

Alzheimer's, national bankruptcy, and hegemonic masculinities in Greece

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This paper experiments with the tension between self-exploration and the production of scientific knowledge. It positions itself at the junction of ethnography and autobiography, with a bit of fiction added in. I interweave autobiographical narrative concerning my father in the period pre-dating a diagnosis of Alzheimer's, with reflection, and hypothesis formulation, concerning my current research project on an ostensibly unrelated subject. My fieldwork focuses on the sovereign debt crisis in Athens, Greece and its impact on gendered and disparately nationalized subjectivities.

I draw from personal life in yet another way here, as my research 'field' is where I currently live and work. Thus, the paper traces some of the ways with which emergent narratives based on physicalized crisis in 'personal' life, both my father's Alzheimer's and my own experience of national crisis discourse and austerity measures, produce ideas and writing that fuel ethnographic work on larger social realities, and their politics. Part of what surfaces at critical junctions, with some irony to be sure, is a broader process of self-exploration. Yet, part of the project here is to suggest that the 'personal' self, as we have come to know it in any case, as it is normalized and naturalized that is, should not be memorialized. The ability of individuals to adjust and survive, physically and emotionally, and the sharpening of critical theory aimed at resisting politics that totalize, whether the latter target people suffering from Alzheimer's or populations in financial duress, are both contingent on the acknowledgement of the possibility that 'preservation' of a former sense of self is not necessarily beneficial. This paper argues that the self really is not something worthy of that much attention in those terms.

[Alzheimer's, autoethnography, hegemonic masculinity, subjectivity, Greece]

*Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are
but to refuse what we are.*

Michel Foucault, *The subject and power* 2003: 134

When individual human beings ‘fall apart’ seems to me to be a particularly interesting time and social space. The dissolution of aspects of identity, including the physical traces of this process, constitutes privileged research ground for the social sciences as a whole. Be it the sovereign nation or the sovereign individual, the state of sovereignty could perhaps be counted as one of the most powerful foundational fictions for key political subjects of the west, broadly defined. This seems to refer to a form of control which is linked to the mastery of disorder and contradiction, a semblance of consistency, cool reason and trustworthiness, along with the performance of a stable internal core. That these highly valued characteristics often continue to be viewed as inherent aspects of masculinity is no coincidence moreover. Seen in this context, the moments – historical or personal – wherein the construct that I somewhat loosely label sovereignty fails, or actually falls apart, stand as invaluable material, not only for the social sciences in general, but specifically for ethnography and self-understanding alike. It is two such ‘moments’ that are considered here.

In the first instance, this paper deploys an autobiographical narrative that centers on my father in the year leading up to his diagnosis with Alzheimer’s. I describe incidents wherein the fragmentation and ruptured embodiment of my father unfolds, and reverberations are transmitted to that minute part of the social web that is my family of origin. Inscribed on the description of these incidents is our own struggle with denial, as the awareness grows that something is ‘very wrong.’ Autobiographical narrative facilitates an exploration of the condition of my father as a new reality which alters his physicality and slowly dissolves his prior subjectivity, at the same time that it threatens my own in fragmenting ways. Focusing on the interface between an Alzheimer’s patient and his or her family, here in the case of one member of a fairly elite part of the population in Athens, Greece, this paper seeks to contribute to the recent literature involving ethnographies of Alzheimer’s.¹

At another level, I frame the narrative concerning first encounters with my father’s illness as significant not only because of what it says about the onset of Alzheimer’s, and its multiple effects on both the ill person and the people involved in his or her care. The autobiographical grappling with this specific form of trauma, a key aspect of which is a certain ruptured embodiment and a fundamental defamiliarization of the familiar, is also important and helpful in terms of my current fieldwork researching subjects in crisis in the Greek context. Moreover, as one of those subjects myself, I find, and attempt to show here, that this connection between the onset of my father’s illness in 2008, and Greek society during the crisis which started in 2010, resonates at an even more personal level, in terms of my own condition in the context of the sovereign debt crisis.²

In short, the year before ‘the crisis’ in Greece had given any visible sign of existence in either the Eurozone or national public discourse was the year I slowly came to realize that my father was ill. Part of what drives this paper is the *subsequent* period of time, the two years *following* the initial public announcement of a serious national problem. During this time I have had the opportunity to use knowledge gained from my experience with my father to both intellectually study, and practically cope with, some of the intra-psychic effects, often physicalized, of the sovereign debt crisis in

Greece. Yet, what this paper focuses on working through is the material *preceding* this time of ‘knowing,’ the time, that is, wherein I experienced my father’s initial disassemblage. I turn to that experience, some incidents more specifically, from my present perspective of both pursuing my research project in the sharpest way possible and struggling to adjust to the new social and economic realities in ways that are most conducive to personal survival.

Parallels are sketched between the experience of ‘discovering’ my father’s illness, coping with financial and other problems related to his illness, and the experience of people in Greece ‘discovering’ that the nation-state is in dire straits. Given that my own personal work and life situation is in fact a small piece of my current research topic, tracing the links between my father’s illness and the nation’s crisis thus involves a process of self exploration in more ways than one. Perhaps more importantly, however, this project strives to contribute to the redressing of a failure, as Herzfeld (2009: 132) describes it, “to follow through on the realization that the detail with which they [anthropologists] seem so obsessed can be used to speak about major public issues in new ways.” While I identify more as a sociologist, both sciences lack something, often in opposite ways, in terms of achieving the balance Herzfeld speaks of. Indeed, an important way to do this is to revise our attention to embodiment, as he suggests, both that of the subjects we study and of ourselves. Thus, this effort is embedded in a larger project of deploying consciously embodied autoethnography in the service of contributing to public knowledge, social scientific and other, and sharpening social analysis that is critical. I find “the moral responsibility of witnessing” which McLean and Leibing (2011: 194) posit and develop a particularly useful concept. The traffic between auto and public is only possible, I agree, to the extent that the at times quite intricate process of responsibly witnessing, in writing in this case, is achieved.

