

Globalization, Education and Intellectual Production in Greece: An Interview With Constatine Tsoukalas¹

NICOS ALEXIOU
PETER BRATSIS

A Note to Readers:

Constatine Tsoukalas is arguably the most influential political sociologist in Greece today. Professor Tsoukalas has published widely since the late 1960's, mostly in Greek and French, and he is a familiar presence to those who follow his frequent contributions to Greek newspapers and television. None the less, most of his work remains unknown in the English speaking world. This is no doubt because of the lack of translation of his major works into English. This interview touches upon three key aspects of his work: education, the role of intellectuals and the Greek state.

In order to make the following discussion more intelligible to the novice reader (and rather than giving an overly detailed bibliography and overview of his work) we will present some of the major theoretical currents Professor Tsoukalas draws upon in his analysis. From the perspective of this interview, the most important concept to understand is reproduction and all that it implies. As used by Prof. Tsoukalas, this concept derives from the work of Louis Althusser and its subsequent appropriation by such theorists such as Nicos Poulantzas and Jean-Claude Passeron.² In the Althusserian problematic all societies

¹ This interview was conducted in New York City, December 1995.

² See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London, 1969); Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London, 1970); Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York,

are presented as consisting of three "instances" or "moments", the economic, the political and the ideological/cultural. In opposition to more orthodox Marxist formulations of base and superstructure, each instance of the social formation is seen as being relatively autonomous from the others in the sense that all affect each other and, thus, there is no simple determination of any part of society. Any particular aspect of society is, rather, seen as overdetermined by its relations to the whole of society. Determinations are multiple and dialectical.

The relevant question thus becomes one of reproduction since we can no longer assume that everything is simply a reflection of the economic base or, in a more Hegelian way, that every particular aspect of society is simply an expression of its essence.³ The question of reproduction enables one to examine the particular relations/articulations of the various instances of society to each other in this context of the constant production/reproduction of the social relations that constitute society. It is no accident that Prof. Tsoukalas' major work on education in Greece is titled *Dependency and Reproduction: The Social Function of Educational Mechanisms in Greece 1830-1922*.⁴ The study of education becomes the study of the articulation of education with the political and economic instances. Thus, when Prof. Tsoukalas discusses education he is always emphasizing its relations to the economic and political and the possible contradictions these relations may contain. Globalization becomes a relevant issue assuming it signifies a substantive change in the economic moment and, in this way, necessitates a rethinking of the articulations between it and education.

1971); Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1973); and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London, 1977).

³ A significant body of literature has grown around this theme of reproduction; in economics it is best represented by regulation theory as well as the work of Kostas Vergopoulos; in politics it is best represented by those who depart from the work of Nicos Poulantzas and Antonio Gramsci, such as Bob Jessop, Ernesto Laclau, Claus Offe and Leo Panitch; in social theory variations on this theme can be found in the work of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Stuart Hall. This is obviously a partial but representative list.

⁴ This work is not available in English. Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction* can be read as a theoretical model for Prof. Tsoukalas' work on education in Greece.

As Prof. Tsoukalas makes explicit in his comments, reproduction is not automatic or linear and a change in one moment of society may indeed bring about a disarticulation of the various levels of society. That which was functional to social reproduction twenty years ago may be dysfunctional in today's global society. In particular Prof. Tsoukalas stresses the increasing lack of significance of the political in reproducing social relations. The standard position on this issue had been that in the era of monopoly capitalism (or Fordism) the political was the dominant and cohesive moment in social reproduction. As Prof. Tsoukalas argues in this interview, the economic seems to be more and more dominant in this regard with a corresponding change in the role of (national) politics. Prof. Tsoukalas identifies the attack on public education, political corruption, and the impotence of party politics as symptomatic of these changes.

Readers will note the connection of what may seem to be disparate comments in the following interview to this question of reproduction and the articulation/disarticulation of the various levels of the social whole. We believe that it is unfortunate that Greek social science increasingly turns to rather narrow and linear/undialectical problematics such as rational choice theory and vulgar empiricism. Given the rapid social change and academic fashion in Greece, Prof. Tsoukalas' work and theoretical positions are more and more relevant and deserving of attention.

