

## ***'We are all human': Cosmopolitanism as a radically political, moral project***

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*When you see these people coming out of the boats, it feels like a thousand eyes are looking at you. Their eyes, the eyes of your dead grandparents who were refugees too – who carried the identity of the refugee for their entire lives, the eyes of your children, the eyes of the unborn who will be reading about these events one day in their history books. A thousand eyes, a million eyes, looking at you, asking you: “what are **you** going to do?” How can I go on with my life as if nothing happens knowing that so many human beings are tortured in this way? The sea has a thousand eyes and they all stare at us with a question: “what are **you** going to do?” (Maria, Athens, 2015 original emphasis).*

In 2015 and 2016 more than one million refugees, predominantly from Syria, but also from Afghanistan and Iraq arrived through Turkey to Greece in flimsy overcrowded boats. The precarious journey by sea cost the lives of more than a thousand persons<sup>i</sup>. Greek people, an otherwise predominantly xenophobic and openly nationalist public, demonstrated *en masse* their support to the refugees. The same social actors that conventionally articulate a strong resistance to the ideals of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism (cf. Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010a) manifested their solidarity to the displaced in a variety of discursive and practical ways. Ordinary people expressed their identification with the ‘refugees’ (*prosfyges*), a term thus far reserved almost exclusively for the Greek-speaking, Christian Orthodox populations that have been forcibly displaced from Asia-Minor and Anatolia as a result of the Greco-Turkish war in 1920-22<sup>ii</sup> (cf. Hirschon 1989).

The predicament of the forcibly displaced in 2015-2016 was indeed experienced by many as a condition of multitemporality (cf. Knight 2013, 2015; Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015). Refugeeeness as collective narrative and transgenerational trauma (cf. Anastasiadis 2012), as well as memories of economic migration to Europe, US or Australia became for a large part of Greek society mechanisms of substitution (Levinas 1981) through which a number of people identified with the displaced.

The cultural framework through which this identification was expressed was the concept of humanity, as a quality and an ethos that binds all human beings in a universal and timeless manner. A careful examination of what it means to be human in Greece and of the ways in which intimacy, inclusion, and exclusion are understood and negotiated reveals the recognition of our common humanity to be an explicitly political expression of the cosmopolitan project. At the heart of the Greek conceptualisation of humanity as a state of being we all share, lies empathy as an affirmative political praxis and an affective ethical technology. My contribution aims to discuss empathy as a cognitive, experiential and affective faculty that is distinct from sympathy, compassion and pity. While I share reservations against humanitarian reason and governance, I maintain that hegemonic understandings of what it means to be human obscure the importance of local, vernacular visions of cosmopolitanism as a moral and yet radically political project.

*What is wrong with emotions?*

Terms such as sympathy, compassion, philanthropy and charity have received considerable attention in anthropological literature (cf. Rozaldo 1989; Viveiros de Castro 1992; Throop 2008; 2010; Bornstein 2009). Different authors have launched pointed critiques against compassionate volunteering as the basis of humanitarian 'anti-politics' (Tiktin 2011, 2014; Fassin 2005, 2007, 2011a, 2011b, Muehlebach 2012; Trundle 2014; Wilson & Brown 2009). Emotion-based, spontaneous desire to end the misery and suffering of others (cf. Bornstein 2009: 632) on the basis of a common humanity (Tickting 2006: 39) is seen as creating a hierarchical field of relations at more than one levels. Muehlebach stresses the relationship between volunteering and new forms of neoliberal citizenship (2012; cf also Pedwell 2012; 2014). Fassin highlights the complex ontologies of inequality between humanitarian actors and those who receive their assistance (2007). Locked in an aesthetic of eligibility (cf. Cabot 2014) the sufferer must often prove their innocence through plausible stories and they must demonstrate a certain alignment to local ideals (cf. Wilson and Brown 2009: 23; Crowhurst 2012: 497; Giordano 2008; Ticktin 2006: 43; Cabot 2014; Berlant 2004; Trundle 2014: 144).

I agree and side with these critiques. Indeed, neoliberal governance literally depends on shifting welfare-related responsibilities onto the third sector and ordinary citizens. The fragmentary and episodic character of all forms of aid (organised or informal) disputes the unquestionable character of basic political and human rights. Ordinary citizens are asked to

