

## **Dreaming the Self; A unified approach towards dreams, subjectivity and the radical imagination.**

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*Unsettling dreams – for anthropologists and informants alike; Introductory remarks.*

“So, what are you writing on?” my mother asked in a despondent last attempt to prolong our telephone conversation –the fifth of that day- which I was, equally despondently, trying to put to an end. “Dreams”, I replied. “Dreams? I thought you were working on a publication”, she remarked. “I *am* working on a publication”, I responded –in an annoyed tone which she immediately picked up. “So, anthropology studies dreams as well... Interesting...”, my mother retracted and started narrating to me the dream she had two nights before and then another one, and another one. She had finally found a good excuse to prolong the conversation and address at the same time some of her more burning concerns like the marriage I do not seem to be getting on with and the fact that she is the last one of her friends and relatives not to have a grandchild yet as a result. Her last dream was about teeth. She narrated the dream and gave me her interpretation: “I dreamt that I was having a denture –how weird, as you know all my teeth are in place- which came out. I was so distressed, but then I cleaned it and put it back on again. Falling teeth means death”. In an attempt to evade the subject and avoid the standard grouch about how she will die “before managing to hold a grandchild in her arms”, I offered her an alternative interpretation: “False teeth is about pretention, appearances. Your dream means that you feel as though your public image is being threatened, but you see mum you are stronger than that. You just cleaned it and put it back on”. My mother did not like my innuendo at all, just as I began to enjoy our cryptic talk about my future and her feelings towards it. “Falling teeth is about death”, she insisted, “but I hope you don’t tell anyone else about my dreams. I don’t want people to think that I believe in dreams and nonsense”. Her brief concern with reason, however, was followed by the narration of yet another dream she

had of me in a white dress boarding an Olympic air plane at Heathrow, planned to land right on the roof of our house in Greece.

This paper focuses on *dream-experiences* and *dream-narratives* as sites of creativity and agency. Through the ethnographic exploration of dreams recounted to me mainly by informants in Thessaloniki, Greece I will argue that dreams are means of making sense of the world in a relational and intersubjective manner, as well as instances of the human capacity to invent new forms and ‘original figurations’ (Kirtsoglou 2004: 38; cf. also McNay 2000: 20; Braidotti 2002: 13).

Anthropological research on dreams is definitely not a new field (see for example Tedlock 1987; Edgar 1995; Mageo 2003; Stewart 2004; to name but a few). Nevertheless, the theorization and analysis of the dream experience can be a difficult and awkward venture for a number of reasons. First, the anthropologist –just like her mother- has to face the question of ‘rationality’. Can the focus of our analysis be experiences of ‘dreams and nonsense’, or shall we remain in the comfortable shelter of a semiotic appreciation of the dream as culturally constructed text? (cf. Stewart 1997: 878). Second, the difficulty of envisaging the dream as something more than a reworking of reality becomes even stronger when combined with the realization that we actually have no access –as anthropologists- to the dream as such (cf. Stewart 1997: 877; Edgar 1999: 29; Crapanzano 2003; Hollan 2004: 171). We are confounded to working with *dream-narratives* and thus the synthesis of a remotely comprehensive socioanalytical approach of the *dream-experience* seems –at first sight- like climbing mount untenable. The indecipherability of dreams leads us directly to our third problem, namely their ostensible ‘private’ nature. Anthropology has traditionally devoted itself to the study of social phenomena. The private nature of dreams and the fact that are ‘generated within individual minds’ (cf. Lyon this volume, Heijnen this volume), poses definitely a problem. In an effort to set the scene for my subsequent ethnographic exploration of the power of dreams, I will try to briefly discuss these three problems claiming that they are interrelated and ultimately connected to an artificial dichotomy between dream and reality.

The ontology of the sovereign human subject of modernity –an historicopolitical effect of the age of Enlightenment as Kant had envisaged it- has been firmly established in reason (cf. Foucault 1984; Kant 1784). The use of reason –as opposed

to subjecting oneself to authority- marked the way out of a state of ‘immaturity’, and into a new era of ‘adulthood’ for humanity (Foucault 1984: 37-38). The adult status of man (sic) depended since then, almost directly, on his willingness and ability to be constantly establishing the truth (by reason or science), ostracizing unmediated belief in the realm of ‘primitive thought’. In this context, dreams –just like various other forms of human experience- needed to be firmly grounded to ‘reality’ in order to be subjected to systematic rationalization and scientific investigation. Thus dream-time and the events that take place in dreams were only analysed from the perspective of ‘awake-time’, in terms of images re-worked rather than produced *de novo* or actually existing anywhere else than in human memory (cf. Globus 1994). In our Enlightenment-shaped cosmology what happens during dreaming does not exist. It is only ‘reality’ –that is, awake time- that exists and generates dreams. To argue the opposite, or worse to believe in dreams as authentic experiences, seems for many a violation of human rationality.

