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Life in the First Person and the Art of Political Storytelling: The Rhetoric of Andreas Papandreou

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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes Andreas Papandreou’s skill as a political “story teller.” For a great majority of the Greek population, it is his narrative, his tale of modern Greece, the essay argues, that has become the accepted one. It was his narrative that helped bring and keep him in power for eleven years. One of the building blocks was an innate talent to draw conclusions and persuade the audience using events from his own personal experience – life in the first person. Another element was his academic background and a natural linguistic fluency. The analysis emphasizes his rhetorical devices and draws from the tropes of literature (metaphor, simile, suspense) to complete the standard portrait usually provided by political scientists and historians.

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1. Introduction

Prime minister of Greece for most of the 1980s, my father, Andreas Papandreou was by all accounts, allies and enemies, a formidable politician. But he was also an economist, a scholar, a political tactician, an enthusiast of jazz and rembetiko music, a fan of Greek *tavernas* but also five star restaurants, intensely social, but also someone who could not do without philosophical enquiry, who was deeply moved when a fellow human suffered from serious illness. He was also filled with insecurities, twice imprisoned for political activism. He had three marriages and five children from two different wives, a citizen of Greece, the United States and, for a short time, of Norway and Canada, a harsh critic of capitalism, a social democrat with revolutionary tendencies, skilled in using words, and a politician who “shifted entirely the terms upon which the Greek political system operated.”¹

He believed in a Greece that belonged neither to the Warsaw Pact nor to NATO, a country that would follow its own “third” path. His political base consisted mainly of the “small-scale entrepreneur,” the “underprivileged,” the farmer and the student, all those who had little to no access to power. Polymath, polyglot, gracious but overpowering

¹ Konstantine Tsoukalas, *Ana-gnoseis*, Kastantiotis Publications, 2002, pp. 184-85, chapter on Andreas Papandreou.

when he wanted to be, beloved and hated, he wrote an endless stream of articles, fifteen books, and made thousands of speeches, sometimes delivering as many as ten speeches a day in full campaign mode. The crowds he drew in the major cities have been recorded as the largest in modern Greek history.

He officially entered Greek politics in February 1964, where he ran as a candidate for Parliament for the party of which his father was the leader. Three years later he was in solitary isolation in Athens' Averoff prison. The prison was not entirely unfamiliar to him, since he had visited it once before in 1923, when he was only four years old, to visit his father during one of the latter's numerous banishments and exiles.²

Though they denied him pen and paper, what the prison authorities could not deny him was the ability to reflect on the past and analyze the present. While under close surveillance by the prison guards through a flap in the door, with frequent changes of guard duty in order to preclude the development of "dangerous" personal relationships, with sparse information from his rare visitors — mostly family members— Andreas found time for analysis. Alone with himself, he began to work out his personal account. It was the start of an internal process that would result in his first political book, *Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front*³, but, even more importantly, would lead him to speak about himself in the first person, and give him the tools for original and captivating speeches.

² Cf. *Andreas G. Papandreou, 1919-1986, volume I* ((in Greek), by Katerina Varela, Ellinika Grammata, Ellinika Grammata, 2002, p. 118.

³ *Democracy at Gunpoint: The Greek Front*, Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1971, 360pps, as well as the Greek translation, *Η Δημοκρατία Στο Απόσπασμα*, Εκδόσεις Καρανάση, Athens, 1974. Pagination from Greek version.

2. Politics in the First Person

From the moment that he adopts the first person, he has to acknowledge his own mistakes. He has to answer for his deeds, first of all to himself. In his book he would write about the self-doubt that frequently overcame him during his imprisonment. “What did I do wrong? Could I have done it otherwise? Why is the fate of my country being decided with me closed in a cell? Are my accusers perhaps right? Perhaps I overdid it with my radical and “revolutionary” positions? Did I go too far? Perhaps, as my father asserted on the night of the coup, I myself had put the country on this hazardous course.”

The question cannot be answered at that time with any finality. He was obliged again to answer it publicly three years later, when, as the leader of the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK). Here his answer is better formed. If he were to do anything differently, he says, it would be to organize a grass roots movement, a movement capable of reacting to any efforts to overturn a democratically elected government. Unique in the constitutions of the world, after 1981 he will amend the constitution to allow soldiers to refuse order if such orders violate democracy. (Upon his return to Greece after the fall of the dictatorship, with the ghost of the junta still in the air, he indeed organizes a grass roots movement party, called PASOK.)

How successful was Andreas’ venture into first person narrative? We have some first evidence from his book. In *Democracy at Gunpoint* we witness his reaction to the news that he will be released from prison:

From the moment I heard the news, until my actual release, I suffered more than I ever had. The hours seemed endless. As the hours passed, my doubts grew. I now could see the horrible ugliness of Averoff prison in its fullness, because now I no longer had to hide it from myself. I did not need to control my feelings, to impose on myself the harsh self-discipline required by the long-term imprisonment that I believed awaited me [p. 404].