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PB: As a public intellectual who is familiar with the Greek as well as broader European context, could you outline for us the major obstacles and challenges that the contemporary public intellectual faces.

CT: Intellectuals, basically, are facing the following dilemma: either they decide to be true to their own analytical discourse, which becomes more and more complicated and more and more difficult to convey, in which case they become *de facto* marginalized and incapable of communicating anything to today's telematic audiences; or, they are obliged to change their language and to convey limited meanings, analytically unsophisticated and discursively incoherent. Which is to say, there is an ever increasing distance between intellectual pro-

duction on one hand and the mass audience on the other. This is one main contradiction and an important one in political terms. For example, 100 years ago intellectual production, and intellectuals in general, gave substance to big, vast, and global political movements (I am not thinking only of Marxism although it is probably the most important intellectual movement and gave birth to the most important mass movements of modern times). Today intellectuals are much more marginalized. Either they become clerks, they become persons who make their living out of the very pragmatic and very limited possibilities open to them by the communication media and by the industry of discourse, which dominates us today, or they become alien to public discourse.

In this sense the ethical, moral, and political dilemmas are always enormous, the question is: Do we play the game? How do we play the game? How can we remain true to ourselves within a world where this contradiction becomes more and more globalized and overwhelming? The modern intellectual finds himself in a moral dilemma. His back is against the wall. He does not really know how to think and how to convey analytically and communicate what he thinks. He is more and more cut off from the main political and ideological processes.

This is one of the main components of what one usually calls the post-modern condition. Within post-modernism you have fragmentation. Within this non-globalization of discourse, which takes place on a universal scale, it is extremely difficult for political discourse to be really conveyed through coherent intellectual analysis. This is one of the symptoms of the globalized universe we have to face today. However, probably the most important symptom of this globalized world, I believe, is far beyond the problem of the intellectuals themselves and the role and functions they play within their societies.

I think there is a contradiction between what one calls the economic and what one calls the political. Within the economic global system the real agencies that reproduces the whole system of social relations are not the national states themselves. The agencies have gone far beyond the states, I will mention the World Bank and I.M.F., but this is only part of the matrix of international economic directives which impose externalities and constraints upon the national states. In this phase of the accumulation of capital, it seems to me, the sys-

tem is not reproduced by the states but by this nexus of international matrices which, in turn, gives birth to a new and original contradiction. The contradiction derives from the economic accumulation which occurs on an international/global scale and which is uncontrolled by any national coherent territorial political entity. In this sense, if politics, by definition or at least up to now, took place within the context of the national state (the political personnel is a national personnel, political class antagonisms are conceived and fought within the political arenas in national states) it now increasingly takes place beyond the nation state. National states are growing incapable of reacting to or representing internal struggles otherwise than by simply accepting the external constraints imposed by the international system. In this case, we have a political arena, a political struggle, and a class struggle which cannot possibly, yet, present itself in political terms with coherent and real alternatives.

NA: Is this the end of ideologies?

CT: Not at all. But it is the end of a certain kind of political ideology which conceived the issue of political struggle in national terms. Up to now, the political expression of ideology was always national, internal and domestic. This was true of the communists, liberals, social democrats and neo-liberals. It was in this national political arena that political struggles developed and it is on this level that they made a difference. Today, regardless of ideology, you have an international system within the context of which, it is almost impossible for political alternatives to be materialized within national societies themselves. It is impossible because the dilemma will be, either to withdraw from the system completely or to accept the dictates of the international economic system. Of course, it is impossible to withdraw because the amount of reorganization implied is inconceivable. By not withdrawing from the world system, all polities are obliged to bow to the constraints of these externalities. These constraints are maximization, competitiveness, and acceptance of the liberty of trade according to the dictates of the international system. It comes down to whether or not the state can be thought of as having any serious alternatives as far as its social and economic policies.

NA: What does the prospect of a New Europe with a common currency and government imply in relation to the agency of national states, citizens and social movements?

CT: Maastricht signified the defeat of those who thought of a New Europe geared towards a redistribution of income and social rights by those who think of a New Europe in mainly monetary terms. The vision of a Europe bound by social rights and egalitarian principles is now abandoned. A Europe geared towards competitiveness and maximization, following policies for accelerating productivity and competitiveness regardless of the social cost, is the current vision. This is not a New Europe of workers but it is a new economic entity which wants to be competitive to Japan and the USA.