In a relatively recent introduction to a special issue on dreams, Stewart discusses how Victorian anthropologists evoked the “ability to distinguish purely mental phenomena from real perceptions” as a “prime criterion for having attained civilization (2004: 76). Victorian evolutionism purported that “those who believed in the reality of dreams lacked a theory of mind” (ibid) and therefore only “the savage could consider the events in his dreams to be as real as those of his waking hours” (Lubbock 1870/1978: 126 cited in Stewart 2004: 76). This dichotomy between ‘reality’ and ‘dream’ that rests on a hierarchical distinction between dream-time and awake-time, is not only evolutionist in character, but also clearly artificial since it effects a peculiar compartmentalization of the nature of human beings. For, it presupposes a certainty that whatever it is that engenders events at awake-time is radically different from that which generates events at dream-time and moreover the latter is somehow inferior and subordinate to the former. This supposition is not only somewhat bizarre, but also entirely unfounded and difficult to prove by either purely ‘scientific’ or ‘theoretical’ or ‘philosophical’ means. To say for instance that to invent in awake-time a machine that did not previously exist comes from that part of the brain which is capable of producing technological feats, but to dream of flying comes from some other part of the brain that produces deluded fantasies is illogical; especially if we consider that the machine invented in awake-time can be an airplane. In that sense, Globus is right to argue that “[t]he mechanism for producing the wake

world and the mechanism of the dream ought to be the very same mechanism, at least we should seriously consider that possibility” (1994: 25). As a consequence of the aforementioned observation we are compelled to accept –at least provisionally- that if reality shapes dreams then dreams shape reality too. Most importantly, until we become somehow certain that reality and dream are produced by two separate mechanisms, and until we somehow discover that one mechanism is superior to the other we are also compelled to accept that dream-time and awake-time form a continuum.

My argument in favor of a unified approach towards ‘dream’ and ‘reality’ has consequences for the second analytical problem of dreams delineated above as the asymmetry between *dream experience* and *dream narrative*. Surely, as anthropologists we only have access to dream narratives. In fact, our problem is not disciplinary in its nature; just human. No-one –not even scientists employing advanced technology like EEG equipment- can have direct access to *dream experience*. Someone else’s dream is effectively nothing but that person’s narrative story of a dream. We will never be sure whether the dream took place, or what happened in it, since we cannot –at least in the foreseeable future- share it ‘directly’. Did my mother actually dream of me in a white dress on my way to Greece, or was that a rhetorical device, a way of reminding cum persuading me that I should be getting married soon?

In some ways our inability to share ‘directly’ a dream experience resembles the philosophical problem of other minds. We can never be sure about other people’s mental states or thoughts and yet this has not thus far prevented us from anthropological investigation. Truly, there is a huge difference between culture that ‘unfolds before your eyes’ –so to speak- and the dream which does not. But at the same time a great deal of our understanding of any culture (often including what is broadly termed our own), depends on our informants’ narrative accounts. Meaning is often established in narrative (cf. Kirtsoglou 2010 nd; McNay 2008) both in relation to ‘dreams’ and with regard to ‘reality’, and therefore in this case too, the radical division between ‘dream’ and ‘reality’ is unfounded.

It is not only the anthropologist who makes sense of dreams through narrative. The informant too –the dreamer- must sometimes narrativize the experience before s/he capable of making sense of it (cf. Orchs and Capps 1996: 19). It is therefore fair to argue that the anthropological investigation of dreams is not radically different

from researching other human experiences. Except for one last problem: sociality is shared, while dreams are not.

The last issue of the ‘privacy’ of dreams is too, I claim, a byproduct of the unfounded dichotomy between ‘reality’ and dream’. We surely dream alone, as we think alone, sometimes pray alone, and I too at this very moment write alone this paper on dreams. If however we consider *dream-time* and *awake-time* as influencing each other generatively in a symmetrical fashion, then we can safely argue that dreams cannot be casted out of human sociality. If our waking thoughts are social thoughts, then our sleeping thoughts are social too. And if –as anthropologists- we theorize on human agency and creativity based on what happens in our informants waking life, there is no reason why we do not pursue the same objective in relation to our informants’ *dream-time*. Our abilities to invent, create, generate, synthesize and institute exist while we dream as much as they exist in ‘reality’, if not more so. For, evidently in dreams we often engage with the impossible; sometimes in reality too.