Leaving Greece with his family in 1968, under difficult circumstances, having seen his father for the last time, he writes:

As the plane took off, the sun was rising in Attica. Sophia [his daughter] fixed her gaze on the blue sky. I love Greece, she said. And then she sank into silence. We too followed suit. [p. 404]

Minimal with enormous force, this chapter closing is literary through and through. A few more examples from his *Democracy at Gunpoint* illustrate his literary skills:

“The nearly beardless 20-year old,” he says of the former king, Constantine, “admonishes the 70-year old political veteran,” that is to say, Andreas’ father (p. 159). About an American official, he writes: “Tall, with an athletic build, Campbell was very affable.” In a few effortless pen-strokes identifying a few specific characteristics, he captures the essence of the person, manifesting the basic touches of a genuine writer. “[The Yugoslavian] General Popovich was short and slight, but with a supernatural energy, so it seemed, with rapid movements and a thin mustache.” And his brief but pointed comments on society: “The Athenian dream was a distorted Western model—the refrigerator, the

automobile, 'la dolce vita'." His talent for "detail", a talent we recognize in great writers, will later appear in his speeches.

Aside from the text of *Democracy at Gunpoint*, the first verbal manifestations of his skill as a story-teller are found in the speeches he gave while in exile, usually on the raucous campuses of American universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He emerged as a popular speaker in caucuses and sit-ins and the wide range of Sixties student activities because he was a harsh critic of a US foreign policy, the same foreign policy that supported the dictators that had put him in jail. As a man who had been jailed, he had solid street cred with the crowds. At the core of these university held speeches (for which he never used a written text) was a political narrative that went something like this:

Beginning with his arrival in the United States in 1940, he would explain how he studied at Harvard and joined the US Navy to fight in the Second World War. Before the war he had supported Wallace and after the war he worked with Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Eugene McCarthy – the "liberal" politicians of America.

In this way, he established his credibility in the eyes of the campus students, avoiding the label of the mindless anti-American, clueless about the nature of the country's strong democratic system. With a rich vocabulary and a Bostonian accent, he bore the markings of the progressive American intellectual. This last element certainly contributed, in the eyes of Americans, to his charm, while at the same time gratifying the Greeks, who saw one of their own prospering in his second homeland.

The snapshot version of his full narrative, which would be the one he developed as he came closer and closer to power, is worth providing here: Greece, a small country, has been buffeted by civil war and dictators. The conservatives have subservient to the needs of America's Cold War policy, which require denying the rights to a large portion of the Greek population. However, with his progressive leadership at the helm, and with the vocal support of the Greeks themselves, the country slowly makes its own distinct voice heard and finally frees itself of all foreign domination. With the people finally in power, the country expands the space for democracy, provides equal rights for all, and joins the ranks of all independent modern nations as an equal member.

In the following extract from an unpublished speech, (AGP Archives) we observe the narrative-in-the-making. His rhetorical technique? He introduces himself into the narrative in a way that gives the audience the satisfaction of sharing in events, of being part of history, of discovering the nexus of relationships between Greece and the USA, just as he himself had:

So when I was in Greece, (*before the coup d'état*) the Americans told me: "Why don't you do the right thing? The country in fact must seek to modernize, and you, the men of the Center, are the bearers of this modernizing spirit. There should be changes. But, be careful, take care not to disturb the system of power in Greece, the system that governs Greece—which is to say, the Greek establishment that is maintained by foreign services. Don't ever raise the question as to who governs Greece, the King or the people. Don't ever raise the question whether the army

belongs to the nation or to the Americans. [AGP Archives, speech given to members of PAK, Toronto, July 25, 1973]

Thus in simple, straightforward language, he recounts the relations of Greece and the U.S. as he perceived them. The method is theatrical, dramatizing the case as an invented dialogue between the United States and Greece.

His talent for presenting ideas to the public developed out of his years as an American professor of economics. The academic however does not speak about himself as part of the material he is teaching. Still, the functions of teaching and writing scholarly articles had taught him to put his ideas in logical order, to follow a linear narrative, to obey the rules of evidence and “structure,” to move from point to point in logical sequence, and, finally, to reach a compelling conclusion.

His academic experience is certainly the reason that frequently, after following a speech in Parliament, both friends and enemies would portray it as “academic.” “Andreas again was our teacher,” they would say, meaning that he had made a presentation with a logical structure, a comprehensive totality. He had, in a certain way, told a “story.” Combined with this ability to organize his thoughts were his recent experiences in Greece’s political life, where he had the opportunity, for the first time, to try his hand at political rhetoric. The two together—that is, structured thought and political experience—synthesized by an innate and underexploited literary talent, created something unexpected: a narrative of modern Greece that, in a large part, was a compelling “read.”

