Bearing Witness in *Manoli . . . !*: A Political Opera of Postwar Cyprus

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In the twentieth century, social and political conflicts generated genocidal violence on a global scale. Since World War II, civilians have become the main victims of leaps in the technology of killing and torture deployed in countless wars, civil wars, coups, and dictatorships. The effort to understand, theorize, and work through these historical traumas gave rise to a new discipline in the 1980s and 90s, that of trauma studies, which drew heavily on psychoanalysis.¹ These traumatic events also posed problems for many artists, including composers, who tried to find ways of representing political and historical trauma through various artistic media. Contributing to the collective representation of traumatic past events, art of this kind belongs to the processes of what critical theorist Gene Ray has called “cultural mourning.” Understood in this way, mourning is a collective process seeking to cope and work through shared trauma, so as to “accept the burden of change.”² Even if only in modest ways, art can help to break through imposed silences and avoidances, triggering public discussion and debate and bringing into discourse socially repressed events and legacies of violence. The importance of such artworks is not only aesthetic, then, but also political and social since they often trigger the public discussion of socially repressed issues.

Vassos Argyrides’s opera *Manoli...!* is such a work. The first Cypriot opera, it wrestles with traumatic events of recent Cypriot history. Based on a play by Giorgos Neophytou—who also adapted the libretto in German—the opera tells the story of a Cypriot mother who was an eyewitness to the murder of her son Manos by their neighbor during the July 1974 coup d’état in Cyprus. It focuses on the absence of juridical justice after the Greece-backed coup that triggered the Turkish invasion. As the context of the coup and invasion is complex, a brief review will be helpful. On July 15, 1974, the Greek military junta launched a coup in Cyprus with the help of the armed far-right Greek-Cypriot group EOKA B. This formation emerged in 1971 from remnants of EOKA (1955–59), the anti-colonial Greek-Cypriot movement that fought against the British colonial administration and aimed at the unification (*Enosis*, literally “union” in Greek) of Cyprus with Greece. Its struggle also signaled the first inter-communal differences between

I would like to thank the playwright Giorgos Neophytou and the composer Vassos Argyrides for generously providing and sharing material regarding the opera.

¹ See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1995); Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Brandon Hamber and Richard A. Wilson, “Symbolic Closure through Memory: Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies,” *Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2002), 35–53; Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11 and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

² Drawing on Theodor W. Adorno, Ray argues that “negative presentation” of the structure of trauma in works of art shows the impasse of traditional, positive representation (for example, in the cases of Auschwitz and Hiroshima), granting art an important role in the disclosure of social causes that led to historical violence and subsequently in the processing of historic catastrophes. *Terror and the Sublime*, 2, 6, 12.

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.³ As a result of EOKA's anti-colonial struggle, the Republic of Cyprus was founded in 1960 under three protective powers, namely, Greece, Turkey, and England. However, neither EOKA nor the armed far-right Turkish-Cypriot organization TMT disbanded; TMT was founded in the late 1950s and aimed at the partition (*taksim*) of the island. Makarios III, the Archbishop of the Greek-Orthodox Church of Cyprus, became the Republic's first elected President. Soon, however, problems began between the two main communities (Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots)⁴ as well as within the Greek-Cypriot community. Some of those Greek Cypriots who felt betrayed by President Makarios formed the paramilitary organization EOKA B in order to continue the struggle for *Enosis*. Their actions were closely monitored by the military Junta which had seized power in Greece in April 1967, and with its support EOKA B attempted to overthrow Makarios in 1974. The coup backfired, however, for it provoked a two-phased invasion by Turkey (on July 20 and again later on August 14), an intervention that allegedly aimed to protect the rights of the Turkish-Cypriot minority. Turkish forces never withdrew and continue to occupy thirty-six percent of the island today. The consequences of the invasion were devastating: apart from the many dead, approximately 180,000 Greek Cypriots became refugees and 50,000 Turkish-Cypriots were forcibly displaced, while many others went missing.⁵ In the aftermath of the invasion, President Makarios was restored to power. He granted amnesty to those involved in the coup in an attempt to ensure national unity.

The opera *Manoli...!* is unique in its critical engagement with these recent political events through a medium that is not primarily associated with Cypriot culture. (Despite the growing number of Cypriot composers in the last three decades, Cypriot works have received scant attention in Anglophone musicology). The opera confronts the subjects of national conflict and the lack of justice in the Greek-Cypriot community after the coup. Although the identity of Manos' killer is never specified, it is clearly implied by the character of the Mother that he belonged to EOKA B. This paper explores the ways by which the opera *Manoli...!* expresses the trauma and anxiety of contemporary Greek-Cypriot society with regard to the events of July 1974. Looking at the reception of both the opera and the play, it investigates the processes of remembrance and forgetting in post-1974 Cyprus in the context of a tenuously restored national unity.

***Manoli...!:* Representing trauma**

Lasting approximately forty minutes, *Manoli...!* (1990) is a one-act chamber opera for a soprano and small orchestra consisting of a double string quartet, double bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, trombone, trumpet, horn, and percussion (xylophone, vibraphone, timpani, cymbals, drum). It was commissioned by Michael Leinert, then artistic director of Pfalztheater, Kaiserslautern, during his visit to Nicosia for a performance of *Hamlet* by Pfalztheater. After reading a German translation of Neophytou's play *Manoli...!* and listening to music by Vassos Argyrides, Leinert commissioned the opera which was to

³ For more, see Perry Anderson, "The Divisions of Cyprus," *London Review of Books*, 30, no. 8 (April 24, 2008), <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n08/perry-anderson/the-divisions-of-cyprus>; Christopher Hitchens, *Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 41–47.

⁴ There are also Armenian, Maronite, and Latin minorities on the island.