From the personal to the theory, and back

One of the arguments guiding my fieldwork has become more precise and focused as a result of the identification of similarities. That is, the pain and trauma associated specifically with a *daughter* experiencing the effects of a *father’s* Alzheimer’s formed an uncanny connection with another current research interest of mine, more theoretical up to the present, the issue of hegemonic masculinity as a field of power which is, increasingly, in crisis itself. According to Connell (1990: 83), hegemonic masculinity is “the culturally idealized form of masculinity.”³ This connection, in turn, struck a chord and honed the argument concerning the fragmentation of national and gendered selves in the context of the sovereign debt crisis. Much as Alzheimer’s dismantles normative masculinity and, in my father’s case at least, removes notions of ‘father’ as a subject who is sovereign par excellence, so the flailing of the nation-state, the ripping away of social services, including public health care, and the simultaneous failure of all the rationalizing, and firmly rationalized, IMF ‘austerity’ measures, along with the growing systemic crisis in the international banking system, all indicate, among other things, a ‘falling ill’; what I would describe as the surfacing of a constitutional frailty

in a certain model of the state as a transnational father figure of sorts.⁴ The illusion of cool and well-reasoned mastery and control, including the 'extra' characteristics of provision for the well-being of family members, which is the main effect of the performativity of normative masculinity in disparate social contexts, is indisputably, if initially quite subtly, eradicated. Moreover, key to negotiating with the new realization of this frailty, and dealing with the trauma involved, in both cases, is the speedy acknowledgement of a fundamental loss of trustworthiness.

Thus the intellectual intermingling of my personal experience with my father's illness and my research on the crisis in Greece allows me to further develop the thesis of my work.⁵ Part of what is transpiring within modern nations experiencing a sovereign debt crisis could be said to involve a certain 'Alzheimerization' of governance, in the sense that what is taking place is a massive project of erasure of institutional 'memory.' People of all ages living in Greece are witnessing a drastic reversal of taken-for-granted social commitments, such as pensions and minimum wage agreements, along with the less noticeable, though equally pervasive, disassembly of hegemonic masculinity that this entails, on the part of government, and on the part of 'simple' residents (whether citizens or not) as well.

On the part of 'simple' people living in Greece, it is easy to understand how, for example, sudden or prolonged unemployment throws a monkey wrench in to the performativity of hegemonic masculinity. The same goes for the drastic drop in salary levels, for those who remain employed. The specifically physical ways that this manifests, such as subtle changes in dress, hunching of shoulders, even a difference in the gaze of both men and women as they walk in Athens, constitute ground that is at once fascinating and frightening, while it reveals much of the ruptured embodiment I refer to. Certainly, as Sutton (2010) shows compellingly in the case of women in Argentina, the body becomes a site that visibly bears the mark of the emotional and physical strife that are concomitant to a sovereign debt crisis.

On the part of the ruling elites, heads of state, for example, such as George Papandreou, or leaders of international bodies such as the ECB or the IMF, emerge as subjects grappling with a flailing hegemonic masculinity that they simultaneously express, reinscribe and, at times, trouble. The Greek Prime Minister's sudden about-face and almost whimsical call for a public referendum in November of 2011 is one example. After over a year of spearheading the approval of massive measures without concern for public consensus, and immediately after an initial deal seemed to have been achieved with Merkel and Sarkozy, in the midst of one of the more harrowing stretches of funding uncertainty for the nation, the call for a referendum, quite late in the game, is puzzling. Though at one level it reads as a typically Zorba-like move, conveying the stereotypically unbridled passion and free-spiritedness associated with Greek men, whether as lovers or heroes, it also stands as a particularly vivid demonstration of how a markedly 'macho' gung-ho move-forward type of leadership can have an almost 'girlish,' stereotypically defined, underside. This bold move no doubt aimed at activating the Mediterranean-machismo frame of reference for the PM of dwindling popularity, as well as at securing at least minimal compliance with what was made clear would be debilitating new measures.

However, the sudden call of Papandreou on the 31st of October, to Greek citizens directly, for a sign of full and absolute support to the terms of the new loan to the country, as outlined in the Euro Summit decision of 26 October, 2011, *after* the PM had already agreed to them in his capacity as PM and member of the Summit, can also be read as cowardly, potentially sneaky and markedly un-manly in hegemonic terms. The main thing that had transpired in the interim was an expression of understandable public disgruntlement, such as several incidents of yoghurt-throwing at Members of Parliament of the governing party during the parades of the national holiday of October 28th. In this context, the call for a referendum can be viewed as a disproportionate attempt to regain ground, and prowess, echoing of a plea, distinctly unmanly, for a serious demonstration of ‘love’ after the signs of disaffection during the holiday. Merkel and Sarkozy’s own initial astonishment with the Greek PM’s sudden move, shifted fairly quickly to a clear admonition, if carefully phrased, that the referendum, if it were to take place, ask the Greek people whether or not they wanted to remain within the Euro-zone. While Papandreou’s move made their own performativities of hegemonic masculinity wobble for a moment, their stand ultimately added yet another layer of subtle emasculation to the public persona of the Prime Minister of Greece. Of course, the sexual misconduct of the former head of the IMF, Dominique Straus Kahn, and the globally transmitted images of the arrest of the heretofore bastion of the need for reasoned discipline, perhaps stand as the simplest example of the phenomenon I attempt to describe as the disassembly of hegemonic masculinities.⁶