The successful use of slogans that he invented over his political career – what we now call sound bites – was a natural instinct for him and useful in instantly shaping public opinion. For example, in 1983, with public attitudes broadly favorable to labor actions, Andreas reversed public support for a pilot strike at Olympic Airlines by referring to the pilots’ high wages as “penthouse salaries.” Thus, in a single night, he managed to deflate their cause, depriving them of broad public support for their demands. He called the pensions of the Right “starvation pensions” and on the eve of coming to power in 1981, he signed a “contract with the people.” Again the 1981 victory was an “appointment with history,” and would serve to right the wrongs for the underprivileged and disempowered. As for the right, he has been endlessly quoted as saying: “The people do not forget what it means to be governed by the Right,” a phrase which rhymes in modern Greek and often shouted loudly by crowds at PASOK speeches. (Ο λαός δεν ξεχνά τι σημαίνει η δεξιά).⁴

His use of similes and metaphors to capture the political pulse was not the only thing that gave his narrative unusual force. Also contributing to its impact was something less palpable—something that functioned unconsciously, almost indefinably, giving his spoken word a disarming persuasiveness. When he spoke, he made it seem as if he himself were hearing his story for the first time. We discover the truth about Greece at the same moment he himself “discovers” it. This lent his speeches a powerful freshness.

⁴ The phrase/slogan was recently re-quoted by an important member of the SYRIZA party. Lafazanis to attack the governing party, upon revelations of secret discussions between the governing party and key members of the Nazi Golden Dawn, party. April, 2014, Greek Parliament.

For example, one does not know at the outset of his speeches just who the good guys and who the bad guys are. Of course he knows. But it sounds as if he has not yet made up his mind. We learn who is who as each character's actions unfold before our eyes, giving the narrative a distinctive sharpness and suspense.

In one of his discussions during the years of exile (1968-1974) he recounts a conversation, not many months before the coup, with the American ambassador in Athens. This tale is used to support his conviction that the United States had put the colonels in power. The setting was a lunch-meeting he and his father had with the US Ambassador, Philips Talbot. Here is Andreas' account of their exchange.

"I am very worried about developments in Greece... Because," [Talbot] said, "there is a slogan which you have started, and it has caught on and spread across Greece and I'd like you to explain it to me. The slogan which you are constantly shouting is 'Greece belongs to the Greeks.' What does that mean? Why do you make that statement?"

And we said, "Well, doesn't it belong to the Greeks, shouldn't it?"

"No", Talbot said, "I am not saying it shouldn't. But the way in which you say it suggests that you believe that it doesn't belong to the Greeks, that it belongs to us."

And then we said: "But that is what we believe, that it belongs to you and it shouldn't."

“But,” he said, “Mr. Andreas Papandreou, since 1962, we have ceased to have any influence in Greece, we have no influence.” (AGP Archives, Toronto, July 25, 1973)

In speaking to the representative of the great trans-Atlantic superpower, Andreas subtly mocks the ambassador. He uses the plural “we said,” to include the audience who presumably would give the same answer as their political leader. This produces deep satisfaction in his politicized audience. But the simplicity of expression and use the dialogue is no mere rhetorical trick. They reflect his remarkable ability to elucidate complex political situations in a straightforward manner, using live examples. And of course it provides one of the building blocks for the modern narrative of the conservatives’ dependence on American foreign policy.

Frequently in his speeches of that period (1968-1974), he engages in historical retrospective, evoking individual freedoms and other Enlightenment values. He analyzes the political economy and the rivalry of the two superpowers and the role played by dictatorships in suppressing independent peoples. He discusses struggles in the Third World for national independence, criticizes the members of the Soviet bloc as illiberal regimes that repress their own peoples.

For Andreas, the crushing of the 1968 “Prague Spring”, when Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia, was an event parallel to what had happened in Greece. Both reflected the refusal of the superpowers to allow small, peripheral countries to emerge from their satellite status and become independent nations. To legitimize this view historically, he cites Greece’s struggles against Ottoman Empire or the more recent

German occupation. His choice of the word “liberation” for the name of his anti-junta organization—the Panhellenic Liberation Movement (PAK)—resonated with Greeks who had been nurtured on stories of the 1821 War of Independence and the WWII Occupation.

At a dinner-event that took place in July 1971 for members of PAK Toronto—largely working class Greek immigrants—he analyzed the Greek Right’s flawed policies for dealing with the demands of the Great Powers. He describes Greece’s geo-political position as “extremely useful” to the USA in its conflicts with the Soviet Union over the Middle East, leading the US to support a brutal military dictatorship that it regarded as necessary to secure Greece’s militarily useful space for its “expansive autocracy.” The geo-political references to Algeria, Libya and Malta, are only part of his analytical, academic interpretation of events, but also raise the morale of the listeners, because it shows that Greece is not alone in the struggle—that conflict with the great powers—as in the cases of Algeria, Libya and Malta—can lead to independence.

The same speech also raises the rhetorical question as to why the United States finds the traditional Greek Right to be unsatisfactory, why the US was unable to find a more palatable way of controlling Greece and was forced to impose the junta:

It was enormously difficult for us to convince a whole range of Greeks—those playing some kind of a leadership role, either in resistance or political movements or in the political parties—who believed that, at some point, America would understand its error, would realize that you don’t have to have the Greek people in bondage in order to serve your

military and economic interests. (AGP Archives, Discussion with members of PAK, Toronto, July 1971, author's translation)

Andreas then assumes the role of the innocent right-winger puzzling over his failure to please Big Brother:

Finally, from Paris, the exiled leader of the right (Karamanlis) was justified in his complaints to the Americans:

“Where did I fail you? Didn't I do my job well? Didn't I carry out the orders you gave me? How was I at fault?”