alleviate the effects of the deep and painful asymmetries created by integrated world capitalism (Guattari 2000) in ways that are themselves imbued with asymmetry and inequality. Two particular issues however, deserve further attention and discussion. First, we need to reflect on perceptions of the role of emotion vis-à-vis our vision of the political. If the 'anti-political' character of humanitarianism is established in the affective, spontaneous responses of actors, what is then the primary principle that organises the 'political' field of citizenship and equal rights? My aim is not to offer an apology for humanitarianism and philanthropy. I can ethnographically ascertain their deeply hierarchical effects. My point here is to problematize the manner in which emotion emerges as hitherto anti-political and juxtaposed to a certain –I would say modernist– vision of the political that appears to have no legitimate and credible space for the affective and relational components of subjectivity. The notion of this rather masculinist understanding of citizenship does much more than promote an atomistic and bounded concept of the self (cf. Saba Mahmood 2004: 12). It creates a paradox, especially relevant in the discussion of forced displacement: namely, where is *the right to have rights* established? (Arendt 1968: 177; cf Benhabib 2004: 51). For the rights of others to be enforceable norms (i.e., laws), there must be a sovereign power with the ultimate authority of enforcement (Benhabib 2004: 29). “The will of the democratic sovereign” however, “can extend only over the territory under its jurisdiction; democracies require borders. Empires have frontiers, while democracies have borders” (ibid: 45). Sovereign bodies, Benhabib rightly observes, depend on this distinction between ‘full members’ and ‘those who fall under the sovereign’s protection’ (2004: 45). There is therefore something inherently paradoxical in regarding nation-states as the guarantors of the rights to inclusive forms of citizenship. While I am not arguing in favour of philanthropy and charity as a solution to this paradox, I call for a reconsideration of our vision of ‘the political’ that seems far too connected to the ideals of a sovereign nation-state bestowed with the power to enforce rights and obligations according to a contractarian ethos of equality (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006). While I agree that the a-political sentimentality that humanitarian sympathy entails is deeply problematic, I claim that we need to find legitimate space and role for the shared, affective component within the political.

The second point that arises from current literature on charity, volunteering and philanthropy is our assumptions regarding the meaning of ‘human’. It has been argued that belief in ‘our common humanity’ as the origin of our sympathy towards others can be based

on a concept of the human that is too general, anonymous, decontextualized and ahistorical to be socially and politically meaningful (cf. Malkki 1996). Yet, a closer examination of the ethnographic specificity of different works (eg. Muehlebach 2012; Trundle 2014; Ticktin 2006; Fassin 2007; 2012) reveals that the humanitarian ethos exhibited by the protagonists in each case is very much socially, culturally and historically specific. Ideas about who qualifies as a 'human being in need' are born in a neoliberal context, and remain underwritten by an ethos of confession which establishes the 'truth' about the Other, her innocence, the legitimacy of her suffering and the plausibility of her case. Confession, as the main ritualistic (Catholic) technology for the production of truth in the West has been established (as Foucault evidences) in the Middle Ages (1978: 58, 59). The deeply hierarchical nature of philanthropy, sympathy and compassion is therefore to be found, not necessarily in the relationship between giver and receiver *per se*, but in the fact that confession becomes the foundation of such a relation. The 'gift' of charity is so poisonous, troubling and ambivalent (cf. Derrida 1992; Bornstein 2009; Trundle 2014: 3), because the receiver needs –by means of confessing his or her truth- to prove that s/he is human and therefore worthy of it. Charity and philanthropy are technologies of (re)humanisation based on a notion of the human that needs to be proven, spelt out and justified. In the process of becoming knowable, the recipient of charity becomes also governable (cf. Tazzioli 2013; Vaughn-Williams 2015). The nature of the relationship that can be established on the basis of such a perception of humanity is of course hierarchical. For, the giver always and finally establishes herself as the ultimate 'judge' of the recipient's confessed truth.

In what follows I will investigate Greek conceptualisations of intimacy, inclusion, exclusion, hierarchy and obligation. I will eventually show that perceptions of what it means to be human form a powerful, vernacular of explicitly political manifestations of solidarity mediated by empathy as an affective and transformative technology.

### **The poetics of sociality: intimacy and common humanity**

#### *Dhikos/xenos*

The distinction between *dhikos* (one of us, insider, intimate) and *xenos* (foreign, stranger, unknown, outsider) has been discussed in Greek ethnography (cf. Panourgia 1995: 17; Danforth 1989: 171; Herzfeld 2003). The distinction between the two terms that are

notoriously difficult to translate accurately (cf. Panourgia 1995: 16), for reasons that will become evident in the following paragraphs, “demarcates all the boundaries of intimacy from a person to a nation [and] provides the framework for moving from one level to the other and back again (Herzfeld 2003: 142). In relation to its opposite (*dhikos*), a *xenos* can mean anyone beyond the kin-group, the neighborhood, a circle of friends, a village/town/city/country/ethnos. *Dhikos* and *xenos* should be seen not as two clear and absolute opposites, which can exist independently of each other, but as a system that constitutes intimacy, belonging and proximity, relative, fluid and contextual processes. The fellow-supporter of a political party is thus definitely a *dhikos* in terms of political affiliations, but surely a *xenos* when compared to members of one’s own family. Even within the extended family, a distant cousin (otherwise a *dhikos* vis-à-vis non kin) can be seen as a *xenos* in relation to one’s siblings. To complicate matters even more, the *dhikos/xenos* schema is not just a reference to belonging, but also to emotional attachment and/or trust. A person who is a *xenos* is not only distant, but also –by virtue of being unknown– potentially (although not necessarily) hostile and thus mistrusted. In its polysemic character the *dhikos/xenos* identification system creates multiple and sometimes overlapping circles of inclusion and exclusion. The many different qualities of proximity, affinity, intimacy and distance (genealogical, emotional, political, national, related to trust and mistrust) of *dhikos/xenos* and the fact that unavoidably all individuals occupy several of these categories at once, means that one is always at some level a *dhikos*, and simultaneously (at another level) a *xenos*.

Apart from being conventionally used as a term of reference for national others<sup>iii</sup>, *xenos* in later years, is being deployed (commonly by ordinary people, but also strategically by ultra-right wing and fascist political circles) as a shorthand for the category ‘immigrant’. *Xenos* in this sense, often acquires racialised connotations and can denote different degrees of resentment or even hostility towards foreigners, irrespectively of their legal and political status.

