

The Cook, the Chef and their Lover: Reflexions on the Neoliberal Adventures of the “Greek” Self

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Abstract

Greece has been diagnosed as a hybrid nation caught in a perpetual oscillation between East and West. In the aftermath of the economic crisis this hybridity has been identified as the root of all evil, with various state ideologues and official discourses enjoining the ‘Greeks’ to abandon their twilight status between two incompatible forms of life, become fully Westernised, and embrace a fully-fledged Western selfhood. The article discusses this ideological project and its attempts to engender a profound transformation at the level of ‘Greek’ identity. However, while surfing on the waves of this discourse of self-change, we come to realise that what is truly at stake is not a ‘national’ change as such, but, rather, a profound re-organisation of society along a hard-line class basis; that is, the re-division of society into an entrepreneurial minority on the one hand and masses of obedient workers on the other. This is what ‘change’ at the level of ‘Greek’ selfhood is all about: the production of obedient workers who have the requisite capacities and skills for fulfilling the neoliberal and entrepreneurial plans of the elites. I develop this line of inquiry through a focus on the culinary and dietary changes currently taking place within Greece, and through a close reading of a popular film, *Culinary relationships*, in which one can trace the aforementioned class-based nature of the Greek predicament via the fictional conflict and competition between a chef and a cook who are battling over the same woman.

Keywords: East, West, Entrepreneurship, Neoliberalism, Greek Self, Culinary habits

Between Constantinople and Brussels

The emblem of the Byzantine Empire - the same as the one found on the flag of the Greek Orthodox Church - is a two-headed black eagle, with its two heads looking outwards in opposing directions. One head looks out over the East, the other looks towards the West, or so it is said. As such, the emblem is assumed to define Greece’s position in the world. Whether it be in terms of mentality, morality, food and music, or religion, the country has been diagnosed as suffering from a perpetual crisis of identity, a conflict between two traditions, a schizoid-existence between the East and the West¹. It is beyond the scope of the present article to chart the full historical development of this condition of hybridity, but one can trace its origins back to the emergence of the Byzantine Empire after the dissolution of the Roman Empire. Constantinople’s² capture by the Franks, namely the west Europeans, the crusaders, and the attempts to Latinise (i.e. Westernise) the population, as well as the constant

¹ This form of discourse concerning the country’s position has been propagated by several intellectuals across the political spectrum. For example, the writer Nikos Kazantzakis, the painter Yannis Tsarouhis and the poet Odysseus Elytis have as early as the 1930’s talked about Greece’s meteoric position between the East and the West – often stating their preference for the cultural heritage of the East.

² Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It is the contemporary city of Istanbul.

attacks by the Turks and the final capture of the city by the latter in 1453³, define a space that ever since has been claimed by two distinct and incompatible forms of life: on one side, the mysterious, savage, traditional, Islamic and resolutely hostile East which invariably threatened the country's sovereignty and, on the other side, the modernised, rational, Christian and similarly hostile West⁴. Byzantium was from its inception a strange mixture of Eastern and Western elements. Having Greek as its official language, culturally it bore a closer affinity to Eastern modes of being, while its state structure was closer to the Roman one. The Ottoman Empire, which succeeded the Byzantine Empire, introduced within what would later come to be defined as Hellenic/Greek space more Eastern elements, while the gradual detachment from the Empire, and the eventual war of independence in 1821, clearly implanted within the Hellenic space enlightenment ideas from the West⁵. In the 20th century, several episodes would strengthen even more resoundingly the Eastern character of the country, just as several other episodes would also strengthen its Western character⁶. In the 80s - with the winds of change brought to the country by the socialist government, and with an irresolute place in the EU - all this was cast in a very positive light by intellectuals, who argued that this peculiar national spatio-temporal 'entrapment' in a space-time between Constantinople and Brussels afforded the country a unique geo-cultural asset that could lead it to interesting paths, and endow it with an important role on the world stage. Greece's role as a bridge between the East and the West promised a bright and prosperous future. In this respect, it appears something went seriously wrong.

In February 2012 - with Greece now a full member of the EU but under constant threat of expulsion due to its messy economy- a well-known young, pretty and successful actress gave an interview to a women's tabloid magazine where, among other things, she stated the following: 'we, the Greeks, have no class. We are *uneducated*. We try to pretend we are European⁷, while in fact we are just Eastern'⁸ (italics added). In the same magazine, a similarly well-known young, handsome and successful actor, upon being asked if a revolution is what the situation calls for in Greece, replied succinctly: 'Greeks have to become respectful and humble, we are

³ Post-1453 Byzantium ceases to exist. The Greek speaking population (and contemporary Greece) were incorporated within the Ottoman Empire. The Turks brought and established a different cultural and administrative system allowing, however, the Greek speaking population to retain its language and religion.

⁴ Historically, and ever since Byzantium, the West has been viewed as a threat. Indeed, at times, it was considered a more dangerous threat than the Turkish one, a fact which is captured in the Greek saying: 'Better the Turkish turban than the mitre of the pope'. In today's crisis plagued Greece, the West (whatever this means) is once again seen by many as an enemy to the country's sovereignty.

⁵ For a concise narrative of the competing accounts and versions concerning the complexity of these processes, see Liakos, A. (n.d.) 'Historical time and national space in modern Greece'.

⁶ One such episode was the violent expulsion of the Greek communities of Asia Minor by the Turks and the destruction of their cities in 1922. The migrants, who fled to Greece in their thousands, brought with them a distinct culture that bore a close affinity with the Turkish one. Some of the important cultural elements imported to Greece during this period which, ultimately, came to define popular culture were the culinary habits of Asia Minor and *rebetico* music - music that has its origins in Persia and, thus, structurally speaking, differs significantly from Western music. Other episodes that further strengthened the Western character of the country were, of course, the incorporation of Greece within the sphere of influence of the Western allies after WW2, the military junta's pro-western propaganda in the late sixties-early seventies, as well as the decision by the conservative government of Konstantinos in the 1970s to join the European Community.

⁷ The word 'Europe' is employed in Greece as if it is a unified place on the Western borders of the country, and more often than not is seen as synonymous with 'civilised life'. It is also a word that designates a mixture of individualism, an ethic of hard work, respect for the state, and a set of obedient behaviours, usually discussed with reference to specific patterns of organisation characteristic of northern countries (such as Germany, Sweden, and Denmark).

⁸ Anna-Maria Papacharalampous (2012), interview in the magazine *I*, 9-15 February 2012, pp. 24-28.

people with lots of complexes'⁹ – a form of psy-speak emblematic of the relatively recent psychologisation of Greek society, and the personification of the pseudo self-insight described by Lasch (1991) in the *Culture of Narcissism*. These statements should not be all too readily dismissed as nothing other than the personal dissatisfaction of a couple of national celebrities. On the contrary, such phrases typify the desire of a new generation of the so-called creative class, certain sectors of the elites, the urban high-middle class, and what Žižek (2012) refers to as the salaried bourgeoisie, to wholly abandon the country's hybridity, and undergo a program of complete Westernisation; a process which, as the two actors explicitly mention, requires the radical and profound transformation of the 'Greek self', as well as broader cultural reform.