#### **b. Phobetor<sup>i</sup> - the self salvaged**

The ethnographic instances of dream-narrations that will be recounted in this paper are part of my ongoing fieldwork in Thessaloniki, Greece that started in 2007. The main objective of my research has been politics and more specifically the broad themes of globalization, anti-americanism, power, rhetoric and history. Long term fieldwork however, often creates extended and extensive relations with people and ultimately involves the discussion of themes that are seemingly irrelevant to one’s own research. Fieldworking is more often about shared instances of sociality than solely about researching one theme. In this context many of my informants shared with me their dreams. Some of them related to political matters and some don’t, but all of them were interesting and intriguing enough to be recorded in my field-diary. The dream that I will be considering in this section relates to times of distress and clearly indicates the dreamers’ attempt to negotiate and resolve anxiety, uncertainty and stress.

## *Markos*

Markos is an 81 year old man of refugee origin. He currently resides in *Kalamaria*, a distinctly refugee neighborhood in Thessaloniki and he used to own a small family industry (*viotehnia*) that produced clothes. Such industries were very common in Greece, especially in the eighties, but Markos prided being among the oldest members of the profession since his mother was herself seamstress. Both Markos's parents came from Asia Minor in 1922<sup>ii</sup>. His mother Tasia was about 15 and his father approximately 18 years old when they fled the burning harbor of Izmir (*Smyrna*) in Turkey. Markos's dream is one of the many dreams narrated to me in the field that relate to political events. Such dreams, imbued with historicity, were often experienced by people who were the children of refugees or refugees themselves. It is also important to note though that informants of different backgrounds reported dreams of being refugees, an experience they never had in 'real' life, attesting to the shared character of historical narratives and the culturally-laden nature of dreams. Markos's dream took place in the summer of 1974 during the invasion of the Turkish military forces in Northern Cyprus. At the time, all men under 40 in Greece were called up for compulsory enlistment, but Markos was not drafted since he was already 44.

*Yes, I was not drafted, but many of my neighbors were... many people... leaving wives and small children behind, not knowing if they will come back. Kyra-Tasia [Markos's mother] was constantly crying. 'Don't cry' I was prompting her, I will not be going anywhere, but she would constantly remember her own experience, fleeing from the flames in Smyrna [Izmir] and she would cry 'for the poor, unlucky people of Cyprus' who were now in similar position. "You don't know Markos what it is to run for your life", she kept saying. I must have been really influenced by her sorrow, the events and the general atmosphere. I remember I had this frightening and at once peculiar dream. In my dream I was in the waterfront of Thessaloniki. Just in front of the White Tower [an Ottoman monument, originally built to fortify the city, later used as a prison and in modern times the emblem of the town]. Everything was quiet and ordinary. I was strolling on the waterfront under the shining sun. Then suddenly, out of nowhere there were flames, and smoke and people screaming and running from soldiers who were after them. They were heavily armed soldiers with modern*

*weapons and ammunition and they were coming from everywhere. I felt disoriented, frightened, and I started running myself. I was trying to leave the waterfront and go into the town thinking that I could perhaps hide in the home of my friend Yorgos that was relatively close to where I was at the time. Then I saw my mother. She was running and a soldier was after her. I tried to go to her rescue but I could not reach them. I tried screaming but no voice was coming out of my mouth. I kept running but the distance between us was becoming greater and greater and I felt incredible agony and despair. And then I saw a high-ranking priest but couldn't see his face. He came flying from the sky, like a big, black bird with his cloth waving and he dived like a sea-gull, reached for my mother and snatched her from the crowd. He was much like an angel and I was left there watching them as they flew above my head, crying in relief that my mother was out of harm's way. When I woke up I was still crying. I couldn't sleep for the rest of the night, just sat there in the balcony thinking of my dream and the high-ranking priest whose face I couldn't see. To my mind at the time it was an image inspired by Makarios [Makarios III, archbishop and president of Cyprus at the time]. The next day however, when I told my mother about the dream and the priest she shook her head. 'You dreamt of Chrysostomos', she told me. 'You dreamt of saint Chrysostomos' and she crossed her self. 'May his grace help all the people who are now in need' (i hari tou na voithisei olous tous anthropous pou einai stin anagki).*

By St. Chrysostomos, Markos's mother meant Chrysostomos Kalafatis, (or Chrysostomos of Smyrna as he is widely known in Greece) the archbishop of Izmir in 1922. Chrysostomos Kalafatis was lynched by the mob just prior to the great fire that destroyed part of the city and resulted in the dramatic exodus of its Greek inhabitants in the 9<sup>th</sup> of September of 1922. Most refugees, and especially people who originated in Izmir, consider Chrysostomos Kalafatis a saint because purportedly he refused to leave the city the day before when the Greek army left, choosing to remain alongside his flock and becoming a martyr.

Markos's dream has a number of theoretically and analytically significant dimensions, especially in relation to the alleged privacy of dreams. We undoubtedly dream alone. It is nevertheless a matter of analysis and perspective whether we dream as 'individuals' or as 'persons'. I am alluding here directly to Strathern and her

theorization of the Melanesian person, in order to maintain that it is indeed difficult to insist on a “strict separation of the individual from the collective” (Stewart 1997: 877; cf. Kleinman and Kleinamn 1996: 189).

