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The Literary Poetics of the Authoritarian Face of Power

Abstract

This paper examines two Modern Greek novels and discusses the imposition of authoritarianism and punitive mechanisms applied in two different political situations. The first of these concerns an authoritarian regime that commits atrocities against dissidents while the second examines the power relations that develop in left-wing organizations in Greece, result in criminal violence and ultimately mirror the authoritarian methods used by those in power. These texts demonstrate authoritarianism may be engendered in any political organization, regardless of ideology. The paper utilizes the theoretical principles of Cultural Criticism together with literary narrative techniques.

Keywords

power, punishment, resistance, ideological camp, law

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Introduction

Social order, unanimity and a form of discipline to ensure cohesion have been intrinsic parts of society since the dawn of organized human existence. As such, societies through the ages have invented and established a dualist system that defines permissible and prohibited acts (Butler, 2008; Derrida, 1990). This in turn leads to the establishment of rules and institutions which, whether unwritten and customary or official, aim to impose a combination of obligation and discipline.

This dualist system constitutes the dominant ideology, the normative matrix that rejects offenders and deviants (Butler, 2008). The system may be changed according to circumstance, epoch and societal structural shifts, redefining the concept of deviance depending on the beliefs any given community has historically considered unacceptable (Hester–Eglin, 1992; Prus–Grills, 2003). Past examples of deviance include mental illness, crime, perversion, terrorism, homosexuality, dissidents or the irrédictables according to Nathalie Zaltzman (2018). Normativity and deviance are both aspects of the concept of discipline. As Michel Foucault states, discipline is a means of training that produces submissive, docile bodies open to experimentation and transformations (2011).

In this paper, I will present the authoritarian face of power as described in two modern Greek novels, the Λοιμός [Pestilence] by Andreas Frangias (2002) and the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] by Dimitris Nollas (2010). The former depicts a concentration camp where leftists exiled by authoritarian, anti-communist governments are sent. The second traces the history of a left-wing resistance organization from its establishment during the German occupation through the Greek Civil War and up to post-dictatorship Greece. The main focus will be the relations of power that develop between the members of the organization. The texts were chosen because they discuss the limits of freedom and the relations of hierarchy and subservience that are hallmarks of tyrannical leadership, whether of a government or of a political organization.

As for methodology, the paper utilizes material from the Theory of Cultural Criticism supported by the various narrative techniques.
literary works use to highlight the issue of political authoritarianism. The objective of the paper is to demonstrate that, regardless of ideological bent or color, the authoritarian face of power often uses identical methods to suppress freedom of mind and harm physical bodies.

**The tyranny of power in the Λοιμός [Pestilence]**

As Foucault argues, “power is the name given to strategies exercised within a society” (1991, p. 98). Power produces regimes of truth, i.e., the normative truths the system uses to manipulate the individual into adopting imposed behaviors (2011).

Power is assisted by the Law, which implements legislative rules and restrictions citizens are obliged to accept and respect. However, the restrictions imposed by the Law are considered to allow power to exercise a form of violence, known as legitimate force or, as Hannah Arendt (2000) puts it, mitigated force. Foucault and Noam Chomsky once held a dialectical debate on human nature and the relations between justice, law and power. In this debate, the former supported that the legal system inherent in the field of normative law fosters relations of domination and submission, while the latter countered that, while the state possesses the power to reinforce a given perception of what is legal, citizens who exploit those areas of law which are appropriately formulated and interpret them correctly may act against any areas which serve simply to validate the system of power in place (Foucault, 1991).

The limit imposed by law is violated when an authoritarian government uses ostensibly legitimate force to impose the order-submission dualism on the people. In such cases, governance assumes the form of domination of man over his fellow man through violence (Arendt, 2000). Indeed, many consider violence to spring from the so-called mastery instinct, which Sigmund Freud connects with the instinct of aggression (Einstein, Freud, 1933) or, as Derrida (2006) describes it, violence.

Events in the Λοιμός [Pestilence] transpire in a concentration camp for political prisoners located on an unnamed island. While never explicitly mentioned in the text itself, studies have demonstrated
that the island in question is Makronissos (Koutsopoulou, 2019 as she refers to Stavropoulou, 1997). Violence is exercised against the prisoners in pursuit of one purpose: their alienation from humanity. Their jailors make every effort to break the prisoners’ will and cause complete submission, treating them as bare lives, lives that are discredited and their deaths are placed under the jurisdiction of the sovereign power (Agamben, 2005).