What is important to stress right from the start, is that for the sectors holding such views, the East comes to encapsulate an assortment of heterogeneous baggage that must be left behind. In a form not that altogether different from what Said (2003) described as 'Orientalism', for a cross-section of the pro-West, middle and upper strata of the population, 'East' is tantamount to a lack of education, conservative, traditional values, a lack of hygiene, unresolved psychological complexes within the self, immaturity and a childish faith in revolutionary politics, i.e., a political immaturity that is unable to face reality and accept that capitalism is the only possible reality! In short, 'East' is everything that lies outside civilisation: out with the idealised phantasmatic image of capitalism as the system of unbridled individualism, infinite growth and endless progress. After all, corruption, lack of meritocracy (another discourse wholly in the service of individualism), favouritism, bribing, in short, everything that has been associated with the country's near bankruptcy, are all classified as the product of an Eastern mode of social and political relations, as well as the result of an incomplete, deficient and immature self, which derives its premises not from personal capacities and skills, but is rather hetero-determined, relying heavily on family and networks of acquaintances (see Blue, 1992¹⁰). This is schematically the 'political' perception of certain sectors of the population; a class specific perception which attempts, through its constant reproduction in the mainstream media and its strengthening from various forms of psychology and the mediatic tutelage of conservative intellectuals, to impose itself as the national self-perception and paradigmatic form of reflexive self-critique. What we should see it as first and foremost is as a political project which proclaims that radical political change is not a solution: what is needed, in actual fact, is a radical transformation of the 'Greek self', namely, its transformation into a fully Westernised self.

Stelios Ramphos, a philosopher with a special affinity for Plato, is one prominent conservative intellectual whose portrayal of the Greek self, and his conceptual insights into the Greek psyche, both inform and theoretically buttress a public discourse that depoliticises the crisis, and instead reduces it to the aforementioned problematic, or what he calls 'sick', hybridity' of the Greeks: 'we are no longer East either, this is why we are sick...a sick hybrid' (2011, p. 70)¹¹. Ramphos' case is not

⁹ Apostolis Totsikas (2012), interview in the magazine *I*, 9-15 February 2012, pp. 30-33.

¹⁰ Blue (1992) provides a detailed discussion of the marked differences between the Greek self and the Western Protestant self.

¹¹ This kind of split personality, or hybridity, is also attributed to the Western part of Turkey. It is indicative that, in his review of Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul: Memoreis and the City* for the *Guardian*, David Mitchell describes Istanbul as the city 'with West in its head but East in its soul' (endorsement of the English edition of Pamuk's book by Faber and Faber).

an individual one; indeed, he is representative of that class of ex-leftists who have not only changed camps and sided with capitalism, but have become passionate enthusiasts/apologists for neoliberal economic policies and State power. As such, people like Ramphos serve as ideological reminders and ‘proof’ of the futility of Marxist politics, of the need to leave behind the ‘political immaturity’ of youth and embrace the pragmatic-consensualism that defines the present order of things. It comes as no surprise, then, that Ramphos is the current media darling, and equally adored by the upper classes within the population (including journalists) who can afford to attend his rather expensive seminars. What makes his depiction of the Greeks even more important, however, is the close relation he maintains with the executive power - he was, for instance, an ex-advisor to the ‘socialist’ Prime Minister (George Papandreou), the very man who brought the IMF to Greece, and signed the memorandums of extreme austerity measures and poverty - and it is clear that his anthropology both informs and provides justification for the government’s policies (see Vatsinas, 2012¹²). Or, phrased otherwise, Ramphos is the public intellectual whose arguments legitimise neoliberal reforms and austerity measures at the level of the public’s consciousness; he is the theoretician par excellence of a form of psy-discourse which contends that what needs to be changed is the Greek psychological makeup itself – a position echoed by the two aforementioned actors. For Ramphos, in words reminiscent of those expressed by the actress, ‘it is when looking deeper that [Greece] is not Europe, but dynamically speaking, it is keen on being Europe. That is, our “psychology” is not [European] but our ambition is [to be European]’ (2011, p.68). Suffice to say that having no European ‘psychology’ whilst having a strong ambition to be European, leaves one with no other option than to change his/her ‘psychology’ in order to meet the ideal of his/her ambition. This is precisely what is at stake in Greece post-crisis: the reconstruction of the Greeks at the behest of plutocratic elites and neoliberal ideologues.

According to the State’s luminary, there are several things the Greeks must change, all of which signal a transition from ‘Eastern’ characteristics to ‘Western’ ones: they have to learn how to be less emotional and develop their rational mind, they must abandon their obsession with the past and become future oriented, break with familial links and rely on their own capacities, skills and knowledge, and so on and so forth. Of course, said argument proceeds, what is also required is a radical change in the cognitive system of the Greeks, more specifically, in the way they attribute causality. For Ramphos, the tendency of the Greeks to attribute their misfortune to external causes (e.g. the 400 hundred years of occupation by the Ottomans, the hostile Americans and so on) is futile and covers over the personal responsibility all Greeks have for what is happening in the country. This radical personalisation of responsibility, and the simultaneous demand for individual change, inevitably leads to a radical depoliticisation of the Greek predicament¹³. For Ramphos, there is no capitalism, no oligarchic parliamentarianism and lack of democracy at all levels, no economic globalisation. His analysis is strictly an anthropological/psychological

¹² Vatsinas (2012) provides a detailed analysis of the affinities between Ramphos’ portrayal of the Greeks and the political discourse of the ex-prime minister.

¹³ To a certain extent, this ostensibly liberating but actually enslaving individualism that the State demands from its citizens is what is demanded from Greece as a whole. The country is enjoined to stop relying on economic support from other countries; it is demanded that it must learn how to survive/prosper on its own potential and skills, and to assume its responsibilities and rights. In fact, what is obfuscated by this discourse of national ‘emancipation’ is that the web of responsibilities and rights are all related to the right to consume the mega-products produced in the ‘civilised’ Western countries and the responsibility to pay for them (Triliva, 2012, personal communication).

analysis, and it is precisely this kind of analysis that underpins the wider political project of ‘educating’ and disciplining the Greeks. Ramphos is perfectly clear in this respect, there has to be a profound change in two indissolubly connected aspects: the cultural and the personal; a change, moreover, that should be conceptualised and orchestrated by the media and the ministries of education and culture. The first, namely the cultural change, will put an end to the endless pretence of being ‘European’, and will make being ‘European’ an actual reality. The second, namely the radical change of the Greek self, refers to the ‘education’ the Greeks must undergo in order to acquire the requisite qualities needed to achieve a fully-fledged ‘Western’ individualism – this is precisely the meaning that ‘education’ comes to take, for what the Greeks are believed to be lacking is not formal education¹⁴, but the psychic and mental qualities that define a person as ‘educated’, namely those qualities associated with ‘Western’ forms of selfhood, and associated with a functional capitalism – ironically, or perhaps not, the magazine in which the interviews of the two actors appeared is entitled ‘I’.

In the remainder of the paper I will discuss this systematic attempt to ‘educate’ the Greeks and bring about a change in their selfhood, by focusing on the national culinary and dietary habits.

The ‘cooking’ of the self

The Film *Politiki Kouzina*¹⁵ (‘A touch of spice’, 2003, dir: Tasos Boulmetis) tells the story of a Greek Family (and can be read as an analogy for the Greek community as a whole) who is deported from Istanbul in the early 1960’s due to the escalation of tension in Turkish-Greek relations as a result of the political conflict in Cyprus. The story unfolds through the eyes of the adult son of the family, then a child and now an astrophysicist and a talented cook with a passion for traditional Greek-Turkish cuisine. The memories of the protagonist are defined by the family gatherings in Istanbul, that involved the collective preparation of food by the extended family, as well as the details of recipes of various dishes and the philosophy of cooking taught to him by his grandfather: food is a whole world, a whole universe; this is why, the grandfather explains, the word ‘gastronomy’ contains the word ‘astronomy’. While a whole host of Greeks leave Turkey for Greece, the Grandfather refuses to leave and stays forever in Istanbul. Despite promising several times to visit his family in Athens, he always fails to do so. The grandfather thus represents the part of Hellenism that forever remained in the East; that part, in other words, which avoided even the slightest Westernisation. On the other hand, the adventures of the family in Greece, and the training they have to give their young son (the astrophysicist cook) in order to adapt to the ideals of life in Athens during the years of the dictatorship (1967-1974), nicely captures the gradual process of Westernisation. The advice given to the parents by a high-ranking officer in the military police illustrates this point: they are to prohibit their son from spending time in the kitchen cooking, and they are to force him to adopt the ‘Greek’ accent (as opposed to the Eastern accent). Despite the fact that the film expresses strong nostalgia for the fully Eastern way of life (and collective

¹⁴ According to Eurostat, the number of Greeks in tertiary education in 2010 was higher than in countries like Austria, Sweden and Finland (see:

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Tertiary_education_statistics), and according to a European Commission Survey conducted in 2006, Greeks were more likely to speak a foreign language than, say, the Irish and the British (see: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf).

