

Manipulating Language: Metaphors in the Political Discourse of Georgios Papadopoulos (1967–1973)

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The manipulation of language to achieve one's aims leads us to the important assertion that through speech politicians do indeed aim at achieving a given outcome from a society. One way they achieve this is by painting a picture through metaphor of that society in the present, as well as in the past and the future. The examination of metaphor in the political discourse of Georgios Papadopoulos and the analysis of it is an attempt to determine how the manipulation of such rhetoric can be effective, if at all, in a given social, historical and political context. The importance for the analysis of Papadopoulos' discourse is further expressed by the Greek historian Meletopoulos:

Ο πολιτικός του λόγος έχει κεντρική σημασία, όσο κεντρική ήταν και η θέση του ίδιου [του Παπαδοπούλου] στο απριλιανό καθεστώς. (Meletopoulos, 1996:160)

His political discourse has a central importance, as central as his role [Papadopoulos'] in the April regime.¹

In defining metaphor as "the application of a name or descriptive term or phrase to an object or action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable",² we gain an understanding of its use in Papadopoulos'

1 All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

2 A great many differing definitions are put forward by various authors on what constitutes a metaphor grammatically and philosophically. Most of them question the constitution of a metaphor as well as referring to the need to base modern-day interpretations of metaphor on the ancient beliefs of Plato and Aristotle in defining

political rhetoric. Metaphors are of significant importance to his discourse in that they create a world of images and emotions according to how he wishes to portray this world and transmit it to his listeners. These metaphors, in turn, become effective in that their interpretation summons up powerful images in the receiver of the metaphor, and in that they are constantly reiterated in the discourse of the dictator. In creating these images through metaphor, Papadopoulos not only constructs his themes by breathing life into them, but also continually complements them by making such images three dimensional and sustaining these images through repetition.

For example, communism³ was used to represent Greece's degradation in society and to justify the coup of 1967 by claiming that the "imminent danger" that Greece faced from this "enemy", would be eliminated by the coming of Papadopoulos' "Revolution".⁴ As a theme, communism is used early on during his dictatorship, but then quickly

this non-literal tool. This paper has no need for such complex philosophical debates. Its need lies only in establishing that the examples given further on are indeed metaphors. For this purpose, the definition given in the *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* suffices in that it offers an amalgamation of most theories on the constitution of metaphor (the literal and non-literal nature of it aside).

For the interested reader, among the books devoted to metaphor which I consulted, the one I found most helpful in defining metaphor throughout the ages is Cooper's (1986). However the most comprehensive *grammatical* outline of metaphor, its definition and its composition, exists in Lakoff & Johnson (1980) though here also there is a great deal of philosophical debate on metaphor and objectivism, subjectivism and experientialism. The outline on the web page created by Ronnie Manalo Ruiz of the Georgia Institute of Technology at the following web site: <http://www.lcc.gatech.edu/gallery/rhetoric/terms/metaphor.html> was also very helpful in defining metaphor in layman's terms.

- 3 It should be noted that Papadopoulos himself, like most fascist leaders, was a passionate anti-communist, and this fact no doubt added to the zealous way in which he spoke of communism and abhorred it and any perceived relation to it, in the early years of the dictatorship.
- 4 In Papadopoulos' political rhetoric, he repeatedly refers to his government as "the Revolution of 21 April 1967" or simply "the Revolution". Therefore the usage of the terminology "the Revolution" in this paper is consistent with Papadopoulos' intent.

replaced by the social and moral demise of the Greek nation. Here we find the repetition of surgical and medical metaphors as an aid to this transition, and the eventual interpretation of Greece as a nation that needs to be “healed”, and a people that needs to be “cleansed” and “made healthy” once more.

The consistency in metaphor is more prominent in platform oratory, which Papadopoulos utilised throughout his rule as dictator. Such planned oratory allows the orator to construct his/her argument or ideology in such a way as to get the maximum desired effect from his/her audience.