⁵ See Anderson, "Divisions of Cyprus." It is estimated that approximately 1,600 Greek Cypriots went missing in 1974; there have also been approximately 500 Turkish Cypriot persons missing as a result of the bi-communal conflicts of the 1960s and the events of 1974. The ongoing process of identifying remains is conducted by the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP): <http://www.cmp-cyprus.org/>.

be performed both in Germany and Cyprus. Directed by Leinert and conducted by Andrew Olivent, *Manoli* was first performed in Pfalztheater, Kaiserslautern, in May 1990 with Jayne Casselman as Mother (Figure 1). The opera was also performed in Cyprus—in Nicosia and Limassol—in December 1990, this time, however, with Gerda Maria Knauer in the role of Mother. A new production was premiered in May 1992 at the Forum of the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg (Figure 2). It was directed by Luiz Claudio da Silva, conducted by Marius Bazu, and sung by Sabine Schmidt Kirchner.

Figure 1. Jayne Casselman as Mother, *Manoli...!*, Pfalztheater, 1990.

Figure 2. Poster of *Manoli...!*, Forum of the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, 1992.

Born in Cyprus in 1960, the opera's composer Vassos Argyrides studied composition and orchestration in the Moscow P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory (1980–86) with Albert Leman, Karen Khachaturian, and Evgeny Makarov. His compositions include the symphony *Images of Cyprus* (Moscow Symphonic Orchestra, 1986), *Five Glances* for woodwinds, music for orchestra, theater (e.g., Aristophane's *Plutus*, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*), ballet (e.g., *Peregrination*) and cinema (e.g., *The Slaughter of the Cock*, *Evagoras' Vow*, *My Country Alone*), as well as songs. During the last decade Argyrides has worked with Russia's Ossipov National Academic Folk Instruments Orchestra, performing in Cyprus, Greece, and Russia. His recent work on adaptations of traditional Cypriot music for symphonic orchestra, *The Treasure of Cyprus*, was recorded by the 21st Century Symphonic Orchestra of Moscow under Pavel Ovsyannikov. From 2007 to 2009, this work was performed throughout Europe (Moscow New Opera, St Petersburg, National Philharmonic of Ukraine, Cadogan Hall, London). *Manoli...!* is Argyrides' first and only opera.

Manoli...! is the monologue of a mother whose life is marked by despair and anger for the unpunished murder of her son during the July 1974 coup. Her sole interlocutor is her cat Manolis, who bears the name of her son Manos, underlining her loneliness and isolation. Freed from the Aristotelian notion of catharsis, *Manoli* does not offer any solution to the problem of justice that preoccupies the heroine. On the contrary, it ends in uncertainty with its heroine in the same state of loneliness as in the beginning. *Manoli* belongs with those works familiar in twentieth-century opera that do not send the audience home relieved from the aroused "pity" and "fear."⁶ These emotions remain unrelieved, vibrating as it were in the wake of the music and stimulating further thinking about problems that remain unresolved.

⁶ According to Luigi Dallapiccola, this uncertainty is an element shared by many twentieth-century operas. As he argues, the nineteenth-century notion of love is no longer central to twentieth-century opera: leaving the love duet behind, it opts for

Aiming to spur reflection on recent events of Cypriot history, *Manoli* could be characterized as a “negative presentation” of the trauma of the July 1974 coup. Negative presentation is a strategy of indirection appropriate to the representation of historical trauma. One well-known example of its deployment is Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah*. Lanzmann represents the violence of the Holocaust only indirectly, through the survivors’ testimonies and their attempt to articulate what resists symbolization—their experience with genocidal murder. *Manoli* does not present Manos’ death on stage in any direct or positive way. Instead, it alludes to it through the memories of the Mother, who is presented as socially marginalized. Although elements from her life may seem to some extent familiar, it is almost impossible to identify with her situation, thus creating a distance between the drama that unravels on stage and the audience who watches and listens.

While employing this negative strategy, *Manoli* is otherwise quite close to what Bertolt Brecht called “epic theatre.” For Brecht, the “culinary” aspect of opera leads to an enjoyable experience of intoxication, to an illusion, mainly aiming at pleasure and entertainment.⁷ Opera as an “apparatus” of entertainment establishes an attitude in the spectator that is uncritical and ill-suited to reflection on social and political issues of the day. In contrast to dramatic theatre (and opera), Brecht’s epic theatre aims to develop the audience’s capacity for critical reflection and action. It narrates the plot instead of merely presenting it on stage as an object for identification and absorption. The audience retains a distance from the events depicted and can respond by activating its own critical capacities and taking a position. It is precisely such an aim that the writer Giorgos Neophytou, assigns to the play *Manoli* as well as to Cypriot theater in general in an interview in 1988: “A Cypriot play is a conversation with the audience, it talks to him about things that he knows well, about burning subjects, and challenges him to take a stand.”⁸ Neophytou is well acquainted with Brecht’s work, to which he was exposed during his studies in Leipzig in the 1960s. His play *On Love and Other Things* (1998/9) for Cyprus Theatre Organization (THOK) is a collage of Brecht’s poems and songs.

Manoli is a brief, intense, and direct work freed from any decorative elements in its musical unfolding of human suffering. Silence and loneliness are reinforced by the use of spoken word, which is mostly heard without orchestra—a bare voice coming out of silence. The opera starts with a shot and the voice of the Mother looking for Manoli (“Manoli wo bist du?”), leading to an orchestral interlude. The opera consists of interchanges between spoken word without any orchestral accompaniment, recitative-like passages where the narration is loosely set to music, arioso-like passages, and several arias with occasional spoken word accompanied by music. These interchanges give an impression of discontinuity that suits the text and action. The compositional terms mentioned here are not described by the composer as such, but

monologue, turning loneliness into an aesthetic stance, and ending in uncertainty. This is not to suggest that anxiety, loss, and loneliness are not encountered as opera themes prior to the twentieth century. For example, Richard Wagner’s work focuses on the notions of loss and lack, characteristic of the human condition. However, in the case of Wagner, loss and lack are part of a larger fantasy, in which love takes a central and redemptive role, countering both pain and lack. This is what is implied with Wagner’s motive of redemption through woman’s selfless and loving sacrifice: sacrificial love offers a solution to this immeasurable loneliness and fallibility, granting metaphysical salvation through love. On the contrary, the representation of the experience of modernity leaves no room for such a fantasy in twentieth-century operas, where anxiety and trauma are not only central but also often remain unresolved. The ending of Dallapiccola’s *Il prigioniero* is a good example. Raymond Fearn, *The Music of Luigi Dallapiccola* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 126. For more on the notion of redemption vis-à-vis loss and the Lacanian fantasy of wholeness, see Anna Papaeti, “Rethinking Redemption: Woman and Sacrificial Love in Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas,” (PhD thesis, King’s College London, 2007).