As I have argued elsewhere (Kirtsoglou 2004: 38), Strathern’s concept of the person becomes a useful theoretical and analytical notion in our understanding of Greek subjectivity. The person, Strathern claims is ‘a multiply constructed agent’, ‘composed of diverse relationships’, who acts ‘because of relationships’ and as such her identity is always relational (1988: 324, 57). In terms of Greek ethnography, it has been long pointed out that the concept of the single individual is insufficient for understanding and explaining Greek culture (Kirtsoglou 2004: 107; Theodossopoulos 1997: 264; Salamone and Stanton 1986: 99; Hirschon 1989: 141; Herzfeld 1985: 11). If in Greece one is performing ‘on behalf of a collectivity’ (Herzfeld 1985: 11; Kirtsoglou 2004) in his/her awake time, there is no reason to think that in his/her dreamtime will experience events as a single, isolated individual.

In his exploration of the image of the ‘field’ in Modern Greek dream narratives, Stewart argued in favour of a strong “continuity between the personal and the social, the emotional and the cognitive” showing effectively how such “putative dichotomies merge in human experience” (1997: 877). Likewise the dream of Markos recounted here attests to the inherently social and relational potential of dreams. His dream, ‘incorporates’ his mother’s narrative of her experiences in the great fire of Izmir, and is providing shape to culturally and historically formed analogies between the exodus from Izmir and the dislocation of populations in Cyprus. In the dream both these events merge representationally in the familiar setting of the waterfront in Thessaloniki, constituting the dream an historical narrative. Markos’s dream analogy is a kind of narrative shared not only between his own dream-time and awake-time, but between his dream-time and his mother’s awake time and ultimately between his dream-time and the awake-time of a number of other refugee and non-refugee informants who –when addressing historical and political matters- draw consistently analogies of a similar kind (cf Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010; Sutton 2003).

The ‘illogical’ image of the high-ranking priest flying and snatching Markos’s mother out of harm’s way is of particular importance when one considers the act of ‘sharing’ the dream the day after. Markos dreamt not as an individual, but as a person composed of relationships. Much in the same manner, his explanation of the dream has not been an individual venture but a shared practice. As Stewart points out, it is



not unusual for people in Greece to share dreams (1997: 884). These moments of sharing (by no means specific to Greek culture), effect a further cultural contextualization of the dream imagery (Edgar 1999: 28). Considering the importance of group work for dream interpretation, Edgar maintains that “the culturally constructed meaning evoked from the dream imagery... did not essentially reside within the dream imagery itself but was created through... the cultural contextualization... of the reported dream imagery (1999: 28). For Markos, sharing the dream with his mother meant also a shared authorship of the dream narrative. It is through such processes of sharing that “the idiosyncratic personal dream comes to be converted, through contact with public canons of interpretation into a recognizably standard narrative” (Stewart 1997: 885). Commenting on the dream also shapes the dream up to a great extent. The flying priest is finally named as being not Makarios (the archbishop of Cyprus), but Chrisostomos (the archbishop of Izmir), thus firmly establishing the dream not only in awake and shared time, but also in the histories and legends of Greek refugees from Izmir; or else in shared cosmologies.

Markos’s dream is clearly an attempt to solve a condition of anxiety and distress (cf. Stewart 1997) through the image of ‘flying’ and the symbol of the guardian angel. In ‘real’ time Markos (like others in Greece) was experiencing distress and anxiety at the face of the events in Cyprus and at the possibility of an impending Greco-Turkish war that would have no doubt changed people’s lives irrevocably. Ordinary men and women feel understandably powerless when confronted with large scale events they cannot influence or control. Similarly, Markos is witnessing the events in the dream from a powerless standpoint. He reports not being able to shout, or save either himself or his mother. His feelings of powerlessness in ‘real’ life acquire a visual and representational status in the dream. Employing historically and culturally specific shared symbols, the dream offers a creative resolution. The mother is salvaged and anxiety gives its place to relief through strengthening the connection between the world of men and that of saints (cf. Stewart 1991; 1997: 886). Irrespectively of the identity of the high-ranking priest, he is a religious entity with powers that are not ordinary to man. He is an angel, or like an angel, a creature of the world of the sacred. When faced with events he cannot control, Markos is dreaming of ‘godly’ –so to speak- entities who come to the rescue of his mother. ‘Real’ life might be something he cannot influence, but in his dream he can reduce the distance between Man, God and His saints. In Markos’s dreamworld

the forces of the heavens empathize with the human predicament on earth. Thus the lack of ‘earthly’ power is being compensated with ‘heavenly’ power. His faith in a safe future is being restored through an ‘illogical’ image of a flying priest, which nevertheless –in terms of ‘real’ life beliefs and shared symbols- makes perfect sense. Markos’s dream supports Barris claim that “the paradoxical logic of legitimate violations of sense does not only characterize dreams, but also characterizes certain very deep kinds of issue... the deepest, most meaningful dimensions of our sober, waking reality” (2010: 3). After all, at the face of such adversities- what Markos can do (in dream or awake time) other than leave his future in the hands of God?