Similarly, some people living in Greece seeking to compensate for the shock and trauma they are experiencing, and to find a more solid footing for identity, find themselves iterating exaggerated forms of both national and gender identity, often with shockingly racist and sexist consequences. It is as though, for some, a phantasmatic version of the nation, indeed a version that never quite existed in reality, is resuscitated to recover the current loss of prowess. This dynamic is made crystal clear in two examples of formal public discourse.

One, on December 2, 2011 a strange and shocking piece of news was reported with regards to the examination of candidates to join the Hellenic Coast Guard as officers of the force’s Legal Services.⁷ According to allegations that are under investigation, in a deviation from standard protocol for the specific examination process, the women candidates were suddenly informed that they would have to pass a physical examination as well. They were called before a committee of doctors, in a large auditorium-type room of the Ministry and they were told to remove all their clothes, including underwear. Allegedly, the one woman doctor on the committee listened to each woman with a stethoscope and then left the room. The candidates were then told to perform a series of physical exercises that were supposed to show ‘the state of their health.’

Second, also in December of 2011 another interesting piece of news was publicized. Having successfully cut down the capacity of public hospitals by a third, and in the midst of massive cuts on the health services and medicines provided by public insurance which is paid for by forced deductions from public servants’ salaries throughout their employment for the state, the Minister of Health, Andreas Loverdos, made a

startling announcement. During a public convention held on the topic of ‘Promoting Public Health’ he stated that undeclared prostitution is one of the biggest risks “to the Greek family” because of its relation to the transmission of AIDS (sic). In his elaboration, he apparently focused on “the juvenile African girls who work as prostitutes and are HIV positive” and concluded that “all women carriers should be deported.”⁸ Like the example of the Coast Guard’s patently sexist twist on normal examination procedures for new candidates to its ranks, the Minister of Health’s statements illustrate how the larger context of the financial crisis, and the public fear it generates, is linked to an intensification of racist and sexist sentiments, and practices, more recently held under somewhat better check in Greek society. This reflects the effort to reinstate a domain of superiority, in the face of the sudden and drastic loss of status.

Other people living in Greece-of-the-crisis, like me and my family when we first started seeing the signs of my father’s illness, evince a similar dynamic of turning ‘backwards’ to grasp at older more comfortable narratives to make one’s way with the new facts of life by simply being slow to make life-saving choices in their everyday lives, in their finances, and in their system of values, for example, as denial to accept the new situation keeps them glued to very shaky ground. From remaining in high-priced rented apartments, or apartments purchased with large loan payments that the new salary levels can no longer sustain, and driving cars they cannot meet monthly payments for, to using credit card cash withdrawals to pay for ‘usual’ monthly expenditures such as books, theater etc., many people lose crucial time as they struggle with denial during a window of time which could be used to reserve existing resources for the difficulties in store.⁹

In the public discourse example of the press conference given by the Minister of Health, the focus on young African women sex-workers in Athens as an enemy of ‘the Greek family’ attempts to deploy a familiar and longstanding nationalist preoccupation with ‘the Greek family’ in an attempt to negotiate with the harsh realities of both the massive cutbacks in health care that he himself initiated, and the growing numbers of unemployed, or illegally employed immigrants. Similarly, on the part of members of the middle class, the choice to continue to buy books or go to the theater, by extending credit card debt, even as the average middle class household’s income is greatly diminished due to sudden unemployment of members, and/or cutbacks in the pay of those employed, reflects a groping for strands of a former identity that clearly can no longer be sustained. Moreover, in both these cases, as in the case of the Coast Guard examination, we see variously crude attempts to resuscitate domains of power and superiority that are rapidly being rendered redundant by the new fiscal reality which is leveling the Greek class system.

Thus, there are important links, almost visceral, between my experience with my father and the situation I am currently witnessing, experiencing, and studying as field-work, which itself coincides with the situation of my life here in Athens where I have lived and taught at Panteion University since 2000. While each of these sheds more light on the others, the argument I sketch is that my experience of my father’s Alzheimer’s is pivotal and serves, in some ways, as a powerful ‘representative anecdote’ (Burke in Ortner 1978: 1). Parts of my experience with my father, translated into

ethnographic fragments, reveal key elements of the larger culture I am studying – Greek society in the context of the sovereign debt crisis. Also, ‘self’ work undertaken, almost of necessity, as a result of the trauma of my father’s illness, yields a honing of research inquiry. Last, the connections between the ‘father-with-Alzheimer’s’ field and the ‘Greek-subjects-in-crisis’ field, indicate a pathway not only for better intellectual understanding of my formal research topic but also for personally coping with the trauma of [the] crisis.