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1990), 34–41.

⁸ Annita Kostekoglou, “Γιώργος Νεοφύτου: Δικαιοσύνη και όχι Εκδίκηση” [“Giorgos Neophytou: Justice not Revenge”], *Kerykas*, April 17, 1988. The translations of Cypriot newspaper articles from Greek into English are my own.

are used in a broad sense in order to offer a clearer view of the opera's structure; with the exception of sections of spoken word, the opera is through composed. The sense of discontinuity is reinforced by the use of chromatic passages for orchestra that alternate between spoken word and sparse orchestral writing. Despite the heavy use of half tones and chromaticism, the composer never abandons tonality. However, diatonicism is used selectively, pointing to the lives of the Mother and Manos before the coup, thus turning the past into the Mother's point of stability, both dramatically and tonally. Examples are the aria "Eines Tages" recalling the past, which follows the opening orchestral interlude and first spoken-word section, and the aria "Mit siebzehn war mein Manos," which refers to Manos' first love and comes shortly after "Eines Tages."

By various means the composer translates effectively into music the Mother's anxiety and melancholy. Her vocal line constantly stumbles in silence and repetition. Chromatic and rhythmic *ostinati*, consisting of brief motivic figures and heavily employing half tones, alternate with spoken word and silences, while her chromatic vocal line occasionally falls back into a nostalgic diatonicism and lyricism. The persistent repetition of chromatic phrases (often alluding to the modal colors of Greek music) both by the Mother and the orchestra undermines the diatonic character of the work, giving the music an effect of weariness. The Mother's fragmented musical language, broken down by perpetual repetition of small motivic units that do not unravel her music, translates musically the nature of trauma as something raw and unyielding, as a knot that, when it is not processed by the subject and assimilated as experience, resorts to repetition.⁹

According to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, trauma is "the object of anxiety" and belongs to the site of the real—that which lies beyond language and resists symbolization.¹⁰ For Lacan, the symbolic order, structured by laws, is essentially a linguistic dimension. It is what keeps the real, the traumatic, at bay by means of institutional and linguistic codes. Subjectivity is constituted through entry into the symbolic order. However, the symbolic order wounds the child (*qua* would-be subject) by refusing it the excessive enjoyment (*jouissance*) experienced in the dyadic relationship with the mother. In the order of law, this enjoyment is reserved for the father (*le nom du père*). On the other hand, the symbolic protects the child from this incestuous enjoyment and its risks of violent conflict: the child thus enters the symbolic as a subject who can enjoy the benefits of law but can never escape its own constitution through lack and desire, which for Lacan are coexistent.¹¹ The real, then, returns the subject to this remainder of lack in its own formation. It is the impossible, traumatic kernel that lies beyond the symbolic order; it is encountered beyond language and law, hence its traumatic quality. For Lacan, traumatic encounters with violence and death put the subject in contact with this more fundamental threat to subjectivity as such. As an encounter with the real that cannot be managed by such symbolic processes as substitution and displacement, trauma exceeds symbolizable experience and expresses itself symptomatically in obsession, repetition, and

⁹ On trauma and repetition, see Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan XI (London: Vintage, 1998), 42–70.

¹⁰ The symbolic, the imaginary, and the real are the three orders that comprise Jacques Lacan's classification system, which allows the understanding of psychoanalytic phenomena. For a more detailed exposition of these categories see Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 82–84, 159–161, 201–203. On the ego and subject, the imaginary and symbolic relations see Jacques-Alain Miller, "An Introduction to Seminars I and II, Lacan's Orientation Prior to 1953 (II)," in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud*, eds. R. Feldstein, B. Fink, and M. Jaanus (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 21–23.

¹¹ The imaginary always betrays characteristics of illusion such as wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, and similarity. It is, therefore, the order of deceptive appearances. The real is thus also situated in opposition to the imaginary order.

blockage.¹² In the opera this is efficiently conveyed through the repetition of small rhythmic and melodic units. A good example is the phrase “Ich weiss, dass sie wiederkommen” (“I know that they will come back”, Sound Example 1).¹³ The melodic and rhythmic motif, which is repeated throughout the passage, returns later in the work, mirroring in a sense the return of the trauma.

Sound Example 1: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0006.103>

Furthermore, Argyrides effectively sets to music the society’s refusal to listen and respond to the Mother’s testimony. At the point when the Mother notes that she does not care about what other people, who consider her crazy, believe or say, Argyrides composes short passages for men’s and women’s choruses. These are heard early in the opera after the aria “Eines Tages” and before the aria “Mit siebzehn war mein Manos,” sounding like voices coming out of the Mother’s head (Sound Example 2):

Women’s Chorus

God, the poor woman, since she lost her son, she is totally confused. Her nerves!

Men’s Chorus

Forget it, dear madam, forget about it! There was a war. We were invaded. We cannot change this, unfortunately. There is no evidence.