The relative and provisional character of intimacy categories however, means that an individual *xenos* can always become a *dhikos* (despite the fact that in terms of categorical grouping they may remain classed as *xenos*). The generic category of the stranger/foreigner, almost always excludes some particular *xenos* who is perceived as being ‘different’ (cf. Herzfeld 2005: 85). Either through employment, or through neighborliness, or in other

contexts, the (foreigner)*xenos* becomes known (cf. Herzfeld 2003; 2016: 92) and can be gradually converted from a stranger into an intimate and trusted figure.

The transformation of a *xenos* (in all its different meanings) into a known and trusted *dhikos* happens through sociality that ranges from everyday mundane exchanges to exceptional acts of sheep-stealing (cf. Herzfeld 2003: 141). Sociality-induced relatedness is expressed in Greek with the term ‘familiarity’ (*oikeiotita*)<sup>iv</sup>. Like *dhikos/xenos*, familiarity is a provisional and performatively established quality. Social exchanges render a person familiar in varying degrees and provide the chance to establish trust and loyalty allowing strangers to become intimate<sup>v</sup>. Two siblings can grow into strangers (*xenoi* - plural) while complete strangers can become ‘close like family’, where family here is to be understood not in its genealogical sense, but as a metaphor of intimacy and trust.

The synthetic and polysemic system of relatedness instituted through the performative categories of *dhikos/xenos*, familiarity, trust and mistrust, is underwritten by equally complex processes of creating, accepting and avoiding responsibilities and obligations. In an eloquent discussion of presents and promises and through the examination of name-day gift-receiving etiquette, Hirschon (2008) explains the politics of obligation. In the Greek cultural context where people ‘abhor’ status differences and hierarchical relations “the notion of obligation is a nexus which generates ongoing exchanges in which the actors seesaw between superior and inferior positions depending at which point in the chain of exchanges they are” (ibid: 193). Social actors become trapped in this seesaw as they alternate between the positions of gift-giver and gift receiver (2008: 193). The hierarchical relations between givers and receivers are at the heart of all patron-client relationships (cf. Campbell 1964), regulate the provision and acceptance of hospitality (cf. Herzfeld 2012; Candea 2012), and generally pervade all aspects of everyday sociality (cf. Papataxiarhis 1991). As Hirschon observes, obligation literally means in Greek to be “under debt”, and Greeks visibly detest being indebted and in relations permeated by a sense of obligation (1992; 2008: 193).

Obligation –as the visible sign of dependency– is indeed a worrisome social burden, but one that comes as part and parcel of sociality. The burden of indebtedness is alleviated by the responsibility to reciprocate which is an opportunity to find oneself from the position of the receiver to that of a giver. Because responsibility implies obligation (and vice-versa), ultimately neither condition is comfortable. For, the superiority established through giving is

fleeting, provisional and self-subversive, insofar as the moment of giving prefigures the moment of receiving.

Obligation and responsibility become particularly interesting technologies of sociality when examined vis-à-vis *dhikos/xenos*, trust, intimacy, emotional proximity and familiarity. One way of transforming a *xenos*, from a distant outsider to a more intimate insider (*dhikos*) is through initiating cycles of reciprocity that operate as spaces for exhibiting loyalty which gradually dissolves feelings of mistrust. The seesaw of obligation and responsibility (cf. Hirschon 2008) is thus a way of 'knowing' the Other and of creating intimacy, which has the power of eroding indebtedness. Within a family –as the primary metaphor for social and genealogical relatedness– indebtedness between individuals is ideally absent as members are *ex officio* obliged to cater to the each other's needs.

At this point, and before I proceed to examine another important category that mediates relations of inclusion, exclusion, intimacy, trust and hierarchy, I must say that the aforementioned cultural analysis of *dhikos/xenos*, obligation and responsibility is not a rigid and predictable structural schema. On the contrary, it is filled with ambiguity, misunderstandings, ambivalence (even hyperbole) and it is perpetually caught in the politics of successful and failed social performance (cf. Herzfeld 1985; Kirtsoglou 2004). The inchoate quality of intimacy anticipates its own subversion. Intimacy and relatedness, in their performative character, contain within them the seeds of their own negation.

### *Anthropos*

The term 'human' is used in Greek far more often than it is used in English, in the place of the generic English word 'man', to mean a human being and a person . 'The man needs his privacy' is translated, for instance, as "the human needs his privacy" (*o anthropos thelei tin isihia tou*). "Have you got someone to take care of you?" translates in Greek as "have you got a human?" (*exeis anthropo?*), and a common expression for 'being alone' is "I don't even have a single human" (*den eho oute enan anthropo*). To ask someone 'what sort of human are you' (*ti soi anthropos eisai*) directly questions their moral ground, while wondering "aren't I a human?" (*ego den eimai anthropos?*) is a rhetorical way of ascertaining one's rights in a social context.

A 'human being', beyond having their basic needs covered, is seen as deserving respect, fair treatment, being considered and taken into account. To be a 'human', *anthropos*, means to belong to a category of existence by 'birthright' (cf. Rapport 2012) and as a matter of ontology. It follows that everyone –both *dhikos* and *xenos* – is a human being. Humans are conceived in Greek culture as sharing a number of common predicaments and a fundamental bond, with each other as they endure the difficulties of life as struggle (*agonas*) (cf. Theodossopoulos 2008).