Timelines

The time period of the year leading up to my currently 77 yr. old father’s formal diagnosis, coincides with the year preceding the initial public recognition and declaration that Greece has a problem with sovereign debt. Greece launched its own austerity measures in February 2010, with significant cuts in public servant salaries, and then resorted to the European financial support mechanism on April 23, 2010.¹⁰ The ‘mechanism,’ a hefty loan connected to another set of austerity measures, with further cuts in salaries, along with the sharp constriction of social services provided by the state, including pensions and public health services. On May 2, 2010 the first batch of these measures were finalized and their implementation initiated.

My father’s diagnosis of Alzheimer’s from a doctor in one of the private hospitals in Athens is dated February 10, 2010. A subsequent diagnosis, this time of ‘senility,’ was issued from a doctor in one of the state-run hospitals in Athens on March 16, 2010. We needed this formal diagnosis from a state-run hospital for legal reasons in order to help us deal with the significant financial fall-out of his illness. Indeed, as the first doctor we consulted told us, “mismanagement of financial affairs is often the first symptom of Alzheimer’s.” In what follows I use a different voice to explore, and work with, incidents from the time preceding both diagnoses.

The Steinway promise

We are unique. That is how we were raised. That is how my parents acted about ‘the family.’ That is how we feel, very keenly, if in a quite different register, at the present as well. My mother told my sister to price my father’s gold Rolex the other day.

My father never even liked Rolexes, and pretty much never wore the one that my mother got him for one of his birthdays. My father is currently a retired professor of the Athens Polytechnic University. In 1973, he came to Athens, Greece, initially on a leave of absence as a full professor of Electrical Engineering at Columbia University, New York, NY. His aversion for Rolexes aside, my father is someone who was firmly committed to the Mercedes Benz that he had bought when he became a full professor at Columbia. He arranged for it to be shipped to Greece shortly after we moved here. He was 39 yrs. old at that time, if I have this piece of the family history narrative right. That is, he was roughly five years younger then, than I am as I write this, here in Athens.

My father continues to receive a check for royalties on his first, or maybe second book, from McGraw Hill Press. He happily bragged to me about this, just once more, a few weeks ago. I, a (mere) tenured Assistant Professor of Sociology at Panteion University, Athens, Greece, not married and, by choice, up to now at least, *not* a mother, told him, when he braggingly showed the royalties check to me the other day, “that’s great, daddy, wow, bravo.”

It looks like the Rolex, which was bought from Tiffany’s, “by the owner’s mother for the owner’s father” as the ad my sister has on the web states, might get 1000 Euro. My sister thinks that we should sell it even if we get a bid for less though. My sister is a psychologist for middle-school students at the prestigious Kollegio Athinon, a private school that primarily serves the children of the upper and upper-middle class of Athenian society, nestled in a beautiful park-like campus in the northern suburb of Philothei. My sister is very worried about our mother, she could have a stroke from all this. Helen is also stressed about the monthly loan payments on the condo apartment she and her husband, very firmly at times, call ‘home.’ My niece doesn’t seem to have such a heavy investment in any conglomeration of concrete, no matter how many trees surround it. But I noticed that she has become attached to just one particular route for us to approach the playground by, and she also showed signs of stress as she speaks Greek and English with great proficiency for her age, but in a more rapid and staccato tone than the average toddler, also surely stressed.

“Your aunt asked about the piano,” my mother told me today on the phone. My mother had surprised us the other day by mentioning that it might be a good idea to see if we might be able to sell the dark brown Steinway in the living room of the apartment we had grown up in and where she now lived with my father. Thankfully, they had finished paying off the apartment’s mortgage a few years ago. “It is special,” she had said, “we bought it in New York.” I wondered where my aunt asked for a quote on its resale value. This aspect of ‘selling it’ was a chore for which it was hard to get my mother’s permission. I hadn’t yet had the energy to actually do it. “At some music store downtown, I don’t know,” my mother explained. I had, however, surfed the web a bit and found that a 1972ish stand-up Steinway, without a tail, might, perhaps, get about \$10,000 in either Maine or some town in Minnesota. “And?” I asked my mother. “And, well, the thing is you need someone who wants the value not just for the piano itself, but because of its age.” As I tried to figure out what that meant my mother continued, “but you go ahead and ask, dear; she didn’t get an actual price.”

This whole situation seems so unique. We are a good family, as the carefully compiled content of the photo albums my mother has diligently prepared over the years testifies. We are, clearly, most of all, the family ‘of’ a presently retired, previously successful, often treated as gifted, *academic*. The four of us had relocated from Columbia faculty housing, in New York, New York, USA to a life of the same wonderful rank of full professor at the reverent National Polytechnic Institute of Athens, so he could fulfill his life’s dream of returning, shortly before the far right wing junta collapsed in 1974, it might need to be noted. And, now, over three and a half decades later of a ‘good’ life, with good college educations in the States for both me and my sister, plenty of travel for all and other assorted accoutrements... here we are.

Indeed, this situation, for all its apparent specialness, is not at all unique; quite the contrary, the social scientist in me is screaming. I bring to mind the walk I took in the used-to-be-posh neighbourhood of Pangrati, when I noticed that the little windows at the height of my knees looked in on little rooms with two people, or three, sometimes five or six, sitting on couch-like benches. Upon repeated observation, a discreet pause, and some slight bending down over a couple of these floor-height windows, I realized that immigrant families were living in the storage rooms that the bourgeois Greek families in the apartments above must be renting out to them. These people, of course, crowded in the basement storage rooms, would think having a gold Rolex to sell is a bit like having won a lottery.