The prisoners are subjected to disciplinary techniques such as forced confessions and torture. The prisoners are subjugated and forced into confessions to “reform” their ideology, an issue also touched on by Stavroupolou (2001). Such subjugation is facilitated by the use of continuously and mechanistically repeated phrases designed to inculcate new behaviors, such as: “The mountains, the stars and the stones all whisper incessantly: ‘Repent!... repent!...’” (Frangias, 2002, p. 188), or: “At the crack of dawn, everyone lines up and shouts their epithet. ‘I’m a vile subversive.’ I am an execrable conspirator! ‘I’m morally untrainable” (p. 98). On full display in this case is the very concept of performativity according to which the word produces the results it names through repetition and juxtaposition (Butler, 2008).

Torture is a punitive ritual to affirm normative truth. This ritual – performed as public spectacle no less – constituted the dominant political practice from the 16th to the 19th century in Europe, where crimes committed by the accused were viewed as offences against the omnipotence of the supreme ruler. Such offences thus had to be redressed as publicly and cruelly as possible, through torture. Punitive rituals were thus shot through with revenge and served to set an example, but above all, they constituted a policy of terror with the sole objective of making the sovereign power of the ruler clear to all (Foucault, 2011). Through his descriptions of the torture the prisoners are subjected to, the author sheds light on policies of terror and how they are used to shut down all those aspects that make us human, such as will and dignity, through targeted physical pain and the removal of an individual’s ability to react: “They wrapped him in seven coils of barbed wire,...The culprit was propped atop the hill, where the sun and the wind would dry him out”. Also: “The guards quickly added more barbed wire from the
outside, bundle after bundle. They hastily erected a tall, fortified and impassable fence of thorns”. Also: “In other cases they would restrict the space in the cage...more and more, until finally the ‘specimen’ was forced to stand upright, with only barbed wire to lean on” (Frangias, 2002, pp. 74, 151, 188).

The latter passage demonstrates once again the role of language, with the word ‘specimen’ being used deliberately to reduce the prisoner from “human” to “bare life”. Similarly, in other parts of the text the prisoners are called “subjects”. In addition, in place of names, both the victims and the perpetrators are given epithets based on either their internal or external attributes or their properties; examples for the prisoners include “the thirsty one”, “the suspended one”, “the black cap”, and “the yellow cap” while the jailors are known, for example, as, the “overseer”, the “white shirts”, the “underlings”. Giannis Pappas (2012) examines and analyzes these epithets in detail. In the text, the avoidance of names and explicit references to time and place serves both to wipe away any semblance of individual identity and to facilitate understanding of the concepts of universality and timelessness; both of these leave the temporal and spatial limits wide open to encompass all similar cases of tyrannical authoritarianism, regardless of place or perpetrator; it is exactly this element which shows that the machinations of the state apparatus constitute established authoritarian practices throughout the ages and regardless of the place and people involved.

The author also uses language to praise the determination of certain figures: for example, a prisoner initially referred to as the “wrinkled little man” begins to resist and is named first “the lucky man” and then finally “the man” in the process (Angelatos, 2009). While the author prefers a third-person narration that often uses external focus, he also frequently goes into a grammatical second-person narration to explore the inner thoughts of the victims, thus creating a sense of intimacy that accentuates his “participation” in the action. For example: “Exhausted, you shut your eyes for a moment. A fly came and lit on your eyelid” (Frangias, 2002, p. 85).

The author’s style is shot through with irony, absurdism and descriptions viewed through an idiosyncratic realism that depicts a senseless, nightmarish reality. This initially appears most likely
to be a literary exaggeration rather than something that could actually transpire. Nevertheless, in this way the author provokes the reader into a deeper reading and reflection that surpasses emotion, into a feeling of contrast between illusion and reality that is reminiscent of Pirandello’s discourse on the umorismo of the author. Specifically, through the humor technique, Luigi Pirandello attempts to deconstruct and lay bare the illusions in which people believe they live. In his view, people see illusions as reality and must be urged to re-invent the ideal according to which they should live (Pirandello, 2006). True to Pirandello’s humor, the author calls upon the reader to understand that the deconstructed ideal is none other than freedom itself.