### c. Phantasia – the self imagined

As I have argued, the anthropological exploration of dreams demonstrates the unbreakable continuity between the ‘personal’ and the ‘social’, between dream-time and awake-time. The following dream will serve as an ethnographic illustration of my claim that dreams are sites of agency and creativity. I will recount the dream narrative of Niki, a 45 year old woman who works as a high-school teacher in Thessaloniki. At the time of my fieldwork, Niki was married to Charis who was a doctor and lived a comfortable life with her two children in a detached house in Pylaia, a suburbia-like area of Thessaloniki. Niki is the fourth child of a relatively poor working-class family, while Charis is of similar background. They represent the image of the ‘self-made’ couple, an all too common occurrence in contemporary Greece. Niki narrated to me one of her important dreams in order to explain how she came to imagine herself as Charis’ wife long before they eventually got married.

*Niki*

*When I originally met Charis in the university we were just friends. I was in a relationship with Nikos –you don’t know him- an engineer from a very rich family. Everyone was telling me how lucky I was, and that I should stay with Nikos and marry him and have an easy life. I could appreciate the prospect of an easy life coming from a non-well off and big family myself. And Nikos was a good guy. It’s not as if I didn’t*

*fancy him, or as if he was boring or a bad character or any of this. But I just didn't see us together. Each time I was trying to imagine my life with Nikos I could see me in a nice apartment, working just for my personal realization, having a nice car, wearing nice clothes... having two children, a boy and a girl (I have always wanted a boy and a girl) who were attending a private school and tennis lessons. All that was really nice but there was nowhere the image of me and Nikos, together. It was all about how easy and tidy life would be. And then I had this dream... It was vivid and symbolic; beautiful dream and crystal clear to me, despite the fact that I usually find most of my dreams to be nonsensical and rather convoluted. I dreamt of a garden. It was a gorgeous garden with flowers and orange trees. The branches of the trees were almost touching the ground from the weight of the fruits. I was walking in it and the wonderful smells were filling my body and reaching my soul. Just as I was strolling in the garden, it started raining but the sun was still up. The sun was shining and it was raining at the same time. Rain felt like a cool, pleasant shower and I was dancing alone thinking to myself that this must be how the garden remained so beautiful and the trees so full of fruit... because it rained so nicely while the sun still shone. And then in my dream I thought of this silly rime 'sun and rain- the poor are getting married' (ilios kai vrohi pantreuontai oi ftohoi). You know it... yes... and I thought instantly of Charis and I said to myself in the dream that Charis was not rich but I could marry him there and then in that garden and live happily with him. I woke up and I knew instantly that Charis could become my husband and that we could live well together. Do you see what I mean? Not necessarily that we **would**. I did not see the dream as an omen or a premonition that one day I would marry him. I felt that **we could**... that we could be good together despite not having money, not being professionally secure yet. I felt that what mattered is that I thought of him –or even of somebody **like him** if you want- in the dream. There I was in the middle of heaven, of all this richness and I did not think of Nikos who was my boyfriend and rich in terms of money. I thought of someone else and I immediately understood that I was after a different type of 'affluence', the type of affluence that fills your soul like the aroma of a flower; not just your pocket.*

Niki's dream is especially rich in symbols of archetypal male-female relationships. The setting is a garden that alludes almost directly to the Garden of Eden, full of powerful representations of fertility, prosperity and happiness. It is the ideal setting of

getting married and living happily ever after, what Hollan calls a selfscape (2004: 170). Hollan employs the term 'selfscape' to refer to "emotionally and imaginably vivid dreams that appear to reflect back to the dreamer how his or her current organization of self relates to various parts of itself, its body and other people and objects in the world" (2004: 172). The fertile trees, the wonderful smells and the paradoxical combination of rain and sun that brings to mind a simple (almost nonsensical but common) Greek rime about the marriage of the poor provide Niki the context and the opportunity to "develop a further emotional integration of the various aspects of the self" (Edgar 1999: 32). In 'real' life, she is in a relationship with a rich young man but when trying to project herself into the future she is incapable of imagining a 'common' future with him. Friends and people close to her keep commenting on the rich man's affluence. Niki herself seeks *some kind of affluence*, coming from a relatively poor and large and family. However, as it turns out, she is more after what she understands as 'emotional affluence' rather than 'material wealth'. A marriage with a rich person almost certainly promises her the latter, but evidently not the former. Her dream-time becomes a kind of 'context' where she can explain her awake-time ambivalence and a field of relations where the self is imagined as 'emotionally affluent' and not 'simply rich'.