But yet they haven't traveled the same distance, I answer back to myself. The distance travelled has got to be an important factor here. I don't mean the geographic distance. Certainly some of these people living in the underground closets of the former Athenian aristocracy have travelled much, much more of that than we have. What I'm talking about is the distance between being a 38 yr. old Greek-American full professor at Columbia University and a 77 yr. old retired full professor of Computer Science at the venerable Athens Polytechnic *who is barely paying for his own cigarettes*, who doesn't have a functioning computer, or the money to get a new one, and who is asking his 44 yr. old Bryn Mawr educated daughter, herself just recently tenured at Panteion University (somewhat less venerable, though often similarly sexist in culture, as several recent studies of Greek faculty promotion processes indicate)¹¹ and the recipient of a full 1700 Euro monthly pay (prior to the austerity cuts in salary but still less than what I earned as a teaching assistant pre-Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego), to lend him 3.500 Euro "just till the next pension payment falls in."

The precise distance I am thinking of, moreover, is the distance evidenced by what I just described, only widened by my finding, in my father's booklet of receipts, after we had received one of the first clear signs of his illness in the form of a letter from the Greek Tax Bureau stating that he owed last year's taxes, yet another receipt indicating he had been paid for consulting services offered just six months ago – for a sizeable sum no less! –, despite what was, at that time, an 'early' state of dementia or Alzheimer's. Early, I think now, though he was already driving in ways completely out of character for him by purposefully going the wrong way down one-way streets and running red lights, quite aggressively. Early, mostly in comparison to the present, wherein he has started expressing extreme rightist and pro-nationalist positions concerning Greece, while also occasionally using weird village-like lewd language, neither of which he would have ever shared with me, his eldest daughter, in the past. This distance, then, these distances rather, and the related *times* as well, have got to count for something, no matter that our home address has been the same for the past thirty years or so. They've got to count for more than something, actually.

Still, I realize, this all is very small change. It probably sounds like a funny joke to the Afghan twenty-somethings who risk their lives to sail to the Greek port of Patras and then live in a camp-city on the fringes of the port – at least until the summer of 2010 when it mysteriously caught fire – without any of the support of a city, like bathrooms or water, while ducking racist Greek police on their daily forays for food. Hav-

ing trouble responding to red lights, in a car you own and a country you are a citizen of, is certainly nothing compared to having to endanger one's own life as one tries to jump on to a moving truck to get to Italy. While there might be something common in the suffering, the Third Country Nationals migrants in Greece have certainly suffered more.

Nonetheless. Shouldn't there be a way to make all of these disparate distances count on the same ground after all, I wonder even as I proceed to walk with my feet landing a bit higher than the height of the heads of the migrant tenants of storage rooms in Pangrati.¹² Isn't the fall my sister and I are experiencing, quite different for each of us as well, with our two seventy-something parents-transmogrified-into-toddlers in tow, somehow connected to the dislocation of national others? The almost overnight transformation of our parents from two well-educated, economically stable, fully independent and overly responsible adults to two individuals that are variously dependent and unable to cope with key parts of reality is enough to cause deep feelings of dislocation in itself. But doesn't the little cliff the Halkias family is quickly sliding down also count as some form of traumatic migration?

If nothing else, there is the distance between having a father, and having that same embodied subjectivity mutate, seemingly all-of-a-sudden, into a delinquent teenage son complete with temper tantrums, violent outbursts, petty (and not-so-petty) theft and dangerous driving. On my own inner terrain anyway, this distance emerges as a horrifying chasm. Some sort of steep divide that cannot, actually, be fathomed. I somehow stumbled into it as I was walking, and found my heart lurching downwards, at a speed of hundreds of kilometers per second.

And yet, at the same time, my body, a part of *me* that is, appears to all intents and purposes to be in exactly the same place. How's that for evidence of something being seriously off with our established methods of counting distance? The people living in the storage rooms have traveled thousands of actual geographic kilometers *and* suffered untold hardship, all only to get to those storage rooms, at best. There is no way that my journey can be commensurate with that. The journey from a comfortable childhood and adolescence in Greece, to a hard-working but happy undergrad and graduate student in the United States and then on to a hard working if often discontent academic in Greece again, even when facing personal struggles with xenophobia, ageism and sexism, cannot be commensurate with that. And yet. And yet, for some reason, when the recent chapter of my father's Alzheimer's is added in, it feels as though there might be a way in which it might, might, not be arrogant, or callous, or racist, to say that there is something of a pain that is shared, something of the experience of a violent and traumatic form of migration that is shared.

Another indication. The last time I saw my father in his office he had demanded that I come see him there and return his public health insurance booklet, which I had borrowed in an effort to get approval for the routine physical exams he needs and which he can no longer afford to get at the private hospital he formerly used. Now that he was no longer earning money as a consultant, or receiving his salary as an academic, and given that my parents, like many, had not accumulated any savings, they have had to learn to live off what is left of the state's pension after the disparate payments towards recently acquired debts of my father were made. My father was sitting

by the office window, in his familiar imposing desk chair, with an air of importance that was, more than slightly, off. Some folk Greek music was playing loudly on a little portable CD player I saw next to his desk. He smiled brightly, and I noticed that his huge office in the Polytechnic was, surprisingly, very clean. The last few times I had visited his office it looked dirty. He was wearing a blue linen shirt, the same one he had been wearing when we went for coffee together the previous week. It crossed my mind that he might have been wearing it all week. Today it was buttoned crookedly and I saw from the side that part of it was not tucked into his pants. Once the initial effect of the strange new details subsided, I realized that actually the first image as I walked into his office was real. It was that of who daddy *was*; of who he has been, that is.¹³ The first *feeling* I registered, I realized, as I walked in to that so-familiar office, seeing that so-familiar face, was of a gap.

