But "the people" is a very loaded term, and Dimitriou is clearly creating a language for a certain kind of alienated populace.

Q: And in pairing them, it seems like the ways these texts are working with language is very productive. Ipek is bringing out the violence of diglossia, and that's a very productive part of Greek literature that Dimitriou is drawing on. He's telling us that Galbanian, as it were, is a

productive kind of work to be happening on language. Although in your paper you didn't actually talk about the language at all, so it's interesting that that's how it started.

Q: We might think here also about Shane Meadows, who did the film *This is England*, which has been called a new naturalism in England. This reminds me of Dimitriou up to a point, in his assault on a national core.

Q: I'm compelled by your framing of these writers, though I'm not familiar with them. I was wondering if one way to mediate the great temporal distance between these two moments—though the historical conjunctures do seem to work—would be to worry the definitions a little bit. Some people have used the term neo-naturalism to describe a certain kind of movement, especially in cinema, but the same kind of theorization doesn't seem to have been done for literature. There is a body of theory and criticism, but mostly in film, and in an Italian postwar context. There's a lot of interest in trying to grapple with this concept. I've seen neo-naturalism cropping up, but there's this slipperiness, temporally speaking. It might be used in conjunction with images of this gritty underlife, as with the director Shane Meadows who was just mentioned, who is seen as inheriting the British social realist cinema. There is a critic writing about U.S. novelists who writes about neo-naturalism, but he's actually talking about novels written in the 1930s. One thing that strikes me as potentially different and interesting is the question of agency. Going back to Zola, that version of naturalism is associated with the crushing of character by environment—like Hardy, too, who treats a similar kind of destructive crossroads of culture and commerce. In recent neo-naturalist representations there is a violent, fragmented agency, even if it's abject or negating. But this question of agency might be key to the works you discuss, too.

Q: When you talked about naturalism, I did think about those writers who were dealing with social aspects, too, I'm interested by the connection between naturalism and realism. A Greek novel that comes to my mind is Taktsis, *The Third Wedding Wreath*. Is that realism?

Q: But there's this issue of when the social violence is written on the body—so it doesn't really matter if it's naturalism or realism or neo-naturalism, as long as you can make the definition work.

A: Yes, I have to come up with my own definition because there's no contemporary theorization of realism. I'm trying to bring film and literature together, because they exchange techniques of representation, literature certainly becomes more visual. There has to be more theorization of these things. I tried looking at Raymond Williams, he seems to be the only person who's trying to look at the way realism is going.

Q: I don't think you need to get into the nomenclature, that's a distraction from what you're doing with this contrapuntal reading of these stories. I was originally thinking that naturalism was a recourse for you, a way to avoid saying Marxist or materialist, to talk in an aesthetic way about a politics of reading..

Q: When you present that slate of issues, it directly refers to the chapter where you worked with *Hostage*, the film by Giannaris.

Q: It's all about the subjectivity of the kidnapper, and how that can come out through camera angles—which again brings up the whole question of agency, which is presumably not available in a naturalist narrative.

A: But I'm trying to say it's different from a naturalist narrative in that sense, because the characters are trying to get out of that.

Q: But there also seems to be an absence of a social project here, or the destruction of a social project, particularly in "The Murderess."

Q: I was making various connections while you were giving your talk, and it seems like one immediate point of reference for Papadiamantis in terms of the commodification of bodies and dowries would be Theotokis, *Timi kai to brima*, which deals with very similar questions, since the question of modernity and urbanization comes in. The other more intriguing combination I was thinking of Elfriede Jelinek, these explosions of violence: at the end of her books there are these explosions of violence, and all these questions of agency, the commodification of bodies, gender relations, and so on, would make her an interesting link. It also ties in with the Michael Haneke and some of his earlier German period stuff. In terms of Gerinek there is also the question of whether this is realist, hyperrealist and so on. So there are numerous questions there that are linked to your project as I understand it.

Q: You might also look at some of those people who are working on multilingualism and money, Walter Benn Michaels and Mark Shell, who writes about multilingualism and money as a structure in narrative.

Q: I wanted to return to an earlier point that was made about gender. I think the heart of the paper was in your description of the protagonist in "The Murderess," and the way she feels objectified. What came out was a caring for this character which became almost the tragic height of the paper. I wonder if the larger point might be that these two writers are both focusing on the major social problems of their day, in which case Papadiamantis would be saying that the major social problem is the objectification of women. For Dimitriou, the problem might be different.

A: I do want to go back to what Raymond Williams said about realism being about bringing in characters who hadn't been given a voice. In that sense, the objectification of women in Papadiamantis is parallel to the objectification of immigrants in Dimitriou's day.

Q: I agree with your analysis of the talk: it's the reading of Papadiamantis that stays, and the Dimitriou seems a bit less worked out, as if the affect of it isn't as important for you, or as if it's not as intellectually central to what you're working on. In "The Murderess," there's something about that character, and it's certainly a form of agency that she takes in the story. It seems like you haven't figured out quite what to say yet about Dimitriou.

Q: In terms of the jump in the Greek prose tradition, I think there's a relation between Dimitriou and the civil war novel, which is spare, unemotional, staccato, often fragmented but has an ideology that can sweep some of those pieces up. But then after a few decades of this, Dimitriou is taking the body out of that, and leaving the ideology behind. For leftist

reader this is a problem. His most famous story is “Woof, Woof, Dear Lord,” about the torturing of animals. It begins with a very sympathetic description of people living on the underbelly of society, but then we get this very violent torturing of a dog, and the story ends with a plea to God to take pity, but it’s not clear on whom. So the left reads that and finds it very difficult to make sense of, even if there is a continuity in terms of writing style with earlier writers with a political bent.

Q: It does seem like with the last part of *N’akouo kala t’ onoma sou*—with the notion of hearing that name, hearing that foreign name be praised—there’s a kind of emotional recuperation, bringing the social outsider inside, the same way you get the murderess being brought in. The book as a whole might be a bit more detached, but there’s a much more intact emotional moment at the end of that last novella. There might also be something about writing that violence in the name, Hadoula being the caressing, but also the hand that murders.