The novel’s overt absurdity and irony are in keeping with Northrop Frye’s theory of Criticism (1996). According to Frye, myths may be categorized into two fictional types, tragic and comic, depending on the protagonist’s power to act. The protagonists of the Λοιμός [Pestilence] belong to the tragic type, and more specifically to the subcategories of low mimetic action and tragic irony. Their inclusion in these subcategories is justified if we consider that they act like any normal person would, and, despite their innocence, society alienates them and considers them guilty, forcing them to struggle with absurdity. According to Frye, the myth as an archetype is depicted in literature at times through apocalyptic imagery associated with paradise and at other times with demonic imagery associated with the image of hell. The latter imagery is especially evident in the Λοιμός [Pestilence], where chaos and nightmares come to the fore through descriptions of sadism, horror, public punishment and torture, while, as the above passages from the text show, symbols such as the desert, the stake, the spiral and the tyrannical leader abound throughout. Demonic imagery is vital to literature; by representing the immoral it turns moral archetypes on their head and allows the ideal to emerge, even if indirectly. In conclusion, we see those two different literary theories, each with its own theoretical arsenal, interpret the literary universe of the Λοιμός [Pestilence] in the same way, naming it as nightmarish and absurd.

When state authority oversteps normative boundaries, it creates what is known as a state of exception a political situation in which,
as Agamben describes, the legal system is suspended, basic human rights are restricted, decrees with the force of law are enacted and the sovereign who enacts the state exercises absolute power. As such, from the moment the legal order -regardless of the violence inherent in it- is suspended, it gives way to a lawlessness, devoid of legal rule in which pure, unlawful violence is king. What we see, in other words, is the paradox of the lawful implementation of a state of lawlessness, which establishes its own legal order while engaging -”legally”, no less- in punitive practices (2007). A modern example of such an exception is the concentration camp, which, while established on land governed by a conventional legal order, is nevertheless a zone in which “anything goes” (2005). Examples include Guantánamo Bay and the gulags of the former USSR (Butler, 2009; Foucault, 1987), but also in many cases refugee camps, indefinite detention in the USA and zones d’attente in airports (Agamben, 2005).

In the Λοιμός [Pestilence], the “normalization” of the exception is depicted through the image of the concentration camp as both a dystopia and a heterotopia. The former (Papanikolaou, 2002) is represented through the depiction of the camp as a nightmarish state with no way out and zero chances of escape. Here, power is imposed in every possible way to achieve the complete control over and enslavement of the prisoners (Gakos, 2010), while any and all resistance ends in physical and moral annihilation. However, the purest form of dystopia in the Λοιμός [Pestilence] are the tombs, the underground spaces where the prisoners sleep. The tomb is a symbolic concept which suggests the extermination of the political being’s physical body:

The digging crews are constantly at work, opening new tombs...More housing, for newly arrived prisoners. Pits gape open at regular intervals. They’ve spread to the camp’s outskirts...New arrivals are sorted into threes and shown to their open tomb: “This is where you’re staying” (Frangias, 2002, p. 167).

The author also focuses on the extermination and humiliation of the prisoners’ material bodies, identifying them with the rodents that coexist with them in their underground tombs:
The rats, countless, fat and large,...They burrow and burrow...They respond to the stones you throw at them with their piercing little eyes...conquerors...You’ll often find they’ve made nests among the stones of your family tomb...Their bite is sweet, you can hardly feel it...True, many have woken up missing an ear...That’s their favorite morsel, and despite all the gnawing no blood ever flows (Frangias, 2002, pp. 60–62).

Heterotopias are spaces that house radical otherness; they are used to measure both deviation from the norm and the normal itself. But heterotopias can also be used to evaluate various forms of different social order, i.e., as spaces that produce forms of hybrid experience. In the latter case, space and time are viewed as transitional, akin to the threshold in old transition rituals; here, however, the threshold is expanded and geared to allow the birth of a new social condition (Stavridis, 1998). Examples include clinics where individuals are subjected to medical experiments, sanatoriums to isolate those with infectious diseases, concentration camps etc. The Λοιμός [Pestilence] contains just such a heterotopia, in which the new social condition appears to be that of the slave laborer who’s been stripped of their rights: “Like ants, they line up and go up and down incessantly, following the landscape as if tied to one another, pulling each-other endlessly forward...Our communal labor camp...” (Frangias, 2002, p. 66).