Human beings are known and defined by their humanity (*anthropia*), which stands for all emotions, habits, attitudes and behaviours appropriate for and towards human persons. Much like all other qualities, humanity in the Greek context is performatively established. To be a human (*anthropos*) and to have humanity (*anthropia*) means to be willing to see the world from the Other's point of view, to engage others in their capacity as human beings and not as members of any other category (including gender, race, religion or nationality).

To relate to others as humans, also means to consciously and significantly play down the hierarchies associated with giving and receiving. All human beings are seen as being by default vulnerable and therefore potentially in need. This is encapsulated in the common, almost stereotypical phrase "we are all human. Today it is you, tomorrow [in the future] it will be me"<sup>vi</sup>. Reciprocity, as the element that alleviates and subverts the burden of obligations, is taken in such cases for granted within the time-frame of human kind, a kind of timeless, primal time within which we all end up owing to each other and being collectively indebted to the supernatural (represented as God, Life or the Universe).

The opposite –refusing to transcend the level of categorical groupings or to inappropriately enforce hierarchical relations of indebtedness– can earn someone the accusation of not being human (*dhen eisai anthropos esy*). While success or failure to honour one's obligations within the *dhikos/xenos* system is sanctioned at the level of society (*koinonia, kosmos* cf. Just 2000), failure to respond properly to other human beings is ultimately judged by the supernatural (cf. Herzfeld 2005: 160-170). In more than one occasions during the 2015-2016 refugee arrivals, and particularly upon hearing about shipwrecks or dramatic landings, I have heard different Greek people (not necessarily religious) exclaiming that "God will burn us to the ground", or "God will punish us" (*tha mas kapsei o Theos, tha mas timorisei o Theos*), or simply that 'we will pay for these things' (*tha plirosoume gia auta ta pragmata*).



'Us' and 'we' referred in this case to the human collectivity, to 'mankind' which failed so dramatically to uphold its primary responsibility of protecting all of its members.

The meaning of human (*anthropos*) and of being imbued with a sense of respect towards other humans (*anthropia*), becomes especially relevant against the Aristotelian distinction between *zoe* and *bios* as theorised by Hannah Arendt (1959). According to Arendt, *zoe* is the kind of unqualified, bare life which becomes meaningful only when it is transformed to *bios*, social life embedded in the body politic. Developing further Arendt's thought Agamben (1998) discusses *homo sacer* as a special category of the Roman law, within which a human being remains the subject of the law but only in terms of bare life. As *homo sacer's* rights as a citizen are suspended, his/her *bios* is reduced to *zoe* and as a result has no political value; her death can thus remain without retribution. Arendt's and Agamben's analyses seek to theoretically grasp the phenomenon of the Holocaust and subsequently of all concentration camps as contexts where political existence is reduced, via a process of violent depoliticisation to bare life.

What it means to be 'human' in the Greek context questions this radical distinction between *zoe* and *bios* (cf. Panourgia 2009: 113), sometimes turning it on its head. Attempts to reduce a human being into a *homo sacer* can have the opposite effect, to trigger that is, a process of 'recognition' of the humanity of the other. This basic level recognition compels social actors to redeem a fellow-human from the status of 'naked existence' and reinstate her to the position of having a *bios*, thereby granting her the right to a dignified and socially recognized life. An idiosyncratic version of cosmopolitanism is thus accomplished, through the refusal to sustain the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* (cf. Rapport 2012) and through a deep-seated belief in their ideal unity.

According to my Greek informants, 'everyone deserves to live like a human being<sup>vii</sup>'. The spectrum of rights credited to every human is wide (and in some ways outside the scope of this paper), but amongst the most fundamental ones is the right to sociality and to being treated by others with humanity. Humanity in this case fits very much the Kantian representation of a moral limit to what one is and is not permitted to do to other humans. While for Kant however every person deserves respect independently of their deeds, humanity in the Greek case is performatively established. Greek people tend to feel responsible for what they do and for what they *let happen* to others. Failure to exhibit

humanity can earn someone the characterization of inhuman (*apanthropos*), or animal (*zoon*) (cf. Herzfeld 2005: 76). Inhumanity or animality stems from failing to acknowledge the bundle of rights credited to all human kind. If one goes beyond this point, and starts actively hurting others, s/he then transforms into a beast (*ktinos*), and finally into a monster (*teras*), a freak of nature that emerges out of disobeying the most fundamental rules of the cosmos<sup>viii</sup>.

What I have tried to accomplish in this section is to demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of local systems of intimacy, belonging, hierarchy and obligation. While it is true that acts of giving and receiving are generally hierarchical and establish asymmetrical relationships, in the Greek context they are also means and ways of assuming responsibility and of transforming a distrusted stranger into an intimate insider. At the level of *dhikos/xenos*, every act of giving preempts the act of receiving rendering the ensuing hierarchies provisional and self-negating. Intimacy, granted or gained through genealogical and social relatedness erodes significantly the sense of indebtedness associated with giving and receiving. Even if one is stripped of all social networks of intimacy and trust (as in the case of refugees), or when these networks have no power to cast their protective shade onto her (cf. Loizos 1975), she still remains a human being who deserves the support and fellowship of other human beings around her. The manner in which vulnerability and need are envisaged in Greece as common predicaments of all humans destabilizes hierarchical relations between givers and receivers through the belief that at a fundamental level we are all indebted to each other.