I tried to be cheery and briskly walked to where he was sitting at his desk. Before I had settled into one of the chairs on the other side of his desk, he told me that he needed a little money to pay back someone he had borrowed from, in order to take his laptop to be fixed. Just 3000 or 3500 Euro, if I could lend it to him until his next pension payment 'went in.' In fact, if I could go to the bank down the road and get that for him and come back, he'd put some coffee on for us.

I recently had the occasion to think back to that last visit of mine to my father's office. Shortly after that visit, the Polytechnic sent a letter asking that we collect all his things and vacate it as all Professor Emeriti would be sharing a small office down the hall given the new constrictions in office space. For some reason, that visit came to mind when the third round of austerity measures were approved by Parliament that included yet another cut in all public servants' salaries, including academics and hospital doctors. The new measures, along with the retroactive deduction, brought my pay that month, as an Associate Professor with tenure at Panteion University, down to 1350 Euro take-home per month. I tried to figure out why that visit to my father's office came to mind as I heard the news of the new measures on the radio driving home from Panteion one evening and I couldn't put my finger on it.

At home that evening, it became clear. The Greek parliament is going to take more money out of my pocket in order to pay for a debt that isn't mine and that might in fact well be the result of some third political entity, in turn, taking advantage of it. Or, the Greek parliament is taking more money out of my very slim pocket in order to pay for some unwise expenditure it has previously approved. Either way, the third round of austerity measures, continuing to target public servants even as big business, and lots of individuals living in the northern suburbs, such as my father, continued not to be paying even the taxes that they owed, simply is not, itself, a decision that is wise. It may look 'wise,' and organized, as so many of the IMF-ECB-EU stipulated measures look when they are presented, but there are very important ways in which it is not.

After all, I thought to myself that evening, I work, indeed I work a lot, and part of my work is to teach some of the highly prized offspring whom the country is expecting to help create 'the future'. While it may look like everything is okay, and something that is right and reasonable is happening, in fact, as my last visit to my father in his office had helped me to realize in his case, something is *very* wrong.

Connecting the pieces

As the sovereign debt crisis ‘spreads’ ... from Ireland originally, to Greece, and on to Italy, to Spain, to Portugal, even to France it seems, in ways that almost make the movie *Contagion* look timid, it is easier to say that yes, something systemic is wrong. This is not, however, a case of lax habits of personal hygiene; the crisis is not about individuals’ or groups’ laziness and ‘corruption,’ as is often said in sectors of the local and the international media about Greek people. In the case of the sovereign debt crisis, and the bail-out plans and austerity measures that are being exported and imported by disparate nations in neat ‘packages,’ much like the bundles of debt that were developed into ‘investment opportunities,’ always purporting a democratic neutrality. One important aspect is the complete lack of consideration of the historical and cultural bedrock upon which all economic activity rests in disparate national contexts. In Greece, for example, tax evasion is a tenacious part of the cultural heritage of life under the Ottoman Empire in which deceiving local authorities was prized and seen as a demonstration of both manliness and autonomy.¹⁴ Like individuals, and nations themselves, sovereignty is a historical construct which glosses aspects of reality that refute its purported naturalness. Subjectivities articulated as ‘individuals’ and social groups bounded as ‘nations,’ are not, in fact, either fully independent or fully rational political subjects.¹⁵

Another important aspect seems to involve the almost neurotic reiteration of a form of mastery. We are called on to be witnesses to a performance of superiority in skill and abilities, a techno-knowledge of fiscal management; and we are being called on to do so even in the face of its repeated failure to do anything but drastically impoverish nations that had been taught quite systematically to shape their economies around the very abundance of external loans that is currently proclaimed proof of the lack of adequate governance.

A third aspect of ‘what is wrong’ seems to be related to the growing pile of evidence that the typically nicely suited masculinities bearing the disparate fiscal and managerial masteries to the nations in need, like the former president of the IMF himself, are also, in the end, not as dispassionate and cool reasoned, not as ‘in control,’ as their rhetoric asserts. Figuratively speaking, the buttons on the shirt, if one looks carefully, are buttoned crooked. Perhaps, the idea crosses my mind, precisely because of the intensity of the on-going performance of control and logic; perhaps also because the stakes seem to be so high in the performance of superiority of this version of reason, perhaps this is the extra turn of the screw which ends up causing the machine to fall apart.