¹⁵ The literal translation of the title is ‘cuisine from Constantinople’ (therefore, Eastern cuisine).

self) left behind, it still manages to effectively capture the character of the Greek life over the last five decades: that is, the (Middle) Eastern character and rich tradition of Greek food, as well as the not wholly Westernised Greek self, which is interwoven within strong extended family webs - a self highly hetero-determined and defined by its social relations.

Greece, like all other neighbouring countries in the region, has a very rich cuisine – most of it of (Middle) Eastern character - with a huge variety of main dishes, salads and dips circulating on the family table throughout the year, obeying either idiosyncratic preferences, or religious patterns (e.g. Lent, special fasting days, etc.). Over the preceding decade, however, Greeks have experienced a furore of cooking ‘education’, with dozens of food related TV programmes, cooking reality shows (one with child participants), and dozens of magazines and books bombarding them with recipes and other cooking and baking tips. The question raised here, then, is why a country with such a rich culinary and dietary tradition needs such intensive kitchen training and culinary education¹⁶. The answer becomes immediately clearer if we examine the content and form this training invariably takes. For most of the programmes concern not the reproduction of traditional cuisine - that would be of no interest after all - but either the re-making and re-invention of it as an ‘ethnic’ cuisine (thus carving out a creative distance from tradition!¹⁷), or, more often, the creation of previously unknown dishes, dips and salads - a process for which Jamie Oliver’s name is symbolic, both for his skilful and creative individualism and in terms of his cosmopolitan gastrosexuality¹⁸. The Greeks, then, are taught how to distance themselves from tradition, how to cook in a completely different style and way (often going against powerful medical discourses which contend that the traditional diet is good for one’s health!); in other words, how to create dishes, not just reproduce recipes. This distancing from tradition, which is not simply related to issues of self-image and body-image, but to one’s desirable social status-image, is reflected also in the fact that the culinary training of younger generations does not take place as much as it used to in the context of the family (a tradition reproduction unit) but is performed by the media (see also Triliva, 2010, for a debate on such issues in relation to the island of Crete).

According to Lévi-Strauss (1970), the uniquely human act of cooking, that is, the transformation by fire of the raw material into cooked food provides a metaphor for the relationship between nature and culture. Initiation ceremonies in several tribal communities and cultures very often include an element of ‘cooking’ the person: in steam, in smoke, in hot water, etc. ‘Cooking’, an expurgation based on smoke or incensory, is also that which is employed for cases when somebody falls back within

¹⁶ Dietary and culinary re-education is by no means restricted to Greece; it seems to be a trend that characterises the West as a whole, and in certain countries entails a re-education within a more global, multi-ethnic perspective (De Vos, personal communication). It is my argument, however, that this re-education takes a particular, distinct form in Greece.

¹⁷ I mean neither to idealise tradition nor make a plea for a return to tradition. After all, as De Vos (personal communication) has commented apropos Flanders, although I would contend it holds for Greece also, what passes for tradition often derives from the upper classes and only later becomes diffused within the population at large, or, in fact, originates in other countries. That said, I employ ‘tradition’ on an analytical basis for elucidating the changes in metabolism taking place in contemporary Greece.

¹⁸ Culinary training is heavily gendered which I do not discuss in the current article. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the emergence of the gastrosexual man in Greece is accompanied by the production of new power relations between men and women. For more on the emergence of the gastrosexual man, see Future Foundation (2008).

nature, falls too deeply into biology, and, as a consequence, is in danger of 'rotting' in his/her absolute rawness. In short, cooking brings somebody out of the state of nature and into civilisation. As Harpur (2009/2002) comments: 'we cook ourselves, then, at moments of biological crisis in order to transform ourselves from natural beings into social beings' (p.94). It is my argument, then, that the kitchen training and culinary education to which the Greeks have been subjected over the last decade or so constitutes precisely such a rite of passage: a passage from tradition to modernisation; a passage from the 'savageness' and 'naturalness' of the East to the 'civilised' social life of the West. After all, cooking in a 'Western' fashion not only means to acquire a set of Western habits. More than this, it involves becoming another person altogether, a person who leaves behind the repertoric repetition of tradition and employs his/her creative skills towards innovation and bringing to life new forms. Thus, 'Westernisation', in this respect, stands for the distancing from tradition and the embedding of culinary and dietary habits into the terrain of privatised creativity and individualism. It is a rite of passage from an immature, dependent childhood (of the East¹⁹) to mature adulthood (of the West). For, as Harpur argues, without a 'cooking initiation we are all in danger of remaining immature, dependent, self-centred, uncertain of who we are' (ibid. 96); in short, all the evil things the Greeks are diagnosed as suffering from by foreigners and local ruling elites alike.

We know from Norbert Elias (2000/1939) that eating habits are indissolubly connected to particular forms of self and social relations. Thus, Greek (Middle Eastern) food, with its distinctive smell and taste (e.g. garlic), the bodily odour it produces, as well as the frequent and excessive bodily irruptions that often accompany its consumption, is related to relations of proximity between bodies that are increasingly rendered repulsive, 'unhygienic', and associated with violations of personal space and feelings of disgust - processes related to the topos of the immune body, the atomised, clearly demarcated body that stands in conflict with other bodies (see Papadopoulos, 2011)²⁰. A fully fledged individualism requires that bodies are distant, separated. The alteration of the Greek (semi-collective) self, then, requires a change in the relations between bodies which, in turn, requires, and indeed is predicated upon, among other things, a dietary change. This change in the relations between bodies has been actively promoted by EU officials, through the imposition of relevant policies. For example, a regulation implemented several years ago demanded, among other things, the prohibition of hand-made products, such as cheese and sausages, from being sold to restaurants or anybody else, under the auspices of public health protection rhetoric. What was primarily at stake was not simply an interest in public health per se, but the promotion of a business mentality, the imposition via the force of the law of a spirit of entrepreneurship: everything, from cheese to wine, had to be produced in small government licensed and EU standards approved meeting plants with proper machinery (bought from Western countries, of course!). The attempt to impose this entrepreneurial mentality, however, intersected with, and in

¹⁹ The East is, after all, a vast unknown territory where immigrants, much feared for their 'naturalness' and despised for their lack of 'civilisation', come from. And one thing the Greeks certainly share with the immigrants, at least with those coming from the southern Balkans and the Middle East, is their cuisine, their food, their dietary habits.

²⁰ We should also mention, here, that the drowsiness that such food may cause, and the long break or nap that is often required to rejuvenate one's capacity for work, are rendered wholly unproductive and antithetical to the demands of capitalism, which requires agile, flexible, tireless bodies in constant move and capable of enduring long working hours. Greeks thus have to become more capitalism friendly...

fact demanded, the recalibration of the relations between bodies. Indeed, handmade products like cheese literally contain the body of the producer: his/her hand. To achieve the separation of bodies, entrepreneurial individualism thus requires that the *hand* is removed from *handmade* products.