Niki's dream is an example of the dreamer's cognitive processes that acquire visual form (Stewart 1997: 890; cf. also Hunt 1989: 149). Like the images of the open fields that Stewart explores, the garden becomes for Niki a "pictorial imagination of the cognitive spatialising of thought that is undertaken in actual thinking and problem solving". Her garden is a dream-instance of what Castoriadis terms the instituted-instituting imaginary. The archetypal garden of Eden with its images of fertility (and their association to womanhood) is an example of the instituted imaginary, of social significations that crystallize and solidify (Castoriadis 2007: 73). Niki's thoughts – triggered by the recollection of the rime- and the synthetic, idiosyncratic setting of the rain and the sun are an example of the power of creation, of the human ability to create and to form, that Castoriadis calls 'the instituting' social imaginary (ibid: 72). The actor here is not simply engaged in active problem-solving and decision-making. She is also 'imagining' her self, and actively guides (through dream) the course of her life, ultimately *becoming* what she has dreamt of. The dream as 'selfscape' "provides a current map or update of the self's contours and affective resonances relative to its own body as well as to other objects and people in the world" (Hollan 2004: 170),

actively ‘mediating the dreamer’s sense of self and her social environment’ (ibid: 172). The garden of Eden, ultimately created by Niki using familiar, cultural and social symbols of happiness, serves to position the self vis-à-vis oneself and others, to differentiate between types of affluence and to guide life decisions. Niki became what she had dreamt of; as she herself states, not because the dream was an omen of what was about to come, but because the dream was an opportunity to resolve the tension between “a self that felt and acted in the past, a self that feels and acts in the present, and an anticipated or hypothetical self that is projected to feel and act in some as yet unrealized moment” (Ochs and Capps 1996: 29; cf also Stewart 2004: 173; Havel 1983).

The context of dream-time, in all its paradoxical flexibility and freedom collapses the past, the present and the future, into one continuous time allowing desire to be imagined and embodied. Niki is not just envisaging her self happy and content. By entering this ‘fairy-tale space’ (cf. Stewart 1997) she translates happiness and affluence into tangible objects, smells and feelings of a cool shower under the sun. Her dream is then –clearly- an embodied narrative of the self imagined, a set of structuring-structured principles where already delineated frames produce the very concepts they are made of (cf. Bourdieu 1990; Kirtsoglou 2010 nd).

#### **d. Morpheus – the self invented**

The analysis and theorization of dreams passes necessarily through the analysis and theorization of narrative. This is the case, not only because as anthropologists we only have access to dream narratives, but also and perhaps more importantly because as Edgar argues the “filtration of imagery into thought is an act of translation which begins the construction of meaning (1999: 29). The dreamer herself often makes sense of the experience by narrativizing it, and turning it into a relatively coherent tale. Most importantly though, in some ways the dream is itself a narrative, a “story that you tell yourself without knowing why” (ibid: 40). The ‘unfinished’, ‘unpredictable’ quality of dream-narratives (or dreams as narratives) substantiate the ‘non-reflexive side of subjectivity’, and the role of intuition and emotions in the realization of the self (cf. McNay 2008: 10). The ‘power of creation’ –what Castoriadis calls *vis formandi*- entails radical innovation, the ability to create, to form to imagine and to

invent (cf. Castoriadis 2007: 72). I feel that it is easy to accept this idea in the context of subject-object, where the object can be something tangible or an idea, a synthesis, a piece of music, a mathematical proof. Where we often have trouble of fully conceptualizing the power of *vis formandi* is the self. How can the self invent itself? Social constructivism –a powerful theoretical and analytical scheme in the social sciences- does not allow us much scope of conceptualizing such radical forms of creation. Inventing the self is a tempting idea that flirts intensively with the impossible, or at least with the improbable. The dream becomes an ideal context of catching a glimpse of that impossibility. The flexibility and seeming ‘irrationality’ of the dream, its liminality and character as a space where all rules and laws can be inverted allows sometimes for the self to be “invented in new, dazzling garments” (Edgar 1999: 39). This is a *de novo* kind of invention (cf. Globus 1994) and it should not be conflated with *ex nihilo* creation. Human beings are capable of inventing new forms and engage actively with the creation of ‘original figurations’ (cf. Kirtsoglou 2004: 38; Braidotti 2002: 13). This process is often of unexpected and un-anticipatory nature, but it is always firmly established in a social and cultural field of possibilities (cf. Boudieu 1993; cf. also McNay 2008: 182, 185).