The experience with my father, immediately preceding the onset of the ‘bail out’ plan for Greece, for all the pain it caused, works as a type of ‘injection’ providing me with ‘anti-bodies’ towards some of the personal effects of the country’s financial crisis, or as a sort of ‘rehearsal stage’ for dealing with the unfolding national, and international crisis. In addition, it helps to sharpen my gaze as a researcher. A concrete central idea that has evolved as a result of the intermingling of auto-ethnography, personal life and ethnography, is that an important part of the effects of the crisis on

subjectivities at present is linked to a crisis in hegemonic masculinities. I do not think it is a coincidence that the suicide rate in Greece went up by 22.5% according to the 2012 statistics released by the Police Force, and that the majority of these were men. The sovereign debt crisis can be approached from a sociological perspective as an articulation of a process of Alzheimerization of core social institutions, in the sense of an eradication of the past and of any semblance of continuity that is the necessary ground for trustworthiness. This process, I suggest, in turn results in a fragmentation of subjectivities that is also similar to the symptoms of Alzheimer's; the sense of an erosion, and often loss, of aspects of identity that are core.¹⁶ Further, I am suggesting that an important part of the trauma relating to the crisis, like that relating to Alzheimer's, is connected to the fact that most subjectivities formed in the context of 'the West' in late modernity, in one way or another, have a form of hegemonic masculinity as a key ingredient in their disparate processes of identification. Indeed, the father figure who is wise, adequately competent, and sufficiently providing, if not all that sensitive, is typically writ large in mainstream representations of the nation-state. Part of what happens with the economic crisis currently unfolding in Europe is that this cornerstone is also being put in bold relief as a fiction.

I'm not sure about bodies, or the subjectivities that animate them, but the subjects who result in 'father,' as in 'mother' no doubt, can be deadly. Also, distance, for sure, is not purely a spatial or geographic quality. After all, the belligerent part of the social scientist in me wants to say, migrants left somewhere 'bad' to find a better life. What my family experienced through the onset of my father's Alzheimer's, what I experienced through my own trajectory of migration to the present, and what many of us living in Greece are experiencing in the context of 'the crisis,' are examples of the reverse process. While our current condition remains better than that of the people in the Pangrati storage rooms, the direction one moves in also makes a difference.

Distance can be a steep dark inner staircase that one finds oneself plummeting down, and it can be a familiar chair, a familiar office, with a familiar face smiling outwards. All my father's idealizing of Greece as an idea and place, all his carefully laid and followed career plans, all his carefully kept insurance policies, all the women he loved in his own disparate ways, and all the generosity and genuine care he has shown to me and my sister, like all the king's men in Humpty Dumpty's case, cannot put the pieces together again.

The Steinway promise is null and void; there comes a time when dominant masculinity can no longer command the price it seeks to exact, and value, as my father used to be fond of saying, is something that can be very hard to determine. Throughout all this, I can't help but think that what is placed in sharp relief are the often creative ways in which subjects struggle to 'adjust' and bodies quite stubbornly remain vital agents. Subjectivities are indeed the complex articulation of social forces which traverse them. When the former 'fall apart,' a space to challenge the latter potentially opens up. If my father, and myself, are interesting enough for me to write about publicly, we can only be so, to my mind, by virtue of what our stories can be shown to say about what is *not* personal, about the societies we are a part of.

Notes

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I am grateful for all the useful comments made by participants in the Ethnography and Self-Exploration symposium held at the University of Amsterdam, December 8-9 2011. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the incisive comments of Ellen Kristvik, Katayoun Tamara Medhat, and Frederica Deiana. In addition, I am grateful for the very close readings of the earlier version of this paper, along with detailed comments, by the discussants Michelle Allport, Julia Challinor, Athena McLean and Sjaak van der Geest. I also would like to thank both of the final two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Finally, I thank Giannis Golfinopoulos and Jonathan Markovitz for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper and their support for the project as a whole. Part of the bibliographical research done for this project was possible thanks to affiliation to the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research in Spring 2011, as a Guest Fellow, I thank Janus Oomen jr and Trudie Gerrits for vital research assistance at the AISSR.

- 1 See for example the collection of articles edited by Annette Leibing and Lawrence Cohen in *Thinking about Dementia: Culture, loss and the anthropology of dementia* (2006). Also, a social context with strong cultural similarities to the situation in Greece is explored in a discussion of ethnographic work with six Mexican-American families with a member diagnosed with Alzheimer's by Ladson Hinton M.D., Carolina Apesoa-Verona, Judith Barker (2010). Focusing on just one case of a person with Alzheimer's in order to examine the ways in which Alzheimer's patients can be thought of as experiencing subjects, and attending specifically to the discourses articulated by family and other care-givers, the sociologist Roma Chatterji (2008) develops a powerful analysis in favor of attending to the disparate embodied aspects of forms of subjectivity. Finally, also of special relevance to my work here, using an approach that is self-described as 'not ethnographic,' Jessica Robbins's examines the Final Report of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) to argue that Alzheimer's constitutes the antipode to the U.S. normative construction of aging. Though framed in terms of the specifically U.S. stigma attached to Alzheimer's, Robbins' analysis traces how people with Alzheimer's constitute a form of inner aporia to foundational fictions about the self in many societies. My own effort in this paper as a whole is at the junction between Robbins analysis, Herskovits' (1995) and Lawrence Cohen's (2000) project which brings together an ethnography of dementia in four neighborhoods of the city of Varanasi in India, with analysis of events in India and around the world. In important ways, the basis for this line of research was established with Cohen's (1994) article on the necessity of positioning the study of old age in cultural and critical perspectives.
- 2 For a multifaceted consideration of the fraught zone of contact between ethnography and life, or "the shadow side of fieldwork" see McLean and Leibing (2007).
- 3 The concept is complexified significantly in the abundance of related sociological literature produced in the last two decades, as well as in the poststructuralist analyses following Judith Butler's notion of the performativity of gender, or Judith Halberstam's (1998) notion of female masculinities, as well as by a more recent revisiting of the concept by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), which emphasizes 'geographies of masculinities' among other things. Even in this state of definitional flux, the concept remains quite useful.