“Did we ever place in doubt your sovereign rights, America? Did we tell you to take your bases and get out? Did we say that we didn't want your dollars? That we didn't want your investments? On the contrary, we became a welcome mat. Why don't you want us? How have we failed? [AGP Archives, Toronto, July 1971)

Following these rhetorical questions comes the “redemption” for the listener, who is prepared for the answer that he, in fact, already knows:

And the answer from the Americans—and we know what it is—is very simple: We know you are prepared to serve us. We believe it absolutely. But that is not enough, because you are no longer in command of the Greek people, something you had managed for some ten or twelve years. Who is in charge of the Greek people now? Do you control them, Mr. Karamanlis? Do you, Mr. Kanellopoulos? Because I, as America, would very much prefer to have the semblance of democracy—to have elections, parliaments, rallies, demonstrations—and at the same time

maintain respect for our fleet, our air force and our military operations.
(AGP Archives, Toronto, July 1971)

He speaks with caustic humor. The Right did everything it could to please the United States, but even then the United States was not happy. The Right could not “command” the Greek people. Andreas continues his narrative from the perspective of the American:

Something has happened here. This people have woken up. We (note: *meaning we the Americans*) defeated the communist led National Liberation Front with a civil war, and the Karamanlis period followed. We had said that maybe things would settle down. Then along came the first “Unyielding Struggle” (*led by Andrea’s father*) and we said, let’s see if we can manage things. Then came the second “Unyielding Struggle.” (*led this time by Andreas with his father*) Well, things didn’t work out. These people cannot be held back except with the heavy presence of arms... There is no other way. (AGP Archives, Toronto, July 1971)

We see here how he sets up the story — sets up, that is, his version of contemporary history, a version that begins with the National Liberation Front fighting the German Occupation, and then moves directly to the Center Union and to his father’s First and Second Unyielding Fights of the early 1960s. He implies that, in the current phase, the torch has been passed on from the civil war guerrillas, to his grandfather, and now to his very own resistance movement, with Andreas himself the leader of such

an organization, an organization that will soon, so the story goes, bring the disenfranchised Greeks to power.⁵

The conclusion of his analysis is that the people, on their own, have rejected the Right:

The Greek people have rendered the [traditional] political leadership useless because they reject being played the fool. The Greek people are not about to offer “solutions,” except under the gun, so to speak. Left free, they would surely direct the country just as they wanted. This maturity has arrived in Greece. American services realize this even more than our own. And for this reason, the United States has identified itself with the junta, with Papadopoulos, with military rule in Greece. [PAK Toronto, July 1971, AGP archives.]

Today, perhaps, this analysis does not seem so original, mainly because this narrative has become the central narrative of modern Greece. It is an analysis embraced by a large segment of the Center-Left and is embraced by most people today as the authentic narrative of the country’s political history. While some of Andrea’s ideas have been articulated by others, Greece’s historical narrative has never been presented so comprehensively, free of the traditional analyses that dictate the positions of the Center, the Right or the traditional Left.

But don’t all politicians create a political narrative? That is true. An important facet in a politician’s life is the use of stories to explain the world in which they move. These stories are the basis for their “image”— the myth attached to them, marking their personal passage.

⁵ «Ο λαός στην εξουσία» was one of PASOK’s powerful slogans, meaning literally «People in Power.» This slogan implied that until the coming of PASOK, the people were in fact, not in power.

The stories that politicians offer pertain to their political positions. Sometimes they persuade, sometimes they fail to wake even a mouse. Successful leaders are those who not only shape events, but also shape the interpretation of those events. Such leaders leave their stamp on the society. Politicians who are leaders do not accept the given narrative. They propose a new one, one that - if they themselves are a truly great public figure - make them part of the commonly-shared and accepted history. To a large degree, Andreas Papandreou convinced people of the need for change, an analysis which differed from that of the Left, Center, or Right.

And that is why he finally earned massive support from the Left, Center, and Right. People of differing backgrounds and ideologies felt part of a large progressive patriotic movement, one that wished to change Greece. That is perhaps why today, with the disintegration of PASOK, its supporters have spun away helter-skelter into the original components parts: some support the SYRIZA party, some the communist, some the right, and some the extreme right Nazi party Golden Dawn. Today's implosion of PASOK has led to an explosion of the extremes. The progressive center vanished, bloating the remaining parties in unexpected ways.

Calling someone a "patriot" before Andreas appropriated and re-shaped that word meant you belonged to the right. The communists were considered traitors and the right claimed to be the "true" patriots of the country.

The new boy on the block, Andreas, claimed you could be a patriot *without* being a rightist-nationalist. He appropriated that term and made

it possible for all Greeks to call themselves “patriots” without automatically implying that they belonged to certain political party. In this way he took the wind out the right-wing sails. But he also proposed social policies that resembled those dreamed of by the partisans fighting the Germans. Thus a large number of left-wingers came over to his side. Progressive social policies plus a “Greece first” foreign policy succeeded in uniting disparate people under one large political party.