Metaphors, in general, are effective⁵ in two main ways. Both of these depend on the ability of the speaker to judge and interpret the need of the audience, and the ability of the audience to understand the interpretation of the speaker. The first aspect conducive to a metaphor’s being effective is the degree to which it is easily interpretable and understandable by the audience. A metaphor that cannot be understood is unsuccessful as a metaphor, since its very definition relies solely on the ability to interpret something literal and transfigure it into something that ordinarily would not have these literal qualities.⁶ Secondly, the extent to which a single metaphor can not only be remembered and recalled but, through consistent use, can be linked to a multitude of ideas immediately, depending on the aims of the speaker, and the character of the listeners.⁷

5 It is important to reiterate that metaphor does not occur on its own in political rhetoric and that there are a great many factors which make political rhetoric, or any form of discourse for that matter, “effective”. For further reading on this topic, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and Cicero’s *De Oratore* are recommended, as in many ways these books are still the basis our understanding of the essential tools of persuasive and effective language used today.

6 Many people who lived in Greece during the dictatorship and are familiar with Papadopoulos’ political rhetoric are of the opinion that the non-literal tool of metaphor, used frequently by Papadopoulos, had as an end result not a clear transmission of ideas, but ambiguity and confusion, which lead only to a source of ridicule. To quote Aristotle on the importance of clarity of metaphor as an aspect of style in rhetoric, “to be good [style] must be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do” (Aristotle: 1404b).

7 People will only interpret information as they understand it and our understanding

If we take the examples of “the plaster cast” and the metaphor of rebirth used by Papadopoulos we can ascertain these two points in detail.

The metaphor of “the plaster cast”, is especially relevant in that it was used so consistently by Papadopoulos. In the following example, the “patient” personifies Greece and its people, and the “doctor” is identified with Papadopoulos and his government:

Ασθενή έχομεν. Εις τον γύψον τον εβάλαμεν. Τον δοκιμάζομεν εάν ημπορεί να περπατάει χωρίς τον γύψον. Σπάζομεν τον αρχικόν γύψον και ξαναβάζομεν ενδεχομένως τον καινούργιο εκεί όπου χρειάζεται [...] Ας προσευχηθώμεν να μη χρειάζεται ξανά γύψον. Εάν χρειάζεται, θα του τον βάλομεν. Και το μόνον που ημπορώ να σας υποσχεθώ, είναι να σας καλέσω να ειδήτε και σεις το πόδι χωρίς γύψον! (Papadopoulos 1968:171)

We have a patient. We put him in a plaster cast. We try to see whether he could walk without the cast. We break open the first cast, and we eventually put the new one on, where it is needed. [...] Let us pray that he will not need a plaster cast again. If he needs it, then we shall put it on him. And the only thing that I can promise you, is to invite you also to see the leg without a plaster cast!⁸

The images that come to mind when one thinks of a plaster cast are also plentiful, powerful and simple in their understanding and interpretation. In its literal sense, it is necessary to heal a broken bone, but also to restructure the area and retrain the bone into its original form, free from its past ailments. The plaster cast is put on by a caring and thoughtful doctor, who knows what he/she is doing and is in total control of the situation at all times. The doctor is strong, all knowing and powerful and contrastingly the patient is weak, feeble and needing support. In addition,

of the world is based on a great many things which will not be elaborated on in this essay. It is important however to be aware that a person who has been raised in a particular socio-economic, political, cultural, sexual environment will perceive the world differently from someone who has been raised in a different combination of environments. These factors will affect not only how they perceive the world but also how they interpret it and most relevantly here, what they hear and understand from it.

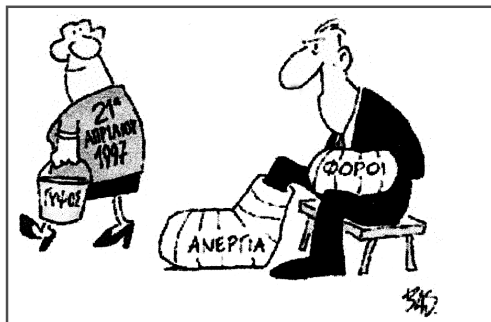
8 This particular excerpt is also found in Van Dyck, 1998:17–18.

the eventual need for a plaster cast involves an original act of clumsiness, an accident of some sort, severe enough to need to be aided in its recovery. One does not associate a level of calmness and togetherness with a broken leg or arm. Instead, one thinks of a momentary lapse of concentration, of logic perhaps, but nevertheless of being in a moment of senselessness, in a situation of stupidity even.