On an empirical level, and at first glance, this rite of passage seems to be working - albeit with plenty of variation from place to place and distinct class-based characteristics. For since the appearance of this food wave, there have been immense changes in the composition of the Greek dinner table, especially the celebratory table of the younger generations of middle class families. Despite the fact that the everyday family table remains relatively 'traditional' - albeit with several 'cosmopolitan' modifications and add-ons - the celebratory table, that is, the lunch/dinner prepared on various special occasions for friends, relatives and colleagues has been recognisably Westernised. For example, the traditional meat dishes with a strong taste of garlic, common to the Eastern Mediterranean coast, have given way to cosmopolitan fusion meat dishes with fruits and nuts, or self-styled spaghetti dishes. The vegetable salads - including the tourists' favourite, Greek salad with olive oil - have been deemed embarrassingly folkloric for special occasions and, thus, have been pushed aside by the previously unknown pasta side-plates, or the rocket, parmesan, prosciutto and dried tomatoes combinations... with a vinaigrette dressing. Moreover, the vegetable pies and other former delicacies have been replaced by the outlandish and recently imported 'quiche Lauren', whilst the similarly recently imported and impressively tricolored 'cheese cake' has replaced the traditional semolina tray pies and filo pastry cakes with honey-made syrup and an often strong scent of cinnamon. And yet, the problem still remains. Due to the fact that the everyday dinner table remains largely traditional, the Greeks still appear to be masquerading in public as something which they are not, at least not whole-heartedly: that is, in private, they remain distinctly Eastern (although not totally Eastern); whilst in public they behave as Westerners (although not totally Western either). One is reminded again of the aforementioned words of the actress: '*we try to pretend we are European, while in fact we are just Eastern*'. It is this divided self that the State and its paraphernalia is attempting to fix in all its manifestations. What is required is the completion of the Europeanization of the population, the abandonment of Eastern savage unruliness and disobedience (paradoxically expressed as a fixation upon tradition), and the embracing of the maturity personified by Western capitalism. But it seems unlikely that this will occur in culinary terms. For in the midst of the economic crisis that affects the lower middle classes and the working classes more acutely, and drives more and more people into poverty, the materials required for cooking with imagination and creativity are obtaining an ever more phantasmatic status. In fact, in such conditions, a return to simple versions of traditional cuisine is increasingly the only way by which this strata can survive - with a pan of bean soup in red sauce (the so called 'national food'), for example, a family of four can survive for two days at minimum cost; not quite the same as cooking salmon filets with avocado dressing.

Thus far I have deliberately limited my discussion to a national basis in order to show how the whole issue of change is understood and constructed within public and official discourse, whilst touching upon its culinary aspect. This is an insufficient level of analysis, however. And this is the problem with the predominant discursive framing of Greek selfhood - exacerbated by Ramphos's portrayal of the Greeks. The main problem with this kind of discourse is not simply that it only singles out certain

'bad aspects' in order to construct the Greeks as essentially 'deficient' and 'sick' people, but rather, and most importantly, the problem lies with the fact that, on the basis of these putative bad characteristics, this discourse crudely constructs an average 'Greek' that is, practically speaking, non-existent. And what makes things worse yet still, is that it is this psychological portrait of the non-existent average 'Greek' that constitutes the basis for the government's decision making on economic and public policies (see Badiou, 2012²¹). It is my argument, here, that the discussion of the average 'Greek' has an ideological function, as it serves to obfuscate the class dimension of the program of the elites, and the fact that what is ultimately being carried out is the 'taming' of the lower classes and the pacification of class struggle. It is this dimension I will now turn to.

Class war in the kitchen

The class character of culinary and dietary habits should not be understood in purely economic terms. More than this, it appears that even the bourgeois diagnosticians themselves approach it in cultural terms. For those diagnosticians, as well as their target audience of the wealthier sectors of the population, the East is foremost a geographical metaphor for the lower classes, for the proletariat – remember that the most destitute and exploited sectors of the proletariat in Greece are immigrants who come from... the 'East'. Traditional, Eastern, Greek cuisine is proletarian cuisine because it is repertoric, in the sense that its preparation follows tradition and habit; while it was once undoubtedly invested with lots of creativity, now one merely reproduces cooking conventions, executes recipes, albeit with no precision and no careful measurement. Traditional cuisine is proletarian, not simply because the vast majority of it is relatively inexpensive, and, as such, can sustain a stable household economy amidst the crisis, but mainly because it intersects with the massive expansion of routine manual and immaterial labour. On the other hand, 'Western' cuisine - whatever this means within the Greek context - and its gourmet cousin, is associated with the upper middle and higher strata of the population as well as the emerging creative class. Again, this is not only because this demographic can afford to buy the requisite ingredients and materials, but rather because it corresponds and intersects with the position that these groups occupy in the process of production, and the importance of imagination and creativity in this process - alongside the obsession with health, fitness and youthfulness that defines this demographic. 'Western' dishes have no name prior to their subsequent naming, they belong to no tradition, they simply do not exist until somebody brings them into being through the power of their own imagination and creativity; there are no pre-existent rules or routines to follow, one can mix ingredients as one sees fit, substitute one ingredient for another, play, experiment. These two different modes of cooking, it is argued, correspond to different modalities of selfhood: the first, to an Eastern, proletarian, irrational, immature, hetero-determined self; the second, to a Westernised, civilised, (Protestant) autonomous, self-determined and newly creative self.

A film that fuses together, in an overt manner, culinary and dietary habits with class antagonism, or better yet still, that makes explicit the latent culinary aspect of class

²¹ Badiou (2012) provides a detailed account of the workings of this process in relation to the average French person.

antagonism, is 'Dangerous Cooking'²² (2010, dir: Vasilis Tselemegos). The film tells the story of two men, a renowned haute cuisine chef and a seaman cook, who both unwittingly fall in love and have a relationship with the same woman. The chef (interestingly, he is played by the same actor who played the passionate Eastern influenced cook in the movie 'Touch of Spice'), who can be considered the embodiment of the upper classes, has an aesthetic, erudite approach to cooking and attempts to charm the woman with his unique gourmet specialities; subsequently, upon sampling the chef's dishes, she names them for inclusion in a haute-cuisine cookbook he is writing. This process of naming is interesting in itself, as it indicates the lack of origin of these specialities: they are not rooted in tradition, they have no name, they are nothing less than the product of a creative mind, and obtain their names only by virtue of an equally creative act determined by visual and gustatory aesthetics. The chef, then, is a culinary artist, an autonomous person, a self-determined individual, one who throughout the film appears to have no family, no relatives and no friends. Rather, the people he interacts with are work partners, colleagues, acquaintances, who are all related to his job and career development as opposed to his personal life – indeed, even his lover is incorporated into his career development, given that she is both the source of inspiration and the one who names the dishes he creates. On the other hand, the seaman cook has a more pragmatic approach to cooking. He charms the woman with his 'eastern' naturalness, whilst the foods he cooks have pre-existing names, inasmuch as they are all derivative of the national cuisine. Moreover, his profession is a way of making a living rather than part of a career trajectory, or a way to achieve self-actualisation and/or publicity. Unlike the chef, he has a sister who works as a waitress in a neighbourhood cafe (family - lower class), and friends who are in no way connected to his job prospects and development. Furthermore, unlike the chef who cooks only with his own aesthetic standards in mind, he takes into consideration the desire of those that he cooks for, namely the seamen on the boat. He is not a fully independent and autonomous individual; he is hetero-determined, his self has 'eastern' elements, he is a member of the lower classes, a person who is attached to the past, as represented in 'Touch of Spice', but yet not entirely so.