3. ‘Greece belongs to the Greeks’

Finally, let’s look at another example of the personal style that characterizes him in that period, a style characteristic of his talks at dinner-meetings. At a dinner-meeting with the Greeks of Germany in Aachen in June of 1972, he explained the impact of his signature slogan: “Greece belongs to the Greeks.” Note once more that he begins with specifics in order to arrive at a broader conclusion regarding Greek national consciousness, conveying the sense of sharing something of his own experience:

From 1965-67, I toured most of Greece and spoke in countless villages—this I think you know. I spoke on average of fifteen times every weekend. Thus I got to know a large cross-section of farmers, mainly, but also workers. You will remember the slogans that grew out of the second Unyielding Fight—some already existed from the first. But “Greece Belongs to the Greeks” came out of the second.

Allow me to say something, and trust my words. I spoke to them then as Minister of [Economic] Coordination. I was knowledgeable about economic issues and spoke to them about tomatoes and ochra and such

like. But let me note the following: All hell broke loose, irrespective of age and city, when I stated “Greece belongs to the Greeks.” Such a response to this simple slogan was something I had not expected.

This is something that has been forgotten and misunderstood. But I have not forgotten... Because when Greeks are moved to the point of tears around the theme “Greece belongs to the Greeks”, it is because it awakens something within them that goes back to at least a century, if not five centuries, it reminds the Greek of centuries of occupation, slavery and struggle. This slogan symbolized the tomatoes and the oranges and the house in rubble, the child who is unable to attend university and goes abroad to work—everything, the whole system of power, of security files, every aspect of oppression. All of that was condensed in this slogan. This became the national consciousness. (AGP Archives, Aachen, Germany, June 1972)

Here we see the “nationalistic” element of his narration, the one that united left and right in a Greece first ideology. Who could really disagree with the notion that Greece belongs to the Greeks? However let’s also pause to look at his particular story-telling technique: The connection he makes between political events and his personal experiences generates the overpowering narrative core of his speeches. He connects general theories about Great Powers and Greece’s struggles for independence with tomatoes and oranges, everyday, familiar things.

He has a right to make this personal connection. After all, he is consistent in his stance of militant resistance against the regime. He has been in prison. He is a leader from the prior period, and perhaps of the next one. Thus his effortless storytelling narrative style, which after his

personal take in his book becomes his natural idiom, rounds out his life as a political actor. His words and deeds, the stories he tells, but also the story of his own life, are what, bit by bit, generate the so-called “Andreas” phenomenon.

Allow me to close this first section by emphasizing something else: Apparently he found it difficult to believe that he had actually lived such a life. As a good author or narrator, he knew that you can’t convince an audience with generalities and theories, but only with specific details and instances which you yourself have lived rather than borrowed details that arise from secondary sources such as research and reading. Musing on occasion before a live audience, he was convinced that all that had happened to him after quitting Berkeley to enter Greek politics was not just a “dream.”⁶ He had a need to tell the story of his life, but of Greece at the same time, not because he wanted to prove something, but because, via personal narration, he discovered his own path and thus his own identity, his very self. It was this book he had to write and rewrite in order to comprehend the sequence and sense of his life. Just as most authors cannot avoid drawing on their own life to create their story, so Andreas put his life on display in order to define out his own story.

4. The Narration Comes to Power

Andreas’ time in exile is reminiscent of the initiation and training of the *hero* prior to doing battle. He has gathered up his tools: He has

⁶ The need to narrate, the need to understand the world just as it is (as both Wittgenstein and Marx roughly stated), and finally, the effort to understand his place within it concerned him increasingly. I believe that he asked, “How is that I arrived at the place where I am?” He constructed what I call the “narrative core” of his life, the story he told himself about himself.

perfected his rhetorical arsenal, consolidated his knowledge, acquired experience in organizing a movement (PAK had members on five continents), grappled with the organizational problems and, finally, forged his vision—a vision that began and ended with a deep faith in the people and in democracy.

His return to Greece after the fall of the junta required him to play a new role. Once a driving force in the fight to overturn the dictatorship, he must now pursue power, abandon the leather jacket of the revolutionary leader in favor of the necktie of the leader seeking to gain a parliamentary majority.⁷

His recent organizational experiences would have a direct impact on his strategic moves. “We need to set our sights on creating a massive popular base—the majority of Greeks who are both oppressed and denied the privileges of the economic oligarchy,” he declared in 1975. He would create committees at various levels, he would slowly clarify the ideological stance of the movement and, in line with his strategy, call for the creation of local organizations, which quickly sprung up across the country. “Lots of work!” we would tell the new members in Corfu in August 1975. “We must organize. We need a broad based organization in all facets of the movement. Local organizations. Labor organizations in every facet of public political life.”

He had to create labor organizations, to engage social groupings, to confirm his leadership within the movement, to take care that the party went neither too far left, adopting the practices of the traditional Left,

⁷ The initials PASOK resembled those of PAK, in order to maintain a sense of historical continuity as the single purpose anti-junta organization (PAK) morphed into a mass-based political party (PASOK).

nor to identify with the old-style practices of the politicians of the Center, the voting base from which PASOK derived much of its strength. He won the organizational gamble. By 1977, PASOK had nearly 30,000 active members. Four years later, in 1981, membership would surpass 100,000.