The last dream that this paper will explore relates to inventing the self. The protagonist of this narrative, is Mihalis a man in his early forties who up until his thirtieth birthday worked as a chief barman in stylish night clubs in Thessaloniki and various islands like Mykonos, Crete and Santorini. After a dream on the night of his thirtieth birthday Mihalis decided to become a doctor. When I met him he had finished medical school and was specializing in pediatrics.

### *Mihalis*

*It all started with a dream I had the night following my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. I went to sleep after celebrating with my friends at about 5.30 in the morning. Being head barman for so many years meant that I had all sorts of friends and always a cool place at my disposal for such celebrations! I went to sleep and I had this dream... I saw myself in a hospital, dressed in white like a doctor and seeing patients... I was asking them about their symptoms and once they started telling me what they felt I immediately knew what was wrong with them. I remember thinking in the dream how easy the*

*diagnosis was. I just knew! I was giving them various pills, different colors and shapes and they instantly felt better. I could see the gratitude in their eyes and the smiles in their faces and it was so nice. Such a nice feeling! I woke up smiling and it was so vivid and felt so easy to achieve that I said to myself: "Mihali, that's it. You are going to medical school". I felt as if I was already a doctor. All that was left were a few practical details I needed to take care of. I saw myself as someone else. It hasn't happened to me in real life. I never thought of becoming a doctor. To tell you the truth I was even a little scared of blood and stuff like that. I mean up to then. I never, ever thought of it before. It was completely new. Now I am a doctor and I feel just like in the dream: totally at home with this.*

Mihalis's dream was definitely an innovative scenario that acted as a guiding force, directing his behavior in awake-time (Krippner 1994: 19). What is important to note in his narrative though is that the dream did not simply appear to have 'inspired' a life choice. In the dream, Mihalis claims that he 'became' a doctor. His dream acted as a space of subject formation. In the context of the dream he was able to invent a new role and a novel kind of subjectivity for himself. As I have argued above, this is not an ex-nihilo creation. The power of the doctor, his/her readily available knowledge and assumed command of the human body, the expected gratitude of the patient and the power relationship between the healer and the healed are representations firmly established in a specific socio-historical field (cf. Foucault 1975; 1976; 1980 indicatively). What is totally new for Mihalis is the identification of the self with this specific, instituted field of possibilities. In the dream (as well as in the narrative that made sense of the dream) he was capable of exercising a radical form of imagination, of feeling like a doctor thereby literally in-corporating the sociocultural expectations and representations of the role. In this unanticipated reflexive exercise during dream-time Mihalis made for himself a new self that was finally and ultimately realized in awake-time. His last sentence "Now I am a doctor and I feel just like in the dream: totally at home with this", encourages us not to doubt the continuity of existence and to question yet again the rigidity of the dichotomy between 'dream' and 'reality'. Just as the dream *felt real*, reality *feels like a dream*. What appears at first to be a playful fantasy of experimentation with the 'metaphoric possibilities of the self', ultimately effects reality to become itself a 'meaningful metaphor' (Edgar 1999: 39, 40). Narrative agency translates into tangible life choices and the 'unconscious' mind

reconciles fully with its ‘conscious’ counterpart. With it, I do not mean that the subject is at one with his/her consciousness (Moore 1999: 166; cf. Kirtsoglou 2004: 37). I am rather suggesting that our moments of reflexive silence are not radically separated from those of reflexive awareness. The self in all its parts, multiple and contradicting identifications, is never in stasis (cf. Kirtsoglou 2004), and thus there is no definite moment when we *are this and not that*. Likewise, our ability to engage in creative action is not a feature of either solely waking life, or purely dream-time. The human subject is –I claim– in a continuous dialogue with the world outside and the world inside and is capable of reconciling the two in an instituted-instituting manner. Created and at once creating and creative, the subject dreams of new (and preferably better –whatever that may mean) worlds. His/her dreams, shaped by experience and at once shaping it are equally powerful across ‘times’, while sleeping or awake. In this sense, dreams can be seen as instances of the radical imagination, sites of human agency and creativity, and self-making contexts imbued with culture, historicity and sociality.

### ***Hypnos and Thanatos; Concluding remarks***

*Hypnos* (sleep) was envisaged in ancient Greek mythology as the twin brother of *Thanatos* (death). Some (mainly Freudian-inspired) psychoanalytic strands of dream analysis see the inherent creativity of dreams as a matter of the disintegration and subsequent restoration of the self (cf. Kohut 1977; Hollan 2004; Heijnen this volume). The idea of sleep as being akin to death, is itself a cultural symbol inspired by the taboo-quality of the ostensible non-sociality of sleep. Sleep is imagined as a kind of temporary social death, much like the modern Greek concepts of *xenitia* (migration in a foreign country) and *separation* (cf. Kirtsoglou 2004: 89; Danforth 1982: 33, 90-5; Seremetakis 1991; Panourgia 1995). Sleep as a powerful *metaphor* of death however (like *xenitia* and *separation*) cannot be conflated with the purported existence of some dark-side, backwater side of the human psyche (Heijnen this volume). On the contrary, the dream reveals itself to be a site where the psyche reunites with radical imagination and society (cf. Castoriadis 2007: 203-205). The generative character of dreams can therefore be understood fully only the context of a unified approach and



not on the basis of artificial (almost structuralist) dichotomies between dream and waking time, fantasy and reality, memory and 'real'-time creation.