An interesting aspect of the film, which enables us to elucidate further how styles of cooking correspond to forms of selfhood and modes of work, involves a conversation between the chef and the cook towards the end of the film, upon realising that they have been sleeping with the same woman. The conversation is about cooking, and the chef is arguing in favour of molecular cuisine which he praises for its precision and exactness, that is, the quasi-scientific and rationalised way it is produced so as to take into account fine visual and gustatory aesthetic criteria. In molecular cuisine nothing can be left to chance, every single ingredient must be measured and considered in terms of its role in the final result. In other words, the type of work the chef praises is a product of creativity and imagination which is subsequently operationalized into a careful, disciplined and rationalised process – this is the spirit of entrepreneurship. At the other extreme, the cook, as an 'Eastern' self, counterpoises that all of these aforementioned processes kills the joy of cooking, the 'beauty of the unexpected', the 'magic of the contingent', the accident, the mistake that might, nevertheless, produce a good result. Despite the fact that, at first glance, the discourse of the cook sounds

²² The film is based on a book by Andreas Staikos (1998) with the same title. It was published in English in 2000 with the title *Liaisons Culinaires* by Harvill Press.

like an exultation of creativity, thus signalling his agreement with the chef, it is not. What the cook praises, in actual fact, is not creativity per se, but the non-rationalised character of traditional cuisine, more specifically, the space that allows for an inattentive style of cooking, for mistakes – and is this not precisely what has been diagnosed as the fundamental problem of the Greek economy: its lack of proper planning and rationalisation? The at first creative then rationalised, self-determined approach of the chef is contrasted with the almost ‘magical’ approach that plans little, and cares more for the ‘joy’ of doing than any mistakes that might occur in the process. The Greeks, according to prevailing discourses, are like the cook, and must become more like the chef.

Towards the end of their conversation, the cook comments to the chef that one cannot feed molecular cuisine to a hungry crowd of thirty seamen. The chef’s reply is indicative of the type of selfhood he possesses: ‘it is not acceptable for the criterion of a chef to be based on the wild instincts of thirty savages’. One’s criteria, then, must be independent from the desires and needs of the proletarian savages, who, in turn, must be taught and socialised into civilisation; they must undergo the ‘cooking’ rite of passage from savageness to civilised selfhood. The chef’s comment does not merely express a long-held view of the upper classes that the lower classes as savages, neither does it simply reflect the logic underpinning the cooking rite of passage. More than this, it frames the ‘savages’ as needing to be ‘educated’; they must conform and succumb to the upper classes’ desires, tastes and projects (I’ll return to this later). This is the role the State and its paraphernalia have undertaken post- crisis: to educate the child-like Greeks. It is a mode of parenting which Grille (2008) has defined as the ‘socialising mode’:

The socialising parent tends to view the child through a moral lens that dichotomises behaviour into ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The end goal of parenting is to produce a ‘good’ child; one that is courteous and well mannered, a productive and law-abiding member of society. (p. 72)

This is what the so called ‘education of the Greeks’, to use yet again the aforementioned words of the actress, is all about. ‘Mass production’, said the Boston department store magnate Edward A. Filene in 1919, ‘demands the education of the masses; the masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world...They must achieve, not mere literacy, but culture’ (quoted in Lasch, 1991, pp. 71-72). Similarly, in the case of Greece, ‘education’ is all about the re-socialisation of the Greeks (which becomes synonymous with the lower classes –the masses), the profound restructuring of their identity so that the ‘bad’ things will be eliminated and substituted with the ‘good’ qualities of obedience, conformity, and all those qualities necessary for adapting to the projects of the elites. In the final scene of the film, things are put right between the chef and the cook. We see the chef relaxing in the terrace of a restaurant he has opened, after a long opening night which he mainly spent signing copies of his cookbook (I will come back to this also). The cook appears and places on the table a tray covered with a silver lid, which we are led to believe is food for the chef. A brief conversation then ensues, with the cook commenting jokingly that had he been the author of the cookbook, it would have been much spicier (an allusion to the details of his sex-life with the woman). The chef’s reply is short and to the point: ‘To write a book’, he replies, ‘you first have to learn how to write’. We are once again brought back to the theme of the lack of education of the lower classes. Lack of ‘education’ is partly a geographical issue (i.e., the ‘old’ Eastern Greece that is to be left behind), but is first and foremost a class issue (the uneducated proletarian must

learn to conform and obey the knowledgeable elites. In this respect, it is indicative of a paternalistic obsession with ‘education’, and the particular meaning that the latter takes, that at the end of a TV interview with Stelios Ramphos, the journalist, recapitulating the teachings of the State’s diagnostician, admonishes the audience: ‘So, let’s find the way to education, that is, let’s find the way to Europe’ (2011, p.74). Yet again, not to be ‘European’ is to be seen to not have an ‘education’.

Barbarian proletarians and the spirit of entrepreneurship

An important nodal point in the incitement of class struggle was the December 2008 ten-day long riots that followed the murder of a young student by a policeman in the centre of Athens. The riots caused a headache for those in power, because they unleashed an antagonism that was totally unexpected and virtually impossible to understand and explain within the prevailing frameworks and categories. After all, in the preceding couple of decades or so, class struggle in Greece, for all intents and purposes, has been in hibernation. Indeed, the incessant promotion of extreme life-style consumerism and unbridled consumerist individualism had brought about the diminishment of working class solidarity and militancy, displaced proletarian anti-consumerist discipline, and dismantled a solid household economy that hitherto supported class struggle by providing conditions of relative safety and stability. The proliferation of financial institutions offering easy loans for any and all needs and at flexible rates had helped to propel consumerist individualism, whilst producing a culture of indebtedness that increased the economic dependency and insecurity of proletarian forces, in turn, subjugating them even more. Indebtedness and consumerism were the traps the working class were led into in order for them to be controlled and pacified – all this having been accompanied, of course, by the corruption and co-option of institutional unions and union leaders within the mainstream political system.

The December 2008 riots were the first massive coming-together of sections of the working and lower middle classes to express their dissatisfaction with the prevailing culture of consumerism, individualism and indebtedness. The riots brought to the surface once again the inherent contradiction between the passivity of a seductive but alienating individualism on the one hand, and the desire for a meaningful collective life on the other. In this sense, the events marked the constitution of what we can call a radical *morphoma*: that is, a politically heterogeneous formation of various sections of the working and lower middle classes, at a distance from party-controlled unions and with varying degrees of politicisation, political ideas and practices; a *morphoma* that emerged not simply out of a process of defining and targeting the enemy, but out of breaking with the prevailing states of passivity and apathy. What moved the protesters, then, was not simply a ‘we don’t like you’, but also a ‘we don’t like what we have become (by having passively accepted the “peace” terms and life conditions imposed on us by the enemy)’. The violence and destruction that took place in those riots, apart from being seen as a direct attack on the state and plutocratic institutions

and symbols, should also be seen as an attempt to destroy the very conditions of working and lower middle class consumerism. For example, the places of luxury and hyper-consumption (e.g. branded clothing shops, car retailers, banks, travel agencies, etc.) that were smashed and torched were in shopping areas frequented by the lower-middle and working classes rather than those of the upper classes. It is in this precise sense that the violence contained elements of a working-class self-liberation from the very conditions of its hedonistic enslavement.

The December events lit the fuse and re-ignited class struggle, which now escaped the suffocating control of institutional unions, taking fluid forms and moving in various directions. The phantasmatic image of social and political peace²³ was seriously disturbed, and the feigned national stability radically called into question, with the incitement of this political antagonism reminiscent of a civil war spirit. As a pamphlet from the ASOEE (the Athens School of Economics and Business) occupation succinctly put it: ‘the Varkiza peace agreement has been broken. We are in civil war once again’ — a reference to the agreement that involved the disarmament of the Left, and attempted to end the Greek civil war in 1945 following the events of December 1944. Hyperbolic as this statement may sound, it perfectly captured - but also, and most importantly, constructed - the polarizing and confrontational dynamic produced by the events. Literary locutions and political statements, as Rancière (2006) argues, introduce into imaginary bodies lines of fraction and disincorporation. Similarly, the ‘end of the Varkiza agreement’ statement (now sprayed on several walls around Athens) is a declaration of disincorporation from the imaginary national body and its mythical social peace, and, at the same time, a declaration of fracture, of the breaking away from passivity and apathy.