Sound Example 2: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0006.103>

In these passages, which consist of short musical phrases, the composer uses contrapuntal imitation, sounding rather canonic: he systematically brings in the subject in all voices, one by one with very few, insignificant changes, since the subject is melodically rather static. It is the weaving of the rhythmic pattern that creates intensity through imitation of the subject in the different voices and their overlap. Through imitation Argyrides manages to create the sense of a violent blockage that is impossible to penetrate, suppressing any voice that wishes to say something different. Contrary to the men’s and women’s choruses, the Mother’s phrase “Mein Sohn ist nicht im Krieg umgekommen! Wie oft soll ich es Euch sagen?” (“My son did not lose his life in the war. How often do I have to repeat myself?”) is characterized by a chromatically descending line in half tones (G to A). This starts off fragmented. Soon, however, it appears more composed and decisive in her next phrase, “Er war nicht im Krieg mein Sohn” (“My son wasn’t in the war”), which is essentially a melodic augmentation of the previous line. It consists of a half-tone descent from G to B-flat in quarter notes and half notes, and is freed from any melodic ornaments or rests, thus highlighting her determination and commitment to her cause. However, her intervention is not successful in penetrating the choruses and making their musical language more dialectical. Her words “Welcher Krieg? Welche Invasion und das was vorher passiert ist?” (“What war? What invasion? What about what happened before that?”) are crushed by the Men’s Chorus which sings in homophony, “Was vorher passiert war das reinste Durcheinander. Wer kann sich noch zur recht finden?” (“What happened

¹² Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26.

¹³ All sound examples are taken from the recording of *Manoli...!* by Multisound (MLSD 101). Jayne Kasselmann sings Mother; Jiri Starek conducts the Pfalztheater Orchestra. I would like to thank Multisound and Vassos Argyrides for kindly permitting the use of these sound examples.

before, that was pure chaos. Who can still find his way in this chaos?"). These passages are worth noting because they not only highlight the social desire to silence the voices that speak of the past, but also represent an acoustic testimony of the way the Mother perceives the response of society, that is, as voices that block her discourse and force her into several repetitions of the phrase "Ich habe nicht" ("Ich habe nicht den Verstand verloren"/ "I haven't lost my mind"). Her desperate insistence on this traumatic event is reflected not only in the above-mentioned repetition, but also in the rhythmic and melodic *ostinati* in the winds and strings (and the brass at the very end) that characterize her two phrases and have a weary effect.

Manoli's end is inconclusive. The Mother's wish "that they will not come back," is left hanging in the air. ("They" here are the murderers of EOKA B, a formation that emerged from within the Mother's own Greek-Cypriot community.) The opera ends with an imaginary trial, staged in the Mother's head, during which she testifies, somberly repeating the phrase "so they don't come back." Argyrides uses timpani and military drum as well as winds and brass, effectively creating the atmosphere of a funeral march but more importantly of a military band, thus musically conveying the Mother's militant fixation on justice (Sound Example 3).

Sound Example 3: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0006.103>

Brass instruments have been commonly associated with the military. However, the military tone of the music in *Manoli...!* is not necessarily optimistic, since it underlines the fact that the Mother's decisiveness estranges her from the society she lives in. Her solitary voice underlines the fact that she stands alone in her cause. In addition to this, the sounds of funeral marches in Cyprus have been associated with Good Friday and the procession of the Epitaph, a ritual that happens at night, in the middle of mass. Specifically, people and priests escort the Epitaph, carried by soldiers, to the center of the neighborhood, mirroring Christ's burial procession. This is usually accompanied by a band—often a police or military one—playing funeral marches, reinforcing the atmosphere of mourning. In this sense, the ending of *Manoli...!* also underlines the fact that, for the Mother, the trial will be a kind of symbolic burial of her son that will let him find peace. The work, which starts with a shot, ends with the march-like sound of the military drum, gradually fading away into silence.

Amnesty, Memory, and Forgetting

Manoli confronts the painful issues of amnesty and forgetting in postwar Cyprus. In the aftermath of the Greek coup and of the Turkish invasion, the need for national reconciliation and unity in the face of occupation was a priority for President Makarios. Hence, upon his return to the island Makarios announced that he was extending the "olive branch" of amnesty to his political enemies, pleading for peace within the Greek-Cypriot community, but also between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots.¹⁴ The perpetrators of the dictatorship in Greece were brought to justice through legal processes.¹⁵ In Cyprus, however, the members of the armed group EOKA B did not stand trial. Only one figure who was brought

¹⁴ President Makarios cited in Syros Papageorgiou, *Μακάριος* [Makarios] (Athens: G. Ladia, 1976), 308–309. My translation.

¹⁵ The Greek Colonels stood trial in 1975 and were sentenced to death. Their sentence was later changed to life imprisonment after the intervention of Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis. In addition to the coup "instigators," those involved in the bloody suppression of the 1973 Polytechnic University in Athens and the Junta torturers also stood trial.

to power by the coup, journalist-publisher Nikos Samson, was prosecuted.¹⁶ In August 1976 Samson was sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment. Three years later he was released by presidential decree due to health problems, on the condition that he would seek treatment abroad and live in exile.¹⁷ Samson returned to Cyprus in 1990 to complete his sentence, and was finally released in 1992 by a decree of President George Vassiliou. Moreover, the state's only gesture to deal with the coup was the attempt to "purge" the civil service and security forces. In 1977 the Council of Ministers of President Spyros Kyprianou appointed two committees to investigate and bring to justice misdemeanors by civil servants who took part in the coup. A total of 1,122 complaints were filed against 2,151 civil servants, but of those only 303 made it to trial. In 1979, sixty-two people lost their jobs by ministerial decree.¹⁸ The so-called "62" were restored retrospectively in the 1990s by the government of Glafkos Clerides. This symbolic gesture nevertheless provoked strong reactions and confirmed that the events of 1974 remained raw for many. Indicative is the statement made by presidential candidate George Iakovou during the 1998 elections that "by restoring the '62' [the Clerides government] tried to rewrite contemporary Cypriot history by absolving the coup."¹⁹