Elements in the novel could be viewed as harbingers of the potential dangers our modern digitized and highly technological times entail. It’s exactly this period, with its technological extremism and hyperbole, which Jean Baudrillard viewed as the era of simulacra, the era of complete uniformity, where originality, differences and otherness are completely eradicated and copies and the similar dominate, in which everything has been transformed into signs that are unrepresentable and therefore incomprehensible to human consciousness (1983; 1996a; 1996b). In the same vein, Donna Haraway (2017) notes that micro-electronics are the technology that enables simulacra, in other words replicas without identity. Both theorists point out the risk to humanity itself when the boundaries between reality and simulation blur as the two states collapse into each other.
In the Λοιμός [Pestilence], the precursors to this nightmarish universe are the cyborgs. Cyborgs are hybrids, the technological blurring of boundaries made manifest: they are at the same time machine and matter, living organisms and artificial constructs, intellect and artificial intelligence, man and animal; they are post gender creations, a field of totality born of advanced technology, a blend of reality and fiction that transcends the traditional boundaries of good and evil, gender and contradiction, provoking and dismissing dualism itself and obfuscating creator and created (2017).

More precisely, in the Λοιμός [Pestilence] there are extensive references to strange and murderous “beings” which kidnap prisoners in the night to punish them. Their nature remains obscure, as they are described as hybrids, neither human nor animal. They are of unknown origin, exhibit both mechanical and organic elements, are capable of transforming and mutating, and their abilities far outstrip those of humans. While never explicitly named as “cyborgs”, these self-existent and self-acting beings are described in such terms - their form and action combined with the sense of fear and insecurity they engender in the consciousness of the prisoners - that the reader is almost immediately reminded of hybrid entities. For example:

That night, the same heavy footsteps were heard on the stone-paved road... at times they stride forward, at others they drag their feet. Hooked limbs turn like antennae, searching for a particular sleeping prisoner... These strange creatures of the night lift the flagstones up to retrieve a dead man... they descend from the mountain, with their long grasping arms covered in sharp teeth and their thoraxes made of hard, spiny shell-like material. Their backs are like their bellies, which they drag as they move forwards on all fours, passing over the stones and terraces. Their breath is like a gypsy’s accordion. But still others neither breathe nor blink. They can even shrink... and burrow into the stones of your family tomb. And there they lie in wait until one night, the grow... and suddenly, you find yourself entangled, terrified and bewildered, a sack of flesh caught in their winding tentacles. (Frangias, 2002, pp. 33, 34, 35)
The text of the Λοιμός [Pestilence] shows that prisoners are examples of the exercise of “legitimate” force and state violations of regulatory restrictions. Of course, this is all within the context of a purely dictatorial government that quashes all political resistance.

**Power and how it is handled in the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone]**

Dimitris Nollas’ novel Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] (2010) traverses’ modern Greek history and the trajectory of Greece’s Left. The novel examines the activities of leftist organizations in Greece during the Occupation and the Civil War, the post-war period, the junta as well as in post-junta Greece, which saw the rise of organizations some called terrorists and others saw as “urban guerillas”.

In particular, it is structured in three successive time periods, to better explore the preconceptions of these revolutionary organizations. The narrative present focuses on an organization which exploits its younger members, ideologically driven by the older members who fought against the junta and idolized the National Resistance fighters. As such, the theoretical framework of the older two groups is associated with communist beliefs, and their differing ideological development closely follows the political developments in the USSR. The younger members, despite being ideologically manipulated by their seniors, choose to react violently to the social inequality they experience, in what they see as a form of social revolution: “On that peaceful night, before him stood the multi-story headquarters of NAFTIΛΑΚI S.A,... while he was checking the timer on the bomb one last time, as the countdown to detonation had begun,...the suffocating nightmare of the morning returned...” (Nollas, 2010, p. 16). For the bomber, failure means death, and it is exactly this which comes to pass. In this case it could perhaps be viewed as a suicidal act, a self-sacrifice similar to the Japanese practice of kamikaze. According to Albert Camus (1971, p. 349), “the rebel has only one way of reconciling himself with his act of murder if he allows himself to be led into performing it: to accept his own death and sacrifice”. But even so, the murder of innocent people remains a crime.
As observed previously, group relations, especially among the senior members, are dominated by ideological differences that engender suspicions and lead to mutual accusations of dealings with the authorities or their covert wings (intelligence services). For example: “At the time of Jack’s escape and his move to Antwerp, a certain Tsalafatis was an aide at the Seaport Consul’s office… Their friendship made certain comrades suspicious; some of them wondered aloud what he was doing with that junta snitch”. Also: “...’need I remind you...that such actions in the past allowed the Security Service to set up a parallel KKE, which it had under its complete control? Because those who should have been vigilant were caught sleeping’ (Nollas, 2012, pp. 45, 68).