If we now take these literal images that we have of a plaster cast and transfer the patient in the plaster cast to Greece in the plaster cast, we envision an influential picture of Greece needing to be healed, needing to be retrained and restructured and remolded so that it can be free of its past afflictions. In the past it had a lapse of logic, of sense and now needs to be helped to recover. The present government is going to help it. It holds the power to “heal” it. It is the trained technician in this situation and caring and thoughtful to its patient, who needs its support.

Let us look at the second gauge of metaphor and effectiveness. Is it recallable? There is no doubt here that the answer is yes as today, along with his slogan “Ελλάς Ελλήνων, Χριστιανών”, it remains the single most quoted and recalled metaphor of his entire political rhetoric. This image of the plaster cast has remained synonymous with his rule and that of the dictatorship.

There are many current examples to be found in newspapers that show the many different ways in which such a metaphor is recalled. The cartoon below, for example:



(Source: *Αδέσμευτος Τύπος*, 21 April 1997, the sketch of the day)

It shows an aging Papadopoulos who is encased in two casts, one for taxes and one for unemployment. There is a woman walking away from him carrying a bucket reading “Plaster” and on the back of her T-shirt we find the date of the thirtieth anniversary of the dictatorship’s beginning. Here the plaster cast metaphor is likened to a legacy of unemployment and taxes left over from the years of dictatorship.

Similarly in 1970, a short story by Thanasis Valtinos, “Ο Γύψος” (*The Plaster Cast*) was published along with seventeen other short stories written in opposition to the dictatorship in the book *Δεκαοχτώ Κείμενα*, (Βαλτινός 1970). This short story is about a man who after a fall is held prisoner in a hospital and covered from head to toe in plaster, eventually asphyxiating from the plaster being poured into his mouth. Though the plaster cast was used metaphorically by Papadopoulos to represent how he was healing the country and its people, it was used as a metaphor in a different way by the people who were opposed to the dictatorship. For these people, the plaster cast was symbolic of the forces of the dictatorship, suppressing the freedom of the people in Greece at that time. In this same way, it was symbolic in Valtinos’ short story. The freedom that the man once had was squeezed out of him by the plaster that covered him and eventually killed him. A metaphor in itself of the freedom that Greece once had being taken from the people and of the oppression that now covered the Greek people, killing them both metaphorically and literally.

The metaphor of rebirth⁹ is often interchanged with or becomes the replacement of Papadopoulos’ surgical and medical metaphors. In the final two years of his rule as dictator, we find that his surgical and medical metaphors become almost obsolete. He no longer concentrates simply on the matter of “healing” Greece and its people, but of completely

9 The language surrounding the metaphors and allusions to rebirth, reformation and a conception of a new Nation is not something that is specific to Papadopoulos’ rhetoric and has been used and is still being used in political speeches around the world, regardless of cultural background. Consider the now famous Gettysburg Address in 1863 with the notion of a new Nation “conceived in liberty” and “brought forth” by “our fathers”.

transforming them and breathing a new life into them.

Papadopoulos makes use of images particular to rebirth to highlight the need for Greece to break completely from the burden of its past politics, economy and society. Such metaphors give the listener an acute picture of a process of change and more importantly, the need for change. He speaks of the rebirth of either the whole of Greece or aspects of Greece such as the people and their political and social views. These aspects soiled in the past decades by previous governments can be cleansed under his government. How is the metaphor of rebirth interpreted by an audience?

Firstly, with rebirth (as with surgery and plaster) there is the immediate assumption of negative associations with the past leading to the need for this rebirth and reformation. People never need to be reformed or for that matter reborn, if their previous lives have been happy, orderly and just. This concept alone constructs the images of a negative past and contrasts them with those of a positive present.

Secondly, arising from these negative associations with the past we have a necessary cleansing of the soul of all negative past associations. Because of the turbulent and chaotic past, a metaphor of rebirth creates an image in the mind of the Greek people that is easily drawn out and recalled at appropriate moments leaving no room for a false interpretation of it. With this necessary cleansing of this past “inheritance” however, the citizen must also revert back to the Christian and Hellenic ideals that were embodied in ancient Greece, in Byzantium, and more recently during the War of Independence in 1821, and through a “rebirth” give rise to such ideals once more.