As much I side with the critics of humanitarianism, charity and compassionate volunteering, I claim that hierarchical relations between givers and receivers are not uniformly understood and constructed at all contexts. In some cases these relations are envisaged as far less rigid and they remain mediated by local understandings of what it means to be human, insider/outsider and by culturally informed notions of need, responsibility and obligation. References to our common humanity therefore, far from being abstract, general and ahistorical, are established in culturally and historically specific ways of understanding and enacting what it means to be human.

## **Where is the right to have rights established?**

One of the main issues at heart in the critique launched against the deeply unequal character of humanitarian reason (cf. Fassin 2012) is that the receiver depends on the good will of the benefactor. This hierarchical relationship precludes the establishment of political rights within stable and permanent frameworks and leaves large numbers of people literally at the mercy of their fellow human beings, trapped at the receiving end of gifts that “call for no counter gift” (ibid: 3). I agree with this observation that calls for careful examination of alternatives. If one’s rights are not established in the will (good or not) of other social actors, two options remain. These rights are either guaranteed by sovereign nation-states, or, they come as part and parcel with one’s humanity (cf. Rapport 2012). The very existence of sovereign nation-states however, depends on borders (cf. Benhabib 2004) and aggressive politics of exclusion. When it comes to certain rights (such as those of mobility), the nation-state is certainly not a suitable guarantor. In this sense I find myself in profound agreement with Rapport’s position that “the cosmopolitan project is to know Anyone in terms of a universal human nature”, where Anyone is a “human actor who is to be recognized as at once universal and individual” (2012: 2). The recognition and respect of each other’s common humanity promote a kind of cosmopolitan project that is at once political and moral.

The moral aspect of social relations has been central to a number of Enlightenment scholars such as Kant, Hume and Adam Smith. For Kant morality is connected to reason and the autonomy of individual agents who enforce moral obligations upon themselves (cf. Timmerman 2010). Kant’s thought is useful in our understanding of how and why social actors force themselves to obey moral codes even at the absence of witnesses. His decisive exclusion of sentiments however, as it becomes apparent in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* makes it difficult to account for the role of the affective component in moral social relations (ibid).

In contrast to Kant, Hume is an explicit anti-rationalist. He maintains that morality cannot be derived from reason alone, or from the combination of reasoning knowledge and belief (Mackie 1980: 52). The seat of morality is to be found in sentiments. In Hume we also find an interesting formulation of ‘sympathy’ –not as compassion or pity- but as an inclination to share the feelings of Others (ibid: 5). Hume’s concept of ‘sympathy’ inspires Adam Smith. In

his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith envisages 'sympathy' to be the effect of a process of mirroring through which we understand how others feel in a given situation.

Smith's concept of sympathy opens up a very interesting window in our understanding of moral sentiments and of what could possibly motivate us to become each other's keepers of rights. In the previous section and while I discussed Greek conceptualisations of 'what it means to be human', I have claimed that one of the basic dimensions of humanity is the ideal unity between *zoe* (bare life) and *bios* (social life) that all human beings are seen as hitherto deserving in the Greek context. I have also maintained that profound ruptures in this unity tend to trigger the conscious efforts of other social actors who feel compelled to relieve the suffering of their fellow humans (cf. Bornstein 2009) restoring them back to sociality. What Bornstein calls *philanthropy* (ibid) is in this case an urge to safeguard a person's right 'to live like a human being'. The motivation behind this urge appears to be established in our capacity to recognise and identify with the feelings of others in a way that transcends (in the Greek case) categorical identifications predicated by the scheme of *dhikos/xenos*. The leap from viewing someone as *dhikos/xenos* (intimate/stranger, or insider/outsider) to engaging them simply as human beings is mediated –as I have claimed– by the quality, feeling and attitude of humanity (*anthropia*). As a feeling, humanity (*anthropia*) depends on empathy, the recognition of the position of the other and the ability to imagine oneself as another in order to appreciate their current problems and conditions. As a quality, humanity (*anthropia*) is the capacity to recognise ruptures in the fundamental unity between *zoe* and *bios* and as an attitude, it is the actions one takes in order to repair the aforementioned ruptures.

My use of the term empathy here is similar to the 'essence' of Adam Smith's sympathy. The term sympathy however is almost impossible to reclaim due to its close semantic association with compassion and pity, largely established in the work of Nietzsche. It is in Nietzsche (*Human All too Human*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, but more so in *Thus Said Zarathustra*) where we see an understanding of compassion as deeply hierarchical, profoundly self-driven and condescending. The Nietzschean term *Mitleid* (cf. Frazer 2006) inspired a genealogy of critiques of compassion, pity and sympathy that marked the meaning of all of these terms in an irreversible manner.

As opposed to sympathy, pity and compassion in the Nietzschean sense, empathy needs to be understood as a cognitive and affective mechanism related to responsibility and, as Levinas claims to accountability (1981/2013). For Levinas, identification with the Other holds the Self “hostage” and “accountable for what [she] did not do, accountable for the others before the others” (Lingis 2013: xxix).