This is why the austerity measures imposed by the IMF and the EU as a remedy to the crisis have been welcomed with no resistance by the government and the elites in Greece. For the measures do not concern simply the shoring up of the country’s external debt, but rather the restructuring of its entire economic, political and social life, so that the recent resurgence of class struggle can be contained and nipped in the bud before attaining uncontrollable intensity and traction. The increasingly revolting ‘barbarians’ of the lower classes should be subjected to the constant poverty shocks brought on by extreme austerity measures, and left disoriented from the rhetoric that they were responsible for what has happened to the country, and therefore should accept the much needed development that would bring an end to the decimated economy; they should, in other words, be made to succumb to the plans and projects of the local and foreign elites. In this respect, Ramphos’s rhetoric, charming in its psychologising kind of way, has been an important means through which to persuade people not to react furiously but rather to change themselves – remember the words of

²³ A nodal point for this image of class peace was the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens — a spectacular part of the redistribution of wealth to the upper classes — which can be viewed as the culmination of the state’s attempt to eliminate even the faintest signs of political antagonism, and present to the watching world the image of a harmonious, Western country, and, most importantly, a good environment for investment.

the actor here that a revolution will solve nothing, and that what is needed is a change in the Greek mentality.

This shock-therapy is complemented by the sustained attempt to cultivate a spirit of entrepreneurship in the country. Remember the words of Margaret Thatcher back in the late 1970's, when she argued that the greatest asset of the American economy was its culture of enterprise and that 'it was therefore vital to secure in this country [Britain] that same enterprise culture' (quoted in James, 2008, p. 140). This is exactly the same logic that the state is now attempting to re-activate in Greece, through its determination to follow to the letter the basic tenets of neoliberalism, insisting that the well-being of the Greeks will be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms (for more on the tenets of neoliberalism, see Harvey, 2005). What is at stake, then, is the attempt to restructure and modify the 'Greek' self in alignment with pro-entrepreneurial modalities; modalities manifested either in active ways as investment for innovative ideas and business - mainly for the 'lucky' ones who have the capital, can claim EU funds, and have the creative and administrative skills for investing in profitable directions, and who dream of being the next exemplar of success and enrichment²⁴. Alternatively, it manifests itself as passive obedient behaviours structured around the fear of losing one's job, or via the hope of future employment (for the 'unlucky' 2 million unemployed Greeks, almost a million in part-time jobs and occasional employment with no insurance whatsoever, and the thousands of underpaid immigrants).

The Greek crisis does not merely concern the country's external debt and need for fiscal reforms. It is first and foremost the result of a pressing demand for the reorganisation of society and its re-orientation towards a fully-fledged neoliberalism, as well as the restructuring of society, and its re-division into the creative active business orientated people and the masses of those performing badly paid routine labour, whether manual or intellectual; reforms that, ultimately, require a profound change of the self. Simultaneously both reflecting and constructing the spirit of the

²⁴ Entrepreneurial mentality seems to have also infiltrated sectors of the Greek society one would never imagine. Even the Greek Orthodox Church, which has for centuries been the source of anti-West religious sentiment, and a technology for the reproduction of 'Eastern' modes of mentality (see Ramphos, 2010), seems to be performing a volte-face. In this sense, the most interesting of the dozens of scandals - disappearing as quickly as they had emerged - was the so called *vatopedi* scandal in 2008, named after a business-oriented monastery in Mount *Athos* in Northern Greece - a monastery frequently visited by world-renowned luminaries like prince Charles and Vladimir Putin. The scandal revealed *inter alia* an extensive economic giving and receiving of public property between the monastery and government officials, as well as mythical amounts of money, stockmarket shares, various investments and offshore companies all owned by the monastery and its leading monks. This particular scandal, unlike other church related scandals which follow a 'traditional' pattern of corruption and personal enrichment of the secular sectors of the church, constituted a turning point for the country. For the Eastern Church's Christian spirit had been betrayed by those who were supposed to be its strongest depositaries, namely the monastic, ascetic community. Embracing the entrepreneurial spirit of the age, the *Vatopedi* monks marked a transition from companionship and frugality to the golden-boy individualistic mentality. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, then, that recipes from the monastic community of Mount *Athos* appear in various tabloids, whilst numerous talented ascetic cooks have published books detailing their 'creative' re-discovery of traditional monastic recipes.

times, in an article written in April of 2010, Ramphos claims that ‘...if we want to be creative people, creators of opportunities and horizons, who will put an end to the crisis with their dynamism, and not simply by saving money, we ought to combine carefully the extreme austerity measures of emergency with the anthropological parameter of the Greek problem’ (2011, p.91). One can imagine here that neither the two million unemployed, the twenty-five thousand homeless in the streets of the major cities, the rapidly increasing number of people living on an average salary of 400 euros per month, nor the increasing number of people living under the poverty line will be the dynamic creators of the opportunities and horizons imagined by Ramphos. On the contrary, these will be the men and women who, destitute and exhausted, will be the obedient and cheap labour-power for both the longstanding ruling class and the new creative entrepreneurial class.

Similar in this respect, albeit with a different focus, is the analysis of the pioneers of the new entrepreneurial creative and innovative sector, those who see themselves as the unique individuals who will change the direction of the country forever, and who define what they do as the ‘disruption of the existing order’ and the creation of the new – i.e., the chefs. TEDxAthens, part of the worldwide TEDx series, is characteristic not simply of the emerging ‘New Greek’, but more importantly, of the attempt to tame class struggle and incorporate the work-force within the project of the “unique” and “creative” individual. The following is how Dimitris Kalavros-Gousiou, founder and curator of TEDxAthens – and, according to his profile on the TEDxATHENS website: a young entrepreneur, trainee lawyer and technology enthusiast who splits his life between London and Athens²⁵ - explains the aims of the events:

We have to give hope everywhere, especially to the active part of the community. There are many multimedia empires shooting pictures of Greece with riots, protests, fire, fights, blood, etc. We believe there is another part of Greece full of doers and people waiting for a chance to show their potential. They want to create, not to destroy. We want to get hub of people and try to come up with new ideas, new concepts that can improve our everyday life²⁶.

Whilst one must concur that Greece is not a homogeneous place, and that there is undoubted variation amongst the populace, what is not clear however, is why the protesters and rioters are seen to be the opposite of ‘doers’. After all, there are many ‘doers’ participating in the riots, just as there are many protesters who are also ‘doers’ – in fact, they are all doers. However, our young pioneer is wholly disinterested in these kind of interrelations. What he really wants to communicate is a divided Greece: a country split between barbarian proletarian destruction on the one hand, and entrepreneurial passion on the other; between masses of protesting workers and the talented creative individuals, between unruly cooks and business-oriented chefs. Note that for our young genius the improvement of everyday life will not derive from

²⁵ <http://2011.tedxathens.com/team/dimitris-kalavros-gousiou/>

²⁶ D. Kalavros-Gousiou (2012). ‘Bringing Greece into the future (interview), available in: <https://www.hellenext.org/reinventing-greece/2012/01/bringing-greece-into-the-future-withtedxathens/> (accessed 20th October 2012)

struggle, but rather as an outcome of the new ideas and concepts developed by the creative entrepreneurs. After all, this emergent class of creative and innovative ‘doers’ is the one who can disturb the establishment. The TedxAthens conference in 2011 bore the fancy name ‘the Art of Disruption’. In his keynote address to the conference, Juliano Tubino, the worldwide director of Microsoft, explained to the local creative and innovative wannabe entrepreneurs the spirit of innovative individualism and its disruptive effects. Innovative disruption, he said, ‘is something so different that is either creating a new market, or a new segment, or is bringing something so different, so unique and so valuable that it is transforming the existing market’²⁷. The message was clear: ‘this is what you should do, to engage in innovative disruption, to create new markets’.