NA: But what does this mean as for national sovereignty?

CT: I think very little, in that sense. This is because national sovereignty has been already gravely impaired by the international system itself. I do not believe, for example, that if Greece had left the EU her economic and political policies would have been much different from what they are now. Turkey is not yet a member of the EU but they have to align themselves to the dictates of the international economic establishment. The problem is not a problem of law, of legal constraints due to this EU. The problem is much more deeper and more difficult to overcome.

The problem is the growing contradiction between the possibility of economic and social policies on one hand and the dictates of the international system on the other. On this issue, I do not think that this is very different for national societies whether they are within the EU or not. Even Europe, as a much larger economic and political entity, would not be able, at least easily, to define another kind of socio-economic policy geared towards the protection of workers and the poor. Therefore, the implications for national sovereignty are less than it seemed in the first place. Obviously, European institutions, in many technical ways, limit national sovereignty. But this containment does not go much further than the objective containment due to the new international system, I believe.

PB: Coming back to your emphasis on reproduction and how the state is less important in reproducing society while greater importance is now given to international organizations; given that the actual mechanisms and apparatuses through which this reproduction takes place still exist in national terms (i.e. the educational system of Greece is still Greek), do any new contradictions come about between the actual mechanisms through which this reproduction comes about

and these new structural boundaries between the economic and the political?

CT: The mechanisms (also) obey and bow to the same external constraints. One of the most important issues in Greece today is education. In Greece traditionally we have had public education and free education. According to the Greek constitution today, higher education is public and free. These competitiveness biases or extremity constraints demand the total modification of educational structure to the effect that:

- a) private higher education should be allowed or permitted, and
- b) public higher education should become paid education.

This would have been unthinkable politically ten or fifteen years ago, but by now it is going to be one of the main issues in the immediate future and I am afraid that we will have a constitutional amendment to this effect. I do not see easily that the political forces in Greece will be able to fight this general assault against what was and still is one of the main assets of Greek society, free and public education. The mechanism of education, which is extremely important in reproducing labor power, ideology, national cohesiveness and values, is under constant assault. This is a new phenomenon and it is one of the side effects of the growing impossibilities of the Greek political system to resist what is by now a universal assault.

NA: In the past two or three decades, or at least after 1974, we have had many changes in the educational system. We would like you to go further and explain a term you have used in the past, that of "overeducation." How is it related to the state and to the unplanned, probably, expansion of the university?

CT: Many people have misunderstood this term as some kind of value judgment. It is not, it is a judgment of fact. When I worked on the Greek educational system of the 19th century, I was really surprised to discover something nobody had paid attention to, up to then. In comparative terms Greek education was much more developed (more students in the universities, more schools) than most of the countries with comparative economic and political levels. This is what I meant by overeducation. Remember that Greece was a country where capital accumulation did not yet need the services of many educated administrators and also a country without a strong cultural and intellectual tradition because of the occupation by the Ottoman Empire.

Suddenly you see that within one century there is an enormous production of Greek educated personnel. In trying to answer why, I thought that this was closely related to the development of the Greek state, on one hand, and the particular role of the Greek Diaspora, outside Greece, on the other.

The term overeducation still applies. Comparatively, Greece is not a very developed country yet all statistics place the educated personnel of Greece in a high position, when compared with other countries of the same socio-economic background. The results still, if not outstanding as in the 19th century, are at least spectacular in the sense that Greek education at all levels is, in a quantitative level, extremely developed. That, in turn, leads to a new contradiction. Remember that university graduates have been, traditionally, employed by the state. I think there is an antinomy between a large number of Greeks who are educated on a formal level and the demands of the private labor market for specialized educated personnel. This is a great antinomy within the context of these new external constraints that I tried to analyze before. So, actually, the Greek political ideology tries to adopt to these external constraints. Now it is more or less accepted, by all political forces, that the Greek state cannot afford to expand anymore and hence the Greek state cannot afford to still be the main employer of the educated personnel. On the other hand, capitalist development in Greece, for what it's worth, would need another kind of education.