Empathy as the feeling that mediates the manifestation of humanity presupposes an embodied being who reacts to the face of the Other in a visceral manner (cf. Levinas 1981/2013: 88, 89). The ideal unity of *zoe* and *bios* is then enacted in the human being who is at once a body and a person, and can partake in the symbolism and physicality of the feelings of Others.

The ability to empathise with others, in conjunction with the culturally specific understanding of vulnerability and need as a common predicament of all human beings (as I have already discussed) has tremendous political potential. The idea that weakness, vulnerability and need –as much as one tries to avoid them– are associated with human existence, challenges perceptions and representations of stable hierarchies of powerful and weak persons. The saying *today it is you, tomorrow it could be me; we are human beings*, encapsulates a vernacular understanding of power that is almost Foucauldian in character since power is not understood here as something that is acquired or possessed by any one in particular, but is rather seen as exercised from ‘innumerable points’ (Foucault 1978: 94). In order to better understand the fundamental difference between perceiving subjective positions (and thus hierarchies) as stable and viewing them as provisional, unpredictable and in a state of flux I will juxtapose two quotations. The first, is from Didier Fassin (2012: 4):

*“Humanitarian reason governs precarious lives: the lives of the unemployed and the asylum seekers, the lives of sick immigrants... threaten and forgotten lives that humanitarian government brings into existence by protecting and revealing them. When compassion is exercised in the public space, it is therefore always directed from above to below, from the more powerful to the weaker.... The concept of precarious lives therefore needs to be taken in the strongest sense of its Latin etymology: lives that are not guaranteed but bestowed in answer to prayer, or in other words are defined... in the relation to those that have power over them”*

What follows is an extract from my fieldnotes and refers to the 2015-2016 arrival of refugees in Greece:

*More than six thousand people live in the makeshift camp of Piraeus in small, flimsy tents and some –very few- in larger UNHCR ones. The few showers and bathrooms are insufficient as the weather is getting hotter. Eleni, a woman in her fifties comes every day in the camp; two and sometimes three and four times. Each time she takes people back to her house to have a bath and do their laundry. Eleni carries big IKEA bags with the dry clothes to the camp, where they get emptied and filled back again with more clothes to be washed. Randa [Syrian refugee woman] tells me that the smell of clothes, washed in Eleni's house, remind her of her mother. Eleni also talks about her own mother who came as a refugee from Asia Minor in 1922<sup>ix</sup>. "You see?" she contemplates, "this is the fate of human beings" (auti einai h moira ton anthropon). Back then, it was my mother, today it is those people and tomorrow... who knows? It could be me or my children. How can you stay indifferent to what happens here? How can you go to your house and eat, and have a bath and relax when you know that there are human beings forced to live in these conditions? Human beings like me and you. I am not rich, but I have a bathroom and a washing machine. Life? Fate? God? –name it as you want– allowed me to have a bathroom and a washing machine. This is what I have. This is what I share<sup>x</sup>".*

From reading these two excerpts, it becomes evident that while Fassin refers to a stable hierarchy of lives instituted and sustained by the violence of governance, Eleni does not view herself as a powerful benefactor, or as a 'moral neoliberal' (cf. Muehlebach 2012). Quite the contrary, she views plenty of common political ground between herself and the refugees in the makeshift camp. Their condition is something that can happen to anyone. It follows then that Anyone is "a human actor who is to be recongised as at once universal and individual (Rapport 2012: 2) capable of practicing "a particular localised life... and yet [one who] continually embodies global entitlements and continues to be recongized as bearing universal capacities" (ibid: 6). Such 'entitlements' and 'capacities' may not always be positive in the manner that Rapport's jouissance-imbuded concept of the 'life project' entails. More often than not in the historically formed Greek consciousness they are not entitlements at all, but (similarly global) misfortunes, disasters and calamities that test the (similarly universal) capacities of people to endure and survive them.

## Other minds

Through the example of Greek perceptions of what it means to be human, I have tried to show how culturally nuanced moral visions can destabilise and subvert neoliberal sensibilities. All human beings are locally seen as being flimsy, vulnerable, at the mercy of wars, famines (cf. Knight 2015), natural disasters and a capricious supernatural that is constantly criticised in Greece for looking the other way. While God's gaze (*vlepei o Theos*) is frequently evoked by Greek people as an admonition against wrong-doing, far too often the opposite also holds true. The exclamation "God, can't you see?" (*De vlepeis Thee?*) serves to remind everyone that God, much like the state (cf. Herzfeld 1992) and every other source of power, is in fact indifferent to human suffering. The quality and ethos of humanity as *anthropia* possessed and exhibited by fellow beings is in many ways the ultimate guarantor of one's rights when all else fails.

Humanity as *anthropia* cannot be confused with humanitarian governance, charity, pity or compassion. It constitutes a vernacular cosmopolitan ethos that is at once a specific kind of morality, a social condition and an orientation (cf. Rapport 2012: 27, 30-31), but also an aesthetic, and a radically transformative affective, political technology (ibid: 40-41). One's humanity as *anthropia* is mediated by her capacity to empathise with the feelings and predicaments of others to become mobilised and responsible in the face of the Other. Empathy in this case promotes an understanding of the human condition that is at once timeless and universal. The tragedies, misfortunes and afflictions suffered by one's grandparents as refugees in the past (for instance), are similar to the ones suffered by refugees in the present (cf. Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015). The calamities of life here (whatever this 'here' might be) are seen in Greece as essentially similar to the ones suffered 'over there' as human beings are 'the same everywhere and always'<sup>xi</sup>.