This suspicion forms the backdrop of the text, in which hostile relations and competitions for power that result in murder play out. In essence, the leadership of the organization views murder of the most heinous kind as the answer to any doubts expressed by the members regarding the truth the organization stands for. For example: “While they were waiting for him...he lay hacked to pieces, bleeding out on his kitchen floor” and “I caught a glimpse of his head, a crimson sphere, cracked open, blood everywhere. I would never have been able to recognize him if not for his shirt…can you imagine? identifying someone from a piece of cloth?” (pp. 92, 93–94). It is descriptions like this which demonstrate that even organizations claiming to be fighting for a better world exercise hatred and exterminate man, treating him as a “bare life”.

A fascinating aspect of the novel is the criticism it levels at journalists, which the author describes as “the systemic intellectuals par excellence”; they are accused of using the academic disciplines of history and literature for purposes of state propaganda, to associate and thus identify social revolutionaries with the common criminal protagonists of literary works. Indeed, the system frequently describes acts of political resistance in terms drawn from criminology, in a deliberate effort to equate political action with criminal acts, and consequently to convict political dissidents as criminals.

1 The organization’s operations are juxtaposed with the actions of Balzac’s hero, Vautrin, who becomes chief of police despite being a wanted criminal.
(Hester-Eglin, 1992). Discussing these practices as they manifested in Greece, Koutsopoulou (2019, p. 280) argues that:

The first governments in post-civil-war Greece refused to use or even acknowledge the term [political prisoner]. Indeed, during the civil war the government repeatedly and categorically denied the existence of political prisoners, attempting to classify them as common criminals. This approach allowed the executive branch to remain uninvolved, paving the way for the judiciary to impose any sentences it saw fit, up to and including the death penalty.

Foucault gave an interview in 1976 on political prisoners in the USSR and how they were equated with common criminals. In this interview he attacked the position of the then-deputy minister of Justice, who justified this practice by claiming that the concept of the political prisoner did not exist in the USSR; only those individuals who attempted to weaken the state through treason, espionage, terrorism and slanderous propaganda were to be condemned (1987).

Thanks to its wealth of historical references, the text highlights how History and Literature view and present the facts of historical events. While the avant-garde is hardly averse to challenging the systemic construction of historical truth, modernist historiographical novels attempt to establish a perception of History as a defining force, and their inclusion of historical figures in the narrative serves to imbue their otherwise fictional world with a sense of believability (Hutcheon, 1988). By contrast, postmodernism has introduced the concept of historiographic metafiction, which encompasses texts with historical references, as is the case in the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone]. In this frame, History is viewed as a human construct, a system of reasons that generate meaning, a discourse on events that challenges the absolute truth and objectivity that historical knowledge seeks to stand for (Tzouma, 1991). The primary objective is to make it clear that we only know the past through texts which reproduce what is considered to be true (Hutcheon, 1988). As for the relationship between historiographical fiction and historiographical metafiction, Hutcheon argues that both face the same fundamental issue of how their document sources are treated: are
they approached from an objective, neutral standpoint, or is some level of interpretation inevitable? (1988).

Parody and intertextuality are two basic narrative techniques historiographical metafiction uses to question universal historical truths, find potential different truths and cultivate critical thought. For its part, parody works by incorporating and then deconstructing elements of the past (1988). It thus gives the reader the opportunity to see historical events and figures from a critical perspective and exercise a measure of control over established versions of the truth. In its subversive role, parody is aided by intertexts that can deconstruct and rewrite reality, casting doubt on concepts such as uniqueness and originality and challenging the reader’s pre-conceived identities. Any text can serve as the intertext, whether it be a historical document, a diary, a newspaper—anything that can complement or undermine reality (1988).

The Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] includes an extensive historical intertext, the goal of which is to make readers reflect on both the objectivity of the cited historical information and the methods employed by the revolutionary organizations. Interspersed throughout the text are the events of the Soviet Revolution, discussions of divergent communist positions, references to Lenin, the Spanish Civil War, the Stalinist Purges of 1944, the Communist 4th International, Opla, Zachariadis, the cover-up of Lambrakis’ assassination etc. For example: “…we would observe their quarrels…they would apportion blame for…the split in κκε in February 1968 in the wake of the Invasion of Prague…or after the Parisian, German or Mexican May of 1968. They’d argue about Mao and Trotsky…”. Also: “It would have led to exactly the same situation as under Stalin. The same old shit, the same gulags, the same systematic purges…”. Also: “We hadn’t even issued a revolutionary manifesto or proclamation, and we went and murdered one of our own…True students of Nechayev, that’s what we were” (Nollas, pp. 29, 30, 60).