Thirdly everything that comes into the “new life” after the rebirth has positive overtones, a purity and a reformation of the soul and of ideas which is itself the overriding aim of rebirth. An example of the metaphor of the rebirth of the land and of ideas is found in a speech made by him on 25 March 1968 whilst he was in Patras. His speech ends with:

Ας αναφωνήσωμεν δια λογαριασμόν όλων τον Ελλήνων: Ζήτω η Αναγεννωμένη Νέα Ελλάς. (Papadopoulos, 1968:149)

Let us proclaim, as a receipt of all Greeks: Long live the Reborn New Greece.

He also uses this metaphor of rebirth as a means of justifying any question that might be posed to him regarding his government staying in power. On 21 January 1971, when questioned about whether or not his “Revolution” would remain in power, Papadopoulos answers:

Διότι αυτό το τελευταίον είναι υπόθεσις άλλων. Είναι υποθέσεις εκείνων, οι οποίοι έθεσαν την θρυαλλίδα εις την δυναμίτιδα δια την έκρηξιν προς αναγέννησιν της Πολιτείας την νύκτα της 21 Απριλίου. (Grigoriadis 1975, 2:176)

Because that last is a matter for others – it is a matter for those who applied the fuse to the dynamite for the explosion aimed at the rebirth of the state on the night of 21 April.¹⁰

In the above speech Papadopoulos makes it decidedly clear that the “rebirth of the State” came on the very night that his “Revolution” forcibly took charge of the country. The blame here is laid on those “who applied the fuse to the dynamite for the explosion”. It is ambiguous here who the “those” he refers to actually are. Reflecting on his political rhetoric, this ambiguity works for him in the sense that according to his thematic shifts, the reason leading to this need for “rebirth” and the subsequent need for his government to be the “midwife” changes. In the beginning the “those” was communism, the enemy of the state, the ideology that had infected the people. Then the “those” became society, the sick and ailing citizen, who had been led astray by immoral temptations. Finally the “those” became the Greek nation in its entirety, a nation that must now heal itself through healing its past.

Though countless examples can be found in Papadopoulos’ political discourse utilising the metaphor of rebirth, undoubtedly the most effective one of them all is his combination of religious tradition with this rebirth metaphor in his cry “Χριστός Ανέστη – Ελλάδα Ανέστη” (Papadopoulos, 1968:119).

10 As translated by Woodhouse (Woodhouse, 1985:90).

Firstly, when one thinks of the resurrection of Christ, one thinks also of the reasons for his resurrection, that is, the need for humankind to benefit from the lessons that he taught them and the need for humankind to believe in him and his abilities and his teachings. Papadopoulos uses this notion of the rebirth of Greece in a similar way, and by coupling this rebirth with the resurrection of Christ, he proclaims that humankind needs to believe in his abilities and the abilities of his government to work with the citizen and eventually watch Greece prosper.

Secondly, with the resurrection of Christ comes the resurrection of Greece, a greater land which, still maintaining the ideals and beliefs of the past, can be freed from the turmoil of it. Just as the world was “saved” by Christ’s resurrection, so too will Greece be saved by Papadopoulos’ government.

The importance of the role that religion and Hellenism will play in this rebirth remained a reference to his ideology from his first few speeches to his last. Greece will be “reborn”, will achieve “great things” and “will always live”:

Αι υποχρεώσεις μας περιγράφονται και από την θρησκείαν και από την ιστορίαν μας. Ομόνοιαν και αγάπην διδάσκει ο Χριστός. Πίστιν εις την Πατρίδα επιτάσσει η Ιστορία μας.

[...] η Ελλάς αναγεννάται, η Ελλάς θα μεγαλοουργήσει, η Ελλάς πάντα θα ζει. (Papadopoulos, 1968:136)

Our obligations are described both from religion and from our history. Christ teaches peace and love. Our history commands belief in our Fatherland.

[...] Greece is being reborn, Greece will achieve great things, Greece will always live.

Through a consistent use of similar representations and similar exceptionally powerful pictures, Papadopoulos paints a state of affairs in Greece, both past and present, and transfers these images to the Greek people through the effective and powerful use of metaphoric language. The metaphors of rebirth and “the plaster cast” provide us with a picture that impresses us by its simplicity, its power and its repetition.

To quote Demosthenes, “it is not you [the citizens] who aim at what they [the politicians] wish for, but they who aim at whatever they think you desire”. The aim of this research is to show just that: how linguistic tools used in a political discourse aim at a given outcome and at sustaining and substantiating the desirable themes that a politician such as Papadopoulos chooses in his political rhetoric.

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