The way Greek-Cypriots dealt with the polarization that culminated in the coup is not very different from that followed in other countries such as Spain and Argentina in the aftermaths of their lengthy military dictatorships. Despite the fact that the coup in Cyprus lasted only a week, it is important to look briefly into the responses of these two countries to national conflict in order to contextualize the reaction of Cypriot authorities in 1974. In the case of Spain, the so-called "pact of forgetfulness" (*pacto del olvido*) was marked by the absence of a collective discussion about the violent past. At the end of the war both Republicans and Nationalists agreed to the so-called "never again" (*nunca más*) in an attempt to safeguard the transition from hostility to a mutual recognition of collective responsibility.²⁰ For some, however, the general amnesty of 1977 was, in the words of one Socialist MP, "simply a forgetting. . . an amnesty for everyone, a forgetting for everyone, by everyone."²¹ Similarly, in Argentina of 1986 the so-called Full-Stop Law (*Ley de Punto Final*) granted amnesty to everyone who took part in the seven-year military junta that took power in 1976.²²

Clearly, the fear that ideological polarization would reignite conflict has been a significant factor behind the decision to seek forgiveness and forgetting through political amnesty. In the case of Cyprus, the conflict was simmering in the Greek-Cypriot community from 1960 until July 1974. The community was divided between those who supported and those who opposed Makarios and Independence—a division reflected in the press and confirmed in the emergence of the armed group EOKA B. Thus, after the two-phased Turkish invasion and the restoration of President Makarios, the government was faced with a complicated problem. It consisted not only of the conflict within the Greek-Cypriot community and the armed groups that had not disbanded, but also of the consequences of the Turkish invasion and

¹⁶ Samson was prosecuted after a provocative speech he gave in a political gathering in the village of Platres. Andreas N. Loizou, "Το πραξικόπημα και το δίκαιον" ["The Coup and the Law"], in George Tenekides and Yannis Kranidiotis, eds., *Κύπρος: Ιστορία, Προβλήματα και Αγώνες του Λαού της* [Cyprus: History, Problems and Struggles of its People] (Athens: Hestia, [1981] 2000), 520–21.

¹⁷ Before he went abroad, Samson's jail time had been significantly reduced on the grounds of good behavior. Ibid., 527–28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 546, 548–50.

¹⁹ "Iakovou Statements," *Cyprus News Agency: News in Greek* (January 24, 1998), <http://www.hri.org/news/cyprus/kypegr/1998/98-01-24.kypegr.html>

²⁰ Paloma Aguilar, *Memory and Amnesia: The Role of the Spanish Civil War in the Transition to Democracy*, trans. Mark Oakley (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 134–5.

²¹ Giles Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels Through a Country's Hidden Past* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 76.

²² Ibid., 83. It must be noted that this law, which was later deemed unconstitutional, no longer exists in Argentina.

occupation and the urgency of disarmament. In contrast to the “never again” of Spain and the *Punto Final* of Argentina, the amnesty in Cyprus did not come as an expression and acknowledgment of collective guilt and an overall solution, but in the form of a symbolic, generous gesture of its President. The silencing of the July 1974 events left uneasy many who saw the perpetrators continue their everyday lives without assuming responsibility or expressing any form of remorse. It is in this context that the Mother in *Manoli* repeatedly speaks of the need for accountability for those involved in the coup, “so that the case can be closed.” The Mother’s anger is constantly rekindled when she sees her son’s murderer, who lives in her neighborhood and treats her like a crazy old lady. Each encounter makes her relive the trauma of witnessing his death:

I see them coming! I know that they will come back. I can see it in their eyes, Manoli, when he steps out of his store and looks at me. He laughs full of mockery, Manoli. And I blush. I blush and am ashamed and walk away. I run away, Manoli, full of shame, as if I were the murderer and he the victim.²³

The killer’s lack of self-reflection is not accidental. The playwright/librettist here refers to real events and, specifically, to a group of people who had been involved in the coup but did not keep a low profile. It is precisely to this kind of behavior that President Makarios refers in his speech a year after the coup, urging people to maintain the fragile unity but at the same time registering his concern and anxiety over the reckless attitude of coup participants:

Forgetting the past, peace and unity was and is my intention and my honest wish. However, the stance of those who participated in the coup so far has been unacceptable, they [...] have a provocative behavior and present themselves as ultra-patriots, as leaders of the struggle.²⁴

Hence, through the story of the Mother the personal sphere meets the political, with references to real events and unresolved issues at the heart of the Greek-Cypriot community.

Figure 3. Program of *Manoli...!* for Pfalztheater, 1990.

²³ I would like to thank Kristian Krieger for translating the German libretto into English.

²⁴ Makarios cited in Papageorgiou, *Μακάριος*, 312. My translation.

The Mother's entrapment in the past makes her appear mentally fragile to those around her, who view her as someone unable to deal with the fact that her son was murdered. The comments on the Mother's mental condition are contained in the opera (possibly for reasons of consistency) but appear more extensively in the play on which it is based:

[T]hey think I'm crazy. Crazy. But they are fools too, Manoli. They have given me their own madness. But how come they think I'm deaf and they talk as if I cannot hear them? Yesterday, as I was walking outside the school, Eleni was standing at her door with her neighbor Ioanna. "How are you, Mrs Maria, how are you doing, are you well, we don't see you anymore." Small talk. As soon as I left . . . , I only made a step, Manoli, just a step, and they started. "Poor her, since her son died she is not well. Her nerves." And the other one said, "It's the war, dear Mrs Eleni. That's what happens in the war."