He has a knack for words: He re-defines the out-of-daily-usage word *establishment* (*katestimeno*) to mean just that, he introduces the term *retro-active* (*etero-chronismeno*) for pay hikes, he calls government changes a *re-structuring* (*anadomisi*), a new relationship with Turkey (1987) acquires the status of *no-war*. He draws his metaphors from the WWII liberation movement, and labels his political enemy as a “collaborator” or “national betrayer.” (Compare this briefly to his grandfather’s language, which drew from the country’s Byzantine-Christian inheritance. He once called C. Mitsotakis an Apostate, and it has stuck up until today, 50 years later.)⁸

Along with creating a new organization, he also needed to give the movement a new context, a new story. “Our national independence,” he said in talking to the newly-formed PASOK in 1975, (six years before he would become prime minister with an overwhelming vote in 1981) “will be guaranteed for us by the non-privileged Greeks, the workers, the farmers, the craftsmen, the salaried workers, the small-business

⁸ Caveat: There is not, to my knowledge, any study on the use of metaphor and language of Greek politicians, so these remarks are drawn from my own experience and for that reason subject to welcome revision. Nor has there been much research on the quality of Greek political discourse through the past century. Nor do we even know which are the “great speeches” of Greek politicians, unlike the Penguin book of Great Speeches. In this sphere of interest, the academic community has been greatly lacking. This short essay is an effort to draw out such interest and to provoke further research on the speech-making qualities of modern Greek politicians, a much lambasted and hooted tribe indeed, but whose oral contributions require far greater analysis before being dismissed and/or ignored.

professionals and the youth.” This is the part of the narrative that includes the ones that those in “power” have ignored for decades and left out of the country’s story.

From the start, Andreas identified the ideological framework, the language and the social-economic classes that would give PASOK its first great victory in October 1981. He put aside the traditional divisions between left and right and created a general framework within which the vast majority of Greeks had a place. PASOK was a movement that arose from the “guts of the people.” Effectively, everyone could participate in the great vision of change. In fact, consistent with an open-door approach, citizens were allowed simply to walk into a local party office and sign up, without much ado. Speaking on Greek television on the night of the election victory, he would declare, in keeping with the overall story: “We are a government of all Greeks.”

This, then, is one part of the new narrative—a movement or a party that represents many classes of people, particularly the “wronged” and non-privileged, the ones who have a right to come to power but who have been left out so far. Leaving aside generalities, he addressed the specific problems affecting small craftspeople, pensioner, and farmers—problems like inadequate irrigation, the lack of local government autonomy, the hydra-headed central administration. Yet everything was encompassed in the broader vision of a new Greece—a vision summarized in a manner accessible in the mid-1970s to every voter by PASOK’s key slogans: national independence, popular sovereignty, social liberation and democratic processes.

His emphasis on the group of entrepreneurs he labeled as “mikro-mesaioi,” i.e. small to medium sized enterprises, was not simply a rhetorical trick to garner yet another group of particular voters into the fold of the socialist party. This emphasis was based on a larger theory about the path Greece needed to adopt to survive the pressure from massive global competition. His political economy analysis (bolstered by his Harvard Ph.D. and years of working on the theory of the firm as an economist) led him to believe that multi-nationals and their products (Coca-cola and the like) could only be competed away by strengthening the backbone of local production. It was no accident that one of the first policies the dictators took was to allow the import of Coca-Cola, thus killing off the local soda producer Tam-Tam.

For Andreas, increased local production and economic growth would come mainly from the small to medium sized entrepreneurs, the only class capable of producing quality Greek products that could then compete with massive “globalization.” It is no accident that once in power, the PASOK government created a whole slew of policies to support this particular class of Greeks, with varying degrees of success, but this more economic analysis is outside the scope of this particular essay.

5. Open Assemblies

In the early years in power he developed a unique manner of “governing.” This was to ensure “feedback” from below, through a continual give-and-take with the people. For that reason, he initiated something unique in the annals of modern European history: The open

assembly. This was a forum that approached the limits of direct democracy. How did it work? Simple enough: He would bring out the whole government and its ministers to engage in open discussions in the countryside. Here citizens were allowed to ask the ministers directly whatever they wanted, in full view of the all-powerful prime minister. Andreas would open up with a speech and then the floor was open. This “floor” usually numbered in the thousands. For the first time Greeks were able to address their complaints in full view of the government. Here was where direct dialogue between all his ministers and thousands of people took place, where anybody could raise a hand and ask why the school was not yet built, when the road would come, how the port would be shaped, and then the ministers were obliged to answer on the spot. All this was new.

For example, let’s take a few lines from his speech at the open assembly at the Lasithi plateau in Crete (April 29, 1984), attended by over a thousand people from the countryside.

We have come to hear about where the measures we took succeeded. And we want to hear where the measures we took failed. We want to hear your criticism. Because our path is always a corrective path, based on the hopes, experiences and aspirations of the Greek people.
(Author’s translation)

There follow hour-long discussions and complaints, criticism of unfinished promises, issues to be resolved, things still to do, plus appreciation for the chance to participate without restraint.