Let’s return to ‘Dangerous Cooking’. The film - part of the ‘education’ of the Greeks into a new mentality – registers a very interesting resolution of class antagonism, one not far removed from reality in actual fact, and definitely related to the nation building project that occurs on the behalf of the elites. After the two men have realized they were sleeping with the same woman, their antagonism intensifies, and the chef invites the cook to his house for dinner in order to discuss the whole situation. As soon as the cook takes his place at the table and the chef brings the food, the cook is surprised to find the most traditional, working class food (often referred to as our national food): ‘bean soup in red sauce’. But this ‘good will’ gesture of embracing proletarian culture is soon shown to be nothing but a cynical ploy to trick the cook into withdrawing from the conflict over the woman’s body. Eventually, the antagonism escalates further, and the two men decide to bring an end to it all by staging a final trial: they both must cook for the woman, each in his own signature style, the same traditional (Eastern) dish, *mouzaka*, and then have her decide which dish is the best and, consequently, which of the two men she will be with. Faced with such a task the woman instead abandons them both and leaves. The national body cannot be split on such a basis; both classes are required, what is important is simply who gets to run the show.

When the woman, fed up with their ‘childish’ fights, abandons them both, the two men engage in a process of communicating with each other. The aforementioned conversation concerning the different styles of cooking and their merits is part of this process. Finally, unable to possess the woman’s body for themselves, and through having to cope with her loss, they become friends and they are shown working in a restaurant together. The restaurant, in fact, belongs to the chef, where he offers a menu comprising of the new dishes included in his cookbook, whilst the cook is an employee in the chef’s restaurant – albeit with a good position as head of the kitchen. The restaurant is thus neither a traditional Greek tavern nor a kebab shop! It is an

²⁷ Juliano Tubino (2011). ‘Disruptive innovations and entrepreneurship’ (keynote talk in TEDxAthens, 2011). YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8erGwKM8tI&playnext=1&list=PLBEEF2B7A1D47732B&feature=results_main (time span: 02:10-02:34).

haute cuisine, luxurious place for an upper class clientele who have both the taste to appreciate its newly created gourmet delicacies, and the money to afford its steep prices. One can also assume that the cook has adopted the chef's approach to cooking since he is now the head of the kitchen. In other words, the cook – acting as an exemplar of an obedient worker rewarded for his obedience with a well-paid post in the chef's kitchen - does nothing more than preparing, or at least supervising, the execution of the Chef's recipes – what he maintains from his 'Eastern' self, from his 'traditionalness', is the aspect of executing things designed and planned by others, in this case the chef's recipes. The new components of his selfhood lie in the fact that, whereas in the past he prepared inattentively traditional recipes, allowing for mistakes and accidents, now he has learned how to prepare with precision and careful measurements. The new obedient (and therefore rewarded) proletarian is not like the old one; he/she has been trained, 'educated' into neoliberal cuisine.

The previous competition between the two members of antagonistic classes for the same national body (the woman), then, culminates only when the proletarian succumbs to the chef's project and conforms to his entrepreneurial spirit. Creative entrepreneurship is therefore presented as the way to break from a past riven by antagonism and conflict, and embrace the harmonious future of class peace and modernisation. In the restaurant's opening night we see the cook, his sister and his friend (all working class people) working in a state of absolute panic in the kitchen, while the chef signs copies of his book and socialises with his affluent guests-customers. In the penultimate scene, in a moment of absolute docility, or as a way simply to express his gratefulness for his incorporation within the new deal, the cook tells the chef-entrepreneur that their former antagonism was 'a stupid thing'. That said, everybody must now occupy his/her place in the New Greek restaurant at the end of the universe.

Positive Psychologies for Melancholic Greeks

We need to return to the aforementioned joke that the cook made concerning his 'spicy' (and therefore Eastern/Oriental) past with the woman. What the cook actually expresses through this joke is his melancholy, his inability to let go of the lost object. Greeks are diagnosed as melancholic, as existing in a state of never ending mourning, both for their ancient past and their Eastern past²⁸. The cook lost the woman, and lost equal enjoyment of the common body, regaining it subsequently only by virtue of his subordinated position in the chef's restaurant. Unlike the cook, the chef is not melancholic, he still possesses the woman's body albeit in a different way; it is through his cookbook, after all, and through his creative and entrepreneurial capacities and skills, that he managed to bring the past into the present and future by

²⁸ It is interesting that this form of melancholy appears to exist in Turkey too. This is how Orhan Pamuk, in his *Istanbul*, describes the city: 'After the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the world almost forgot Istanbul existed. The city into which I was born was poorer, shabbier, and more isolated than it had ever been in its two-thousand-year history. For me it has always been a city of ruins and of the end-of-empire melancholy. I've spent my life either battling with this melancholy, or (like all Istanbul) making it my own' (2005, p. 6).

transforming it into something new – remember that the woman was both the inspiration for the dishes and the one who named the dishes. What the cook communicates through this joke, then, is both his melancholy and bitterness towards his exclusion from the process of writing the cookbook – his education is inadequate, his knowledge insufficient for co-authoring a book, he can only learn how to follow it.

We know that melancholy and (black) humour bear not simply a close etymological relation²⁹, but share, as Freud has argued, a common formal structure. Critchley (2002) argues that humour is an anti-depressant that works by virtue of the ego finding itself ridiculous, and such humour is not depressing, but on the contrary gives us a sense of emancipation, consolation and childlike elevation. And he adds: ‘humour is an antidepressant that does not work by deadening the ego in some sort of Prozac-induced daze, but is rather a relation of self-knowledge ... it is a profoundly cognitive relation to oneself and the world (p. 102). Now, the cook’s joke is not a self-deprecating joke, at least not at first sight, but rather one directed towards the chef – the implication being that he, the cook, had a better sex-life with the woman than the chef did. It is, however, also liberating, soothing, in the sense that it allows him to confront his powerlessness in relation to the chef (a relation of self-knowledge). We can say, following Billig’s (2005) distinction, that, psychologically speaking, the joke allows the cook to relieve both his melancholy and powerlessness, but sociologically it functions in a conservative way, as it serves to avoid direct confrontation with the chef and thus perpetuates the cook’s subordinate position.

I mentioned previously that while the chef is relaxing on the garden armchair of the restaurant terrace, the cook appears and places on the table a dish covered by a silver food tray. But after having made the joke, he lifts the lid revealing not food for the chef but a traditional cake-like food, made of boiled wheat and sugar, which is offered in religious remembrance ceremonies following one’s death. This revelation is then followed by the cook’s comment that this commemoration ceremony will help them to forget the woman. Can we take the cook’s words seriously here? Is this commemoration ceremony the final act of escaping melancholy - and thus the final act of obedience to the new deal? Or is it simply another indication of his continuing melancholy and experience of powerlessness - and thus a space for future resistance?