What can I say to them? Should I go back and tell them that it is your mind that's sick? Because you understand nothing. How many times should I say this to you? MY SON WAS NOT KILLED IN THE WAR. HE WASN'T IN THE WAR, MY SON.²⁵

The Greek-Cypriot society is portrayed here as one that suppresses any voices that bring to the fore the traumatic events of national conflict, jeopardizing the fragile stability. The contrast between the Mother and society regarding memory is not simply a dramaturgical device but reflects a divergence within the Greek-Cypriot community at the time. The following article of the newspaper *Epikaere* (*Επίκαιρη*) with regard to the premiere of the opera in 1990 reflects this divergence:

[T]he lie behind the official side, behind the slogans "I don't forget" or "All the refugees to their homes", when the same official side excludes the real expression of the desire for justice, looking condescendingly at those who wish it, shaking their head and calling them full of "understanding" "poor people who did not manage to pull themselves together!" [...] Neophytou cuts into this schizophrenia that characterizes our official, political discourse, which, on the one hand, glorifies those sacrificed, the freedom-fighters and the mothers who lost their children for their country, while, on the other, it turns these very same people into clinical cases in our everyday social reality.²⁶

Cyprus is not unique in depicting as mentally ill those who hold firmly onto the past, failing to see that for the victims the event has no closure, no ending; it is something very present that cannot be relegated summarily to the past. The story of the mothers of the "disappeared" during the dictatorship in Argentina presents us with a similar case. Specifically, the refusal of some of the so-called *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* ("Mothers of Plaza de Mayo") to accept compensation offered by the democratic state for the disappearance of their children changed their status in Argentinean society. Although the Mothers had been a much-respected social movement, the refusal of monetary reparation by some at a certain point led to their marginalization. From "mothers of the nation," they later came to be called *Las Locas de Plaza de Mayo* ("The crazy ones of Plaza de Mayo") by some voices in both the media and the government since "they no longer embodied the state's vision of a reconciled nation."²⁷ Just like Maria in the opera, the mothers were considered hostages of the past, while their quest for justice, vital for them for the symbolic closure of the cycle of violence, was considered an obstacle and a negation of the new democratic regime.

²⁵ Giorgos Neophytou, "Μανώλη...", in *Plays* (Nicosia: Anev, 2010), 208–209. My translation.

²⁶ Costas Georgiou, "Γιώργου Νεοφύτου 'Μανώλη...!': Η 'τρέλλα' αυτού του τόπου" ["Giorgos Neophytou's 'Manoli...!': The 'Madness' of this Country"], *Epikaere*, June 2, 1990.

²⁷ Hamber and Wilson, "Symbolic Closure," 45.

The parallel with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo did not go unnoticed and was noted in the programs of both German productions of *Manoli*. Both programs include a reference to an Argentinian mother whose daughter disappeared. Additionally, the opening spread of the Pfalztheater's program presented the production's image quoting a line from a letter of an Argentinian mother (Figure 3): "Wir alle werden noch sehr viel tun müssen, damit so etwas niemals wieder geschehen kann" ("We all have to do much more, so that such a thing does not ever happen again").

The theme of memory as ritual is very important in *Manoli*. Neophytou turns the Mother's need to tell her story into a focal point of the work: her testimony will unravel the knot of her trauma, enabling her to symbolize it. Thus, the trial of Manos' killer will prove to be vital on many levels. On a political level, it will ensure the gathering of important experiences and information, which will open up a public debate on the events of 1974. On a personal level, the Mother's testimony will function as a form of psychotherapy, since she will put into words what has been making her language stumble, what essentially has been censored by society itself. In a way, her testimony will reproduce the psychoanalytic process: Maria, the analysand, tells her story, and by listening to her, the judges, acting as psychoanalysts, become witnesses to her testimony. This structure has been the subject of much discussion within the discipline of trauma studies. According to the psychoanalyst Dori Laub, the absence of a true listener to the victim's testimony may lead to "a re-experience of the event itself."²⁸ A cofounder of the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University and a Holocaust survivor himself, Laub's work has been groundbreaking in theorizing the process of witnessing. Testimony, he writes, is not a monologue but presupposes a listener, through whom the survivor can reconstitute the internal "thou," an inner witness; in other words, through narration the survivor reclaims her position as a witness.²⁹ Laub's understanding of testimony has been influential to theorist Kelly Oliver's notion of subjectivity as an outcome of the "address-ability" and "response-ability" entailed in witnessing.³⁰ Taking as her starting point the ability to respond to the victim's testimony—to something that we cannot see but which lies beyond recognition—Oliver frees witnessing from the Hegelian master/slave dialectic, that is, from the witness that narrates as well as from the other who, by listening, grants him recognition. Our obligation, according to Oliver, is "not only to respond but also respond in a way that opens up rather than closes off the possibility of response by others," thus creating the potential for a witnessing subjectivity beyond oppression.³¹

At this point it is important to stress the fact that although testimonies of traumatic experiences are important for victims and society, the redemptive potential of such a process should not be overestimated. This has been extensively discussed with regard to the South-African Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation, which institutionalized the notion of testimony in the process of the nation's recovery from Apartheid and civil war. By considering truth as a unified experience, the Commissions distinguished four categories of truth: personal, social, therapeutic, and the truth of events.³² Their slogan, "Revealing is Healing," denotes their confidence in the testimonies of victims and perpetrators, which can heal the trauma of apartheid both on the personal and national levels. However, the Truth Commissions

²⁸ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 67–68.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 70–71, 85.

³⁰ Oliver, *Witnessing*, 15–17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³² Among the criticism mounted against South Africa's Commissions of Truth and Reconciliation was that they focused on the idea of memory as something homogeneous, static, and collective, instead of approaching it as a political process or a constant struggle through which the representation of the past would continue to be questioned after the Truth Commissions. Antje Schwesig-Simac, *Fantasy Politics: A Lacanian Approach to Truth Commissions* (MA thesis, London School of Economics, 2004), 19.

were heavily criticized for oversimplifying the process of healing traumatic experiences without making clear who was undergoing therapy (individuals, families, community, nation)³³ and without ensuring the repentance of the criminals: in return for testifying about their crimes they were acquitted. However, the most problematic point of the truth commissions is the very concept of truth, in this case an idealized notion considered to be a privilege of those who manage to free themselves, seen outside power and not as conditioned by political and economic power.