The culturally specific belief that we are all 'fundamentally the same' in our common humanity allows one to empathise with the feelings of others. Does this mean however, that they *actually know* how other people feel? Does this kind of empathy as affective technology and political praxis collapse the Other onto the Self, thereby obliterating the differences between them? How is empathy as affective recognition achieved in conditions where the difference of the Other can be safeguarded and respected?

In order to appreciate what ‘the same’ refers to in the Greek case, we need to remember the anxiety and ambivalence that a stranger (*xenos*) causes. The definitional quality of the ‘stranger’, ‘outsider’ (and potentially mistrusted) *xenos* is lack of knowledge about them. Knowing someone, in turn, is not a matter of knowing their story (cf. Fassin 2012), or their soul (cf. Foucault 1978). As Herzfeld observes “[f]or most Greek villagers, moral evaluations are not assessments of innate character –which they deny being able to read even as they try to do so– but rather of social inclusion” (2005: 86). The ‘truth’ of or about the other is in Greece a kind of unattainable knowledge epitomised in the saying “abyss is the soul of human beings<sup>xii</sup>”. Confession, is similarly seen as an unreliable technology for the production of truth (cf. Foucault 1978), since Greek people casually urge each other to not reveal things in confessions<sup>xiii</sup>. Sociality (that gradually transforms a person from a stranger into ‘one of us’) is actually the only way of knowing *something* about others. This is especially evident in local beliefs about children and young people who have not yet had the time to prove themselves through socialisation. Knowledge about them comes from what one knows about their parents and family. The manner in which one’s family and social milieu operates as a proxy becomes apparent in the saying: “a shoe from your own place even if it is patched/but where you know the craftsman who made it” phrased as an admonition against marrying an undecipherable outsider or a non-Greek (cf. Herzfeld 2005: 87, 232).

Given that knowledge about the other is always provisional and established in social relations, and given that a stranger/outsider/*xenos* is seen as an impenetrable and obscure entity, how can empathy operate and how can Greek people claim that ‘all human beings are the same’? The quality of sameness refers here to the *consequences* of our common humanity, rather than to our ‘essence’. The Other is hitherto different in vary many ways that include conventional categorical ascriptions, but also feelings, thoughts and intentions. Her membership in the timeless and placeless community of humans however, grants her similar strengths and vulnerabilities in the face of adversity, comparable options and a certain repertoire of reactions to happy and joyful events. And yet, sameness at the level of the consequences of humanity does not fully explain how we can claim to empathise with the feelings of Others, given that is virtually impossible to know how others feel. The question then remains: does empathy need sameness in order to be accomplished?



In a creative reading of the *Ode to Man* in Sophocles's tragedy *Antigone*, Castoriadis (2007) observes the paradoxical capacities credited by Sophocles to human beings: Man, Sophocles says "has developed language and learned to build cities (353-360; cf. Crane 1989: 106). Man is all-resourceful, and although s/he does not know the future, s/he manages to "make herself a path through everything", and s/he "advances toward nothing of what is to come without having some resource" (360-61). How do human beings 'learn' if no one teaches them? Castoriadis asks. How do they manage to carve paths into the unknown, being prepared (always having some resource), while not knowing what to prepare for? The paradox is solved, Castoriadis argues when we understand the power of human beings to self-create and to become autodidacts (2007: 33). Human beings invent through their radical power of imagination that is (compare with Rapport 2012) at once individual and collective. The "radical imagination", Castoriadis argues "does not exist only at the level of the individual psyche, but also at the social-historical, collective level qua *radical imaginary* (Castoriadis 2007: 372 original emphasis).

Taking my cue from Castoriadis's analysis, I claim that the possibility to empathise with other human beings and to understand their feelings relies on the power of the radical imagination. At some fundamental level, we all 'know each other', while 'knowing nothing about each other' and this is possible, because despite our differences we are made of the same qualities. My Greek informants who empathised with the predicament of the refugees in 2015-2016 and declared their solidarity in discursive and practical forms did not profess to 'know' the Others. They employed their knowledge of past catastrophes learnt through the stories of their own grandparents (cf. Hirschon 1989), their knowledge of what it means to be a foreigner and a migrant in Germany, Australia, Belgium or the US, and their socially acquired knowledge of what the ethos of humanity as *anthropia* commands one to do in such cases. Using this kind of knowledge as a basis, they went on to become *autodidacts* in other people's feelings and experiences.