The unanimous political reaction to this new international context can be summed up in an overall attack on free and public education. The new myth is that the private initiative will immediately take the measures which are necessary in order for Greek education to bloom, according to the laws of supply and demand. Of course, strong historical evidence all over the world has proven that this mythological conjecture never takes place. If we will have private education in Greece this will be a much more class oriented education and also a very bad education. This is because the enormous investments needed for education can only be assumed by the state, no private initiative would ever be able to assemble enough funds to support the "hard" sciences. We will end up with a plethora of second-rate higher education schools, specializing in business administration, software electronics and things like that. Examples of some monstrous results of private intervention in education are to be found in the countries of

the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe where higher education now is extremely expensive, class oriented, and extremely defective. This is a pattern that might be reproduced in Greece if there is an amendment permitting private higher education in Greece.

NA: Many people argue that public education does not satisfy or meet the social demands for higher education.

CT: This is another myth. One must take under consideration the fact that the budget for education in Greece is very low. Actually it is the lowest in Europe. I think that education should be expanded but under the public auspices. The demand for education does not necessarily mean that it should be left open to the private sphere to intervene and create or produce second-rate and very expensive schools. Expansion of the educational system is one thing, and privatization of the system is another.

PB: Given this apparent overproduction of mental laborers has there been a corresponding underproduction of manual laborers?

CT: This is an enormous question. In Greece we have never had a double network of education as has been the case in most other European countries where the future workers are rigorously separated from the future managers and intellectuals. We have a unique network which despite efforts by all governments since 1950 has never been really challenged. Technical education, which was announced and encouraged by all governments has never really imposed itself. It is more or less obvious that we have a main network of education starting in primary school and ending with the university and a secondary important network of technical education. We do not have the same problems of rigid class determinations of workers vis-à-vis manual and intellectual workers, as in other countries. This is one of the main strategic options of Greek capital today. They have been trying to do it for fifty years and they have not succeeded mainly for the reason of the enormous symbolic and real possibility of employment by the state leading to vigorous resistance of the Greek population against having their children integrated into a manual network of education. A few years ago there was a survey by a Greek newspaper in which questions asking if they minded the abolishment of a free and public higher education were answered negatively much more than questions asking if they minded the abolishment of democracy. No political party has yet dared put forth a proposal opposing free public higher education.

NA: We would like to address some of Greece's peculiarities. For example, Greece is a member of the EU and also is part of the Balkan peninsula. Moreover, Greece at the moment (and for some time now), is the only country of the region which is member of the EU. However, we see that there is disproportional development between Greece and the rest of Europe. This problem of underdevelopment is not solely limited to Greece's economy but also expands into other levels, i.e. in the organization of society, in politics, in culture, etc.

How do you interpret this peculiar development?

CT: Greece's region is a region in crisis. What happened in Greece, I believe, in the last twenty years, mainly after 1974, was almost a miracle. This is so because it seems that the country, all this time, runs against all economic orthodoxy. On one hand, we have low levels of investment and low levels of development and, on the other hand, we have high levels of income growth. For the period between 1960-1985 the quantitative performance of the Greek economy was spectacular, in comparison to most other European countries. However, at the same time we did not have development. This is a Greek paradox. On one hand we have growth in incomes and personal consumption, to the extent that income inequalities are balanced and, on the other hand, we do not have development. We do not have industrial or organizational development.

For thirty years Greece profited from an extremely favorable place in the international division of labor. Some reasons that contributed to this might be: First, the large numbers of immigrant who left Greece in the 60s or earlier and send back to the country a substantial amount of money, as foreign currency. Secondly, tourism was extremely important, as well as shipping. This scheme of growth without development which characterized Greece for twenty or thirty years, reached its outmost limits in the mid-1980s. Since then, it became more obvious, that the system does not reproduce itself. Greece faces the problem of reproducing the pattern which supported, until then, its economic development and growth.

PB: Why 1985?

CT: It is not by accident. In 1985, the second government of PASOK, attempted the market conversion of socio-economic politics. The stabilization program of PASOK is nothing else but an overall acknowledgment that standard neo-liberal policies must take place and that monetary stabilization is the most important issue for the country, no

questions asked. This has been more or less an axiomatic assumption which led to the first stabilization program of PASOK. Since then, the alternates between PASOK and New Democracy has been nothing else but different shades of the same political crystallization. This is nothing else but the particular Greek way of conforming to external constraints, as I mention before. By now, it is obvious that the dilemma of modernization, that is the imperative need to increase productivity and competitiveness or else, is more or less accepted by the whole political spectrum.