In *Manoli...!* there is a constant, burning need for testimony, since the work is essentially a testimony of a testimony, and like every testimony it hides a secret which resists the Mother's verbal and musical efforts to articulate it.³⁴ Although many survivors resort to silence, the Mother is obsessed with narrating the murder of her son. Despite the fact that her language and music are fragmented and stumble on the impenetrable nature of her secret, she insists out of a sense of (but also the burden of) responsibility. Nevertheless, her act of telling is not in any sense therapeutic since her sole listener is her cat Manolis. The absence of a listener, who will be a witness to her witnessing and will respond to it undermines the formation of an inner witness and the possibility of a new subjectivity emerging through her testimony.

Neophytou is right in making the trial the focal point of the opera and the Mother's sole *raison d'être*. In fact, the trial draws close to what Slavoj Žižek calls "second death," thus highlighting the difference between first and second death. As Žižek explains in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), this difference resides "between real (biological) death," on the one hand, and on the other, its symbolization, "the accomplishment of symbolic destiny" (the "settling of accounts").³⁵ When these two deaths do not coincide, a suspended space between life and death emerges. This is the site of the Lacanian real, a space of beautifully sublime and fearsomely undead creatures: Antigone and Hamlet's father are the two prominent examples discussed by Žižek.³⁶ Hamlet's father is more comparable here. Contrary to Antigone's symbolic exclusion preceding her actual death, his real death precedes the symbolic one. Only when the death of Hamlet's father is brought to a symbolic closure by the punishment of his murderer will he be able to find rest and cease to be a zombie-like existence caught between life and death. It is in this space that we need to seek Manos, who is unable to "rest" until justice is served. In this context, the Mother's silence simply repeats his (real) death: "But I cannot just remain silent, Manoli. I would feel as if I bury him for a second time." Only the long-awaited trial can bring this affair to a close and complete Manos' symbolic destiny, allowing both mother and son to rest. However, what is most important about it is not the killer's punishment but the Mother's testimony itself, through which the witnessing of her son's death will finally come into existence. Through her narration the Mother will be heard for the first time. She will address her community and will be able to assume a new form: a subjectivity beyond oppression through the dialectical process of witnessing, through the opening of a space for discussion about the traumas of 1974.

³³ Grahame Hayes, "We Suffer Our Memories: Thinking About the Past, Healing, and Reconciliation," *American Imago* 55, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 32, 34.

³⁴ Paul Celan's verse "Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen" ("No one bears witness for the witness") refers precisely to the impossibility of absolute testimony. Paul Celan, "Aschenglorie" ["Ash-Aureole"], in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 260–1.

³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), 135. Žižek has also discussed the notion of "second death" in relation to Richard Wagner's music dramas in Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002); and in Slavoj Žižek, "'The Wound will Heal with the Spear that Smote You': The Operatic Subject and its Vicissitudes," in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 177–214.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

Reception: Symptoms of Repression

The absence of a public discourse on the national conflict following the Independence of 1960 and reaching its climax in July 1974 is the context in which the play and the opera *Manoli* were written. Indeed the unprocessed nature of the trauma of the coup is evident in the reviews of the televised rendition of the play, starring actress Despina Bebedeli. The play was aired on Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) on July 15, 1988, the fourteenth anniversary of the coup. It was hailed by newspapers from across the political spectrum, while some journalists took the opportunity to speak extensively about the issue of historical memory and the dangers of forgetting. An article in the leftist newspaper *Haravgi* [Χαράβγη] discusses the notions of memory and forgetting as well as the lack of the justice needed to ensure a less violent future.³⁷ According to the journalist, the work forces us to see the links between past, present, and future. It comes to awaken us from our lethargic sleep, acting as “an instigator of our conscience, our duty,” pushing us “towards the accomplishment of our duty with regard to the dead, to present and future generations [...], towards catharsis in the literal and metaphorical sense of the word.” Similar thoughts and emotions are also expressed more intensely in another article in *Haravgi* titled “Coups and Television. The Necessity of Memory: The Work *Manoli*...!” The article, published five days before the play aired, draws on the fact that there was no punishment for those involved in the coup: “the seven-day president Samson is cruising Europe”; the perpetrators “with the machine guns have become politicians and try to give us lessons on patriotism”; and “the victims of the coup and the invasion have not found any justice, while the perpetrators live among us.”³⁸ The emotionally charged tone of the article, characteristic of many, is remarkable given that fourteen years had passed. In the journalist’s view this intensity responds to the attempt of national television to downplay the anniversary of the coup and of the invasion: there were only two programs dedicated to the events, namely the play *Manoli* at 7:45 p.m. and a special children’s program at 6 p.m. Additionally, the tone of the article also responds to the fact that, although the play was commissioned a year earlier by CyBC and was scheduled to be aired on July 15, 1987, it was withdrawn at the last minute due to “technical reasons.”³⁹ The last-minute withdrawal was only disclosed eight months later by Despina Bebedeli. This took place during an event on “Contemporary Greek Plays” at the Nicosia Municipal Theatre. When the keynote speaker, Greek playwright Iakovos Kabanellis, praised *Manoli* as an exemplary work of contemporary Greek theater,⁴⁰ the actress stood up and informed everyone what had happened the previous July. The affair was widely reported in the press and was treated as a symptom of the politics of forgetting. The comments of the leftist newspapers *Embros* [Εμπρός] and *Haravgi* are characteristic:

Was it postponed so that it could be shown at a day with no relevance and no pain, so that its directness and importance is diminished? [...] The work must be shown on its day, even with a year’s delay. We will be waiting for it. We know the answers, at least to some of our questions.⁴¹

The fact that it was filmed shows that someone read it and approved it. Also, the fact that it was shelved means that someone else saw it and rejected it. So the issue must be understood in light of the conflict of opinions within the bureaucracy of the CyBC [...]. We understand that the

³⁷ Nikos Tsouris, “‘Μανώλη’: Σκέψεις και προβληματισμοί” [“Thoughts on ‘Manoli’”], *Haravgi*, July 29, 1988.