In Tripoli, Peloponnesus (March 24th, 1984) after three years as the country's Prime Minister, he is still out in the countryside, making direct contact with the people:

This meeting, this conference, has the following unique aspect: That through the representatives of the towns, villages and region you come into direct contact with the whole government. You place the responsibility on us through a dialogue with the people. This interchange happens without the intermediate chain of the state mechanism, a revolutionary step for the government which opens itself to criticism and proposes solutions.

At a gathering in Thessaloniki a few weeks before, he declared, (March 4, 1984), "we need your strength and optimism in order to make a steady advance. But we also need your criticism and your oversight in order to overcome our weaknesses, to test the validity of our choices, to correct our mistakes. We don't only want to speak, but more to hear. To respond and to persuade. To rebaptize ourselves and to draw inspiration."

The Ministers were then asked to respond to the complaints and to do something about them when they returned to Athens. I don't think this element of Andreas' managerial approach to governing has been studied enough to determine it's effectiveness. What did the ministers do when they got back to their offices? It certainly served as a form of mass participation.

These popular assemblies laid the foundations for a vibrant and demanding local governments. Whoever had the chance to hear the

popular assemblies cannot forget them. I myself attended quite a few back then. One could sense the culmination of a twenty-year journey coming to a head in the countryside of Greece. As many as three thousand people would “dialogue” with the ministers, while Andreas played the role of coordinator and “main man.”

Change was the slogan that he used in his third and final election that brought him to power, a most neutral word that had little ideological connotations. It did not attack America, it did not talk about patriotism, it said simply enough: “Change.” And in 1981, it seemed there were few Greeks who did not want change. This slogan replaced the older and more ideologically loaded triptych: popular sovereignty, national independence, etc.

In the 1985 elections, the slogan was adeptly transformed to “*Forward for completion of the Change,*” implying that many things were still needed to accomplish genuine social change. Rather Orwellian in its admittance of unfinished work, this slogan - which included an implied self-criticism - was seen as accepting the failings of the government. Once again PASOK resoundingly won the 1985 elections. No other party even tried to engage the population in open and direct dialogue. The right-wing party emulated PASOK in starting up local cells all over the country, but it was too little, too late. The conservatives were unable to rid themselves of their instinct to micromanage and overcontrol things on all levels. In fact they feared the people. This half-assed approach quashed the very essence of the experiment - which was to allow local cells to flourish spontaneously. Only PASOK, alone among all Greek

political parties, allowed for and succeeded in creating such a dynamic and spontaneous grass roots movement.

As the years in power grew, the man who entwined his personal story with Greece's political history found it increasingly necessary, however, to limit personal expression. The workload of political activity and the intense pressures it brought distanced him ever more from the free narrative in the first person. Let's not forget that the crucial turning point that led him to speak in the first person happened while he was in solitary confinement. Now he is flooded with the blurry whine of power, the endless speeches, appointments, decisions, conferences, dinners, party activity and the like.

By the late 1980s, it is nearly impossible to locate him within his speeches. Here is the paradox of power: At its center, he is the "prime mover" and will, for many years still, be the master of the political game. But he no longer has the luxury to weave his own personal tale. He can no longer talk in the first person.

Meanwhile, the management of power interested him less and less, perhaps because management meant conflict at a personal level, something which, by nature, he loathed. He told my younger brother Andrikos sometime in 1987, after six years as prime minister, "I no longer trust anybody, not even myself." This is the end of the romance of the struggle. It is the end of any illusions about power.

Power surprised him. Micromanagement of daily routines, firing and hiring, and being in charge of the awful system of patronage, where the ultimate word is always from the man at the top, was against his way of

thinking. The routine tasks of governing, such as the decision as to who would be in the cabinet and who not, never engaged him, because it was not a creative act, and above all, involved no intellectual challenge.

His long time in power (eight years, from 1981 to 1989, and then a Coda of three more, from 1993 to 1996) increasingly wore him down. In practice, social transformation is difficult, but while many successes were achieved—the creation of a health care system, substantive decentralization, the rise in farmers’ living standards, the recognition of the National Resistance, Greece’s maturation in the eyes of the Atlantic Alliance, his steady line in relation to Turkey, the consolidation of democracy and realization of the concept of “people power”— he seemed to find satisfaction in nothing except for foreign policy – dramatic when it came to challenging American policy in the Mediterranean. He also enjoyed the adrenaline of election campaigns, which challenged him by igniting his political survival instincts. He was however unable to speak with that singular interplay of personal and political analysis that he had adopted during the years of exile and which drove his popular open air meetings in the early 1980s.

By that point the narrative had been firmly established and you would be hard pressed to find a Greek who did not borrow elements of the original story that he had helped shape. Sure the emphasis might be different depending on one’s political stripes, but the idea that Greece had slowly grown up and that power had indeed been given to the people was generally accepted.

His free and captivating manner of expression, his unique capability for creative narrative continued to be a dominating feature only at more

intimate gatherings and dinner-meetings, providing a source of personal gratification. Under the burden of daily political activity, it, at some point, abandoned him.

This absence of creative activity perhaps explains his disastrous fall from power, which began with a torrid love affair with a younger woman. The sheer boredom of running a difficult country was replaced by the adrenaline of being with a woman forty years his junior. Humbled in the elections of 1989, losing the crucial vote of women because of his flagrant adultery, indicted by his opponents, he became the leader-scapegoat.