Objectively there is no other way out. If one accepts that Greece cannot withdraw from the international economic project for its integration with the rest of Europe, then it is more obvious that Greece is not different from other European countries in complying with the external international constraints. It seems like the current dilemmas Greece now faces, and that somehow managed to be spared of for the past thirty years, are typical to countries with similar level of development.

NA: Another phenomenon you have recently addressed and which is increasingly common to Europe, especially Southern Europe and the Balkans, is political corruption. Is this rise of corruption relevant to the foregoing?

CT: The whole question of corruption should be seen in different terms than it was twenty or thirty years ago. I will not enter to a definition of corruption here but I will mention that it is a new and common phenomenon to all European countries. Is not only by coincidence that in the last five to six years the problem of corruption was common to all European liberal democracies. Countries like Italy, France, Spain, Greece, all faced the problem of corruption of their political personnel. An explanation of this issue in moral terms, i.e., by just arguing that it is human nature and people are just dishonest, that it is analytically useless. On the contrary, we need to address structural reasons.

Growingly, the political personnel is incapable of reproducing itself in a coherent way. The relation between capital and political personnel is a question posed 150 years ago. After all, Marx's argument that the state is an instrument of the ruling class (1848), has generated an enormous theoretical debate. I think that, up to now the political personnel was capable of a kind of autonomous (political) reproduc-

tion. In political terms, political parties used to be more class oriented and with a proper number of members and personnel who were to a certain extent able to finance themselves. This is something which has been changed in the last twenty years. The external constraints, as I described them before, have contributed to the diminishing of (political) distances between the parties. This is perhaps one of the reasons that can explain the phenomenon of universal political disaffection. In general, for the last fifteen years, party memberships have dropped dramatically in all European countries. Moreover, political issues and political differentiation among parties have become objectively narrower. In addition, the political theater is becoming very expensive. It is becoming common to treat political issues as secondary or in a theatrical way. In that case then, the communicational and discursive content of political struggles become increasingly important.

In other words, until twenty years ago, the running cost of parties and in particular the cost of elections was relatively low, even smaller political organizations were able to afford the cost. Today the communication system is such that everything has to pass through expensive public relations (i.e., offices, television and, people who work constantly for the party). That was not the case fifty years ago or in the 19th century, it is a new phenomenon. That means now that a great deal of the playing out of political antagonisms between democratic parties contending for power is becoming very expensive. One may ask how political parties get the money? There are only two sources for money to come. Public and private money. Public money, which is basically the financement of parties by the state, covers only part of the total cost. Capital freely steps in and either assumes the total cost of the political struggle or part of it. Political personnel are now directly dependent on private capital for its public relations, its communication costs, for its election or reelection. This is a new political parameter. Therefore, one can talk about objective white corruption, that is acceptable forms of collusion between the interest of public political personnel and capital. This is something which has been taking place traditionally in the USA and more recently in Europe. In any case, this is a universal phenomenon; the political personnel cannot reproduce itself without the influx of resources which have to come from the private sector. However, empirical research

supports that along with white corruption, also black corruption exists. A segment of the political personnel profits by using this money for their own individual benefit. In this way political corruption can only be conceived of as a structural phenomenon given the present situation of the dependence of the political personnel on capital.

PB: In this sense can one still talk about the relative autonomy of the state?

CT: The state is relative autonomous because it is seen as not being controlled by any single class or class fraction and because it is able to act against the demands of the bourgeoisie in order to secure their long term interests. But if the state cannot in any case do anything else but obey the dictates of the international system and, also, if it has very little discretion in following an alternative way, then the question is if one can still talk about the relative autonomy of the state. I think we must raise again the question, set by Marx, to what extent is the state an instrument of the ruling class and to bring into the discussion the new terms. These existing new terms must reflect the new contradiction between the national state and the international economy on the political level and on the specific forms of articulation between state and society within national countries.

Here I am just posing the question, by transposing Max Weber's definition that the state has the legal monopoly of power. Perhaps today capital has the legal monopoly of power.