³⁸ “Πραξικόπημα και τηλεόραση. Η αναγκαιότητα της μνήμης: Το έργο ‘Μανώλη’” [“Coups and Television. The Necessity of Memory: The Work ‘Manoli’...!”], *Haravgi*, July 10, 1988.

³⁹ Personal statement of the playwright Giorgos Neophytou in April 2006.

⁴⁰ According to Neophytou, he gave the play to Kabanellis at the beginning of 1988 during a visit to Athens.

⁴¹ Meropi Tsimilli-Michael, “Κόλαφος για τους ‘αρμόδιους’ του ΠΙΚ” [“A Slap at the ‘High Officials’ of CyBC”], *Embros*, March 8, 1988.

play's subject matter might have annoyed some conservative circles of the CyBC establishment. But which ones?⁴²

The CyBC never seriously explained the withdrawal, but the left-wing press did not hesitate to interpret it as an attempt to play down the anniversary of the coup so that the fragile political status quo would not be shaken. These articles indict the politics of forgetting with which the state television channel is accused of participating. At the same time the emotional intensity of their language makes clear that even after fourteen years there are still divergent and traumatic memories of the events of July 1974. This difference in recollecting the past, along with an underlying division in the Greek-Cypriot community, was evident in the weeks leading up to the referendum for the Annan Plan in April 2004; 75.83% of Greek Cypriots voted “no” while 64.90% of Turkish Cypriots voted “yes.” The Annan Plan was a United Nations proposal, initiated by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and aiming at a solution to the Cyprus problem and the reunification of the island.⁴³ It proposed the creation of the United Cyprus Republic with a new constitution.⁴⁴ The referendum on the Annan Plan was a traumatic moment for a large part of the Greek-Cypriot community: among other things, it pointed to an analogy between the present situation and the past. Some who rejected the Plan pointed to the imminent dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus. For some supporters of the Plan, however, its rejection would invite a new catastrophe of the Greek diaspora; the allusions to the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe⁴⁵ were many at the time. This analysis does not try to support a one-dimensional reading of the polymorphous character of the “yes” and the “no” responses to the referendum. It aims, however, to underline the psychological dimension of the exchange of opinions and characterizations among citizens in the weeks preceding the referendum. According to Paloma Angular, although such an analogy to a past event can often be an imaginary one, it is nevertheless experienced as a real one both politically and socially.⁴⁶ In the case of the Annan Plan, the dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus constituted a more imminent and real threat than any catastrophic demise of the Greek-Cypriot community possibly ensuing from the rejection of the Plan, particularly in light of Cyprus accession to the EU.⁴⁷ Once again, Greek Cypriots were wielding accusatory terms firmly associated with 1974 in order to characterize positions taken vis-à-vis the Annan Plan (for example, “patriots,” “traitors”). The polarization is symptomatic of deeper trauma, as well as of the absence of true reconciliation between opposing groups within the Greek-Cypriot community after the coup and the invasion. In this sense, the traumas and issues raised in *Manoli* are still current in contemporary Cypriot society. They point to a public discussion that needs to take place between Greek Cypriot parties and citizens so that the past does not appear in the disruptive and raw form of trauma but, rather, is effectively mourned and worked through.

The opera *Manoli...!* effectively translates musically the Mother's failed but continuous attempt to speak of the unspeakable—the murder of her son. A monologue that oscillates between sound and silence, it attempts to express a personal and collective trauma of recent Cypriot history. It therefore contributes to

⁴² “Το σκάνδαλο του ‘Μανώλη’” [“The Scandal of ‘Manoli’”], *Haravgi*, March 18, 1988.

⁴³ http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/Annan_Plan_Text.html.

⁴⁴ Among other things, it included a new flag and new national anthem and offered regulations for a limited right to return that restricted the right of free movement (guaranteed under EU law).

⁴⁵ The Asia Minor Catastrophe refers to the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–22, a series of military events occurring during the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. The Greek campaign was launched after promises of territorial gains by the western Allies. It ended with Greece giving up all territory gained during the war and returning to its pre-war borders as well as a population exchange with the newly established state of Turkey.

⁴⁶ Angular, *Memory and Amnesia*, 9–10.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the Annan Plan in the context of the recent history of Cyprus, see Anderson, “Divisions of Cyprus.”

a process of seeking to understand and critically process the past. It is a testimony that speaks of the loneliness entailed in being a witness and of the burden of responsibility of such knowledge, which, in this case, speaks of death itself. At the same time the work addresses our ability and obligation to respond so that a new kind of subjectivity can emerge from the dialectical process of witnessing, based on testimony as well as on the other's "response-ability." In the case of Cyprus the other should not only point to people like Maria but should also include the Turkish-Cypriot community, which has also suffered from inter-communal fighting in the 1960s and the events of July 1974. The dialectical process of witnessing opens a space for new subjectivity, which emerges as an optimistic possibility that lies beyond the other's recognition and despite the abuse and violence of the past. The Mother in *Manoli...!* asks us to listen closely to her story and, therefore, allow her to be. Her call refers not only to the event itself but also to what remains unspoken, beyond recognition, to what is missed through the cracks of her testimony, through her silence, in other words, to death itself. The opera manages to translate the element of silence and the elliptic nature of testimony, as well as the repetition of the trauma that blocks the Mother's language and fragments her music, thus turning the work into an effective negative presentation of the personal and collective trauma of the July 1974 coup in Cyprus.