The right-wingers who believed that the government was theirs by birthright had sharpened their knives and went for the jugular, nearly succeeding in putting him in jail. He survived the court case against him and regained power in 1993, only to die of a heart attack under difficult and nightmarish bed - time politics in June 1996.

With the end of his ability to put himself in the center of the narration, to be the hero of his own story, he was no longer able to produce. Nonetheless, he was on the verge of a new narration after his “second coming,” his electoral rebirth in 1993. Following an EU meeting in Cannes in 1995, he went on television and spoke about the new European Directorate. “There is a plan to diminish national sovereignty,” he said at the televised interview in Cannes, “and to reduce the power of democratically elected governments. At this meeting I felt I was a foreigner. I saw the new directorate in action.” This was not the Europe of Mitterrand and Kohl, not the Europe he recalled in his previous tenure as Prime Minister. This was a new Europe, the Europe of two speeds.

Cannes was the starting point. Germany was becoming the new America, already dictating terms to the rest of the EU member-states. But this new narrative – barely drawn - was ignored. Ailing physically, lacking his old persona, he no longer had the stamina to take on yet another superpower, nor to mobilize Greece to protect itself from the new Germano-centric Europe. He did promise to “take the fight into the heart of Europe,” but he never got the chance.⁹ Today, over twenty years later, his words sound prophetic. But back then nobody wanted to listen.

In those final years, at the dinner table among family and friends, he preferred to talk about his years as Chairman of the Berkeley economics department, which after what I call the inevitable *sickness* of power, must have seemed to him like a blissful period of creativity and intellectual discourse, a paradise lost. His deteriorating health and the time required to run the country robbed him of precisely these creative attributes, the ones which kept him alive and kicking back in the 1950s and early 1960s, the elements that had fueled the engine of his life for so many years.

6. Afterword

The sway that his narrative still has over the Greek citizen is clear in the fact that all the parties today have stolen bits and pieces of PASOK rhetoric. Tsipras, the leader of the left, has modeled his words and even his oratory on Andreas – even his enunciation and hand movements are recognizable as an outright copy. Tsipras recently claimed, in a speech in

⁹ See televised speech, Cannes, 27.6.1995, <http://bit.ly/1fW5pkz>.

Constitution Square, (2013) that one the most important events in modern Greek history were George Papandreou the elder's electoral victory in 1963 and PASOK's victory in 1981.

The Golden Dawn Nazi party uses Andreas Papandreou's main slogan from the 1960s: "Greece Belongs to the Greeks!" The so-called Independent Greeks party asks for the "true Greeks of PASOK, the nationalists," to vote for them. Now that everybody is dancing on the old man's grave, we should not be surprised that his tomb is being raided.

Andreas Papandreou's legacy is still hotly debated, especially now, when Greece finally confronts its problems seriously, after years of avoiding them. The man may be physically absent, but his ghost is powerfully present.

References

Besides the books quoted in the body of the text, the analysis is based largely on audio cassette tapes which total about 600 hours in length.

One set of tapes, recorded and organized by Margarita Papandreou, provides a rare and extensive audio documentation during the period of exile, 1968-1974. These are freely available for researchers who visit the Andreas Papandreou Foundation and called the “Margarita Papandreou tape archive.” A sampling can be heard on www.agp.archeio.gr

These 1968-1974 tapes can be separated into six categories:

1. Speeches at dinner-meetings of diaspora Greeks, (Συνεστιάσεις) where Andreas analyzes the Greek situation.
2. Speeches in Greek as head of PAK, to large audiences.
3. Speeches in English on American campuses (1967-1974).
4. Talks at his home with friends, in English and Greek, members of his family and members of PAK, where he narrates his recent experiences about trips from which he has recently returned and analyses the agenda of the day.
5. Proclamations for national holidays, which he recorded on tape to be played on radio stations like the BBC and Deutsche Welle.
6. Rare moments when, by himself, he spoke his thoughts into the tape-recorder, usually late at night in his office.

A second source is the “Marianna Koutsi Tape Archive.” These are three hundred plus cassette tapes that cover the period after the fall of the junta, from 1974 to 1988, which include

1. Discussions at the ministerial councils (υπουργικό συμβούλιο) while he is Prime Minister.
2. Discussions with his Executive Committee, (Εκτελεστικό) the pyramid of the Socialist Party organization, on topics that range from Agricultural reform to Defense policy.
3. Speeches given at the Open Assemblies held all over Greece.
4. Speeches in the countryside.

Marianna Koutsi, the sister of one-time press spokesman and PASOK deputy Dimitris Marouda, donated this rare treasure to the Foundation in 2005. It has yet to be analyzed and categorized.

A third source is oral testimony that has been recorded through the Oral History Program at the Andreas Papandreou Foundation and partially available for academic researchers.

A fourth source are his speeches, available on the PASOK website in written summary form.

A fifth source are the PASOK pamphlets and other PASOK publications, some of which are available at the Andreas Papandreou Foundation.

A sixth and final source are my own experiences.

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