By exploring three different dreams, distinct but not unique of their kind, I argued that the radical separation of dream-time from awake time involves a counter-intuitive compartmentalization of the social self and the social mind and forecloses our understanding of agency, creativity and the power of the radical imagination. Through the perspective of an apparent (and ethnographically substantiated) continuity between the social, the emotional, the cognitive and the embodied, the dream can be regarded as another instance of the social, creative self. As Stewart argues, certain strands of anthropological analysis in the past concentrated too much on dreams as cultural texts that disregarded the dream as experience, thereby subordinating the phenomenological dimension of the dream to the semiotic one and thus displacing it (1997: 878). This has happened as a result of the idea that we cannot approach directly another person's dream-experience. We can only speak of and on their dream narratives. As I have argued, this 'trouble' is not solely a problem of dreams and it is in many ways quite similar to the problem of other minds. As anthropologists and fellow human beings in general, we rarely have direct access to other people's mental states whether these people are awake or asleep. All too often we rely on narrative accounts of events and of people's lives. In fact even in our process of making sense of another culture we need to rely on narrative exegeses offered by our informants. Our ethnographies are themselves narratives and indeed provisional ones and not final and overriding accounts of some 'authentic' experience. In particular relation to dreams, it might also be that the predicament of the anthropologist is shared with the informant. The dreamer often has to resort to a narrativized account of the dream in order to make sense of the experience. As Hollan argues, the dream narrated might not be the dream experienced, but "dream narratives are not infinitely malleable either. They are constrained by dream sensations, perceptions and experiences that can be very vivid and 'real'" (2004: 180). Therefore it is safe to argue that for the purposes of analysis and theorization the dream narrative is an adequate version (or representation) of one's original experience and equally open to multiple and often conflicting interpretations.

The fundamental and problematic distinction between what is a 'purely mental' phenomena and 'real perceptions' is established, as Stewart (2004) shows, in evolutionist thought and –as I have argued– in a displaced Enlightenment-oriented

belief in reason as being the exclusive privilege of the Cartesian mind. In this line of (rather empiricist) thought, reason is conflated with rationality and both are confounded as originating in some (mythical) special part of the brain which is somehow magically sealed from emotions and only activated during certain times (preferably during the day and evidently in the morning otherwise school and work would be probably taking place at night). Such claims make excellent cosmological beliefs, interesting themes of anthropological study, but not all that valuable analytical and theoretical tools. As I have argued, we have no grounds (scientific, philosophical or theoretical) to uphold such a distinction. Through the case of Markos and the angelic image of the high-ranking priest, I have demonstrated that even the ‘logical violations’ in dreams are no different from the kinds of logical violations that characterize our awaking reality (cf. Barris 2010). Human beings –both in dream and in awake time- are capable of imagining and believing all sorts of counter-intuitive and apparently ‘irrational’ things like the virgin birth of Jesus, the astrological impact of far away planets, various types of global conspiracies and the idea that Elvis is not dead. Some of these ‘logical inversions’ come to even materialize –given time and effort- and cease to appear as illogical and impossible as they seemed at first; certain technological advancements like space travel are good examples.

Dream experiences and dream narratives cannot be regarded as originating anywhere else but in human culture, sociality, creativity and radical imagination and as such they need to be analysed and theorized as shared instances and not as ‘private’, pre-cultural or ‘a-social’ mystical encounters. For, if we decide to treat the dream (or any other form of human experience) as pre-cultural and a-social we also need to invent that respectively pre-cultural and asocial agent/being/entity (or part of it) who is capable of bearing that experience and such venture comes dangerously close to being too impossible to even dream of.

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<sup>i</sup> In Greek mythology dreams, the *oneiroi* were the children of *Hypnos* (sleep) and they were three: Morpheus, Phobetor and Phantasus. Morpheus' name comes from the word 'morphe', that is form, and his task was to provide shape, form to dreams. Phobetor's name comes from the word 'phobos', fear, and he was responsible for the frightening images and instances of dreams. Finally Phantasus's name

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comes from the verb ‘phantasio’ (to imagine) and he was believed to be the one who brings images to mind.

<sup>ii</sup> For a thorough anthropological accounts of Asia-Minor refugees see Hirschon 1989.