Another aspect of postmodernism is hybridity, the accumulation of different forms of discourse within the same text (Hutcheon, 1988). The plot of the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] is frequently interrupted by the interjection of letters and brief chapters called “Our winged words”. These chapters present newspaper articles
from the police bulletin on murders, deaths or arrests, as well as short, poetically tinged sections of prose. Each of them constitutes an indirect parody of and commentary on both the preceding plot and the truth of the presented events. In fact, the chapter title itself—a reference to the Homeric phrase “έπεα πτερόεντα”, roughly translated into vernacular Greek as “words of the air”, i.e., empty words—implies myriad different opinions and rumors.

The author also uses the technique of metalepsis, which demonstrates how several narrators may express different perspectives, all in pursuit of the same objective. In this way, he enables the narrators to “enter” the text, in a sense, and comment on the truth of the narrative: “And listen here...Listen, I’m telling you how things happened, exactly as they happened,... And don’t smirk at me like that! I’m telling you, this is exactly how things transpired’... Besides, what’s your problem, you poor fool? I’m the narrator, aren’t I? Isn’t it within my rights to pick and choose what I tell you and how’?” (p. 91).

To conclude, the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] utilizes the theoretical framework of postmodern historiographical metafiction to focus on the internal relations of a leftist organization, laying bare the multitude and the subjectivity of its members’ opinions and how they reproduce authoritarian practices comparable to those employed by the system.

Conclusions

It should be considered a given that expressly authoritarian governments violate human rights and impose punitive mechanisms on dissidents. Such a situation is painted in stark colors in the Λοιμός [Pestilence], which places the concepts of “bare life” and the concentration camp at the forefront. But the cases in which governments that paint themselves as democratic but nevertheless employ methods used by authoritarian forms of power are no less serious, and perhaps even more so, as the Ο καιρός του καθενός [A time for everyone] demonstrates. Alexis Ziras (2010) has expressed a fascinating opinion on this text: “Conceptually, shifts in the power relations bring about corresponding changes in morality...the unequal distribution
of power, which all members of the group supposedly hate, is in fact their ultimate objective”.

By examining the two texts in parallel as examples of how man imposes authority on man, certain conclusions may be produced:

Power is viewed as a thread (Smith, 2006, on Foucault), as it permeates all human relationships like a web. The power relations examined here, whether in governments or political organizations, demonstrably reflect each other in their modus operandi: both are reproduced in the same manner and both seek to eliminate any form of reaction through the use of punitive or criminal violence.

The antagonism between members that these relations engender often demonstrates man’s innate aggression and associated Freudian instincts and brings to the fore issues of moral amoralism.

An issue of particular concern is the injustices associated with equating criminal acts with political action. Despite naming themselves social activists, the members of the political organizations choose to commit violent acts punishable by law, such as destruction of foreign property, robbery, etc.

In modern-day democracies, public civic life runs the risk of falling into decline (Agamben, 2005), which is somewhat of a tragic irony given that, at least on the surface, interest in freedom and human rights has never been higher. The texts and the messages they convey are stark warnings to the reader against what is known as biopolitics (Foucault, 2012), the current established means of exercising power. More specifically, the function of biopolitics is to wipe out individuality and distance the individual from civil society and their right to formulate any critical discourse. This leaves individuals open to manipulation, loss of political autonomy and incorporation into a mass society that, facilitated by radicalness of digital technology, will be free to decide for them without giving them any say, thus rendering them “bare lives”.

Ultimately, both texts reflect on situations that have been the focus of philosophical debate throughout the ages, such as history, authoritarianism, resistance, common and state violence. The crux of the matter is how democracy is exercised by political authorities together with, and above all, the democratization of the individual per se within the context of self-awareness and restraint of the
Freudian instinct of aggression. And, more than ever, the present
day calls for democratically sensitive citizens who respect their
fellow man but also zealously guard their civil and political rights,
participate actively in civic life and react to the mass trends of our
time, fully aware of how such trends leave the door open to the
imposition of aspects of the “bare life”.

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