- 4 I would like to acknowledge Michelle Allport for the incisive reading of an earlier version of this paper and the comment she made on this part of the argument. I am grateful for the honing of the argument that her comment helped me to develop.
- 5 The focus of this research project is on the sociological aspects of the crisis in Greece, with an emphasis on the gendered and nationalist aspects of how subjectivities in crisis attempt to cope. The objective is to track the disassemblage of selves; the stakes involve identifying fissures, situational crossroads, wherein the performativity of the national social body could turn in the direction of crafting selves that are more conducive of social justice. The project began in July 2011, though some of the material included predates that. The material examined ranges from Greek and international media reports to interviews and notes based on participatory observation. The method used is critical discourse analysis. The estimated duration of the project is three years.
- 6 Merkel is another example, somewhat more complex perhaps. Several substantive turnabouts, concerning the size of the bail-out package for Greece, or the specific nature of the austerity measures required, were communicated by her with a visible effort to maintain the frame of steady and secure mastery, cool and objective reason. The deepening of her face lines, like that of the slight slouch of her shoulders, were less concrete signs of the trouble at the core of the mindset guiding the program. Certainly, the fact that this subject firmly appeared as a 'she,' complete with light eye-shadow, delicate necklace, and occasional coy glances towards Sarkozy, worked in favor of covering up the cracks evident in her reinscriptions of hegemonic masculinity.
- 7 For more see Stavropoulos, Lambros, "Charges of sexist degradation of female candidates for the Coast Guard," *To Vema*, December 2, 2011.
- 8 See Hadzigeorgiou, Aris and Vergou, Dani, "Deport prostitute carriers of AIDS," *Eleftherotypia*, December 16, 2011.
- 9 The sluggish modification of real estate prices, much-commented on in the local press, for Athens and other large cities of Greece, despite the plummeting rate of sales and the increase in properties being put up for sale, along with the resulting accumulation of empty apartments and buildings, is one of the pithiest examples of this type of behavior. A colleague at the university aged 58 and divorced, with a partially employed daughter and a hefty mortgage on her apartment, put her fairly newly acquired apartment up for sale at 'exactly,' as she emphasized, the same price that she had bought it before the crisis. As our salaries dropped almost month by month at a jarring rate, coming down from 2000 Euro to 1500 Euro, and lower when cuts were implemented retroactively, I discretely urged her to drop the price in the ad, telling her repeatedly "things aren't the same, things have changed." Yet, she remained firm that the price was a fair price for the apartment. Intriguingly, during our little chats in her or my office during the academic year, she would simultaneously openly express her dismay and depression, repeatedly asking me "How are we going to live on these salaries?" and "What if they confiscate the house?"
- 10 The formal announcement was published on the Europa site <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-ReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/446&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> For a thorough chronology of the financial and economic crisis in Greece from the perspective of the European Commission, see http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/fo-cuson/crisis/2010-04_en.htm.
- 11 While there have been several studies on the career paths of men and women in the Greek university system, most are not published in easily accessible venues. One of the studies sampling faculty trajectories from all Greek universities comparatively, can be found at <http://www.womeninedu.gr/> This study argues, for example, that even in universities or

- departments where there are at present more female faculty than male, the promotions of women are approved at a much slower rate, even if they are not married, and the rank of full professor is disproportionately occupied by men.
- 12 The question of how to broaden social analysis so as to remove the study of “migrants” from the safe distance it tends to be positioned in, and also to learn more about how the so-called First World is not only the rosy destination of hopeful upwardly mobile migrants from the so-called Third World, but also, in part, a Third World destination for internal migrants from its own ‘elites’ in itself, seems particularly important and has occupied my research interest for several years. See Halkias (2008).
 - 13 See Sabat and Harre (1996) and Kontos (2006) for the unfolding of an important discussion on how corporality can be an important domain of selfhood that is in fact preserved throughout life with Alzheimer’s.
 - 14 Commenting on the significance of gesture in the context of ‘cultural intimacy’, an area of life in a given society that is at odds with official discourses that deny its content, Herzfeld (2009: 134) makes the uncannily pertinent explanatory point that “Imagine the IRS admitting that what made Americans good citizens was their cleverness in avoiding taxes; imagine the Greek government conceding that it was mostly the ‘Turkish’ aspects of everyday life that provided the familiar contexts of sociability even among those serving in the army.”
 - 15 For a fascinating analysis of how reason is a culturally specific skill that is taught in the math classes of early British grade schools, see Valerie Walkerdine (1988). For more on the discursive production of ‘individuals’ in the context of Greece, and specifically the role played by nationalist discourse in shaping the gendered versions of these subjectivities, see Halkias (2004).
 - 16 Indeed, my own growing sense of disorientation when walking on the university grounds of Panteion, or occasionally even when in the classroom teaching, resonates with something from my last visit to my father’s office. The pay cuts, the temporary lack of heating in the university buildings due to a gap in the state’s funding, along with the recent announcement that no travel for conferences would be covered by Panteion, all converged on the fact of a freeze on institutional subscriptions to scientific journals in a way that, for me at least, dissolves the prior content of the subject position ‘academic.’ As the slight sense of disorientation when walking indicates, all this also troubles routine embodiment.

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