In a similar fashion, the violent rearrangement of life in Greece has stolen many valuable objects from a large sector of the population. The change in the Greek self, then, is seen by the elites as a necessary gesture to avoid perpetual mourning and embrace the future. Ramphos, again, is clear in his diagnosis of the Greeks: they are melancholic; they are past- oriented people who mourn perpetually that which they

²⁹ The word *melancholy*, deriving from the Greek words for ‘black’ (*melan*), and ‘bile’ (*choly*), can be traced back to the ancient medical doctrine that four major liquids made up and regulated the body and one’s mood. Black humour bears a very close etymological relation to melancholy. The word humour, from the Latin word for ‘liquid’, is actually the ‘bile’ and thus, black humour comes to mean the same thing, namely black bile, *melancholy*.

have lost. And, Ramphos goes on, this project to transform the Greek self requires that the most significant constituting element of Greek culture, namely orthodox religion, is changed also – this is why the entrepreneurial dimension of the *Vatopedi* scandal (see footnote 24) is so important – or, at least, that the Greeks distance themselves from it. Excruciatingly Eastern in its logic, Ramphos (2010; 2011) argues, Orthodox dogma not only encourages the national fixation upon the past, but it also promotes a give and take logic with the divine that prevents self-examination, and makes people incapable of trusting themselves, trusting their own will, and being confident about their own skills and capacities.

What is needed, then, is a new kind of individualism that will restore the ‘lack of self-confidence’ and make the Greeks look inwards, engage in self-examination and change. One should not be tricked into believing that these are essentially good qualities that one should have, for in Greece in the midst of the crisis, to trust oneself, be confident and engage in self-examination is nothing but a psychic orthopaedics that functions as a depoliticising and pacifying mechanism: for if the majority of the population looks inward then this serves to depoliticise the crisis and individualises responsibility for what is happening (as if the important decisions about the country were made by them), whilst to trust oneself and be confident means that one never loses his/her courage and hope that one day they might get a job (in a country of two million unemployed!). The promoted skills and capacities are relevant only to an entrepreneurial minority who already have a European mentality. For the rest, these skills and qualities are just an additional demand that makes life even more stressful and depressing: the imperative to change is the new hell the Greeks are forced into, whilst a vicious cycle of self-blame awaits those who do not manage to change! Ramphos’ insights are in accordance with the diagnosis of other experts of the world of business and money. This is how Peter Economides, a world renowned guru of ‘branding’, encourages the Greeks to stop looking backwards and instead turn their gaze towards the future - a future that is nothing other than the perpetuation of the neoliberal present:

Greece is on the verge of bankruptcy, but we are not a bankrupt nation. We are Greeks; people with the power to imagine; people with the intelligence to turn imagination into reality. We imagined democracy, we imagined the Acropolis. Now it’s time to imagine the Future³⁰.

To the aid of this logic of collective self-change comes not only the numerous comedy programmes: candid cameras, hoax and farcical TV shows, stand-up comedy of various sorts and sitcoms which dominate the entertainment sphere – and which make the abandonment of the lost object and self-examination easier - but, of course, various forms of psychology, and most importantly, positive psychology. Greece is right now witnessing a massive and unprecedented proliferation of self-help books and seminars offering practical advice for turning negative thoughts into positive ones, changing one’s thinking, coping with depression and anxiety, as well as learning

³⁰ Peter Economides (2011). Keynote address at EEDE's 11th "Aristoteli" Conference in Thessaloniki. YouTube video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wvyq5AHVrhM> (time span 28:53- 29:14).

the requisite skills for being a winner; as being a winner is all about attitude, as a poster advertising an upcoming self-help seminar in the streets of Athens put it. Positive psychology, in other words, is the most prominent technology through which psychic orthopaedics is practiced in Greece. The following is an extract from the website of the Hellenic society of positive psychology, which defines its purpose and aims:

In this difficult period in which more and more people are striving for a 'good' life, and the values as well as the modern way of life are shaken and re-examined, there seems to be an urgent need to rediscover the meaning of life, to turn to personal sources of satisfaction and happiness and to shield people against the difficulties of day to day life³¹.

For positive psychologists, what is happening in Greece is simply a 'shaking and re-examining of the modern way of life and values'. The vulgar depoliticising of the crisis which the quote performs, expresses perfectly the cultural reform programme orchestrated by the elites. The Greek values and way of life are indeed shaken and re-examined, but what the quote glosses over in its 'neutral' language is who is actually shaking all this, to what aim, and who is actually required to engage in re-examination. The discursive affinities between the discourse of positive psychology and that of the intellectuals of the State and the media are striking. Here, like in Ramphos' writings, what is primarily at stake is the production of an isolated Ego, shielded from outside influence, an Ego that even derives its happiness solely from within, and seeks to find the meaning of life; a meaning which, as Lasch (1991) explains, is nothing but the fulfilment of one's own emotional requirements and peace of mind. The stages for the production of this Ego are simple: first, the person is cut-off from tradition, then they are prevented from building relations of solidarity by looking inwards and building up walls around their sense of self, before then being pushed and encouraged to re-discover the meaning of life within a neoliberal-friendly cartography; or, perhaps more accurately, to discover the neoliberal meaning of life.

By means of conclusion: 'We are all Turks'

Greeks do not simply need to change, they also have to demonstrate to the Western gaze that they have changed, and this is what the business guru Peter Economides refers to as 'branding the Greeks' and branding Greece. This is the reason the young entrepreneurial founder and curator of TEDxAthens contrasted rioters and protesters with the 'doers'. The former is the side of Greece that needs to disappear; the latter represents the new entrepreneurial face that needs to be shown and branded abroad. But all those who see the future through the lens of the neoliberal present, and wish to re-invent Greece and the whole world in accordance with their desires; all those Eurocentrics, in other words, who demand the pacification of class struggle and the inculcation of obedience and docility in the worker, must know that things are never going to be that easy.

³¹ (<http://www.positiveemotions.gr> , my translation)

In an article entitled ‘the disturbing sounds of the Turkish march’, where he discusses the arguments concerning Turkey’s admission to the European Union, Žižek (2007) refers to the official anthem of the European Union, the ‘Ode to Joy’ from the fourth movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. In the middle of the movement, he argues, after the main joy theme, something unexpected happens: at bar 332, the first tone changes completely and instead of the solemn hymnic progression, the same ‘joy’ theme is repeated in the Marcia Turca (‘Turkish march’) style. After this point, everything goes wrong: the simple solemn dignity of the first part of the movement is never recovered. I will not follow to its conclusion Žižek’s argument here, rather I will keep in mind the split and havoc caused by the ‘Turkish march’ invading the solemn melody, and his ascertainment that:

only through a ‘sectarian split’ from the standard European legacy, by cutting ourselves off from the decaying corpse of the old Europe, can we keep the renewed European legacy alive. The task is difficult. It compels us to take a great risk of stepping into the unknown³².

Keeping in mind the ‘disturbing sounds of the Turkish march’, let me give a twist to the meaning of the Eastern species called ‘Turks’ who are refused a place in the Western ‘civilised’ European Union: If the Turks managed in the 15th century to conquer Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, it was not simply due to their military superiority or the Empire’s military decadence, but, mainly, due to the fact that millions of people living outside the city walls were voluntarily converting to Islam and providing active support to the ‘Turk’ warriors. Whereas the Byzantine State was associated with severe taxation, extreme corruption and intimidation of the population, the ‘Turks’ represented resistance, liberation, and brought with them a revolutionary economic structure that pushed aside the Christian trade intermediaries, and allowed people direct access to the products necessary for survival: the Bazaar. It is said that the word ‘Turk’ did not refer to any particular ethnic group; the ‘Turks’ were not in fact a unified nation, but a number of people coming from all sorts of ethnic and linguistic origins. The word is said to be a corruption of the word *Turuq*, the plural form of the word *Tariq*, which in the Sufi tradition means path, way. These *Turuq*, these paths, were not simply religious groupings but, mainly, political and social movements which engaged in a struggle against the Byzantine State, with masses of people entering their cadres to help fight against the oppression and exploitation (see Papazahariou, 2010). Similarly today, with an Eastern ‘barbarian’ passion, with no national and religious distinctions, our target is to conquer the Empire, and it is in this precise sense that, ‘we are all Turks’.

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³² <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/the-disturbing-sounds-of-the-turkish-march>.

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