The process of *autodidaxis* facilitates human-to-human relationships in the absence of knowledge about non-intimate Others. The experiential (I can see), cognitive (I can understand), and affective (I co-feel) components of empathy, are instituted in an autodidactic manner and they make relatedness with strangers possible without forcing the Other to become one with the Self. As a transformative technology empathy remains an

elusive process that depends on conjectures. We believe we can see, we assume we understand and we infer the feelings of Others. The “intersubjective space” is indeed “not symmetrical” (Levinas 1987: 84). “Things”, Levinas points out “are never known in their totality; an essential character of our perception of them is that of being inadequate” (1995: 22). The face of the Other can be a mirror that aids processes of recognition, substitution and identification, but mirroring is itself nothing but an *antanaclasis*<sup>xiv</sup>. In literary theory, “antanaclasis” refers to “the repetition of a word with a different meaning in each time” (Childers and Hentzi 1995: xiii). Our experiential, cognitive and affective perception of the Other is a hermeneutic effort. The intersubjective space of our ‘common humanity’ is filled with the asymmetries and asynchronicities of this hermeneutic effort. It is in this sense intertextual and allows for misunderstandings, for the existence of different meanings and for slight (or bigger) misinterpretations and misconstructions of each other. Human beings as social actors manage to reach a common-ground without necessarily, fully and finally sharing each other’s views, beliefs, perceptions and understandings of each other or of a given situation. Our common humanity is possible, not despite, but *because of antanaclasis*: because we are capable of imagining oneself in the position of the Other, while knowing that we are still separate entities, entitled to the differences between us.

*To be human is a deeply political thing*

Rather than being understood as a bounded entity, the self emerges as an assemblage of forces, composed through history, culture and relatedness. Not despite cultural specificity, but because of it Greek subjects can grant moral recognition to others. Through ideas about what it means to be human and what our common humanity compels us to do, Greek people appear to be capable of placing oneself in the position of the Other, in the full knowledge that each and every one remains a separate entity, entitled to her difference.

The modern Greek vision of humanity, as an unmediated category of belonging, allows actors to supersede all other categories of identification (kinship, gender, race, religion, ethnicity) which thus prove to be provisional. The recognition of our common humanity gives rise to empathy as a moral sentiment, and initiates spirals of responsibility and obligation, through which we attempt to bridge the gap between *zoe* and *bios* around us. The culturally and historically specific content and form of moral sentiments such as empathy

cannot be always and fully appreciated through an analysis of large historical forces such as neoliberalism, or through (other, culturally and historically specific models) of confession-based beneficiary-benefactor relations. This does not mean, that concerns over what constitutes humanitarian reason are not valid, widespread and hegemonically present in Greece and around the world. It is the task of Anthropology however (and dare I say of a postcolonial Anthropology) to mine for alternative understandings and visions of cosmopolitan morality. For, such visions can operate as fields for the development of new, grassroots, 'open ecologies' of solidarity that will form viable alternatives to humanitarian governmentality models.

'We are all human' means in the Greek context that we are all vulnerable, precarious, fleeting and provisional and as such, the only thing we 'owe' to each other is a break from indebtedness and hierarchical, asymmetrical relations of power. In this sense to be human is a deeply and explicitly moral and political position, intimately connected to the cosmopolitan order.

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<sup>i</sup> I refer here to the Eastern Mediterranean route (Aegean Sea). Overall, more than 4000 people lost their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean in the same period.

<sup>ii</sup> and the ensuing Treaty of Lausanne that commanded the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in favour of the ethnic homogenisation of the respective nation-states

<sup>iii</sup> The term foreign powers (*xenes dynameis*) and the role of Americans and Europeans as *xenoi* have been discussed in detail by Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos (2010b)

<sup>iv</sup> Please note that the term *oikeiotita* is etymologically traced to *oikos* (house – household)

<sup>v</sup> and vice-versa. The absence of social exchange or breaking trust leads to estrangement.

<sup>vi</sup> *Anthropoi eimaste; simera esy, aurio ego.*

<sup>vii</sup> *Na zei san anthropos*

<sup>viii</sup> The Nazis for instance are frequently characterised as beasts and when it comes to the Holocaust as monsters. The term monster is typically used for perpetrators of especially heinous crimes such as child physical or sexual abuse or infanticide.

<sup>ix</sup> A large number of Greek people experienced the predicament of the refugees who came in 2015-2016 as a condition of multitemporality (cf. Knight 2013, 2015; Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2015). Both Piraeus and the islands where the present refugees landed are primarily inhabited by the descendants of the Greek-speaking, Christian Orthodox populations that have been forcibly displaced from Asia-Minor and Anatolia as a result of the Greco-Turkish war in 1920-22 and the ensuing Treaty of Lausanne that commanded the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in favour of the ethnic homogenisation of the respective nation-states (cf. Hirschon 1989). Refugeeness as collective narrative and transgenerational trauma (cf. Anastasiadis 2012), as well as memories of economic migration to Europe, US or Australia became for a large part of Greek society mechanisms of *substitution* (Levinas

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1981) through which a number of people treated the 'stranger' as another human being in need, similar to the self.

<sup>x</sup> *H zoe, h moira, o Theos? Pes to opos thes, dosane ki eho ena mpanio kai ena plyntirio. Ayta exo, ayta*

<sup>xi</sup> *Oloi oi anthropoi to idio einai, or panta oi anthropoi einai idioi, or ola gia tous anthropous einai.*

<sup>xii</sup> *Abyssos h psyche tou anthropou.*

<sup>xiii</sup> As epitomised in the saying 'don't even tell the priest about this' (*min to peis oute tou papa*).

<sup>xiv</sup> Interestingly *antanaclasis* literally means in Greek 'reflection' (as one's reflection in the mirror).